

MARIA VALTORTA

THE POEM OF THE MAN-GOD

THE PERSON AND WORKS OF MARIA VALTORTA

Maria Valtorta was born on the 14th of March 1897.

In the spring of 1916, 'during a tremendous period of desperation and desire', the Lord attracted her to Himself by means of a dream which was to remain 'vivid' in Maria throughout her life.

But her withdrawal from the world was still remote. In 1917 Maria entered the ranks of the Samaritan Nurses, and for eighteen months offered her service at the military hospital in Florence 'to serve those who suffered... soldiers, not officers...' she felt as if she were 'sweetly obliged to draw ever closer God'. In 1920 an act of thoughtless violence marked the beginning of her gradual immolation: she was struck in the back by a young delinquent with an iron bar stripped from a bed.

Attracted by the exempla of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, Maria offered herself as victim to the merciful Love: from that moment she grew to extraordinary heights in her love of Jesus, even to feeling His presence in her own words and actions.

In the meantime she maturing the decision to offer herself as victim of the divine Justice.

From April 1934 she was no longer able to leave her bed..

It was in 1942 that she was visited by a pious missionary, Fr. Romuald Migliorini who was her spiritual director for four years; at his request in 1943, she agreed to write her Autobiography.

Prodded by supernatural impulse on Good Friday, the 23rd of April of the same 1943, she began writing the 'dictations': her activity as writer reached intensity from 1943 to 1947, diminishing progressively until 1953.

Mostly the notebook written by Maria Valtorta concerns the life of Jesus: The Poem of the Man-God.

In 1949 Maria offered to God the sacrifice of not seeing the ecclesiastic approval of the Work, and she added the precious gift of her own intelligence. She died in 1961 and in 1973 with civil and ecclesiastic permissions her mortal remains were transferred to the Capitular Chapel in the Grand Cloister of the Basilica of the Most Holy Annunciation in Florence, where the tomb of Maria Valtorta is still venerated.

'The Poem of the Man-God'

is a great life of Jesus, it is a gospel which neither substitutes nor changes the Gospel, but rather narrates it, integrating and illuminating it, with the declared purpose of reviving in men's hearts the love for Christ and His Mother. It was 'revealed' to Maria Valtorta, called 'Little John', to place her close to the Evangelist who was the favorite disciple.

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'The Poem of the Man-God' consists of seven parts:

The Hidden Life

The first year of the Public Life

The second year of the Public Life

The third years of the Public Life

Preparation to the Passion

The Passion

The Glorification.

Maria Valtorta

THE POEM OF THE MAN-GOD

VOLUME ONE

* ON_LINE

THE HIDDEN LIFE

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« God created Me when His purpose first unfolded ».
(Prov. 8, 22.)

1. Introduction.

22nd August 1944.

Jesus orders me: « Take a completely new notebook. Write down on the first page what I dictated on August the 16th. She will be spoken of in this book.»

I obey and I write.

16th August 1944.

Jesus says:

« Today write only this. Purity has such a value, that the womb of a creature can contain the Uncontainable One, because She possessed the greatest purity that a creature of God could have.

The Most Holy Trinity descended with Its perfections, inhabited with Its Three Persons, enclosed Its infinity in a small space. But It did not debase Itself by doing so, because the love of the Virgin and the will of God widened this space until they rendered it a Heaven. And the Most Holy Trinity made Itself known by Its characteristics:

The Father, being once again the Creator of the creature, as on the sixth day of Creation, had a real, worthy daughter fashioned to His perfect image. The mark of God was impressed so completely and exactly on Mary, that only in the First-born was it greater. Mary can be called the Second-born of the Father because, owing to the perfection granted to Her and preserved by Her, and to Her dignity of Spouse and Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, She comes second after the Son of the Father and second in His eternal thought, which ab aeterno took delight in Her.

The Son, being also "Her Son", did teach Her, by the mystery of Grace, His truth and wisdom, when He was but an Embryo, growing in Her womb.

The Holy Spirit appeared amongst men, for an anticipated prolonged Pentecost: Love for "Her Whom He loved", Consolation to men because of the Fruit of Her Womb, Sanctification on account of the Maternity of the Holy One.

God, to reveal Himself to men in the new and complete form, which starts the Redemption era, did not select for His throne a star in the sky, nor the palace of a powerful man. Neither did He want the wings of angels as the base of His feet. He wanted a spotless womb.

Also Eve had been created spotless. But she wanted to become corrupt of her own free will. Mary, Who lived in a corrupt world -Eve was in a pure world- did not wish to violate Her purity, not even with one thought remotely connected with sin. She knew that sin exists. She saw its various and horrible forms and implications. She saw them all, including the most hideous one: deicide. But She knew them solely to expiate them and to be, for ever, the Woman who has mercy on sinners and prays for their redemption.

This thought will be the introduction to other holy things that I will give for your benefit and the welfare of many people.»

2. Joachim and Anne Make a Vow to the Lord.
22nd August 1944.

I see the inside of a house. In it there is an elderly woman sitting at a loom. I would say, noting that her hair, which formerly was certainly jet black, is now quite grey and her face, though not wrinkled, has the gravity that comes with age, that she must be fifty-five years old. Not more.

In estimating a woman's age, I found my calculations upon my mother's face, whose image is more than ever present to me in these times which remind me of her final days at my bedside... The day after tomorrow it will be a year since I had my last look at her... My mother had a very youthful face, but was prematurely grey. When she was fifty she was as grey as at the end of her life. But, apart from the maturity of her appearance, nothing betrayed her age. I could therefore be mistaken in estimating the age of an elderly woman.

The woman I see weaving in a room, bright with the light coming from a door wide open on to a large garden - a small holding I would call it because it smoothly extends up and down a green slope - the woman is beautiful in her definite Jewish features. Her eyes are black and deep and while I do not know why, they remind me of the Baptist's. But, although they are as proud as the eyes of a queen, they are also sweet, as if a veil of blue had been laid on the flash of an eagle: sweet and somewhat sad, as of a person who thinks of and regrets lost things. Her skin is brown, but not excessively so. Her mouth, slightly large, is well formed and is motionless in an austere setting, which, however, is not a hard one. Her nose is long and thin, slightly drooping, an aquiline nose, which suits her eyes. She is well built, but not fat, well proportioned and I think tall, judging her in a sitting position.

I think she is weaving a curtain or a carpet. The many-coloured shuttles move fast on the brown coloured weft, and what has already been woven shows a pretty plaited work of Greek frets and rosettes in which green, yellow, red and deep blue interweave and blend as in a mosaic.

The woman is wearing a very plain dark dress, a red violet colour, the hue of a special species of pansy.

She stands up when she hears someone knocking at the door. She is really tall. She opens the door.

A woman asks her: « Anne, will you give me your amphora? (1). I will fill it for you. »

The woman has a lovely five year old child with her, who at once clings to Anne's dress, and she caresses him while going into another room, and returns with a beautiful copper amphora which she hands to the woman saying: « You are always good to old Anne, indeed you are. May God reward you with this son and the other children you will have, you fortunate one! » Anne sighs.

The woman looks at her and does not know what to say in the circumstances. To divert attention from the distressing situation of which she is aware, she remarks: « I am leaving Alphaeus with you, if you do not mind, so that I will be quicker and I will fill many jars and jugs for you.»

Alphaeus is very pleased to stay and the reason is clear. As soon as his mother is gone, Anne picks him up and takes him into the orchard, lifts him up to a pergola (2) of grapes as golden as a topaz and says to him: «Eat, eat, because they are good », and she kisses him on his little face soiled with the juice of the grapes which the child eats avidly. Then she laughs heartily and at once looks younger on account of the lovely set of teeth she displays, and the joy that shines on her face, dispelling her years, as the child asks: «And what are you going to give me now? » and he gazes at her with large wide open eyes of a deep grey-blue colour. She laughs and plays with him bending on her knees and goes on: « What will you give me if I give you?... if I give you?... guess! » And the child, clapping his little hands, with a big smile responds: « Kisses, kisses I will give you, nice Anne, good Anne, mamma Anne!... »

Anne, when she hears him say: « mamma Anne », gives out a real cry of joyful love and cuddles the little one declaring: « My darling! Dear! Dear! Dear! » At each « dear » a kiss descends upon the rosy cheeks.

Then they go to a cupboard and from a plate she takes some honey cakes. «I made them for you, darling of poor Anne, because you love me. But tell me, how much do you love me? » And the child, thinking of what has impressed him most, says: « As much as the Temple of the Lord.» Anne kisses him again on his lively

little eyes, his little red lips and the child cuddles against her like a kitten.

His mother goes back and forth with a full jar and smiles without saying anything. She leaves them to their effusiveness.

An elderly man comes in from the orchard. He is a little smaller than Anne, and his thick hair is completely white. His face is of a clear complexion with a squarely cut beard; his eyes are like blue turquoises and his eyelashes are light brown, almost fair. His robe is dark brown.

(1) Amphora: a two-handled jar commonly used by the Greeks and Romans.

(2) Pergola: grape vines supported by poles and forming a kind of roof with their leaves.

Anne does not see him because her back is turned to the door and he approaches her from behind questioning: « And nothing for me? » Anne turns round and says: « O Joachim! Have you finished your work? » At the same time little Alphaeus runs to the elderly man's knees exclaiming: « Also to you, also to you. » And when the man bends down to kiss him, the child clings to his neck, ruffling his beard with his little hands and his kisses.

Joachim also has his gift. He brings his left hand from behind his back and offers the child such a beautiful apple, that it seems made of the finest porcelain. Smiling he says to the child who is holding his hands out eagerly: « Wait, I will cut it for you! You cannot take it as it is. It is bigger than you! » With a small pruning knife, which he carries on his belt, he cuts the fruit into small slices. He seems to be feeding a nestling, such is the care with which he puts the morsels into the little wide open mouth that munches and chews.

« Look at his eyes, Joachim! Don't they look like two little wavelets of the Sea of Galilee when the evening wind draws a veil of cloud over the sky? » Anne is speaking, resting one hand on her husband's shoulder, and she is leaning slightly on him, too: an attitude revealing the deep love of a wife, a love still perfect after many years of marriage.

And Joachim looks at her lovingly and agrees, saying: « Most beautiful! And His curls? Aren't they the colour of crops dried in the sun? Look: in them there is a mixture of gold and copper.»

« Ah! If we had had a child, I would have liked him thus: with these eyes and this hair... » Anne has bent down, in fact she is on her knees and with a deep sigh she kisses the two large grey-blue eyes.

Joachim, too, sighs. But he wishes to comfort her. He puts his hand on her thick curly grey hair and whispers to her: « We must continue to hope. God can do everything. While we are alive, the miracle may happen, particularly when we love Him and we love each other.» Joachim stresses the final phrase.

But Anne is silent, dejected, and she is standing, her head bowed, to conceal two tears streaming down her face. Only little Alphaeus sees them and he is confounded and grieved that his great friend is crying, as he sometimes does. He lifts his hands and wipes the tears.

« Don't cry, Anne! We are happy just the same. At least I am, because I have you.»

« Also I have you. But I have not given you a child... I think I have distressed the Lord, because He has made my womb barren...»

« O my wife! How can you have distressed Him, you holy woman? Listen. Let us go once more to the Temple. For this reason. Not only for the Tabernacles! Let us say a long prayer... Perhaps it will happen to you as it did to Sarah... as it happened to Anne of Elkanah. They waited for a long time and they considered themselves dejected because they were barren. Instead a holy son was maturing for them in the Heavens of God. Smile, my wife. Your crying is a greater sorrow to me than being without offspring... We shall take Alphaeus with us. We shall make him pray, since he is innocent... and God will hear his prayer and ours together and will grant it.»

« Yes, let us make a vow to the Lord. The offspring will be His. As long as He grants it. Oh to hear me being called "mamma"! »

And Alphaeus, an astonished and innocent spectator, exclaims: « I will call you so! »

« Yes, my darling... but you have your mummy, and I have no baby... »

The vision ceases here.

I understand that Mary's birth cycle has begun. And I am very happy because I wanted it so much. And I think that you (3) will be happy, too. Before I began to write I heard Mother say to me: « So, My dear daughter, write about Me. All your grief will be comforted. » And while saying so She laid Her hand on my head caressing me kindly. Then the vision began. But at first, that is, until I heard the fifty-year-old woman being called by name, I did not realise that I was in the presence of Mother's mother and consequently of the grace of Her birth.

(3) It is to be noted that Maria Valtorta often addresses her spiritual Father in the course of her work.

3. Anne, Praying in the Temple, Has Her Wish Fulfilled.
23rd August 1944.

Before writing the following, I wish to make a note. The house did not seem to me the well known one of Nazareth. The location, at least, is quite different. Also the orchard garden is larger and beyond it fields can be seen, not many, but they are there. Later, when Mary is married, there is only the orchard, large, but not more than an orchard: and I have never seen in other visions the room that I saw. I do not know whether for financial reasons Mary's parents disposed of part of their property or whether Mary, when she left the Temple, moved into another house given to her perhaps by Joseph. I do not remember whether in past visions and instructions I had a clear sign that the house of Nazareth was the house where she was born. My head is very heavy with fatigue. And then, particularly with dictations, I forget the words at once, although the commands remain recorded in my mind and illuminate my soul. But details fade away immediately. If after one hour I had to repeat what I heard, with the exception of one or two main sentences, I would not know anything else. Visions, on the contrary, remain clear in my mind because I had to watch them myself. I hear dictations but I see visions. Therefore they remain clear in my mind which functioned in following them through their various phases. I was hoping there would be a declaration on yesterday's vision. Instead nothing. I am beginning to see and I write.

Outside the walls of Jerusalem, on the hills and among the olive-trees, there is a large crowd. It looks like a large market. But there are no booths. There are no shouting charlatans or pedlars. No games. There are coarse wool tents, certainly proof against water, hanging on posts fixed to the ground, and tied to the posts there are green branches, providing both ornamental decoration and practical coolness. Other tents, instead, are made entirely of branches fixed to the ground and tied in ridge fashion, thus forming small green tunnels. Under each tent there are people of every age and condition, speaking quietly and earnestly, with the cry of a child breaking the quietness now and again. It is nightfall and the lights of small oil lamps are glittering here and there throughout the odd camp. Around the lights some families are taking their supper on the ground, the mothers holding the little ones in their laps. Many of these tired infants fall asleep holding pieces of bread in their tiny pink fingers while their small heads fall on their mothers' breasts, like little chicks under hens. The mothers finish their meals, as best they can, each with only one hand free, while the other hand is holding the child against her heart. Meanwhile other families are not yet supping and are talking in the dimness of twilight, waiting for the food to be ready for eating. Small fires are lit here and there and women are busy around them. Slow somewhat plaintive lullabies soothe children who are having difficulty in going to sleep. High above is a beautiful clear sky, which is becoming a deeper and deeper blue until it looks like an enormous black-bluish soft velvet velarium. On this cloth, a little at a time, invisible craftsmen and decorators fix gems and night lights, some isolated, some in odd geometrical patterns, amongst which stand out

the Great Bear and the Little Bear, in the shape of a cart, with its shaft resting on the ground after the oxen have been freed from the yoke. The Pole Star is smiling in all its brightness.

I realise it is October because the loud voice of a man says so: « This month of October is beautiful as very rarely in past years! »

Here is Anne coming from a fire with something in her hands, spread over a loaf of bread which is large and flat like a cake and serves also as a tray. Little Alphaeus is holding on to her skirt and is prattling in his little voice.

Joachim, when he sees Anne approaching, hastens to light his lamp; he is at the entrance of his little hut made of branches and is speaking to a man about thirty years old, whom Alphaeus greets from a distance in his shrill voice saying: « Daddy.»

Anne in her stately walk passes along the rows of huts. She is stately, yet humble. She is not haughty with anyone. She picks up the child of a very poor woman, as the urchin had fallen at her feet while running like a little scamp. Since he has dirtied his face and is crying, Anne cleans him, comforts him and hands him to his mother who has run towards them and is apologising. Anne says to her: « Oh! It's nothing. I am glad he did not hurt himself. He is a lovely child. What age is he? »

« Three years. He is my second youngest and I am expecting another one shortly. I have six boys. Now I would like to have a girl... A girl is a lot for her mother ... »

« The Most High has consoled you very much, woman! » sighs Anne.

And the woman goes on: « Yes. I am poor, but the children are our joy and the bigger ones already help with the work. And, Madam, (it is very obvious that Anne is of a higher social standing and the woman realises it), how many children have you got? »

« None.»

« None.» Isn't this one yours? »

« No, he is the son of a very good neighbour. He is my consolation ... »

« Did yours die or...? »

« I never had any.»

« Oh! » The poor woman looks at her pitifully.

Anne says goodbye to her, sighing very heavily, and goes to her hut.

« I have kept you waiting, Joachim. I was held up by a poor woman, the mother of six boys. Fancy that! And she is expecting another child shortly.»

Joachim sighs.

Alphaeus' father calls him, but he answers: « I am staying with Anne. I will help her.» Everybody laughs.

« Leave him. He does not disturb us. He is not bound by the Law yet. Here or there he is but a little bird eating » states Anne. And she sits down with the child in her lap and gives him some cake and, I think, some roasted fish. I can see that she does something before giving it to him; perhaps she removes a fishbone. She has served her husband first. She eats last.

The night is more and more crowded with stars and the camp with lights. Then little by little many lights go out. They are the lamps of those who were the first to have supper and who now go to sleep. Also the buzzing slowly decreases. No more children's voices are heard. Only some babies still unweaned raise their lamb-like little voices seeking their mothers' milk. The night blows her breath over places and people and obliterates pains and memories, hopes and ill-feelings. Nay, perhaps these last two survive in dreams, although alleviated by sleep.

Anne says so to her husband while lulling Alphaeus who is falling asleep in her arms: « Last night I dreamt that next year I will be coming to the Holy City for two feasts, instead of one only. And one will be the offering of my creature to the Temple... Oh! Joachim!... »

« Do hope, Anne. Did you not perceive anything else? Did the Lord not whisper anything to your heart? »

« Nothing. Only a dream... »

« Tomorrow is the last day of prayer. All the offerings have already been made. But we will renew them again tomorrow, solemnly. We shall gain our favour from God by our faithful love. I always think that it will happen to you as it did to Anne of Elkanah. »

« May God grant it... and I wish I had someone say to me now: "Go in peace. The

God of Israel has granted the grace you asked for!"»

« If the grace comes, your child will tell you turning over for the first time in your womb; and it will be the voice of an innocent, therefore the voice of God.»

The camp is now silent in darkness. Anne also takes Alphaeus to the adjoining hut, and puts him on the bed near his little brothers, who are already asleep. Then she lies down beside Joachim and their lamp also goes out: one of the little stars on earth. More beautiful, the stars in the vault of heaven remain watching over mankind asleep.

Jesus says:

« The just are always wise, because, as friends of God, they live in His company and are taught by Him, yes, by Him, Infinite Wisdom.

My grandparents were just and therefore they possessed wisdom. They could quote accurately from the Book, singing the praises of Wisdom from its context: "She it was I loved and searched for from my youth: I resolved to have her as my bride".

Anne of Aaron was the strong woman of whom our Ancestor speaks. And Joachim, a descendant of king David, had not sought so much charm and wealth as virtue. Anne possessed a great virtue. All holy attributes joined together like a sweet-smelling bunch of flowers to become one beautiful thing that was: this exceptional Virtue. A real virtue, worthy of being set before the throne of God. Joachim had therefore married wisdom twice, "loving her more than any other woman": the Wisdom of God enshrined in the heart of a just woman. Anne of Aaron had not sought anything else but to join her life to that of an upright man, certain that family joy lies in uprighteousness. And to be the embodiment of the "strong woman" she lacked only the crown of children, the glory of the married woman, the justification of marriage, the one of which Solomon speaks, as for her happiness she lacked children, the flowers of a tree that has become one thing with the adjoining tree and obtains thereof abundance of new fruit, in which the two good qualities blend into one, because she had never experienced any disappointment on account of her husband.

Although she was now approaching old age and had been Joachim's wife for many years, she was always for him "the spouse of his youth, his joy, the most dear hind, the graceful fawn", whose caresses always had the fresh charm of the first nuptial evening and sweetly fascinated his love, keeping it as fresh as a flower sprinkled with dew, and as ardent as a fire continuously kept burning.

Therefore, in their affliction, their childless state, they spoke to each other "words of consolation in their thoughts and troubles".

And eternal Wisdom, when the time came, besides teaching them in waking consciousness, enlightened them with dreams at night, visions of the poem of glory that was to come from them and was Most Holy Mary, My Mother. If their humility made them hesitant, their hearts trembled in hope at the first hint of God's promise. There was already certainty in Joachim's words: "Do hope... We shall gain our favour from God by our faithful love". They were dreaming of a child: they got the Mother of God.

The words of the book of Wisdom appear to be written for them: "By means of her I shall acquire glory before the people... by means of her, immortality shall be mine and I shall leave an everlasting memory to my successors". But to obtain all this they had to become masters of a true and lasting virtue which no event marred. Virtue of faith. Virtue of charity. Virtue of hope. Virtue of chastity. The chastity of a married couple! They possessed it, because it is not necessary to be virgins to be chaste. And chaste nuptial beds are guarded by angels and from them descend good children who make the virtue of their parents the rule of their lives.

But where are they now? Now children are not wanted, neither is chastity. I therefore say that love and marriage are desecrated.»

4. With a Canticle, Anne Announces that She Is a Mother.
24th August 1944.

I see Joachim and Anne's house once again. Nothing is changed inside, with the exception that there are many branches full of flowers, placed in amphoras here and there, certainly the fruit of the pruning of the trees in the orchard, all in bloom: a cloud varying from snow-white to the red of certain corals. Also Anne's work is different. On the smaller of two looms she is weaving some lovely linen cloth and is singing, moving her feet to the rhythm of the song. She is singing and smiling. At whom? At herself, at something she is aware of in her inside.

I have written separately the slow and yet gay song, so that I might follow it, for she repeats it several times as if she rejoices in it. She sings it more and more loudly and with certainty, like someone who found a melody in her heart and at first whispers it softly and then, being sure, proceeds faster and in a higher tone. The slow and yet gay song (which I am transcribing because it is so sweet in its simplicity) says:

« Glory to the Almighty Lord Who had love for the children of David.

[Glory to the Lord!

His supreme grace has visited me from Heaven

The old tree has borne a new branch and I am blessed.

At the Feast of Lights hope scattered the seed;

Now the fragrance of Nisan sees it germinating.

Like an almond-tree my flesh is adorned with flowers in spring.

In the evening she perceives she is bearing her fruit.

On that branch there is a rose, there is a most sweet apple.

There is a bright star, an innocent little child.

There is the joy of the house, of the husband and wife.

Praise be to God, to my Lord, Who had mercy on me.

His light said to me: "A star will come to you."

Glory, glory! Yours shall be the fruit of this tree.

The first and last, holy and pure as a gift of the Lord.

Yours it shall be and may joy and peace come upon the earth.

Fly, shuttle. Fasten the yarn for the infant's cloth.

The infant is about to be born. May the song of my heart rise to God

[singing hosannas. »

Joachim comes in when she is about to repeat her song for the fourth time. « Are you happy, Anne? You look like a bird in spring. What song is that? I have never heard anyone sing it. Where does it come from? »

« From my heart, Joachim.» Anne has got up and is now moving towards her husband, smiling happily. She looks younger and lovelier than ever.

« I did not know you were a poet » declares her husband looking at her with obvious admiration. They do not look like an elderly couple. In their glances there is the fondness of young couples. « I came from the other end of the orchard when I heard you singing. For years I had not heard your voice, that of a turtle-dove in love. Do you mind repeating that song for me? »

« I would repeat it even if you did not ask me. The children of Israel have always entrusted to songs the sincere cries of their hopes, joys and pains. I have entrusted to a song the task of telling myself and you a great joy. Yes, also of telling myself because it is such a great thing that although I am sure of it now, it does not yet seem to me to be true...», and she begins the song over again. But when she comes to the point: « On that branch there is a rose, there is a most sweet apple, a star...», her well tuned contralto voice at first trembles, then it breaks, and with a sob of joy she looks at Joachim and raising her arms she cries: « I am a mother, my darling! » And she takes refuge on his heart, between the arms that he has held out and has now clasped around his

happy wife. This is the most chaste and happy embrace that I have ever seen in my life, chaste and ardent in its chastity.

And the sweet reproach is whispered over Anne's grey hair: « And you were not telling me? »

« Because I wanted to be sure. Old as I am... to know that I am a mother... I could not believe it was true... I did not want to give you the most bitter disappointment of all. Since the end of December I have perceived that my womb was becoming new and bearing, as I say, a new branch. But now on that branch the fruit is certain... See? That linen is for the one that is coming.»

« Is it not the linen that you bought in Jerusalem in October? »

« Yes, it is. I spun it while I was waiting... and hoping. I was hoping because the last day while I was praying in the Temple, as close as possible for a woman to be to the House of God, and it was already evening... remember that I was saying: "A little longer, a little more". I could not withdraw from the place without receiving the grace! Well, in the growing darkness, from inside the sacred place, where I was watching from the depth of my soul, to obtain assent from the everpresent God, I saw a light, a spark of beautiful light depart. It was as white as the moon and yet it had in itself all the brightness of all the pearls and gems that are in the world. It seemed that one of the precious stars of the Veil, the stars placed under the feet of the Cherubim had become detached and bright with a supernatural light... it seemed that beyond the sacred Veil, from the Glory itself, a fire started which came quickly towards me and while cutting through the air, it sang with a heavenly voice chanting: "May what you asked for, come to you". That is why I sing: "A star will come to you". What child will ours ever be, since it reveals itself as the light of a star in the Temple and in the Feast of Lights says: "I am"? Did you perhaps foresee rightly when you thought I would be a new Anne of Elkanah? How shall we name our creature, whom I perceive talking to me in my womb as sweetly as the melody of waters, with its little heart beating repeatedly like the heart of a pretty turtle-dove held in one's hands? »

« If it is a boy we shall call him Samuel... If a girl, Star. The word that stopped your song to give me the joy of learning that I am a father. The form it took to reveal itself in the holy shade of the Temple.»

« Star. Our Star, because, I don't know why, but I think it is a girl. I think that such sweet caresses can only come from a most sweet daughter. Because I do not bear her, I have no pain. It is she who takes me on a blue flowery path, as if I were supported by holy angels and the earth was already far away... I have always heard women say that it is painful to conceive and to bear. But I have no pain. I feel strong, young, fresher than when I presented you with my virginity in my far away youth. Daughter of God -because this creature born of a barren stump, is more of God than ours- she gives no pain to her mother. She only brings her peace and blessings: the fruits of God, her true Father. »

« Mary, then, we shall call her! Star of our sea, pearl, happiness. The name of the first great woman in Israel. But she will never sin against the Lord and to Him only she will give her songs, because she is offered to Him: a victim before being born.»

« Yes, she is offered to Him. Male or female, as it may be, after rejoicing for three years over our creature, we shall give it to the Lord. Victims ourselves with her, for the glory of God.»

I do not see or hear anything else.

Jesus says:

« Wisdom, after enlightening them with dreams at night, descended "breath of the power of God, pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty", and became Word for the barren one. He, who already saw His time for redemption close at hand: I, Christ, Anne's grandson, almost fifty years later, by means of the Word, will work miracles on barren, diseased, possessed, desolate women and on all the miseries of the world.

But in the meantime, for the joy of having a Mother I whisper a mysterious word in the shade of the Temple that contained the hopes of Israel, of the Temple now at the end of its life, because a new and real Temple is about to come on earth, no longer containing the hopes of one people, but the certainty of Paradise for the people of the whole world, and for centuries and centuries until the end of the world. And this Word works the miracle of making fertile what was

barren. And also the miracle of giving me a Mother, Who not only had the best disposition, as was natural She should have, being born of two saints, but, unique creature, had not only a good soul as many others still have, not only a continuous increase of goodness because of Her good will, not only an immaculate body, but had an immaculate soul.

You have seen the continuous generation of souls from God. Now think what must have been the beauty of this soul which the Father looked fondly on before time existed, which formed the delight of the Trinity, which Trinity longed to adorn it with its gifts, to present it to Itself. Oh! Most Holy Mary that God created for Himself and then for the salvation of men! Bearer of the Saviour, You were the first salvation. Living Paradise, with Your smile You began to sanctify the world.

The soul created to be soul of the Mother of God! When this vital spark derived from the more lively throb of the Threefold Love of the Trinity, the angels rejoiced because Paradise had never seen a brighter light. Like a petal of a heavenly rose, a mystical and precious petal, that was a gem and a flame, the breath of God descended to give life to a body quite differently than for others. It descended so powerful in its ardour that Guilt could not contaminate it, it came through the heavens and enclosed itself in a holy womb.

The world had its Flower, but did not yet know, the true, unique Flower, that blooms eternally: lily and rose, sweet-smelling violet and jasmine, helianthus and cyclamen blended together and with them all the flowers on earth in one Flower only: Mary, in Whom every grace and virtue is gathered together.

In April the land of Palestine looked like a huge garden and the fragrance and colours delighted the hearts of men. But the most beautiful Rose was still unknown. She was already flowering to God in the secrecy of Her mother's womb, because my Mother loved since She was conceived. But only when the vine gives its blood to make wine and the sweet strong smells fill the yards and the nostrils, She would smile to God first and then to the world, saying with Her most innocent smile: "Here, the Vine that will give you the Bunch of grapes to be squeezed in the winepress, so that it will become eternal Medicine for your disease, is amongst you".

I said: "Mary loved since She was conceived!" What is it that gives light and knowledge to the soul? Grace. What is it that removes Grace? Original sin and the mortal one. Mary, the Immaculate, was never deprived of the remembrance of God, of His closeness, His love, His light, His wisdom. She was therefore able to understand and love when She was but flesh forming around an immaculate soul that continued to love.

Later, I will let you contemplate mentally the depth of Mary's virginity. You will have a spell of heavenly ecstasy, as when I allowed you to consider our eternity. In the meantime consider how to bear a creature free from the Stain that deprives one of God, gives the mother a superior intelligence and makes a prophetess of her, although she has conceived in a natural and human way. The prophetess of her daughter, whom she calls: "Daughter of God". And consider what would have happened if innocent children had been born of innocent First Parents, as God wanted.

Man, you state that you are setting out to be "superman", and with your vices are only setting out to be "superdemon". The possibility of existing and living without the contamination of Satan, leaving to God the administration of life, knowledge, and goodness, would have been the means to make you "superman", not wishing more than what God had given you and which was little less than infinite. And thus, in an evolution towards perfection, you would have been able to generate children, who should be men in their bodies and sons of the Intelligence in their souls: victors, strong, giants over Satan, who would have been vanquished so many thousand centuries before the hour, when he will be humiliated, and all his evil with him.»

5. Birth of the Virgin Mary.
26th August 1944.

I see Anne coming out of the garden. She is leaning on the arm of a relative, who is like her. She is obviously several months pregnant and she looks tired

and her fatigue is not alleviated by the sultriness, just as this present heat is exhausting me.

Although the garden is shady, it is very hot and close. The air can be cut like a soft warm dough, it is so heavy. The sun's rays descend from a merciless blue sky and there is some dust making the atmosphere slightly dull. The weather must have been dry for a long time, because where there is no irrigation, the land is literally reduced to a very fine, almost white dust. Out in the open this shade of white is slightly pink, whereas it is a dark red-brown under the trees, where the soil is damp. Likewise the ground is moist along the small flower-beds, where rows of vegetables are growing, and around the rose bushes, the jasmines and other flowers, and particularly in the front of and along the beautiful pergola, which divides the orchard in two, up to the beginning of the fields, now stripped of their crops. The grass of the meadow, which marks the boundary of the property, is parched and thin. Only at its border, where there is a hedge of wild hawthorn, already completely studded with the rubies of its little fruits, is the grass greener and thicker. There are some sheep thereabouts with a young shepherd seeking pasture and shade.

Joachim is working around the rows of vines and olive-trees. There are two men with him, helping him. Although an elderly man he is quick and works eagerly. They are opening little channels at the end of a field to give water to the dry plants, and this water makes its way gurgling between the grass and the dry land. The flow forms circles that for one moment resemble a yellowish crystal and seconds later are only rings of wet soil, around the overloaded vine branches and the olive-trees.

Along the shady pergola, under which golden bees are buzzing, greedy for the sugar of the golden grapes, Anne moves slowly towards Joachim, who hastens towards her as soon as he sees her.

« You came so far? »

« The house is as hot as an oven. »

« And you suffer from it. »

« The only suffering of this last hour is that of a pregnant woman. The natural suffering of everybody: man and beast. Don't get too warm, Joachim. »

« The water we have been hoping for, for such a long time, and that for fully three days seemed so close, has not yet come and the country is parched. We are lucky to have a spring so near and so rich in water. I have opened the channels. It is a measure of relief for the plants which have withering leaves and are covered with dust: just enough to keep them alive. If it would only rain... »

Joachim, with the eagerness of all farmers, looks at the sky, while Anne, tired, cools herself with a fan that seems to be made of the dry leaf of a palm interwoven with many-coloured threads keeping it firm.

Anne's companion interrupts: « Over there, beyond the Great Hermon, fast clouds are arising. There is a northern wind. It will refreshen and perhaps bring rain. »

« The breeze has risen for three days and then it sets when the moon rises. It will do the same again. » Joachim is discouraged.

« Let us go back home. Even here one can hardly breathe, and in any case I think it is better to go back... » says Anne, who looks more olive-hued than usual, owing to a paleness which has come over her face.

« Are you in pain? »

« No. But I can feel the great peace that I experienced in the Temple when I was granted the grace, and which I felt once again when I knew I was pregnant. It is like an ecstasy, a sweet sleep of the body while the soul rejoices and calms itself in a peace that has no bodily parallel. I have loved and still do love you, Joachim, and when I entered your house and I said to myself: "I am the wife of a just man", I had peace: and I felt the same every time your provident love took care of your Anne. But this peace is different. Understand: I think that the soul of our father Jacob was invaded by a similar peace, like the soothing given by oil that spreads and appeases, after he dreamt of the angels. And, possibly more accurately, it is like the joyful peace of the Tobiahs after Raphael appeared to them. If I absorb myself in this feeling, it grows more and more in strength while I enjoy it. It is as if I were ascending into the blue spaces of the sky... And furthermore, I don't know the reason for it, but since I have had this peaceful joy in me, I have a song in my heart: old Tobiah's song. I think it was written for this hour... for this joy... for the

land of Israel that receives it... for Jerusalem-sinner and now forgiven... But do not laugh at the frenzy of a mother... but when I say: "Thank the Lord for your wealth and bless the God of centuries, that He may rebuild His Tabernacle in you", I think that He Who will rebuild the Tabernacle of the true God in Jerusalem will be This One who is about to be born... And I also think that the destiny of my creature was prophesied and not the fate of the Holy City, when the song says: "You shall shine with a bright light: all the peoples of the world will prostrate themselves before you: the nations will come bringing gifts: they will worship the Lord in you and will hold your land as sacred, because within you they invoke the Great Name. You will be happy on account of your children, because they will all be blessed and they will gather near the Lord. Blessed are those who love you and rejoice in your peace..." And I am the first to rejoice, her happy mother...»

Anne changes colour, when saying these words and she lights up like something brought from the paleness of moonlight to the brightness of a great fire and vice versa. Sweet tears, of which she is unaware, run down her cheeks and she smiles in her joy. And in the meantime she moves towards the house, walking between her husband and her relative, who listen and, deeply moved, are silent. They make haste because clouds driven by a strong wind, rush across and gather in the sky, while the plain darkens and shudders at the warning of a storm. When they reach the threshold of the dwelling, a first livid flash of lightning crosses the sky and the rumble of the first peal of thunder sounds like the roll of a huge drum that mingles with the arpeggio (1) of the first drops on the parched leaves.

They all go in and Anne withdraws, while Joachim, standing at the door, talks with the workers, who have in the meantime joined him: the conversation is about the longed for water which is a blessing for the parched land. But their joy turns into fear because a very violent storm is approaching with lightening and clouds threatening hail. « If the cloud bursts, it will crush the grapes and the olives like a millstone. Poor me! »

Joachim is also anxious for his wife, whose time has come to give birth to her child. His relative reassures him that Anne is not suffering at all. But he is agitated, and every time his relative or any other woman, amongst whom is Alphaeus' mother, comes out of Anne's room and goes back in again with hot water and basins and linens dried near the blazing fireplace in the large kitchen, (1) Arpeggio: the sounding of notes in rapid succession.

he goes and makes enquiries, but he does not calm down despite their reassurances. Also the lack of cries from Anne worries him. He says: « I am a man and I have never seen a child being born. But I remember hearing that the absence of throes is fatal.»

It is growing dark and the evening is preceded by a furious and very violent storm: it brings torrential rain, wind, lightning, everything, except hail, which has fallen elsewhere.

One of the workers notices the ferocity of the gale: « It looks as if Satan has come out of Gehenna with his demons. Look at those black clouds! You can smell sulphur in the air and you can hear whistling and hisses, and wailing and cursing voices. If it is him, he is furious this evening! »

The other worker laughs and scoffs: « A great prey must have escaped him, or Michael has struck him with a new thunderbolt from God, and he has had his horns and tail clipped and burnt. »

A woman passes by and shouts: «Joachim! It is coming. And it is happening quickly and well!» and she disappears with a small amphora in her hands.

The storm drops suddenly, after one last thunderbolt that is so violent that it throws the three men against the side wall; and in front of the house, in the garden, a black smoky cavity remains as its memory! Meanwhile a cry, one resembling the tiny plea of a little turtle-dove that for the very first time no longer peeps but cooes, is heard from beyond Anne's door. And at the same time a huge rainbow stretches its semicircle across the sky. It rises, or seems to rise, from the top of Hermon, which kissed by the sun, looks like a most delicate pinkish alabaster: it rises up in the clear September sky and through an atmosphere cleaned of all impurities, it crosses over the hills of Galilee and the plain to the south, and over another mountain, and seems to rest the other end on the distant horizon, where it drops from view behind a chain of high mountains.

« We have never seen anything like this! »

« Look, look! »

« It seems to enclose in a circle the whole of the land of Israel. And look! there is already a star in the sky while the sun has not yet set. What a star! It is shining like a huge diamond!...»

« And the moon, over there, is a full moon, three days early. But look how she is shining! »

The women arrive jubilant with a plump little baby wrapped in plain linens. It is Mary, the Mother. A very tiny Mary, who could sleep in the arms of a child, a Mary as long, at most, as an arm, with a little head of ivory dyed pale pink. Her tiny carmine lips no longer cry but are set in the instinctive act of sucking: they are so small that one cannot understand how they will be able to take a teat. Her pretty little nose is between two tiny round cheeks, and when they get Her to open Her eyes, by teasing Her, they see two small parts of the sky, two innocent blue points that look but cannot see, between thin fair eyelashes. Also Her hair on Her little round head is a pinkish blond, like the colour of certain honeys which are almost white.

Her ears are two small shells, transparent, perfect. Her tiny hands... what are those two little things groping in the air and ending up in Her mouth? Closed, as they are now, they are two rose buds that split the green of their sepals and show their silk within. When they are open, as now, they are two ivory jewels, made of pink ivory and alabaster with five pale garnets as nails. How will those two tiny hands be able to dry so many tears?

And Her little feet? Where are they? For the time being they are just kicking, hidden in the linens. But now the relative sits down and uncovers Her... Oh, the little feet! They are about four centimetres long. Each sole is a coral shell, with a snow white top veined in blue. Her toes are masterpieces of Lilliputian sculpture: they, too, are crowned with small scales of pale garnet. But where will they find small sandals, when those little feet of a doll will take their first steps, sandals small enough to fit such tiny feet? And how will those little feet be able to go such a long way and bear so much pain under the cross? But that for the time being is not known, and the onlookers smile and laugh at her kicking, at Her well shaped legs, at Her minute plumpish thighs that form dimples and rings, at Her little tummy, a cup turned upside-down, at Her tiny perfect chest. Under the skin of Her breast, as soft as fine silk, the movement of Her breathing can be seen and the beating of Her little heart can be heard, if, as Her happy father is doing now, one lays one's lips there for a kiss... This is the most beautiful little heart the world will ever know: the only immaculate heart of a human being.

And Her back? They are now turning Her over and they can see the curve of Her kidneys and then the plump shoulders and the pink nape of Her neck, which is so strong that the little head lifts itself up on the arch of the minute vertebrae. It looks like the little head of a bird that scans the new world that it views. She, the Pure and Chaste One, protests with a little cry at being thus exposed to the eyes of so many, She, Entirely Virgin, the Holy and Immaculate, Whom no man will ever see nude again, protests.

Cover, do cover this bud of a lily which will never be opened on earth and which, still remaining a bud, will bear its Flower, even more beautiful than Herself. Only in Heaven the Lily of the Trine Lord will open all its petals. Because up there, there is no particle of fault that may unwillingly profane its spotlessness. Because up there the Trine God is to be received, in the presence of the whole Empyrean, the Trine God that within a few years, hidden in a faultless heart, will be in Her: Father, Son, Spouse.

Here She is again, in Her linens, in the arms of Her earthly father, whom She resembles. Not at the moment. Now She is just a little human baby. I mean that She will be like him when She has grown into a woman. She has nothing of Her mother. She has Her father's colour of complexion and eyes and certainly also his hair. His hair is now white, but when he was young it was certainly fair, as one can tell from his eyebrows. She has Her father's features, made more perfect and gentle, being a woman, but that special Woman. She has also the smile, the glance, the way of moving and height of Her father. Thinking of Jesus, as I see Him, I find Anne has given her height to her Grandson and her deep ivory colour to His skin. Mary, instead, has not the stateliness of Her mother: a tall and supple palm-tree, but She has the kindness of Her father.

Also the women are speaking of the storm and the unusual state of the moon, of the presence of the star and the rainbow. Along with Joachim they enter the happy mother's room and give her her baby.

Anne smiles at one of her thoughts: « She is the Star » she says. « Her sign is in Heaven. Mary, arch of peace! Mary, my Star! Mary, pure moon! Mary, our pearl! »

« Are you calling Her Mary? »

« Yes. Mary, star and pearl and light and peace...»

« But it means also bitterness... Are you not afraid of bringing Her misfortune? »

« God is with Her. She belongs to Him before She existed. He will lead Her along His ways and all bitterness will turn into heavenly honey. Now be of Your mummy... for a little longer, before being all of God ...»

And the vision ends on the first sleep of Anne, a mother, and Mary, an infant.

27th August 1944.

Jesus says:

« Rise and make haste, My little friend. I am longing to take you with Me on the heavenly contemplation of Mary's Virginity. You will emerge from this experience with your soul as fresh as if you too were created at the moment by the Father, a little Eve not yet aware of the flesh. You will emerge with your soul filled with light, because you will plunge into God's masterpiece. You will emerge with your whole being saturated in love, because you will, have understood the degree to which God can love. To speak of the conception of Mary, the Immaculate, means to penetrate the sky, light, love.

Come and read Her glories in the Book of the Ancestor. "God possessed me at the beginning of His works, from the beginning, before the Creation. From everlasting I was firmly set, in the beginning, before earth came into being, the deep did not yet exist and I was already conceived. The springs did not yet gush with water and the mountains had not yet risen in their huge masses, neither were the hills jewels in the sun, when I came to birth. God had not yet made the earth, the rivers and the foundation of the world, and I was there.

When He prepared the Heavens I was present, when with immutable laws He enclosed the deep under the surface, when He fixed the Heavens firm and He suspended there the springs of water, when He assigned the sea its boundaries and gave laws to the waters, when He ordered the waters not to invade the shore, when He laid down the foundations of the earth, I was with Him arranging everything. I always played joyfully in His presence, I played in the universe..." You applied these words to Wisdom, but they speak of Her: the beautiful Mother, the holy Mother, the Virgin Mother of Wisdom that I am, Who am now speaking to you.

I wanted you to write the first line of the song at the top of the book that speaks of Her, that She might be contemplated and the consolation and joy of God might be known; the reason for the constant, perfect, intimate delight of this God One and Trine, Who rules and loves you and Who received from man so many reasons for being sad; the reason why He perpetuated the human race, even when, at the first test, humanity deserved to be destroyed; the reason for the forgiveness you have received.

To have Mary that loved Him! Oh! It was well worth while creating Man and allowing him to exist and decreeing to forgive him, to have the Beautiful Virgin, the Holy Virgin, the Immaculate Virgin, the Loving Virgin, the Beloved Daughter, the Most Pure Mother, the Loving Spouse! God has given you so much and would have given you even more to possess the Creature of His delight, the Sun of His sun, the Flower of His garden. And He continues to give you so much on account of Her, at Her request, for Her joy, because Her joy flows into the joy of God and increases it with flashes that fill the light, the great light of Paradise with brilliant sparkles and every sparkle is a grace to the universe, to mankind, to the blessed souls who reply with a jubilant cry of alleluia to each generation of divine miracle, created by the desire of the Blessed Trinity to see the sparkling smile of joy of the Virgin.

God desired to put a king in the universe that He had created out of nothing. A king, who by the nature of matter should be the first amongst all the creatures

created with matter and endowed with matter. A king, who by nature of the spirit should be little less than divine, united to Grace as he was in his first innocent day. But the Supreme Mind, to Whom all the most remote events in centuries are known, incessantly sees what was, is and will be; and while It contemplates the past, and observes the present, It penetrates deeply with Its foresight into the most distant future and knows in every detail how the last man will die. Without confusion or discontinuity the Supreme Mind has always known that the king created to be demigod at Its side in Heaven, heir of the Father, would arrive adult in His Kingdom, after living in the house of his mother -the earth, with which he was made- during his childhood, as child of the Eternal Father for his day on earth. The Supreme Mind has always known that man would have committed against himself the crime of killing Grace in himself and the theft of robbing himself of Heaven.

Why then did He create him? Certainly many ask themselves why. Would you have preferred not to exist? Does this day not deserve, in itself, to be lived, although so poor and bare, and rendered harsh by your wickedness, so that you may know and admire the infinite Beauty that the hand of God has sown in the universe?

For whom would He have created the stars and planets that fly like thunderbolts and arrows, furrowing the vault of Heaven, or dash majestically in their rush of meteors, and yet seem slow, presenting you with light and seasons, eternally immutable and yet always mutable. They give you a new page to read on the sky, every evening, every month, every year, as if they wished to say: "Forget your restriction, forsake your printed matter which is full of obscure, putrid, dirty, poisonous, false, swearing, corrupting material and rise, at least with your eyes, to the unlimited freedom of the firmament, make your souls bright looking at so clear a sky. Build up a supply of light to take to your dark prison. Read the word that we write singing our sidereal chorus, which is more harmonious than the one drawn from a cathedral organ. The word that we write while shining, the word that we write while loving, because we always bear in mind Him Who gave us the joy of existing. And we love Him for giving us our existence, our brightness, our movement, our freedom, our beauty in the midst of the gentle azure, beyond which we can see an even more sublime blue: Paradise. And we fulfil the second part of His commandment of love, by loving you, our universal neighbours, loving you by giving you guidance and light, warmth and beauty. Read the word we say, the one on which we modulate our singing, our brightness, our smile: God!"

For whom would He have made the blue sea, the mirror of the sky, the way to the land, the smile of waters, the voice of waves? The sea itself is a word that with the rustling of silk, with the smiles of happy girls, with the sighs of old people who remember and weep, with the clamour of violence, with clashes and roars always speaks and says: "God". The sea is for you, as the sky and the stars are. And with the sea, the lakes and the rivers, the ponds and the streams, the pure springs, all of which serve to nourish you, to quench your thirst, to clean you: and they serve you serving their Creator, without submerging you, as you deserve.

For whom would He have made the countless families of animals, the beautifully coloured birds, that fly singing, and other animals that like servants, run, work, nourish you and succour you, their kings?

For whom would He have created the countless families of plants and flowers that look like butterflies, like gems and motionless birds, and the families of fruits that are like jewels or jewels cases and are a carpet for your feet and the trees that form shelters for your heads, a welcome relaxation and joy to your minds, your limbs, your sight and smell?

For whom would He have made the minerals in the bowels of the earth and the salts dissolved in cold and boiling springs, the iodines and the bromines, unless one should enjoy them, one who was not God, but the son of God? One: man. The joy of God lacked nothing: God had no need. He is sufficient in Himself. He has only to contemplate Himself to rejoice, to nourish Himself, to live, to rest. The whole creation has not increased by one atom His infinite joy, beauty, life, power. He made everything for the creature that He wanted to place as king in the work made by Him: that creature is man.

It is worth while living to see such a work of God and to be grateful to His power that gives you the opportunity. And you must be grateful to be alive. You

should have been grateful even if you had to wait till Doomsday to be redeemed, because you have been prevaricators, proud, lascivious and murderers in your First Parents and you are still so individually. Yet God allows you to enjoy the beauty of the universe, the goodness of the universe: and He treats you as if you were good children, who are taught and granted everything so that their lives might be happier and more pleasant. What you know, you know by the light of God. What you discover, you discover through the guidance of God. In Goodness. Other knowledge and discoveries that bear the mark of evil, come from the Supreme Evil: Satan.

The Supreme Mind, that knows everything, before man existed, knew that man would be a thief and self murderer. And as the Eternal Goodness has no limits in being good, before Guilt existed, He thought of the means to obliterate Guilt. The means: I, the Word. The instrument to render the means an efficient instrument: Mary. And the Virgin was created in the sublime mind of God.

Everything was created for Me, beloved Son of the Father. I-King should have had under my Divine Royal feet carpets and jewels such as no royal palace had, and songs and voices and servants and ministers around me as no sovereign ever possessed, and flowers and gems, all the sublime, the greatness, the kindness that may derive from the thought of a God.

But I was to be Flesh as well as Spirit. Flesh to save the flesh. Flesh to sublime the flesh, taking it to Heaven many centuries before its time. Because the flesh inhabited by the spirit is God's masterpiece and Heaven had already been made for it. In order to become flesh I needed a Mother. To be God it was necessary that the Father was God.

Then God created His Spouse and said to Her: "Come with Me. At My side see what I am doing for our Son. Look and rejoice, eternal Virgin, eternal Maiden and may Your smile fill this Empyrean and give the angels their starting note and teach Paradise celestial harmony. I am looking at You. And I see You as You will be, Immaculate Woman, Who are now only a spirit: the spirit in which I rejoice. I am looking at You and I give the sea and the firmament the blue of Your eyes, the holy corn the colour of Your hair, whiteness to the lily and a rosy colour to the rose, like Your silky skin. I copy the pearls from Your minute teeth, I make the sweet strawberries watching Your mouth and I give the nightingale Your notes and the turtle-doves Your weeping. And reading Your future thoughts and listening to the throbs of Your heart, I have the motive of guidance in creating. Come, My joy, have the worlds as a plaything as long as You will be the dancing light of My thought; have the worlds for Your smile, have wreaths and necklaces of stars; place the moon under Your gentle feet; make Galatea Your stellar scarf. The stars and planets are for You. Come and enjoy looking at the flowers that will be a childish joy for Your Baby and a pillow for the Son of Your womb. Come and see sheep and lambs, eagles and doves being created. Stay beside Me when I make the hollows of the seas and grooves of the rivers and I raise the mountains and I adorn them with snow and forests. Stay here while I sow fudders and trees and vines, and I make the olive-tree for You, My Peaceful One, and the vine for You, My Vine branch who will bear the Eucharistic Bunch of grapes. Run, fly, rejoice, My Beauty. And may the universe which is created hour by hour learn from You to love Me, My Love, and may it become more beautiful owing to Your smile, Mother of My Son, Queen of My Paradise, Love of Your God". And again, seeing the Fault and admiring the Faultless One: "Come to Me, You Who wipe out the bitterness of human disobedience, of human fornication with Satan and of human ingratitude. I will take with You My revenge over Satan".

God, the Father Creator, had created man and woman with such a perfect law of love that you cannot even understand its perfection any longer. And you become lost in wondering how the human species would have come to be, if man had not been taught by Satan how to obtain it.

Look at the fruit and seed plants. Do they produce seed and fruit by means of fornication, by means of one fecundation out of one hundred copulations? No. The pollen emerges from the male flower and driven by a complex of meteoric and magnetic laws it proceeds to the ovary of the female flower. The latter opens, receives it and produces. It does not pollute itself and then refuse it, as you do, to enjoy the same sensation the following day. It produces and until the new season, it does not get pollinated and when it does, it is only to produce.

Look at the animals. All of them. Have you ever seen a male animal and a female

one approach each other for a sterile embrace and lascivious dealings? No. From near or far, they fly, crawl, jump or run, they go, when it is time, to the fecundation rite. Neither do they evade stopping at the pleasure, but they go further, to the serious and holy consequences of the offspring, the only reason that should cause a man, a demigod by his origin of Grace which I have made complete, to accept the animality of the act, necessary since you descended by one degree towards animals.

You do not act as plants and animals do. You had as your teacher Satan. You wanted him as your teacher and you still want him. And the works you do are what one would expect of the teacher you wanted. Had you been faithful to God, you would have had the joy of children, in a holy way, without pain, without exhausting yourselves in obscene and shameful intercourses, which even beasts are unacquainted with, although beasts are without a reasoning and spiritual soul.

To man and woman, corrupted by Satan, God decided to oppose the Man born of a Woman, Whom God had super-sublimed to such an extent that She generated without knowing man: a Flower that generates a Flower, without the need of seed, by a unique kiss of the Sun on the inviolated chalice of the Lily-Mary.

The revenge of God!

Hiss, O Satan, your hatred while She comes into the world! This Child has beaten you! Before you were the Rebel, the Twister, the Corruptor, you were already beaten and She was your Conqueror. One thousand assembled armies are of no avail against your power, the arms of men fall before your scales, o Perennial One, and there is no wind capable of dispersing the stench of your breath. And yet, the heel of this Child, which is so rosy as to look like the inside of a rosy camellia, and is so smooth and soft that silk seems coarse in comparison, and is so small that it could enter the chalice of a tulip and make itself a tiny shoe with that vegetable satin, that heel is crushing your head without any fear and relegates you to your den. And Her cry causes you to flee away, although you are not afraid of armies. And Her breath purifies the world of your foul smell. You are defeated. Her name, Her look, Her purity are a lance, a thunderbolt that pierces you and demolishes you and imprisons you in your den in Hell, o Cursed One, who deprived God of the joy of being the Father of all men created!

In vain you have corrupted them, who had been created innocent, leading them to knowledge and conception by means of the sensuousness of lust, depriving God, in His beloved creature, of being the benefactor of the children according to rules, which, had they been respected, would have kept a balance on earth between sexes and races, a balance capable of averting wars between peoples and calamities between families.

By obeying, they would have also known love. Nay, only by obeying they would have known love and possessed it. A complete and peaceful possession of this gift from God, Who from the supernatural descends to the inferior, so that also the flesh may rejoice devoutly, since it is united to the spirit and created by Him Who created the spirit.

Now, men, what is your love, what are your loves? Either lewdness disguised as love or an incurable fear of losing the love of your partner through her or other people's lewdness. You are never sure of possessing the heart of your husband or wife, since lust entered the world. And you tremble and cry and become overwrought with jealousy, sometimes you kill to avenge a betrayal, sometimes you despair, and sometimes you lack will or even become insane. This is what you have done, Satan, to the children of God. Those whom you have corrupted, would have known the joy of having children without suffering any pain and would have experienced the joy of being born without fear of dying. But now you are beaten in a Woman and by a Woman. From now on, whoever loves Her will become once again God's own, overcoming your temptations, to be able to look at Her immaculate purity. From now on mothers, though not able to conceive without pain, will find comfort in her. From now on She will be the guide of married women and the Mother of dying people, so that it will be sweet to die resting on that breast which is a shield against you, you Cursed One, and against the wrath of God.

Mary, little voice, you have seen the birth of the Virgin's Son and the assumption of the Virgin to Heaven. You have therefore seen that the faultless ones are unaware of the pain in giving birth as well as of the pain in dying. But if the Most Innocent Mother of God was granted the perfection of celestial

gifts, all those who in the First Parents had remained innocent and sons of God, would have generated without throes as it was fair, having conceived without lust, and they would have died without anxiety.

The sublime victory of God over Satan's revenge was to raise the perfection of the beloved creature to a super-perfection that should annul at least in one person all recollection of humanity, liable to Satan's poison, so that the Son should be generated not by a man's chaste embrace, but by a divine embrace that causes the spirit to change colour in the ecstasy of the Fire.

The Virgin's Virginity!...

Come. Contemplate this deep virginity that gives ecstatic dizziness in its contemplation! What is the poor enforced virginity of a woman that no man married? Less than nothing. What is the virginity of a woman who wanted to be a virgin to belong to God, but is so in her body and not in her spirit, where she allows alien thoughts to enter and entertains allurements of human thoughts? It is a sham virginity. But still very little. What is the virginity of a cloistered nun who lives only for God? Very much. But it is never the perfect virginity when compared with My Mother's.

There has always been an association, also in the most holy one. The original association between spirit and fault. The one that only Baptism dissolves. It dissolves it, but as in the case of a woman separated from her husband by his death, it does not render virginity complete such as it was in the First Parents before Sin. A scar remains and hurts causing one to remember it, and it is always ready to become a sore like certain diseases that periodically are made worse by their virus. In the Virgin there is no sign of this dissolved association with the Fault. Her soul appears beautiful and intact as when the Father conceived Her, gathering all graces in Her.

She is the Virgin. She is the Only One. She is the Perfect One. The Complete One. Conceived as such. Generated as such. Remained such. Crowned such.

Eternally such. She is the Virgin. She is the acme of intangibility, of purity, of grace that is lost in the Abyss from which it emerged: in God: most perfect Intangibility, Purity, Grace.

That is the revenge of the God Trine and One. Against creatures desecrated He raises this Star to perfection. Against pernicious curiosity He raises this Coy Virgin, contented only with loving God. Against the science of evil, this sublime Innocent Virgin. In Her there is not only no knowledge of dejected love: there is not only non-acquaintance with the love that God had given to married people. Much more. In Her there is the absence of incentives, the inheritance of Sin. In Her there is only the icy and white-hot wisdom of divine love. A fire that strengthens the flesh with ice, so that it may be a transparent mirror at the altar where God married a Virgin and does not lower Himself because His perfection embraces Her perfection, which, as it becomes a bride, is only inferior to His by one point, subject to Him as a Woman, but without fault as He is. »

6. The Purification of Anne and the Offering of Mary.
28th August 1944.

In Jerusalem I see Joachim and Anne, together with Zacharias and Elizabeth, coming out from a house, which must belong to friends or relatives, and they are turning their steps towards the Temple for the ceremony of the Purification. Anne is carrying the Baby, all wrapped up in swaddling clothes, nay, all tied up in a wide garment of light wool, which, however, must be soft and warm. It is

impossible to describe how carefully and lovingly she carries and watches her little creature, lifting the edge of the fine warm cloth to see if Mary is breathing freely, and then she readjusts it to protect Her from the sharp air of a clear but cold winter day.

Elizabeth is holding some parcels in her hands. Joachim is pulling with a rope two big and very white lambs, that are more like rams than lambs. Zacharias has nothing in his hands. He is handsome in his linen garment, which can be seen under a white heavy woollen mantle. Zacharias, much younger than the one already seen at the birth of the Baptist, in his full manhood, as Elizabeth is a mature woman, but still fresh in her appearance: and she bends in ecstasy over the tiny sleeping face, every time Anne looks at the Baby. She also looks beautiful in her blue almost dark violet dress and in her veil that covers her head and then falls on her shoulders, and on the mantle which is darker than her dress. But Joachim and Anne are certainly solemn in their best clothes. Unexpectedly, he is not wearing his dark brown tunic. Instead he has on a long garment of a very deep red, which we would now call St. Joseph's red, and the fringes attached to his mantle are new and beautiful. He, too, is wearing a kind of a rectangular veil on his head and it is secured with a leather band. Everything is new and of excellent quality.

Anne, oh! She is not wearing dark clothes to-day! Her dress is a very pale yellow, almost the colour of old ivory, tied at her waist, neck and wrists with a large belt that seems of silver and gold. Her head is covered by a very light damask veil, held at her forehead by a thin but precious plate. She has a filigree necklace round her neck and bracelets at her wrists. She is like a queen, also because of the dignity with which she wears her dress, and particularly her cape, which is of a light yellow colour hemmed with a Greek fret beautifully embroidered in the same shade.

« You look exactly as the day you got married. I was just a little older than a girl, then, but I still remember how beautiful and happy you were » says Elizabeth.

« But now I am even more so... and I decided to wear the same dress for this rite. I had kept it for this... and I was no longer expecting to put it on for this.»

« The Lord has loved you very much...» says Elizabeth sighing.

« And that is why I am giving Him the thing I love most. This flower of mine. »

« How will you be able to tear it from your heart when the time comes? »

« Remembering that I did not have it and that God gave it to me. I shall always be happier now than then. When I know She is in the Temple I will say to myself: "She is praying near the Tabernacle, She is praying the God of Israel also for Her mummy" and I will have peace. And a greater peace I will have in saying: "She belongs entirely to Him. When these two old but happy parents, who received Her from Heaven, are no longer alive, He, the Eternal, will still be Her Father". Believe me, I am fully convinced, this little creature is not ours. I was not able to do anything more... He put Her in my bosom, a divine gift to wipe away my tears and fulfil our hopes and our prayers. That is why She belongs to Him. We are the happy guardians... and may He be blessed for this! »

They have now reached the walls of the Temple.

« While you go to Nicanor's Gate, I will go and inform the priest. And then I will come, too » Zacharias says. And he disappears behind an arch leading into a large yard surrounded by porches.

The group continues to proceed along the ensuing terraces. I do not know whether I have said this before: the enclosure wall of the Temple is not on level ground but it rises up higher and higher by means of successive terraces. Each terrace is reached by means of a flight of steps and on each terrace there are yards and porches and beautiful portals wrought in marble, bronze and gold.

Before reaching their destination they stop to take out the contents of the parcels: cakes, I think, which are wide and flat and very greasy, some white flour, two doves in a small wicker cage and some big silver coins: they are quite heavy but fortunately garments did not have pockets in those days. They would have made holes in them.

Here is the beautiful Gate of Nicanor, all chiselled in heavy bronze silver plating. Zacharias is already there beside a stately priest dressed in linen. Anne is sprinkled with what I suppose is lustral water and then she is instructed to move towards the altar of the sacrifice. The Child is no longer in

her arms. Elizabeth, who has stopped at this side of the Gate, has taken Her. Joachim, instead, enters behind his wife, dragging a miserable bleating lamb. And I... I do exactly what I did on the occasion of Mary's purification: I close my eyes not to see any slaughter.

Now Anne is purified.

Zacharias whispers something to his colleague, who nods smiling. He then approaches the group which has reassembled and congratulating the mother and father on their joy and their loyalty to the promises, he is given the second lamb, the flour and the cakes.

« So this daughter is sacred to the Lord? May His blessing be with Her and with you. Here Anna is coming. She will be one of Her teachers. Anna of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. Come here, woman. This little one is offered to the Temple as a victim of praise. You will be Her teacher and She will grow holy under your guidance.»

Anna, already completely grey, fondles the Child, who has awakened and is looking with Her innocent and surprised eyes at all the white and gold lit up by the sun.

The ceremony must be over. I did not see any special rite for the offering of Mary. Perhaps it was sufficient to tell the priest, and above all God, at the sacred place.

« I would like to give the offering to the Temple and go over there where I saw the light last year.»

They go accompanied by Anna of Phanuel. They do not enter the actual Temple; since they are women and it is the case of a little girl, it is understandable that they do not even go where Mary went to offer Her Son. But very close to the wide open door, they look into the half-dark inside from which sweet songs of girls can be heard and where precious lamps are lit and spread a golden light on two flower beds of white veiled heads: two real flowerbeds of lilies.

« In three years' time You will be there too, my Lily » promises Anne to Mary, Who looks fascinated at the inside and smiles at the slow song.

« You would say that She understands » says Anna of Phanuel. « She is a beautiful child! She will be as dear to me as if She were my own. I promise you, mother. If I shall be granted to be so.»

« You shall, woman » Zacharias says. « You will receive Her amongst the sacred girls. I also shall be there. I want to be there that day to tell Her to pray for us from the very first moment...» and he looks at his wife who understands and sighs.

The ceremony is over and Anna of Phanuel withdraws, while the others leave the Temple speaking to one another.

I hear Joachim say: « Not only two lambs and the best, but I would have given all my lambs for this joy and to praise God! »

I do not see anything else.

Jesus says:

« Solomon in his Wisdom says: "Whoever is a child, let him come to me". And really from the stronghold, from the walls of her city, Eternal Wisdom said to the Eternal Maiden: "Come to Me", longing to have Her. Later the Son of the Most Pure Maiden will say: "Let little children come to Me because the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs, and those who do not become like them will not have any part in My Kingdom". The voices follow one another and while the voice of Heaven cries to little Mary: "Come to Me", the voice of Man says, and thinks of His Mother in saying so: "Come to Me if you can be like children".

I give you My Mother as a model.

Here is the perfect Maiden with the pure and simple heart of a dove, here is the One Whom years and worldly contacts do not make defiant in the cruelty of a corrupted, twisted, false spirit. Because She does not want it. Come to Me, looking at Mary.

Since you see Her, tell me: Is Her glance as an infant very different from the one you saw She had at the foot of the Cross or in the delight of Pentecost or when Her eyelids closed upon Her innocent eyes for Her last sleep? No. Here is the uncertain and astonished glance of an infant, then it will be the amazed and modest look of the Annunciation, and then the happy one of the Mother in

Bethlehem, then the worshipping glance of My first and sublime Disciple, then the tormented one of the Tortured Mother on Golgotha, then the radiant glance of Resurrection and Pentecost, then the veiled look of the ecstatic sleep of the last vision. But whether it opens at the first sight, or closes tired on the last light, after seeing so much of joy and horror, Her eye is the clear, pure, placid piece of the sky that always shines below Mary's forehead. Wrath, falsehood, pride, lewdness, hatred, curiosity never soil it with their smoky clouds.

It is the eye that looks at God lovingly, whether it cries or laughs, and that for God's sake fondles and forgives and bears everything, and by the love of God is rendered unassailable to the assaults of Evil, that so often makes use of the eye to penetrate the heart. It is the pure, restful, blessing eye that the pure, the saints, the lovers of God possess.

I said: "The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light. But if your eye is diseased, your whole body will be all darkness". Saints possessed this eye which is the light for the soul and salvation for the flesh, because like Mary throughout their lives they looked only at God. Even more: they remembered God.

I will explain to you, My little voice, the meaning of this word of Mine.»

7. The Son Has Put His Wisdom on His Mother's Lips.

29th August 1944.

I see Anne once again: since yesterday evening I see her thus: sitting at the entrance of the shady pergola, busy at her needlework. She is wearing a grey sand coloured dress, a very simple one and very wide, probably because of the great heat.

At the end of the pergola the mowers can be seen cutting the hay. But it cannot be first-crop hay because the grapes are almost golden coloured and the fruits of a large apple-tree are like shiny yellow and red wax. The cornfield is nothing but stubble with poppies waving like tiny flames and stiff and clear cornflowers shaped like stars and as blue as the eastern sky.

A little Mary comes forwards from the shady pergola: She is already quick and independent. Her short step is steady and Her white sandals do not stumble amongst the pebbles. Her graceful gait already resembles the slightly undulating step of a dove, and She is all white -like a little dove- in Her linen dress which reaches down to Her ankles. It is a wide dress curled at the neck by a blue ribbon and the short sleeves show rosy and plump forearms. She looks like a little angel: Her hair is silky and honey-blonde, not very curly but gracefully wavy ending in curls: Her eyes are sky blue, Her sweet little face is rosy and smiling. Also the breeze that through Her wide sleeves inflates the shoulders of Her linen dress helps to give Her the appearance of a little angel having his wings half-open ready to fly.

She has in Her hands poppies, cornflowers and other flowers that grow in cornfields, but I do not know their names. She is walking and when She is near Her mother She starts running, shouting joyfully and, like a little dove, She ends Her flight against Her mother's knees: she has opened them to receive Her. Anne has put her needlework aside so that She would not get pricked and has opened her arms to embrace Her.

So far yesterday evening. This morning She reappears and continues as follows. « Mummy, Mummy! » The little white dove is completely in the nest of Her mother's knees, touching the short grass with Her little feet and hiding Her face in Her mother's lap, so that only Her golden hair can be seen on the nape of Her neck over which Anne bends to kiss it fondly.

Then She lifts Her head and offers Her mother flowers. They are all for Her mummy and of each one She tells the story She has invented.

This blue and big one, is a star which has come down from Heaven to bring the kiss of the Lord to My mummy. Here: kiss this little celestial flower there, on its heart, and you will see that it tastes of God.

This other one, instead, which is a paler blue, like daddy's eyes, has written on its leaves that the Lord loves daddy very much because he is good.

And this tiny little one, the only one to be found, (it is a myosote), is the one that God made to tell Mary that He loves Her.

And these red ones, does mummy know what they are? They are pieces of king David's dress, stained with the blood of the enemies of Israel and sown on the battlefields and the fields of victory. They originate from those strips of the heroic regal dress torn in the struggle for the Lord.

Instead this white and gentle one, that seems to be made with seven silk cups looking up to the sky, full of perfumes, and that was growing over there, near the spring -daddy picked it for Her amongst the thorns- is made with the dress of Solomon. He wore it, so many many years before, in the same month in which his little granddaughter was born, when he walked in the midst of the multitudes of Israel before the Ark and the Tabernacle, in the splendid majesty of his robes. And he rejoiced because of the cloud which returned to encircle his glory, and he sang the canticle and the prayer of his joy.

« I want to be always like this flower, and like the wise king I want to sing throughout My life canticles and prayers before the Tabemacle » ends Mary.

« How do You know these holy things, my darling? Who told You? Your father? »

« No. I do not know who it is. I think I have always known them. Perhaps there is one who tells Me and I do not see him. Perhaps one of the angels that God sends to speak to good people. Mummy, will you tell Me another story? »

« Oh, my dear! Which story do You wish to know? »

Mary is thinking, deeply absorbed in Her thoughts. Her expression should be immortalized in a portrait. The shadows of Her thoughts are reflected on Her childish face. There are smiles and sighs, sunshine and clouds, thinking of the history of Israel. Then She makes up Her mind: « Once again the story of Gabriel and Daniel, where Christ is promised.»

And She listens, with Her eyes closed, repeating in a low voice the words Her mother says, as if to remember them better. When Anne comes to the end She asks: « How long will it be before we have the Immanuel? »

« About thirty years, my darling.»

« Such a long time! And I shall be in the Temple... Tell Me, if I should pray very hard, so hard, day and night, night and day, and I wanted to belong only to God, for all My life, for this purpose, would the Eternal Father grant Me the grace of sending the Messiah to His people sooner? »

« I do not know, my dear. The Prophet states: "Seventy weeks". I do not think a prophecy can be wrong. But the Lord is so good » she hastens to add, seeing tears appear on the fair eyelashes of her child, « the Lord is so good that I believe that if You do pray very hard, so hard, He will hear Your prayer.»

A smile appears once again on Her little face, which She has lifted up towards Her mother and the rays of the sun, filtering through the vine branches cause Her tears to shine like dew-drops on very thin stems of alpine moss.

« Then I will pray and I shall be a virgin for this.»

« But do you know what that means? »

« It means that one does not know human love, but only the love of God. It means that one has no other thought but for the Lord. It means to remain children in the flesh and angels in the heart. It means that one has no eyes but to look at God, and ears to listen to Him, and a mouth to praise Him, hands to offer oneself as a victim, feet to follow Him fast, and a heart and a life to be given to Him.»

« May God bless You! But then You will never have any children, and yet You love babies and little lambs and doves so much... Do You know that? A baby is for his mother like a little white and curly lamb, he is like a little dove with silk feathers and coral mouth to be loved and kissed and heard say: "Mummy!" »

« It does not matter. I shall belong to God. I shall pray in the Temple. And perhaps one day I will see the Immanuel. The Virgin who is to be His Mother must be already born, as the great Prophet says, and She is in the Temple... I will be Her companion on... and maidservant. Oh! Yes. If I could only meet Her, by God's light, I would like to serve Her, the Blessed One. And later, She would bring Me Her Son, She would take Me to Her Son, and I would serve Him too...

Just think, mummy!... To serve the Messiah!! » Mary is overcome by this thought that exalts Her and makes Her totally humble at the same time. With Her hands crossed over Her breast and Her little head slightly bent forward and flushed with emotion, She is like an infantile reproduction of the Annunciation that I saw. She resumes: « But will the King of Israel, the Lord's Anointed, allow Me

to serve Him? »

« Have no doubts about that. Does King Solomon not say: "There are sixty queens and eighty concubines and countless maidens?" You can see that in the King's palace there will be countless maidens serving the Lord.»

« Oh! You can see then that I must be a virgin? I must. If He wants a virgin as His Mother, it means that He loves virginity above all things. I want Him to love Me, His maiden, because of the virginity which will make Me somewhat like His beloved Mother... This is what I want... I would also like to be a sinner, a big sinner, if I were not afraid of offending the Lord... Tell Me, mummy, can one be a sinner out of love of God? »

« But what are You saying, my dear? I don't understand You.»

« I mean: to commit a sin in order to be loved by God, Who becomes the Saviour. Who is lost, is saved. Isn't that so? I would like to be saved by the Saviour to receive His loving look. That is why I would like to sin, but not to commit a sin that would disgust Him. How can He save Me if I do not get lost?»

Anne is dumbfounded. She does not know what to say.

Joachim helps her. He has approached them walking noiselessly on the grass, behind the low hedge of vine-shoots. « He has saved You beforehand, because He knows that You love Him and You want to love Him only. So You are already redeemed and You can be a virgin as You wish » says Joachim.

« Is that true, daddy? » Mary embraces his knees and looks at him with Her clear blue eyes, so like Her father's and so happy because of this hope She gets from Her father.

« It is true, my little darling. Look! I was just bringing You this little sparrow, that at its first flight landed near the spring. I could have left it there but its weak wings did not have enough strength to fly off again, and its tiny legs could not hold it on to the slippery moss stones. It would have fallen into the water. But I did not wait for that. I took it and now I am giving it to You. You will do what you like with it. The fact is that it was saved before it fell into the danger. God has done the same with You. Now, tell me, Mary: have I loved the sparrow more by saving it beforehand, or would I have loved it more saving it afterwards? »

« You have loved it now, because you did not let it get hurt in the cold water.»

« And God has loved You more, because He has loved You before You sinned.»

« And I will love Him wholeheartedly. Wholeheartedly. My beautiful little sparrow, I am like you. The Lord has loved us both equally, by saving us... I will now rear you and then I will let you go. And you in the forest and I in the Temple will sing the praises of God, and we shall say: "Please send the One You promised to those who expect Him". Oh! Daddy, when are you taking Me to the Temple? »

« Soon, my dear. But are You not sorry to leave Your father? »

« Yes, very much! But you will come... in any case, if it did not hurt, what sacrifice would it be? »

« And will You remember us? »

« I always will. After the prayer for the Immanuel I will pray for you. That God may give you joy and a long life... until the day He becomes the Saviour. Then I will ask Him to take you to the celestial Jerusalem. »

The vision ends with Mary tightly clasped in Her father's arms.

Jesus says:

«I can already hear the comments of the doctors with captious objections: "How can a little girl not yet three years old speak thus? It is an exaggeration". And they do not consider that they make a monster of Me by ascribing adults' actions to My own childhood.

Intelligence is not given to everybody in the same way and at the same time. The Church has fixed the age of reason at six years of age, because that is the age when even a backward child can tell good from evil, at least in basically important matters. But there are children who long before that age are capable of discerning and understanding and wanting with sufficiently developed discretion. Little Imelde Lambertini, Rosa da Viterbo, Nellie Organ, Nennolina, may give you confirmation, o difficult doctors, to believe that My Mother was

able to think and speak like that. I have quoted four names at random amongst the thousands of holy children who populate My Paradise, after reasoning on earth as adults for possibly more or fewer years.

What is reason? A gift of God. God can therefore give it as He wishes, to whom He wishes and when He wishes. Reason in fact is one of the things that make you more like God, the Intelligent and Reasoning Spirit. Reason and intelligence were graces given by God to Man in the Earthly Paradise. How full of life they were, when Grace was alive, still intact and active in the spirit of the first two Parents!

In the Book of Jesus Ben Sirach it is stated: "All wisdom is from the Lord, and it is His own for ever". What wisdom, therefore, would men have had, had they remained children of God?

The gaps in your intelligence are the natural fruits of your fall from Grace and honesty. By losing Grace you banished Wisdom for centuries. As a meteor which is hidden behind masses of clouds, Wisdom no longer reached you with its bright flashes, but through mist which your prevarications have rendered thicker and thicker.

Then Christ came and He restored Grace, the supreme gift of the love of God. But do you know how to keep this gem clear and pure? No, you do not. When you do not crush it with your individual will in sinning, you soil it with your continuous minor faults, your weaknesses, your attachment to vice. Such attempts, even if they are not a proper marriage with the septiform vice, are a weakening of the light of Grace and of its activity. And then, to weaken the magnificent light of intelligence that God had given the First Parents, you have centuries and centuries of corruption, which exert a harmful influence on the body and on the mind.

But Mary was not only the Pure, the new Eve created for the joy of God: She was the super Eve, the Masterpiece of the Most High, She was the Full of Grace, the Mother of the Word in the mind of God.

Jesus Ben Sirach says: "Source of Wisdom is the Word". Will the Son therefore not have put His wisdom on His Mother's lips?

If the mouth of a Prophet was purified with embers, because he had to repeat to men the words that the Word, the Wisdom, entrusted to Him, will Love not have cleansed and exalted the speech of his infant Spouse Who was to bear the Word, so that She should no longer speak as a little girl and then as a woman, but only and always as a celestial creature melted in the great light and wisdom of God?

The miracle is not in the superior intelligence shown by Mary in Her childhood, as afterwards it was by Me. The miracle is in containing the Infinite Intelligence, that dwelt there, within suitable bounds, so that crowds should not be startled and satanic attention should not be awakened.

I will talk again on this subject which is part of the "remembrance" which saints have of God.»

8. Mary Is Presented in the Temple.
30th August 1944.

I see Mary between Her father and mother walking in the streets in Jerusalem. Passers-by stop to look at the beautiful Girl all dressed in white and wearing a very light mantle. The mantle, because of its design in branches and flowers, which are a little darker against the soft background, seems to be the same one that Anne was wearing on the day of her Purification. The only difference is that while it reached down to Anne's waist, in the case of Mary, Who is only a little girl, it reaches down to Her ankles and envelops Her in a small light and bright cloud of rare beauty.

Her fair hair, loose on Her shoulders, or rather, on Her gentle neck, shines through the veil where there is no pattern, but only the very light background. The veil is held on Her forehead by a very pale blue ribbon, on which small lilies are embroidered with silver threads, certainly the work of Her mother. As I said, the snow white dress reaches down to the ground, and Her little feet can just be seen, as She walks, in Her white sandals. Her hands are like two magnolia petals, peeping from the long sleeves. Apart from the blue ribbon,

there is no other colour. It is all white. Mary seems to be dressed in snow. Joachim is wearing the same garment he had on for the Purification. Anne, instead, is wearing a very dark violet dress. Also the mantle, which also covers her head, is dark violet. She is holding it lowered below her eyes. Two poor eyes of a mother, red with tears, that do not wish to weep and above all do not wish to be seen crying, but can but shed tears under the protection of the mantle, a protection that serves its purpose with regard to passers-by and also to Joachim, whose eyes, usually clear, are to-day red and dull, because of the tears he has shed and is still shedding. He is walking with a stoop, his head is covered by a veil worn in the fashion of a turban, with the folds hanging down along his face.

A very old Joachim. Whoever sees him, must think that he is the grandfather or the great grandfather of the little girl he is holding by the hand. The pain of losing Her causes the poor father to drag his feet and he is so weary that he looks twenty years older. He is so sad and tired that he looks like an old sick man. His mouth trembles slightly between the two wrinkles that at the sides of his nose are so deep today.

They are both endeavouring to conceal their tears. But if they are successful with many people, they are not with Mary, Who, because of Her height, sees them from below, and lifting Her head looks at Her father and mother alternately. They make an effort to smile at Her with their trembling mouths and they hold Her tiny hand tighter every time their little daughter looks at them and smiles. They must be thinking: « There. A smile to be seen one time less.»

They proceed slowly. Very slowly. They seem to be wishing to protract their journey for as long as possible. Everything serves as a pretext to stop... But a journey must come to an end! And this one is about to end. Up there, at the top of this last stretch of the road, there are the Temple walls. Anne utters a groan and holds Mary's hand tighter.

« Anne, my dear, I am here with you! » a voice utters, coming out from the shade of a low arch built over a cross-roads. And Elizabeth, who was waiting for them, approaches her and embraces her. And since Anne is crying she says: «Come into this friendly house for a little while. Then we shall go together. Also Zacharias is here.»

They all enter a low dark room where the only light is a big fire. The landlady, obviously a friend of Elizabeth's, but unknown to Anne, kindly withdraws and leaves them alone.

« You must not think that I am repenting or I am giving my treasure to the Lord unwillingly » explains Anne crying, « but it's my heart... oh! how my heart aches, my old heart that is returning to its childless solitude! If you could only feel...»

« I know, my dear Anne... But you are good and God will console you in your solitude. Mary will pray for the peace of Her mother. Won't you, Mary? » Mary caresses Her mother's hands and kisses them. She presses them to Her face to be caressed and Anne holds Her little face tightly in her hands and kisses it repeatedly. She is never tired of kissing Her.

Zacharias enters and greets them saying: « May the peace of the Lord be with the just.»

« Yes » replies Joachim, « implore peace for us, because our hearts are trembling in our offer, as Abraham's did, while he was climbing the mountain, but we shall not find another offer to replace this one. Neither do we want it, because we are faithful to the Lord. But we are suffering, Zacharias. Since you are a priest of God, please understand us and do not be perturbed.»

«Never. On the contrary, your sorrow which does not go beyond reasonable limits and does not shake your faith, teaches me how to love the Most High. But take heart. Anna, the prophetess, will take care of this flower of David and Aaron. At present She is the only lily of David's holy issue in the Temple and She will be taken care of as a royal pearl. Although we are approaching the time when the Messiah is to come, and the women belonging to the house of David should be anxious to consecrate their daughters to the Temple, because the Messiah will be born of a virgin of David's issue, yet, because of the general weakening of faith, the places of the virgins in the Temple are empty. They are too few and none of the royal offspring, since Sarah of Elisha left three years ago to get married. It is true that there are still thirty years to the appointed time, but... Well let us hope that Mary will be the first of many virgins of David's

offspring before the Sacred Veil. And then... who knows...» Zacharias does not say anything else. But he looks at Mary thoughtfully. Then he resumes: « Also I will watch over Her. I am a priest and I have power in here. I will make use of it for this angel. And Elizabeth will often come to see Her.»

« Oh! Certainly! I am in such need of God that I will come and tell this little Girl, so that She may tell the Eternal One.»

Anne has taken heart again. To relieve her anxiety even more Elizabeth asks her:

« Is this not the veil of your wedding? Or have you been weaving new byssus? »

« It is. I am consecrating it to the Lord with Her. My eyes are no longer so good... and also our wealth has been reduced by taxation and misfortunes... I could not afford heavy expenses. I have only seen to Her clothing for the time She will be in the House of the Lord and afterwards... Because I do not think that I shall be there to dress Her for Her wedding... but I want it to be the hands of Her mummy, even if cold and motionless, which prepare Her for the wedding and weave Her linens and dresses.»

« Oh! Why think of that!?! »

« I am old, my dear cousin. I have never felt it so much as I do now in my great pain. I have given the last ounce of strength in my life to this flower, to bear Her and to nourish Her, and now the pain of losing Her is drawing my last strength away and dispersing it.»

« Don't say that, for Joachim's sake.»

« Yes, you are quite right. I will try and live for my husbands.»

Joachim pretends he has not heard, intent as he is on listening to Zacharias, but he has heard and he sighs deeply, his eyes shining with tears.

« It is between the third and the sixth hour. I think we ought to go » Zacharias says.

They all get up to put on their mantles and set off.

But before going out Mary kneels down on the threshold with Her arms stretched out: a little imploring cherub. « Father! Mother! Your blessing, please.»

She is not crying, the little brave girl. But Her lips are trembling and Her voice, broken by a sob, resembles more than ever the trembling cooing of a little dove. Her face is pale, and Her eyes have the look of resigned distress which I will see again on Calvary and in the Sepulchre, where it was so much more intense that it was impossible to look at Her without deep suffering. Her parents bless Her and kiss Her: once, twice, ten times, they are never satisfied... Elizabeth is weeping silently and Zacharias, notwithstanding his efforts to conceal his tears, is deeply moved.

They go out. Mary is between Her father and mother as before. Zacharias and his wife are in front of them.

They are now inside the walls of the Temple. « I will go to the High Priest. You go to the Great, Terrace.»

They go across three yards and through three halls, set one upon the other. They are now at the foot of the huge marble cube crowned with gold. Every dome, convex like a huge half orange, blazes in the sun, which now, at midday, is shining down directly on to the large yard surrounding the solemn building and is filling with its dazzling light the large square and the wide flight of steps leading up to the Temple. Only the porch facing the steps, along the façade, is in the shade and the very high bronze and gold door is even darker and more solemn looking in so much light.

Mary looks whiter than snow in so much sunshine. She is now at the foot of the steps, between Her father and Her mother. How violently their hearts must be throbbing! Elizabeth is beside Anne, but a little behind her, about half a step. Upon the blare of silver trumpets the door rotates on its hinges, which seem to be emitting the sound of a cithern, while turning on the bronze balls. The interior appears with its lamps in the far end and a procession is moving towards the door, a stately procession with silver trumpets, clouds of incense and lights.

It is now at the threshold. In front is the High Priest... a stately old man, dressed in very fine linen, and wearing over his linen dress a short linen tunic and on top of it a kind of chasuble, something multicoloured between a chasuble and a deacon's vestment: purple and gold, violet and white alternate and sparkle like gems in the sun: two real gems are shining more brightly at the top of his shoulders. Perhaps they are buckles with their precious settings. On his breast there is a large metal plate shining with gems and held by a gold chain.

Pendants and trimmings gleam on the hem of his short tunic and gold shines above his forehead on his mitre, that reminds me of the mitre worn by Orthodox priests, a mitre shaped as a dome instead of being pointed like the Roman Catholic one.

The solemn personage moves forward, alone, as far as the beginning of the steps, in the golden sunshine that makes him look even more splendid. The others stand waiting under the shady porch, in a circle outside the door. On the left there is a group of girls, all dressed in white, with prophetess Anna and other elderly ladies, obviously teachers.

The High Priest looks at the little Girl and smiles. She must look very tiny at the foot of the flight of steps worthy of an Egyptian temple! He lifts his arms to the sky in prayer. They all bow their heads in perfect humility before the priestly majesty communicating with the Eternal Majesty.

Then, he beckons to Mary. And She departs from Her mother and father, and as if fascinated, climbs the steps. And She smiles. She smiles in the shade of the Temple, where the precious Veil is hanging... She is now at the top of the steps, at the feet of the High Priest, who imposes his hand on Her head. The victim has been accepted. Which purer victim had the Temple ever received? Then he turns round and holding his hand on Her shoulder as if he were leading the immaculate little Lamb to the altar, he takes Her to the Temple door. Before letting Her in, he asks Her: « Mary of David, are You aware of Your vow?» When She replies « Yes » in Her silvery voice, he cries out: « Go in, then. Walk in my presence and be perfect.»

Mary enters and is swallowed up by the darkness. The group of virgins and teachers, then the Levites hide and isolate Her more and more... She can no longer be seen...

Also the door is now closing on its sweet-sounding hinges. Through the gap which is becoming narrower and narrower, the procession can be seen advancing towards the Holy of Holies. Now it is only a thread. Now it is no more: it is closed. The last chord of the harmonious hinges is replied to by a sob from the two old parents and by a joint cry: « Mary! Daughter! » and then two groans, the one invoking the other: « Anne! » « Joachim! » and they finish whispering: « Let us give glory to the Lord Who is receiving Her in His House and is leading Her along His path.»

It all ends thus.

Jesus says:

« The High Priest had said: "Walk in my presence and be perfect". The High Priest did not know that he was speaking to the Woman Who is inferior in perfection only to God. But he was speaking in the name of God, and therefore his order was a sacred one. It is always sacred, particularly with regard to the Virgin Full of Wisdom.

Mary had deserved that "Wisdom should precede Her and show Itself to Her first", because "from the beginning of Her day She had watched at Its door, and wishing to be taught, out of love, She wanted to be pure to achieve perfect love and deserve to have Wisdom as Her teacher".

In Her humility She did not know that She possessed Wisdom before being born and that the union with Wisdom was but the continuation of the divine pulsations of Paradise. She could not imagine that. And when God whispered sublime words to Her in the depths of Her heart, in Her humility She considered them thoughts of pride and raising Her innocent heart to God, She besought Him: "Lord, have mercy on Thy Servant!"

Oh! It is true that the True Wise Virgin, the Eternal Virgin, has had only one thought from the dawn of Her day: to raise Her heart to God from the morning of life and to watch for the Lord, praying before the Most High, asking forgiveness for the weaknesses of Her heart, as Her humility convinced Her, and She was not aware that She was anticipating the request for forgiveness for sinners, which She would later make at the foot of the Cross, together with Her dying Son.

"When the great Lord will decide, She will be filled with the Spirit of intelligence" and will then understand Her great mission. For the time being She is only a child, who in the sacred peace of the Temple, establishes and re-establishes closer and closer connections, affections and memories with Her God. This is for everybody.

But for you, My little Mary, has your Teacher nothing special to tell you? "Walk

in My presence, be therefore perfect". I am slightly modifying the sacred phrase and I am giving it to you as an order. Be perfect in love, perfect in generosity, perfect in suffering.

Look once again at Mother. And consider what so many ignore or wish to ignore, because sorrow is too irksome to their taste and their spirit. Sorrow. Mary suffered from the very first hour of Her life. To be perfect as She was, implied the possession of a perfect sensitivity. Consequently sacrifice was to be more piercing. And thus more meritorious. He who possesses purity possesses love, who possesses love possesses wisdom, who possesses wisdom possesses generosity and heroism, because he knows why he makes a sacrifice.

Raise your spirit, even if the cross bends you, breaks you and kills you. God is with you.»

9. Death of Joachim and Anne.

31st August 1944.

Jesus says:

« Like a quick winter twilight when an ice-cold wind gathers clouds in the sky, the lives of My grandparents had a quick decline, after the Sun of their lives was placed to shine before the Sacred Veil of the Temple.

But it is said:

"Wisdom brings up her own sons,
and cares for those who seek her.
Whoever loves her loves life,
those who wait on her will enjoy peace.
Those who serve her, minister to the Holy One
and the Lord loves those who love her.
If he trusts himself to her he will inherit her
and his descendants will remain in possession of her
because she accompanies him in his trials.
First of all she selects him,
then she brings fear and faintness on him,
ploughing him with her discipline,
until she has tested him in his thoughts
and she can trust him.
In the end she will make him firm,
will lead him back to the straight road
and make him happy.
She will reveal her secrets to him,
She will place in him treasures of science,
and knowledge of justice".

Yes, all this has been said. The books of wisdom may be applied to all men, who will find guidance in them and a light for their behaviour. But happy are those who can be recognised amongst the spiritual lovers of Wisdom.

I surrounded Myself with wise people, in My human kinship. Anne, Joachim, Joseph, Zacharias, and even more Elizabeth, and then the Baptist, are they not real wise people? Not to mention My Mother, the abode of Wisdom.

Wisdom had inspired My grandparents how to live in a way which was agreeable to God, from their youth to their death, and like a tent protecting from the fury of the elements, Wisdom had protected them from the danger of sin. The sacred fear of God is the root of the tree of wisdom, that thrusts its branches far and wide to reach with its top tranquil love in its peace, peaceful love in its security, secure love in its faithfulness, faithful love in its intensity: the total, generous, effective love of saints.

"Who loves her, loves life and will inherit Life" says Ecclesiasticus. This sentence is linked with Mine: "Who loses his life for My sake, will save it". Because we are not referring to the poor life of this world, but to the eternal life, not to the joys of one hour, but to the immortal ones.

Joachim and Anne loved Wisdom thus. And Wisdom was with them in their trials. How many trials they experienced, whilst you, men, do not want to have to suffer and cry, simply because you think that you are not completely wicked! How many trials these two just people suffered, and they deserved to have Mary as their daughter! Political persecutions had driven them out of the land of David, and

made them excessively poor. They had felt sadness in seeing their years fading through without a flower that would say to them: "I shall be your continuation". And afterwards, the anxiety of having a daughter in their old age when they were certain they would never see Her grow into a woman. And then the obligation of tearing Her from their hearts to offer Her on the altar of God. And again: their life became an even more painful silence, now that they were accustomed to the chirping of their little dove, to the noise of Her little steps, to the smiles and kisses of their creature, having to wait for the hour of God, their only company being the memories of the past. And much more... Diseases, calamities of inclement weather, the arrogance of mighty ones of the earth... so many blows of battering rams on the weak castle of their modest possessions. And it is not enough: the pain for their far away creature, who was going to be left lonely and poor and, notwithstanding their cares and sacrifices, would get only the remains of Her father's property. And how will She find such remains, since they will be left uncultivated for many years, awaiting Her return? Fears, trials, temptations. And yet, loyalty to God for ever!

Their strongest temptation: not to deny their declining lives the consolation of their daughter's presence. But children belong first to God and then to their parents. Every son can say what I said to My Mother: "Do you not know that I must be busy with My Father's affairs?" And every father, every mother must learn the attitude to be maintained looking at Mary and Joseph in the Temple, at Anne and Joachim in the house of Nazareth, a house which was becoming more and more forlorn and sad, but where one thing never diminished, but increased continuously: the holiness of two hearts, the holiness of a marriage.

What light is left to Joachim, an invalid, and to his sorrowful wife, in the long and silent nights of two old people who feel they are about to die? Only the little dresses, the first pair of little sandals, the simple toys of their little daughter, now far away, and memories of Her, memories... And peace when they say: "We are suffering, but we have done our duty of love towards God". And then they were overcome by a supernatural joy shining with a celestial light, a joy unknown to the children of the world, a joy that does not fade away when heavy eyelashes close on two dying eyes: on the contrary, it shines brighter in the last hour, illuminating the truth that had been hidden within them throughout their lives. Like a butterfly in its cocoon, the truth in them gave faint indications of its presence, just soft flashes, whereas now it opens its wings to the sun and shows its beautiful decorations. And their lives passed away in the certainty of a happy future for themselves and their descendants, their trembling lips murmuring words of praise to God.

Such was the death of my grandparents. Such as their holy lives deserved. Because of their holiness, they deserved to be the first guardians of the Virgin Beloved by God, and only when a greater Sun showed itself at the end of their days, they realized the grace God had granted them.

Because of their holiness, Anne suffered no pain in giving birth to her child: it was the ecstasy of the bearer of the Faultless One. Neither of them suffered the throes of death, but only a weakness that fades away, as a star softly disappears when the sun rises at dawn. And if they did not have the consolation of having Me present, as Wisdom Incarnate, as Joseph had, I was invisibly present, whispering sublime words, bending over their pillows, to send them to sleep, awaiting their triumph.

Someone may ask: "Why did they not have to suffer when generating and dying, since they were children of Adam?" My answer is: "If the Baptist, who was a son of Adam, and had been conceived with the original sin, was presanctified by Me in his mother's womb, simply because I approached her, was no grace to be granted to the mother of the Holy and Faultless One, Who had been preserved by God and bore God in Her almost divine spirit, in Her most pure heart, and was never separated from Him, since She was created by the Father and was conceived in a womb, and then received into Heaven to possess God in glory for ever and ever?" I also answer: "An upright conscience gives a peaceful death and the prayers of saints will obtain such a death for you".

Joachim and Anne had a whole life of upright conscience behind them and such a life rose like a beautiful landscape and led them to Heaven, while their Holy Daughter was praying before the Tabernacle of God for Her parents far away, whom She had postponed to God, Summurn Bonum, and yet She loved them, as the law and Her feeling commanded, with a perfect supernatural love.»

10. Mary's Canticle Imploring the Coming of the Christ.
2nd September 1944.

Only yesterday evening, Friday, I began to see. I saw nothing but a very young Mary, twelve years old at most, Her face no longer roundish, as is typical of children, but already showing the future outlines of a woman in a perfect oval. Also Her hair is no longer falling loose on Her neck in soft curls, but it is plaited and two thick braids fall over Her shoulders down to Her waist. Her hair is a very pale gold colour, so light that it seems to be blended with silver. Her face is more pensive and mature, although it is the face of a young girl, a beautiful and pure girl, all dressed in white. She is sewing in a very small room, which is also completely white, and through the wide open window one can see the imposing central part of the Temple, the flights of steps of the yards and porches. Beyond the enclosure wall also the town can be seen with its streets, houses, gardens, and in the background the humped green top of the Mount of Olives.

Mary is sewing and singing in a low voice. I do not know whether it is a sacred song or not. It says:

« Like a star in clear water
a light is shining within My heart.
It has been with Me since My childhood
and it guides Me tenderly with love.
In the depths of My heart there is a song.
Where does it come from?
Man, you do not know.
It comes from where the Holy One rests.
I look at My clear star
And I do not want anything,
Not even the sweetest and dearest thing,
Except this sweet light that is all Mine.
You brought Me down from the Heavens above,
O star of Mine, into the womb of a mother,
Now You live in Me, but beyond the veil
I see Your glorious face, Father.
When will You grant Your servant the honour
Of being the humble maid of the Saviour?
Send us the Messiah from Heaven,
Accept, Holy Father, the offer of Mary.»

Mary is now quiet. She smiles and sighs, then She kneels down in prayer. Her little face is shining brightly. She is looking upwards, towards the clear blue summer sky and Her face seems to be absorbing and then radiating all the brightness in the air. Or rather, it looks as if from within Her a hidden sun is radiating its rays and lighting up Her face, colouring Her snow-white flesh with a light rosy hue. And the light from Her face spreads out towards the world and the sun shining on the world: a blessing and a promise of much good. While Mary is getting up after Her prayer, with ecstatic brightness still on Her face, old Anna of Phanuel enters the room. She stands still, amazed or at least wondering at Mary's attitude and appearance. Then she calls Her: « Mary! » and the Girl turns round with a smile, a different one but still so beautiful and says: « Peace to you, Anna.»
« Were You praying? Are Your prayers never enough for You? »
« My prayers would be enough. But I speak to God. Anna, you cannot imagine how close I feel Him. More than close, within My heart. May God forgive Me My pride.

But I do not feel lonely. See? Over there, in that House of gold and snow, behind the double Curtain, there is the Holy of Holies. Nobody is ever allowed to look at the Propitiatory, on which the glory of the Lord rests, except the High Priest. But My worshipping soul does not need to look at the embroidered Curtain, which quivers at the songs of the virgins and Levites and is scented with precious incense, as if I wanted to pierce its fabric and see the Testimony shine through it. I do look at it! Do not think that I do not look at it with worshipping eyes like every son of Israel. Do not think that pride blinds Me making Me think what I will now tell you. I look at it and there is no humble servant amongst the people of God that looks more humbly at the House of the Lord than I do, because I am convinced that I am the least of all. But what do I see? A veil. What do I think there is behind the Veil? A Tabernacle. What is in it? If I listen to My heart, I see God shining in His loving glory and He says to Me: "I love You" and I reply to Him: "I love You" and I die and I am recreated at each beat of My heart in this reciprocal kiss... I am amongst you, My dear teachers and companions. But a circle of fire isolates Me from you. Within the circle, God and Myself. And I see you through the Fire of God and so I love you... but I cannot love you according to the flesh, neither shall I ever be able to love anyone according to the flesh. I can only love Him Who loves Me, according to the spirit. This is My destiny. The secular Law of Israel wants every girl to be a wife, and every wife to be a mother. But, while obeying the Law, I must obey the Voice that whispers to Me: "I want You"; I am a virgin and a virgin I shall remain, How shall I succeed? This sweet invisible Presence that is with Me will help Me, because it is Its desire. I am not afraid. I have no longer My father and mother... and only God knows how My love for whatever human being belonged to Me was burnt in that pain. Now I have but God. I therefore obey Him unquestioningly... I would have done so also regardless of My father and mother, because I have been taught by the Voice that whoever wishes to follow It, must go beyond father and mother. Parents are loving patrols watching the hearts of their children, whom they wish to lead to happiness according to their plans... and they are not aware of other plans leading to infinite happiness... I would have left them My dresses and mantles, to follow the Voice that says to Me: "Come, My beloved Spouse". I would have left them everything, and the pearls of My tears, for I would have cried having to disobey them, and the instincts of My blood, because I would have defied even death to follow the Voice calling Me, would have told them that there is something greater and sweeter than the love of a father and mother and that is the Voice of God. But now, by His will, I am free from this tie of filial love. Nay, it would not have been a tie. My parents were two just people and God certainly spoke to them as He speaks to Me. They would have followed justice and truth. When I think of them, I imagine them in the quiet expectation among the Patriarchs and I hasten with My sacrifice the coming of the Messiah to open for them the gates of Heaven. I am My own guide on earth, or rather God guides His poor servant giving Her His commands and I fulfil them because it is a joy for Me to obey. When the time comes, I will reveal My secret to the spouse... and he will accept it.»
« But, Mary... which words will You find to persuade him? You will have the love of a man, the Law and life against you.»
« I shall have God with Me... God will enlighten the heart of the spouse... life will lose the incentives of the senses and become a pure flower with the fragrance of charity. The Law... Anna, don't call Me a blasphemer. I think the Law is about to be changed. By whom, do you think, if it is divine? By the Only One Who can change it. By God. The time is nearer than you think, I tell you. Because when I was reading Daniel, a great light came to Me from the depths of My heart and I understood the meaning of the enigmatic word. The seventy weeks will be shortened because of the prayers of just people. Does this mean that the number of the years is being changed? No. A prophecy is never wrong. But the measure of the prophetic time is the course of the moon, not of the sun. Therefore I say: "Near is the hour when the Baby born of a Virgin will be heard crying". Oh! Since this Light that loves Me tells Me so many things, I wish it would tell Me where the happy mother is, that will give birth to the Son of God and Messiah of His people! Barefooted I would travel all over the world, neither cold nor frost, neither dust nor heat, nor wild beast nor hunger would prevent Me from reaching Her and I would say to Her: "Grant Your servant and the servant of the servants of Christ to live under Your roof. I will turn Your millstone

and Your press, use Me as a slave to work Your millstone and to watch Your herds, make Me wash the napkins of Your Child... I will work in Your kitchen, at Your oven, wherever You wish... but receive Me. That I may see Him! And hear His voice! And receive His glance!" And if She did not want Me, I would live at Her doorstep like a beggar, in cold and hot weather, just to hear the voice of the Child Messiah and the echo of His laughter, and see Him passing by... And perhaps one day He would offer Me a piece of bread... Oh! If I were dying with hunger and I were fainting because of extensive fasting, I would not eat that bread. I would hold it close to My heart like a bag of precious pearls and I would kiss it to scent the perfume of Christ's hand and I would never be hungry or cold, because its touch would give Me ecstasy and heat, ecstasy and food ...

»

« You ought to be the Mother of the Christ, since You love Him so much! Is that why You wish to remain a virgin? »

« Oh! No. I am misery and dust. I dare not lift My eyes towards the Glory. That is why, rather than the double Veil, beyond which I know dwells the invisible Presence of Jehovah, I love looking into My heart. Over there, there is the terrible God of Sinai. Here, within Me, I see our Father, a loving Face that smiles and blesses Me, because I am small like a little bird, that the wind sustains without feeling its weight and I am weak like the stem of a lily of the valley, that can only bloom and smell sweetly and can present no other force to the wind but its scented and pure sweetness. God, My loving wind! Not because of that. But because the Son of God and of a Virgin, the Holy of the Most Holy One, can but like what in Heaven He chose as his Mother and what on the earth speaks to Him of His Heavenly Father: Purity. If the Law pondered that, if the rabbis, who have complicated the Law with all the quibbles of their teaching, turned their minds to higher horizons and aimed at supernatural things, deserting the human and lucrative affairs which cause them to forget the supreme End, they should, above all, make Purity the main subject of their teaching, so that the King of Israel may find it when He comes. With the olive branches of the Peaceful One, with the Palms of the Triumpher, spread lilies, lilies, lilies... How much Blood the Saviour will have to shed to redeem us! How much indeed! From the thousands of wounds that Isaiah saw on the Man of Sorrows, a stream of Blood is falling, like dew from a porous vase. May this divine Blood not fall where there is desecration and blasphemy, but into chalices of fragrant purity that may receive it and gather it for the purpose of spreading it amongst the diseased and leprous souls and amongst those who are dead to God. Give lilies to wipe with their pure petals the sweat and the tears of Christ! Give lilies for His keen desire of Martyrdom! Oh! Where will that Lily be, that will bear You? Where is the Lily that will quench Your parching thirst, that will become red with Your Blood, will die for the pain of seeing You dying, and will cry over Your bloodless Body? Oh! Christ! Christ! My desire! ...»

Mary is now silent, weeping and overwhelmed.

Anna is also silent for a little while and then with her clear voice of a deeply moved old woman, she asks: « Have You anything else to teach me, Mary? »

Mary rouses. She must think, in Her humility, that Her teacher is reproaching Her and She exclaims: « Oh! Forgive Me! You are My teacher. I am nothing. But this voice comes from My heart. I watch over it, to avoid speaking. But like a river that under the fury of water breaks its embankment, it has now overcome Me and overflowed. Please pay no attention to My words and chastise My presumption. Words of mystery should remain in the depths of one's heart, which God helps in His goodness. I know. But this Invisible Presence is so sweet that I am filled with joy... Anna, please forgive your little servant! »

Anna embraces Her while tears shine on her old wrinkled trembling face. The tears run along her wrinkles, like water along an uneven ground that becomes a trembling swamp. But the old teacher does not provoke laughter, on the contrary her crying excites the deepest respect.

Mary is clasped in her arms, Her little face against Her teacher's breast. And it all finishes thus.

Jesus says:

« Mary remembered God. She dreamt of God. She thought She dreamt. She was only

seeing again what She had seen in the splendour of God's Heaven, in the instant She was created to be united to the body conceived on the earth. She shared with God one of God's properties, although in a lesser degree, as was fitting. That is the property of remembering, seeing and foreseeing, which is an attribute of the mighty and perfect intelligence not impaired by Fault.

Man was created in the image and likeness of God. One of the likenesses is the capability, for the soul, of remembering, seeing and foreseeing. This explains the faculty for reading into the future. This faculty sometimes comes directly, by God's will, sometimes it is a power of recollection, that rises like the sun in the morning, illuminating a point on the horizon of centuries, already seen in the vision of God.

Such mysteries are too deep to be fully understood by you. But consider. Can the Supreme Intelligence, the Mind that knows everything, the Sight that sees everything, give you something different from Himself, having created you by an act of His will and a breath of His infinite love, and having made you His children both by your origin and your destination? He gives you it in an infinitesimal part, as the creature cannot contain the Creator. But that part is perfect and complete, although infinitesimal.

What treasure of intelligence God gave man, Adam! The Fall impaired it, but My sacrifice reinstates it and opens the splendour of Intelligence, its wealth, its science for you. How sublime is the human mind united to God by His grace, sharing with God the faculty of knowledge!... The human mind united to God by Grace.

There is no other way. Those who inquisitively seek ultrahuman secrets should remember that. All knowledge that does not come from a soul in grace -and is not in grace who is against God's Law, which is very clear in its commandments- such knowledge comes from Satan. It seldom corresponds to the truth when human matters are concerned, it never corresponds to the truth with regard to superhuman matters. The Demon is in fact the father of falsehood and can but lead on to the path of falsehood. There is no other method of knowing the truth, except the one that comes from God, Who speaks and says or reminds, as a father reminds his son of his paternal house and says to him: "Don't you remember when you used to do this with Me, you saw that, you heard something else? Don't you remember when I used to kiss you goodbye? Do you remember when you saw Me for the first time and you admired the bright light on My face shining on your virginal soul, which, having been just created by Me was still pure and free from the evil that later impaired you? Do you remember when you understood for the first time, in a throb of love, what Love is? Which is the mystery of our Being and Proceeding?" And what the limited capability of a man in grace cannot reach, the Spirit of science clarifies and teaches.

But to possess the Spirit, Grace is needed. To possess Truth and Science, Grace is required. To possess the Father, Grace is necessary. Grace is a tent in which the three Persons dwell, it is a Propitiatory on which the Eternal Father rests and speaks, not from within a cloud, but revealing His face to His faithful children. Saints and just people remember God. They remember the words they heard in the Creating Mind and which the Supreme Goodness revives in their hearts to raise them like eagles to the contemplation of the Truth and to the knowledge of Time.

Mary was full of Grace. The whole One and Trine Grace was in Her. The whole One and Trine Grace prepared Her like a Bride for the Wedding, like a Nuptial Bed for the Offspring, like a Divine Person for Her Maternity and mission. She closes the cycle of the Prophetesses of the Old Testament and opens the period of the "spokesmen of God" of the New Testament.

True Ark of the Word of God, looking into Her immaculate heart, She discovered the words of eternal knowledge, which the finger of God had written there, and She remembered, as all saints do, that She had already heard them when Her immortal soul was being created by God Father, the Creator of all living beings... And if She did not remember everything of Her future mission, the reason is that God leaves some gaps in every human perfection, according to a Law of divine prudence, out of goodness and as a reward to creatures.

Mary, the second Eve, had to achieve Her part of merit in being the Mother of Christ, with a faithful good will, that God exacted also from His Christ to make Him a Redeemer.

The spirit of Mary was in Heaven. Her morale and Her body were on the earth and

they had to tread on the earth and on the flesh to reach the spirit and join it to the Spirit in a fruitful embrace.»

A note of mine. All day yesterday I thought I was going to see the news of the death of Her parents being given to Mary by Zacharias, I do not know why. I also thought, in my way, that Jesus would have dealt with the point «remembrance of God by the saints ». This morning, when the vision started, I said to myself: « Here we are, they will now tell Her that She is an orphan » and my heart was already trembling because I would have experienced my own sadness of these past days. Instead there has been absolutely nothing of what I thought I was going to see or hear. Not even one word by mistake. I am very happy about this because it confirms that there is nothing of my own in this work, not even an honest suggestion with regard to one situation. It all comes from a different source. My continuous fear ceases... until the next time because I shall always be afraid of being deceived and deceiving.

11. Mary Will Confide Her Vow to the Spouse God Will Give Her.
3rd September 1944.

What a terrible night! It seemed that the demons were raiding the world. Cannon shots, thunder and lightning, dangers, fears, the suffering because I was lying on a bed which was not mine. And in the middle of all this, there was Mary, like a sweet white flower amongst fire and troubles. She looked a little older than in yesterday's vision, but still a young girl with Her plaits of fair hair over Her shoulders. Her dress was white and Her smile mild and coy: an intimate smile at the glorious mystery enclosed in Her heart. I spent the night comparing Her mild appearance with the ferocity of the world and meditating on Her words of yesterday morning, a song of living charity, as compared to the ferocious hatred of men...

This morning, in the quiet of my room, I saw the following scene.

Mary is still in the Temple. She is now coming out with other virgins from the inner part of the Temple.

There must have been a ceremony because there is the scent of incense in the air of a red sunset. It must be late October, because the sky, already serenely restful as is usual in clear October days, is bending over the gardens of Jerusalem, where the yellow ochre leaves about to fall add gold red spots to the silvery green of the olive-trees.

The crowd, nay the host of white dressed virgins, crosses the rear yard, then climbs the steps, goes through a porch and enters another square yard, not quite so splendid, without any other door except the one leading into it. It must be the yard allocated to the small dwellings of the virgins assigned to the Temple, because each girl moves towards her cell, like a little dove to its nest. They look like a flock of doves that separate after gathering together. They are all speaking in low but joyful voices, before separating. Mary is silent. Before leaving the other girls, She bids them goodbye affectionately and then goes to Her little room in a comer on the right hand side.

One of the teachers, an elderly lady, but not so old as Anna of Phanuel, joins Her. « Mary, the High Priest wants to see You.»

Mary looks at her somewhat surprised, but does not ask any question. She only replies: « I will go at once.»

I do not know whether the large hall, which She enters, is the house of the High Priest or whether it is part of the dwellings of the women assigned to the Temple. I know it is wide and bright, tastefully arranged. In addition to the High Priest, a stately man in his robes, there are also Zacharias and Anna of Phanuel.

Mary bows down on the threshold and does not enter until the High Priest says to Her: « Come in, Mary. Do not be afraid. » Mary looks up again and slowly moves forward, not because She is unwilling, but because of a somewhat unintentional

gravity, which makes Her look more of a woman.

Anna smiles at Her to encourage Her and Zacharias greets Her: « Peace to you, cousin.»

The High Priest observes Her very carefully and then he remarks to Zacharias: « She is obviously of the stock of David and Aaron...»

« My child, I am aware of Your grace and goodness, I know that every day You are growing in grace and knowledge before God and men. I know that the voice of God whispers His sweetest words to Your heart. I know that You are the Flower of God's Temple and that a third Cherub is before the Testimony since You were here. And I would like Your perfume to continue to rise with the incense every day. But the Law says differently. You are no longer a girl, but a woman. And every woman must be a wife in Israel to bear a son to the Lord. You shall follow the commandment of the Law. Do not be afraid, do not blush. I am aware of Your royalty. The Law that prescribes that each man is to be given a woman of his own stock will protect You. But even if that were not the case, I would do so, so that Your magnificent blood might not be corrupted. Don't You know anyone of Your stock, Mary, who might be Your husband? »

Mary lifts Her face full of blushes. Her eyes are shining with tears which begin to appear and with a trembling voice She replies: « No, nobody.»

« It is not possible for Her to know anyone, because She came here in Her childhood and David's race has been struck too severely and scattered too widely to allow the various branches to gather like foliage around the royal palm » says Zacharias.

« We shall then leave the choice to God.»

The tears that Mary had restrained so far, gush out and fall on Her trembling mouth. She looks imploringly at Her teacher.

« Mary has consecrated Herself to the Lord for His glory and for the salvation of Israel. She was but a little child just learning to read and write and She had already made Her vow...» says Anne, helping Her.

« Is that why You are crying then? Not because You wish to resist the Law? »

« Just for that... nothing else. I shall obey you, Priest of God.»

« This confirms what I have always been told of You. How long have You been consecrated to the Lord? »

« I have always been, I think. I was not yet in this Temple, and I had already given Myself to the Lord.»

« But are You not the little one who came twelve years ago and asked me to be allowed to enter? »

« Well, then, how can You say that You already belonged to God then? »

« If I look back, I find I was consecrated... I do not remember when I was born, neither do I remember how I began to love My mother and to say to My father: "Father, I am your daughter"... But I remember that I gave My heart to God, although I do not know when it started. Perhaps it was with the first kiss that I was able to give, with the first word that I learned to say, with the first step that I took... Yes, I think I find My first recollection of love with My first steady step... My house... near the house there was a garden full of flowers... and there was an orchard and some fields... and there was a spring of water at the rear, under the hill, and the water gushed out from a hollow rock that formed a grotto... it was full of long and thin herbs that hung down forming small green waterfalls everywhere and they seemed to be weeping because the thin little leaves, that seemed an embroidery work, had tiny little drops of water on them and when the drops fell they tinkled like little bells. Also the spring seemed to be singing. And there were birds on the olive and apple-trees above the spring and white doves used to come and wash in the clear water of the fountain... I was no longer thinking of all that, because I had put all My heart in God and, with the exception of My father and mother, whom I loved in life and in death, every other worldly thing had disappeared from My heart... But you have made Me think of it... I must find when I gave Myself to God... and the things of My first years come back to My mind... I loved that grotto, because I heard a voice sweeter than the song of the water and the warbling of the birds say to Me: "Come, My Beloved". I loved those herbs covered with tinkling and sparkling diamond drops, because I could see in them the sign of My Lord and I used to say to Myself: "O soul of Mine, see how great Your God is, He Who made the cedars of Lebanon for the eagles, has also made these little leaves that bend down under the weight of a little mosquito and He made them for the joy of

Your eyes and as a protection for Your little feet". I loved that silence of pure things: the light breeze, the silvery water, the purity of the doves... I loved the peace that hovered over the little grotto, and descended from the apple and olive-trees, now full of blossoms, then laden with beautiful fruit... And I do not know... the voice seemed to be saying to Me, yes, just to Me: "Come, specious olive; come, sweet apple; come, sealed spring; come, My dove"... Sweet is the love of a father, sweet the love of a mother... sweet their voices calling Me... but this, this one! Oh! in the earthly Paradise I think that she, who became guilty, heard it thus, and I do not understand how she could prefer a hiss to this voice of love, how she could desire any other knowledge that was not God... With My lips which still tasted of My mother's milk, but with My heart full of celestial honey, I then said: "Here I am. I am coming. I am Yours. No one will have My body, but You, My Lord, neither will My soul have any other love..." And while saying so, it seemed to Me that I was saying over again things already said and that I was fulfilling a rite already fulfilled, and the chosen Spouse was not a stranger to Me, because I already knew His ardour and My sight had been formed at His light and My capacity for loving had been fulfilled in His embrace... When? I do not know. Beyond life, I would say, because I feel I always had Him, and that He always had Me, and that I exist because He wanted Me for the joy of His Spirit and Mine... Now I obey you, o Priest. But please tell Me how I am to behave... I have neither father nor mother. Please be My guide.»
« God will give You Your husband and he will be a holy man, because You have entrusted Yourself to God. You will tell him Your vow. »
« And will he agree? »
« I hope so. Pray, my child, that he may understand Your heart. Go now. May God always accompany You.»
Mary withdraws with Anna. Zacharias stays with the High Priest.
The vision ends thus.

12. Joseph Is Appointed Husband of the Virgin.
4th September 1944.

I see a rich hall with a beautiful floor, curtains, carpets and inlaid furniture. It must be still part of the Temple: there are priests in it, including Zacharias, and many men of every age, from twenty to fifty approximately.

They are all talking in low but animated voices. They seem to be anxious about something I do not know. They are dressed in their best clothes, which seem to be new or just recently washed and they are obviously dressed for some special feast. Many have removed the piece of cloth covering their heads, others still wear it, particularly the elder ones, whereas the young people show their bare heads, some dark blond, some brown, some black, only one auburn. Their hair is mostly short, but some wear it long down to their shoulders. They do not all know one another, because they observe one another inquisitively. But they seem to be akin somehow, because it is clear that they are all concerned with the same matter.

In a corner I can see Joseph. He is talking to a hale and hearty elderly man. Joseph is about thirty years old. He is a handsome man with short and rather curly hair, dark brown like his beard and his moustache, which cover a well shaped chin and rise towards his rosy-brown cheeks, which are not olive-coloured as is normal in most people with a brown complexion. His eyes are dark, kindly and deep, very serious and perhaps somewhat sad. But when he smiles, as he does now, they become gay and young looking. He is dressed in light brown, very simple but very tidy.

A group of young Levites comes in and they take up position between the door and a long narrow table, which is against the same wall as the door, which is left wide open. A single curtain hanging down to about twenty centimetres from the floor is drawn to cover the empty space.

The curiosity of the group increases. It grows more so when a hand pulls the curtain to one side to admit a Levite, who is carrying in his arms a bundle of dry branches on which one in blossom is gently laid: it looks like a light foam

of white petals, with a vague pinkish hue that spreads softer and softer from the centre to the top of the light petals. The Levite lays the bundle of branches on the table very gently to avoid detracting from the miracle of the branch full of flowers among so many dry ones.

Whispering spreads in the hall. They all stretch their necks and sharpen their eyes to see. Zacharias, who is near the table with the other priests, also endeavours to see. But he can see nothing.

Joseph, in his comer, gives a quick glance to the bundle of branches and when the man he was speaking to says something to him, he shakes his head in denial as if to say: « Impossible » and smiles.

A trumpet is heard beyond the curtain. They all become quiet and turn in an orderly way towards the door, which is now completely clear as the curtain has been pulled to one side. The High Priest enters surrounded by elders. They all make a deep bow. The Pontiff goes to the table and begins to speak, standing up. « Men of the race of David, gathered here at my request, please listen. The Lord has spoken, glory be to Him! From His Glory a ray has descended and, like the sun in springtime, it has given life to a dry branch which has blossomed miraculously, whereas no other branch on earth is in bloom to-day, the last day of the Feast of Dedication, and the snow that fell on the mountains in Judah has not yet melted and everything is white between Zion and Bethany. God has spoken and has made Himself the father and the guardian of the Virgin of David Who has Him alone as Her protection. A holy girl, the glory of the Temple, She deserved the word of God to learn the name of a husband agreeable to the Eternal One. And he must be very just to be chosen by the Lord as the protector of the Virgin so dear to Him! For this reason our sorrow in losing Her is alleviated and all worries about Her destiny as a wife cease. And to the man appointed by God we entrust with full confidence the Virgin blessed by God and by ourselves. The name of the husband is Joseph of Jacob of Bethlehem, of the tribe of David, a carpenter in Nazareth in Galilee. Joseph: come forward. It is an order of the High Priest ... »

There is a lot of whispering. Heads move round, eyes cast inquisitive glances, hands make signs: there are expressions of disappointment and relief. Someone, particularly amongst the older people, must be happy that it was not his fate. Joseph, blushing and embarrassed moves forward. He is now near the table, in front of the Pontiff, whom he has greeted reverently.

« Everyone must come here to see the name engraved on the branch. And everyone must take his own branch to make sure that there is no deception.»

The men obey. They look at the branch gently held by the High Priest and then each takes his own: some break it, some keep it. They all look at Joseph. Some look and are silent, others look and congratulate him. The elderly man to whom Joseph was speaking before, exclaims: « I told you, Joseph! Who feels less certain, is the one who wins the game! » They have all now passed before the Pontiff.

The High Priest gives Joseph his branch in bloom, he lays his hand on his shoulder and says to him: « The spouse the Lord has presented you with, is not rich, as you know. But all virtues are in Her. Be more and more worthy of Her. There is no flower in Israel as beautiful and pure as She is. Please, all go out now. You, Joseph, stay here. And you, Zacharias, since you are Her relative, please bring in the bride.»

They all go out, except the High Priest and Joseph. The curtain is drawn once again over the door.

Joseph is standing in a very humble attitude, near the Priest. There is silence, then the Priest says to Joseph: « Mary wishes to inform you of a vow She made. Please help Her shyness. Be good to Her, Who is so good.»

« I will put my strength and my manly authority at Her service and no sacrifice on Her behalf will be heavy for me. Be sure of that. »

Mary enters with Zacharias and Anna of Phanuel.

« Come, Mary » says the Pontiff. « Here is the spouse that God has destined to You. He is Joseph of Nazareth. You will therefore go back to Your own town. I will leave You now. May God give You His blessing. May the Lord protect You and bless You, may He show His face to You and have mercy on You. May He turn His face to You and give You peace. »

Zacharias goes out escorting the Pontiff. Anna congratulates Joseph and then she goes out, too.

The betrothed are now facing each other. Mary, full of blushes, is standing with Her head bowed. Joseph, who is also red in the face, looks at Her and tries to find the first words to be said. He eventually finds them and a bright smile lights up his eyes. He says: « I welcome you, Mary. I saw You when You were a little baby, only a few days old... I was a friend of Your father's and I have a nephew, the son of my brother Alphaeus, who was a great friend of Your mother. He was her little friend, because he is only eighteen years old, and when You were not yet born, he was only a little boy and he cheered up Your sad mother who loved him so much. You do not know us because You were only a little girl when You came here. But everyone in Nazareth loves You and they all think and speak of Joachim's little Mary, Whose birth was a miracle of the Lord, Who made the barren old lady blossom wonderfully... And I remember the evening You were born... We all remember it because of the prodigy of a heavy rain that saved the country and of a violent storm during which the thunderbolts did not damage even a stem of heather and it ended with such a large and beautiful rainbow that the like has never been seen again. And then... who does not remember Joachim's happiness? He dandled You showing You to his neighbours... As if You were a flower that had descended from Heaven, he admired You and wanted everyone to admire You, a happy old father who died talking about his Mary, Who was so beautiful and good and Whose words were so full of wisdom and grace... He was quite right in admiring You and in saying that there is no other woman lovelier than You are! And Your mother? She filled Your house and the neighbourhood with her songs and she sang like a skylark in springtime when she was carrying You, and afterwards when she held You in her arms. I made a cradle for You. A tiny little cradle, with roses carved all over it, because Your mother wanted it like that. Perhaps it is still in the house... I am old, Mary. When You were born I was beginning to work. I was already working... I would never have believed that I was going to have You as a spouse! Perhaps Your parents would have died a happier death if they had known, because they were my friends. I buried Your father, mourning over his death with a sincere heart, because he was a good teacher to me.»

Mary raises Her face, little by little, taking heart, as She hears Joseph speak to Her thus, and when he mentions the cradle She smiles gently and when Joseph speaks of Her father, She holds out Her hand to him and says: « Thank you, Joseph. » A very timid and gentle « thank you.»

Joseph holds Her little jasmine hand in his short and strong hands of a carpenter and he caresses it with an affection that expresses more and more confidence. Perhaps he is waiting for more words. But Mary is silent once again. He then goes on: « As You know, Your house is still intact, with the exception of the part that was demolished by order of the consul, to build a road for the waggons of the Romans. But the fields, what is left of them -You know that because of Your father's illness much of the property had to be disposed of- have been rather neglected. For over three years the trees and the vines have never been pruned and the land is untilled and hard. But the trees that saw You when You were a little girl are still there, and if You agree, I will at once take care of them.»

« Thank you, Joseph. But you have your work ... »

« I will work in Your orchard in the morning and in the evening. The days are getting longer and longer. By springtime I want everything to be in order for Your happiness. Look: this is a branch of the almond tree near the house. I wanted to pick it -the hedge is so ruined that one can enter anywhere, but I will remake it solid and strong- I wanted to pick it, because I thought that if I should be the chosen one, You would have been pleased to have a flower from Your garden. But I was not expecting to be the chosen one as I am a Nazirite (1) and I have obeyed because it is an order of the Priest, not because I wish to get married. Here is the branch, Mary. With it I offer You my heart, that, like it, has bloomed up till now only for the Lord and is now blooming for You, my spouse.»

Mary takes the branch. She is moved and looks at Joseph with a face that has become more and more confident and bright. She feels certain of him. When he says to Her « I am a Nazirite », Her face becomes bright and She takes courage: « Also I am all of the Lord, Joseph. I do not know whether the High Priest told you ... »

« He only told me that You are good and pure, that You wish to inform me of a

vow, and that I must be good to you. Speak, Mary. Your Joseph wants You to be happy in all Your desires. I do not love You my with body. I love You with my soul, holy girl given to me by God! Please see in me a father and a brother, in addition to a husband. And open Your heart to me as to a father and rely on me as on a brother ... »

« Since My childhood I have consecrated Myself to the Lord. I know this is not the custom in Israel. But I heard a voice requesting My virginity as a sacrifice of love for the coming of the Messiah. Israel has been waiting for Him for such a long time!... It is not too much to forgo the joy of being a mother for that! »

Joseph gazes at Her as if he wanted to read Her heart, then he takes Her tiny hands which are still holding the branch in blossom and he says: « I will join my sacrifice to Yours and we shall love the Eternal Father so much with our chastity that He will send His Saviour to the world earlier, and will allow us to see His Light shining in the world. Come, Mary. Let us go before His House and

Nazareth to prepare everything for You, in Your house, if You wish to go there, or elsewhere if You wish so.»

« In My house... There was a grotto down at the bottom... Is it still there? »

« It is, but it is no longer Yours... But I will build another one for You where it will be cool and quiet during the hottest hours of the day. I will make it as much as possible identical to the older one. And tell me: whom do You want with You? »

« Nobody. I am not afraid. Alphaeus' mother, who has always come to see Me, will keep Me company during the day. At night I prefer to be alone. No harm can befall Me.»

(1) Hebrew who had taken special vows of abstinence, see Numbers, 6.

« And now I am there, too. When shall I come and get You? »

« Whenever you wish, Joseph.»

« Then I will come as soon as the house is ready. I will not touch anything. I want You to find it as Your mother left it. But I want it to be bright and clean, to receive You without any sadness. Come, Mary. Let us go and tell the Most High that we bless Him.»

I do not see anything else. But I feel in my heart the sense of confidence that Mary feels.

13. Wedding of the Virgin and Joseph.

5th September 1944.

How beautiful Mary is dressed as a bride, among Her joyful friends and teachers! There is also Elizabeth amongst them.

She is dressed in snow-white linen, so soft and refined that it looks like precious silk. She is wearing round Her slender waist a burin wrought belt in gold and silver, made of medallions held together by little chains - each medallion is an embroidery of gold threads on heavy silver burnished by age. Probably because the belt is too long for Her, still a gentle girl, the last three medallions hang down in the front and fall amongst the folds of the very wide dress that is so long as to form a sort of train. On Her feet She is wearing white leather sandals with silver buckles.

Around Her neck the dress is held by a chain of small gold roses and silver filigree, reproducing on a smaller scale the design of the belt. Running through large holes on the loosely cut neck, the chain gathers the cloth and forms a kind of small frill. Mary's neck emerges from the white pleated cloth with the grace of a stem wrapped in a precious fabric and seems even more slender and whiter than ever, the stem of a lily ending in a lily-like face, which is even paler than usual for the excitement - and purer. The face of a most pure victim. Her hair no longer hangs over Her shoulders. It is arranged in a knot of plaits in a charming style, and precious burnished silver hairpins, all made with embroidered filigree at the top, hold it in position. Her mother's veil is placed over the plaits and it falls in beautiful folds under the precious thin plate that encircles Her snow-white forehead. The veil falls down Her sides and

since Mary is not as tall as Her mother, it falls lower than Her hips, whereas it reached Anne's waist. She has nothing on Her hands, but is wearing bracelets on Her wrists. Her wrists are so thin that the heavy bracelets of Her mother cover the back of Her hands and would fall to the ground if She tossed Her hands.

Her friends gaze upon Her and admire Her. They twitter gaily like sparrows asking questions and expressing their admiration.

« Are they Your mother's? »

« They are antique, are they not? »

« How beautiful, Sarah, this belt is! »

« And what about this veil, Susan? How refined it is. Just look at those lilies woven in it! »

« Let me see Your bracelets, Mary. Were they Your mother's? »

« Yes, she wore them. But they are of My father's mother.»

« Oh! Look. They have the seal of Solomon interwoven with thin little branches of palm and olive-trees and amongst these there are lilies and roses. Oh! Who did such perfect and refined work? »

« They belong to the House of David » explains Mary. « The women of the family have worn them for centuries, when they get married and they are left in heritage to the heiress.»

« Certainly! You are the heiress... »

« Did they bring You everything from Nazareth? »

« No, they did not. When My mother died, My cousin took My trousseau to her house to keep it safely. Now she has brought it back to Me.»

« Where is it? Where is it? Show it to Your friends. »

Mary does not know what to do... She would like to be kind, but she is not anxious to pull out all the things which are nicely laid in three heavy trunks. Her teachers come to Her help: « The groom is about to arrive » they point out. « This is not the moment to cause confusion. Leave Mary alone. You are tiring Her. Go and get ready.»

The chattering group go away somewhat sulkily. Mary can now enjoy in peace the company of Her teachers who say words of praise and blessing to Her.

Also Elizabeth has come near. And as Mary, deeply moved, is crying because Anna of Phanuel has called Her « daughter » and has kissed Her with true motherly love, Elizabeth says to Her: « Mary, Your mother is not here, and yet she is present. Her soul is rejoicing with Yours. Look, the things that You are wearing are giving You her caresses once again. You can still find in them the flavour of her kisses. One day, a long time ago, the day You came to the Temple, she said to me: "I have prepared Her dresses and Her trousseau, because I wish to be the one who weaves Her linens and makes Her bridal dresses, so that I shall not be absent on the day of Her joy". And listen. In the last days, when I was assisting her, every evening she wanted to caress Your first little dresses and the ones You are now wearing and she would say: "I can smell the jasmine perfume of my little one and I want Her to perceive here the kiss of Her mummy". How many kisses on this veil that is now shading Your forehead! There are more kisses than threads!... And when You will wear the cloth woven by her, just think that it was woven more by her motherly love than by the shuttle. And these jewels... Also in hard circumstances they were saved by Your father for You, that You might be beautiful in this hour, as befits a princess of the House of David. Be happy and cheerful, Mary. You are not an orphan, because Your parents are with You and Your husband is a father and a mother to You, such is his perfection... »

« Yes, that is true! I certainly cannot complain. In two months he has been here twice, and today he has come for the third time, facing the rain and the windy weather, to take orders from Me... Fancy: orders from Me who am a poor woman and much younger than he is! And he has denied Me nothing. He does not even wait for Me to ask. I think an angel must tell him what I want, because he tells Me before I can speak. The last time he said: "Mary, I think that You prefer to stay in Your father's house. Since You are a daughter heiress, You can do so, if that is Your wish. I will come to Your house. However, in order to accomplish the rite, You will go for one week to my brother Alphaeus' house. Mary already loves You so much. And from there the procession will start that will take You to Your house in the evening of the wedding day". Was that not very kind of him? It did not even matter to him if the people should say that he has not a house

which I would like... I would have liked it, because he is there and he is so good. Certainly... I prefer My own house... because of memories... Oh! Joseph is so good! »

« What did he say about Your vow? You haven't told me yet.»

« He made no objection. On the contrary, when I told him the reasons, he said: "I will join my sacrifice to Yours".»

« He is a holy young man » says Anna of Phanuel.

The «holy young man » is coming in just now in the company of Zacharias. He is really magnificent. All dressed in gold yellow he seems an eastern sovereign. A splendid belt supports his bag and his dagger, the former of morocco embroidered in gold, the latter with a morocco sheath and gold decorations. On his head he is wearing a turban, that is the usual piece of cloth worn like a hood, as is still customary amongst certain people in Africa, such as the bedouins, and it is held by a precious ring, a thin wire of gold, to which there are tied some small bunches of myrtle. He has on a new mantle, with fringes, and he wears it with great dignity. He is sparkling with joy. He has in his hands small bunches of myrtle in bloom.

« Peace to you, my spouse! » he greets Her. « Peace to everyone.» When he has received a reply to his greetings, he says: « I saw Your joy the day I gave You a branch from Your garden. I thought I should bring You some myrtle which I picked near the grotto You love so much. I wanted to bring You some of the roses that are already beginning to bloom near Your house. But roses do not last long. After a journey of several days I would have arrived here with only the thorns. And I want to offer You, my dear, only roses and spread Your way with soft scented flowers, so that Your feet may rest on them without touching anything dirty or harsh.»

« Oh! Thank you, you are so good! But what did you do to keep it so fresh?»

« I tied a vase to the saddle and I put in it the branches of the flowers in bud. During the journey they have burst into flower. Here they are, Mary. May Your forehead be garlanded with purity, the symbol of a bride, which, however, is much inferior to the purity of Your heart.»

Elizabeth and the teachers adorn Mary with a little garland of flowers which they form attaching to the precious ring the little white bunches of myrtle and they insert small white roses which they take from a vase placed on a small chest.

Mary is on the point of taking Her large white mantle to put it on Her shoulders, but Joseph precedes Her and helps Her to fasten it at the top of Her shoulders with two silver buckles. The teachers then arrange the folds with loving care.

Everything is ready. While they are awaiting I do not know what, Joseph takes Mary to one side and says to Her: « I have pondered a lot on Your vow these last days. I told You that I will share it with You. But the more I think of it, the more I realise that a temporary Naziritism is not sufficient, even if renewed several times. I have understood You, Mary. I do not yet deserve the word of Light, but a murmur of it comes to me. And it causes me to read Your secret, at least in its main lines. I am a poor ignorant man, Mary. A poor workman. I know nothing of letters and I have no treasures. But I place at Your feet my treasure: my absolute chastity, for ever, to be worthy of being beside You, Virgin of God, "my sister spouse, enclosed garden, sealed fountain", as our Ancestor says, who perhaps wrote the Song of Songs seeing You... I shall be the guardian of this garden of spices in which are the most precious fruits and from which a spring of living water gushes out in a gentle surge: Your kindness, o spouse, has conquered my soul with Your innocence, o most beautiful one. You are more beautiful than dawn, You are a sun that shines because Your heart shines, You are full of love for Your God and for the world, to which You wish to give a Saviour with Your sacrifice of a woman. Come, my beloved spouse » and he takes Her gently by the hand and leads Her towards the door. All the others follow them and outside the joyful companions, all dressed in white and wearing veils, join them.

They go through yards and porches, among the crowds that watch them, up to a point that is not the Temple, but seems to be a hall used for ceremonies, because there are lamps and rolls of parchment as in synagogues. They go as far as a tall lectern, almost a desk, and they wait. The others stand orderly behind them. Other priests and curious people gather at the end.

The High Priest enters solemnly.

There is whispering amongst the curious crowd: « Is he going to marry them? »
« Yes, because She is of royal and sacerdotal rank. A flower of David and Aaron, the bride is a virgin of the Temple. The groom is of the tribe of David.»

The Pontiff joins the right hand of the bride with the right hand of the groom and he blesses them solemnly: « May the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob be with you. May He join you and fulfil His blessing in you giving you His peace and numerous descendants with a long life and a happy death in the bosom of Abraham.» He then withdraws as solemn as when he entered.

The promise has been exchanged. Mary is Joseph's spouse. (1)

They all go out and they orderly move to a hall where they stipulate the wedding contract in which it is stated that Mary, the daughter heiress of Joachim of David and of Anne of Aaron gives Joseph, as Her dowry, Her house and the estate attached to it, Her personal property and what She has inherited from Her father.

It is now all over.

The betrothed go out into the yard and they move toward the exit near the dwellings of the women assigned to the Temple. A comfortable heavy waggon is waiting for them. A tent is laid over it as a shelter and Mary's heavy trunks are already loaded on it.

After farewell words, kisses and tears, blessings and advice, Mary gets into the waggon with Elizabeth, while Joseph and Zacharias sit in the front. They have taken off their best mantles and are all wearing dark ones.

The waggon departs at the heavy trot of a big dark horse. The Temple walls and then the city walls are receding and here is the country, new, fresh, blooming in the early springtime sunshine, with the corn a few inches off the ground, its little leaves, which look like emeralds, waving at a gentle breeze, which carries the scent of peach and apple flowers, of clover flowers and of wild mint.

Mary is weeping silently, under Her veil, and now and again She removes the tent and looks at the far away Temple and the city She has left...

The vision ends thus.

(1) In Israel, also at the time of Our Lady, a marriage comprised two phases: the engagement and the wedding. The rite of the engagement, by which the marriage was essentially established, implied that the young couple should be blessed by a priest while holding each other's right hand; a legal contract was made in regard to property and rights. During this first phase they did not live together. The wedding was the solemn accomplishment of the contract and the couple began to live together.

Jesus says:

« What does the Book of Wisdom say, singing her praises? "Within wisdom is a spirit intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle". And it goes on listing her endowments, ending the period with the words... "almighty, all-surveying, penetrating all intelligent, pure and most subtle spirits. She is so pure she pervades and permeates all things. She is a breath of the power of God, hence nothing impure can find a way into her... image of His goodness. Although alone she can do all, herself unchanging, she makes all things new, she passes into holy souls, she makes them friends of God and Prophets".

You have seen how Joseph, not by human culture, but by supernatural education can read in the sealed book of the Immaculate Virgin and how he borders upon prophetic truths by his "seeing" a superhuman mystery where others could only see a great virtue. Since he is imbued with this wisdom, which is a breath of the power of God and a definite emanation of the Almighty, he sails with a secure spirit the sea of this mystery of grace which is Mary. He penetrates with Her spiritual contacts, in which, rather than the lips, the two spirits speak to each other in the sacred silence of their souls, where God only can hear voices and those who are well liked by God, because they are His faithful servants and are full of Him.

The wisdom of the Just man, which increases by his union and closeness to Mary,

Full of Grace, prepares him to penetrate the deepest secrets of God and enables him to protect and defend them from the snares of man and demon. And in the meantime it invigorates him. It makes the just man a saint, and the saint the guardian of the Spouse and of the Son of God.

Without removing the seal of God, he, a chaste man, now elevating his chastity to angelical heroism, can read the word of fire written by God on the virginal diamond, and he reads what his wisdom does not repeat, but is greater than what Moses read on the stone tablets. And to prevent profane eyes from prying into the mystery, he places himself, seal upon the seal, as an archangel of fire on the threshold of Paradise, within which the Eternal Father takes His delight, "walking in the cool of the evening" and talking to Her Who is His love, Garden of lilies in bloom, Air scented with perfumes, fresh morning Breeze, lovely Star, Delight of God. The new Eve is there, in front of him, not bone from his bones, nor flesh from his flesh, but companion of his life, living Ark of God, Whom he receives in guardianship and Whom he must return to God as pure as he received Her.

"Spouse to God" was written in the immaculate pages of that mystical book... And when in the hour of trial suspicion hissed its torture, he suffered as a man and as a servant of God, as no man suffered, because of the suspected sacrilege. But this was to be the future trial. Now, in this time of grace, he sees and he puts himself at the most true service of God. Then the storm of the trial will come, as for all saints, to be tested and made coadjutors of God.

What do you read in Leviticus? "Tell Aaron, your brother, that he must not enter the sanctuary beyond the Veil in front of the Throne of mercy that is over the Ark, whenever he chooses. He may die; for I appear in a cloud on the Throne of mercy, unless he has done these things first: he will offer a young bull for a sacrifice for sin and a ram for holocaust, he is to wear a linen tunic and cover his nakedness with a linen girdle".

And Joseph really enters the sanctuary of God, when and as far as God wants, beyond the veil that conceals the Ark on which the Spirit of God hovers and he offers himself and will offer the Lamb, a holocaust for the sin of the world and in expiation of such sin. And he does that dressed in linen, and mortifying his virile limbs to abolish their faculty of sensation, which once, at the beginning of times, did triumph, impairing the rights of God on man and which will now be crushed in the Son, in the Mother and in the putative father, to lead men back to Grace and restore the right of God on man. He does that with his perpetual chastity.

Was Joseph not on Golgotha? Do you think he is not amongst the co-redeemers? I tell you solemnly that he was the first and therefore he is great in the eyes of God. Great for his sacrifice, his patience, his perseverance, his faith. Which faith is greater than this one that believed without seeing the miracles of the Messiah?

Praise be to My putative father, an example to you of what you lack most: purity, faithfulness and perfect love. Praise be to the magnificent reader of the sealed Book, imbued with Wisdom to be able to understand the mysteries of Grace and chosen to protect the Salvation of the world from the snares of all enemies.»

A very blue sky of a mild February is over the hills of Galilee. The gentle hills that I have never seen in the early history of Mary, are now instead as familiar to me as if I were born there.

The main road is fresh looking because of last night's rain and it is neither dusty nor muddy. It is hard and clean as if were the street of a town and it runs between two hedges of hawthorn in bloom. The hedges are so white that they look like a snowfall. The scenery is broken by the monstrous conglomerations of cacti, with thick leaves like palettes, spiked with stings and decorated with the huge granades of their peculiar fruits, grown without stem on the top of the leaves. Because of their colour and shape, the cactus leaves always give me the impression of sea depths and coral reefs, of jellyfish and other deep sea animals.

Beyond the hedgerows, there is the country. The purpose of the hedges is to fence in the grounds of the various owners, and thus they stretch in every direction forming a strange geometrical design of curves and angles, lozenges, squares, semicircles and the most unbelievable acute and obtuse angled triangles, a design all sprayed with white, like a strange ribbon thrown over the country just for fun and over which hundreds and hundreds of birds fly, chirp, sing, in the joy of love, while working to build their nests. In the fields the corn is taller than in Judaea. The meadows are full of flowers and there are hundreds of fruit-trees all in full bloom, that look like clouds of vegetables white, red, pink, with all gradations of these colours: they seem to be an answer to the light clouds in the sky which the setting sun paints pink, light lilac, periwinkle violet, opal blue and coral orange.

With the light evening breeze the first petals fall from the trees in blossom and they seem a swarm of little butterflies searching for pollen on wild flowers. And from tree to tree there are festoons of vines still barren, except at the top of the festoons, where there is more sunshine, and the first little innocent, surprised, trembling leaves are beginning to open.

The sun is setting peacefully in the sky, which is so benign in its deep blue. The light makes it even more limpid and causes the snow on Mount Hermon and other far away mountain tops to shine.

A waggon is moving along the road. It is the waggon that is carrying Joseph, Mary and Her cousins. Their journey is at an end.

Mary is looking with the eagerness of those who want to know, nay want to recognise what they have already seen, but can no longer remember and they smile when a faint memory comes back to them and rests, like a light, on this or that thing, on this or that point. Elizabeth, Zacharias and Joseph help Her to remember, pointing to various places and houses.

Nazareth is already showing its houses, spread out on the undulations of its hills. Lit up from the left by the setting sun, it shows the white of its low wide little houses bordered in pink and surmounted by terraces. Some of them, fully illuminated by the sun, seem to be near a fire, so red are the fronts of the houses because of the sun, that also lights up the water of the ponds and of the low wells, with practically no parapets, and from which squeaky pails of water are being pulled up for the houses as well as water-bags for the orchards. Children and women rush to the side of the road and look into the waggon and greet Joseph who is well known to them. But they are somewhat embarrassed and shy with regard to the other three travellers.

But when the waggon enters the little town, there is no longer any embarrassment or shyness. Many people of all ages are gathered at the entrance of the village under a rustic arch of flowers and branches, and there is an outburst of shrill voices and a tossing of branches and flowers as soon as the waggon appears from behind the corner of the last house lying before it in the country. It is the women, girls and children of Nazareth greeting the bride. The men, more grave, are standing behind the excited and shouting crowd and they are greeting solemnly.

The waggon is not covered now by the tent, which was removed before reaching the village, both because the sun was no longer annoying them and to enable Mary to see Her native land. Mary thus appears in all the beauty of a lovely flower. White and blonde like an angel, She smiles lovingly at everybody: at the children who throw Her flowers and kisses; at the girls of Her own age who call Her by name; at the elderly women who bless Her with their cheerful voices. She bows to the men and particularly to one who is perhaps the rabbi or the elder of

the town.

The waggon proceeds slowly along the main road, followed for a considerable distance by the crowd, for whom the arrival is an event.

« There is Your house, Mary » says Joseph, pointing with his whip to a little house which is just under the edge of an undulation of the hill. Behind the house there is a lovely large kitchen garden all in bloom, at the end of which there is a small olive-grove. Behind the olive-grove there is the usual boundary hedge of hawthorn and cactus. The fields that once belonged to Joachim, are farther beyond...

« As You can see, very little is left for You » says Zacharias. « Your father's illness was a long and expensive one. Also the expenses to repair the damage done by the Romans were heavy. See? The road took away the three main rooms and the house was cut down in size. In order to enlarge it, without excessive expenses, a part of the mountain was adapted, where the grotto is. Joachim kept his supplies there and Anne her looms. You will do as You think best.»

« Oh! It does not matter if only little is left. It will be sufficient for Me. I will work ... »

« No, Mary. » It is Joseph who is speaking. « I will work. You will do nothing but weave and sew things for the house. I am young and strong and I am Your husband. Please do not humiliate me with Your work. »

« I shall do as you wish. »

« Yes, in this case I do want it. In everything else Your wishes are the law. But not in regard to this.»

They have arrived. The waggon stops.

Two women and two men, about forty and fifty years of age respectively, are at the entrance and many children and young boys are with them. « May God give You peace, Mary » says the elder man and one of the women approaches Mary embracing and kissing Her.

« He is my brother Alphaeus and she is Mary, his wife, and these are their children. They have come to greet You and to tell You that their house is Yours if You wish so » says Joseph.

« Yes, come Mary, if it is painful for You to live by Yourself. The country is beautiful in springtime and our house is in the middle of fields full of flowers. And You will be the loveliest flower there » says Mary of Alphaeus.

« Thank you, Mary. I would come so willingly. But I am so anxious to see and recognise My own home. I left it when I was a little girl, and I have forgotten what it is like... Now I have found it again... and I feel I have found also My lost mother, My beloved father, and that I can hear the echo of their words... and I smell the perfume of their last breathing. I feel I am no longer an orphan, because once again I have around Me the embrace of these walls... Please understand Me, Mary.» Mary's voice trembles and Her eyes begin to shine with tears.

Mary of Alphaeus replies to Her: « As You wish, my dear. I want You to feel that I am Your sister and friend, and also a mother to You, since I am so much older than You are. »

The other woman has come forward: « Hello, Mary. I am Sarah, Your mother's friend. I saw You being born. And this is Alphaeus, Alphaeus' nephew, and a great friend of Your mother. What I did for Your mother, I am willing to do for You, if You wish so. See? My house is the nearest to Yours and Your fields are now ours. But if You want to come, come whenever You wish. We will open a passage through the hedge and we shall be together, yet each of us will be at home. This is my husband.»

« Thank you all and for everything. Thank you for all the good you did to My parents and for your love for Me. May God the Almighty bless you for it.»

The heavy trunks are unloaded and carried into the house. They go in. I now recognise the little house of Nazareth, as it was during the life of Jesus.

Joseph takes Mary by Her hand and they go in. On the threshold he says to Her: « And now, on this threshold, I want a promise from You. That whatever may happen to You, whatever You may need, there is no other friend whom to apply to but Joseph and that, for no reason whatsoever, may You worry all by Yourself.

Remember that I am everything for You and it will be a joy for me to make Your life happy and, since happiness is not always in our power, I will at least make it peaceful and safe.»

« I do promise, Joseph.»

The door and windows are opened. The last searching rays of the sun enter. Mary has now taken off Her mantle and veil, because, with the exception of the myrtle flowers, She has still Her bridal dress on. She then goes into the kitchen garden in bloom. She looks and smiles. Still held by the hand by Joseph, She goes round the garden. She looks as if She were taking possession of a lost place.

And Joseph shows Her his work: « See? I dug a hole here to gather the rain water, because these vines are always thirsty. I cut off the oldest branches of this olive tree to strengthen it and I transplanted these apple trees because two of them had withered. Over there I planted some fig trees. When they grow up they will shelter the house both from the excessive heat of the sun and from inquisitive people. The pergola is the old one. I only changed the rotten poles and I did some trimming. It will give You a lot of, grapes, I hope. And here, look» and he leads Her proudly towards the side of the hill at the back of the house, which limits the northern side of the garden, « here I dug a grotto and I have reinforced it and when these little plants take roots, it will be almost identical to the one You had. There is no spring... but I hope to convey a little stream there. I will work in the long summer evenings, when I come to see You...»

« What do you mean? » asks Alphaeus. « Are you not getting married this summer? »

« No. Mary wants to weave Her woollen clothes, the only things missing from Her trousseau. And I agree with Her. Mary is so young that it does not matter if we wait for a year or more. In the meantime She will get used to the house...»

« Well! You have always been somewhat different from other people and you still are. I do not know who would not be in a hurry to get married to a beautiful flower like Mary, and you are delaying things by months!...»

«A joy awaited for a long time is a joy to be taken delight in more intensely» replies Joseph with a gentle smile.

His brother shrugs his shoulders and asks: « Well, then, when are you thinking of getting married? »

« When Mary is sixteen. After the feast of the Tabernacles. The winter evenings will be sweet for the newly weds!...» and he smiles again looking at Mary. A smile of a gentle secret understanding. A smile of a brotherly chastity giving comfort. He then resumes his tour of the garden. « This is the big room under the mountain. If You agree, I will use it as a workshop when I come here. It is joined to the house, but not in the house. So I will not annoy You with noises and disorder. However, if You wish otherwise...»

« No, Joseph. That is perfectly all right.»

They go back into the house and light the lamps.

«Mary is tired » says Joseph. « Let us leave Her in peace with Her cousins.»

They all say goodbye and go out. Joseph stays for a few moments and speaks to Zacharias in a low voice.

« Your cousin is leaving Elizabeth with You for a little while. Are You happy? I am. Because she will help You... to become a perfect housewife. With her You will be able to arrange Your things and Your furniture, and I will come every evening to help You. With Elizabeth You can purchase the wool and whatever You may need. And I will see to the expenses. Remember, You have promised to come to me for everything. Goodbye, Mary. Sleep the first night as the landlady of this house and may the angel of God make Your sleep peaceful. May the Lord be always with You.»

« Goodbye, Joseph. May you also be under the wings of God's angel. Thank you, Joseph. For everything. As far as I can, I will requite your love with Mine. » Joseph says goodbye to Her cousins and goes out.

And the vision ends with him.

15. Conclusion to the Pre-Gospel.

Jesus says:

« The cycle is over. It has been so sweet and gentle and with it your Jesus has taken you out of the turmoil of these days without any shock. Like a baby enveloped in soft woollen swaddling clothes and laid on soft cushions, you have

been immersed in those blissful visions so that you might not perceive the cruelty of men who hate instead of loving one another, and be terrorised by such ferocity. You could no longer endure certain situations, and I do not want you to die because of them, because I take care of My "mouthpiece".

The reason why victims have been tortured by utter despair is about to cease in the world. Therefore, Mary, the time of your dreadful suffering for too many reasons in such strong contrast with your feelings, will come to an end as well. But your suffering will not cease: you are a victim. But part of it: the latter, will cease. Then the day will come when I will say to you, as I said to Mary of Magdala when she was dying: "Rest. It is now time for you to rest. Give Me your thorns. It is now time for roses. Rest and wait. I bless you, o blessed soul". That is what I was saying to you, and it was a promise which you did not understand, as the time was approaching when you were to be immersed in, rolled over, chained and filled with thorns, in deepest darkness... I am repeating that to you now, with the joy which only the Love, Which I am, can feel when It can stop one of Its beloved from suffering. I am now telling you that that time of sacrifice is ceasing. And I, Who know, say to you, on behalf of the world which does not know, on behalf of Italy, of Viareggio, of this little village, where you brought Me - meditate on the meaning of these words - I say to you "thanks" as is due to holocausts for their sacrifices.

When I showed you Cecily, the virgin-spouse, I told you that she became impregnated with My perfumes, behind which she dragged her husband, brother-in-law, servants, relatives, friends. You played the role of Cecily in this mad world, and you do not know, but I am telling you, I Who know. You became saturated with Me, with My word, you informed people of My desires and the best among them understood and following you, a victim, many more have risen, and if your fatherland and the places dearer to you are not completely ruined, that is due to the fact that many victims have been consumed after your example and your ministry. Thank you, My blessed one. But go on. I have great need to save the earth, to buy the earth again, and you victims are the money.

May Wisdom, which taught saints and teaches you directly, elevate you more and more in the understanding of the Science of life and in its practice. Pitch your little tent near the house of the Lord. Nay, pitch the pegs of your own dwelling in the abode of Wisdom and live there without ever coming out. You will rest, under the protection of the Lord Who loves you, like a bird among flowery branches and He will shelter you from all spiritual storms and you will be in the light of the glory of God, from Whom words of peace and truth will descend for you.

Go in peace. I bless you, o blessed soul.»

Immediately afterwards Mary says:

« A present to Mary for her feast from Mother. A chain of presents. And if there are some thorns amongst them, do not complain to the Lord Who has loved you as He has loved few people.

I told you at the beginning: "Write about Me. All your sorrows will be comforted". You can now see that it was true. This gift had been put aside for this time of excitement, because we do not take care only of the spirit, but we also look after matter, which is not the queen but a useful servant to the spirit in fulfilling its mission.

Be grateful to the Most High, Who is really a Father to you, also in an affectionately human sense, and lulls you with sweet ecstasies to conceal from you what would frighten you. Love Me more and more. I have led you into the secrecy of My early years. You now know everything about Mother. Love Me as daughter and sister in our destiny of victims. And love God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit with perfect love. The blessing of the Father, of the Son and of the Spirit passes through My hands, is scented with My motherly love for you and it descends and rests upon you. Be supernaturally happy.»

8th March 1944.

What I see. Mary, a very young girl: She looks fifteen years old, at most. She is in a small rectangular room: a room most suitable for a girl. Along one of the longer walls, there is a bed: a low bed, without bedstead, covered with thick mats or carpets, which appear to be laid on boards or cane-trellis, because they are very stiff and without any curve, as is usual with our beds. Against the other wall there is a kind of bookcase with an oil lamp, some rolls of parchment, some needlework carefully folded: it seems to be embroidery work. Beside the bookcase, towards the door, which opens onto the kitchen garden and which is now covered by a curtain gently moved by a light breeze, there is the Virgin sitting on a low stool. She is spinning some linen which is as white as snow and as soft as silk. Her little hands, just a little darker than linen, are whirling the spindle very quickly. Her beautiful young face is slightly bent forward and She is smiling gently as if She were caressing or following some sweet thought.

There is a great silence in the little house and in the kitchen garden. There is a great peace both on Mary's face and in the surrounding place. There is peace and order. Everything is neat and tidy and the room, although very modest looking and very modestly furnished -it is almost as bare as a cell- has something austere and regal about it because of its cleanliness and the care with which everything is laid: the clothes on the bed, the rolls, the lamp, the copper pitcher near the lamp, with a bunch of branches in bloom in it. I do not know whether they are peach or pear branches. They are certainly branches of a fruit-tree, with pinkish white flowers.

Mary begins to sing in a low voice, then She raises Her voice slightly. But She does not sing loudly. Still, it is a voice vibrating in the little room and one can perceive the vibration of Her soul in it. I do not understand the words as they are spoken in Hebrew. But as now and again She repeats « Jehovah » I realize that it is a sacred song, perhaps a psalm. Mary is probably remembering the songs of the Temple. And it must be a happy memory because She lays Her hands in Her lap, while still holding the yarn and the spindle, and lifts Her head leaning against the wall: Her face is beautifully flushed and Her eyes are lost behind... I wonder what sweet thought. Her eyes are shining with tears, which appear but do not overflow and they make Her eyes look larger. And yet those eyes are smiling, they are smiling at a thought they can see and by which Mary is abstracted from the earthly world. Mary's face, flushed and girded by the plaits She wears rolled up like a crown round Her head, seems a beautiful flower, as it emerges from Her plain white dress.

The song changes into a prayer: « Most High Lord God, do not delay any longer in sending Your Servant to bring peace to the world. Grant us the favourable time and the pure and prolific virgin for the coming of Your Christ. Father, Holy Father, grant Me, Your servant to offer My life for this purpose. Grant Me to die after seeing Your Light and Your Justice on earth and after knowing that our Redemption has been accomplished. O Holy Father, send the Promise of the Prophets to the earth. Send the Redeemer to Your maidservant, so that in the hour of My death, Your abode may be opened to Me, as its gates have already been opened by Your Christ for all those who have hoped in You. Come, come, O Spirit of the Lord. Come to the faithful who are expecting You. Come, Prince of Peace!...» Mary remains absorbed thus...

The curtain moves fast, as if someone behind it ventilated it or shook it to draw it. And a pearl white light mixed with pure silver makes the slightly yellow walls clearer and makes the colours of the cloths brighter and Mary's raised face more spiritual. And in such light, while the curtain is still drawn on the mystery to be accomplished, the Archangel prostrates himself: the curtain no longer moves: it is hanging stiff against the doorposts like a wall separating the inside from the outside.

The Angel must necessarily take a human appearance. But it is a transhumanised appearance. Of what flesh is this beautiful and gleaming figure made? With what substance did God form it to make it perceptible to the senses of the Virgin? Only God can possess such substances and use them so perfectly. It is a face, a body, eyes, a mouth, hair and hands like ours. But they are not our dull matter. It is a light that has taken the colour of flesh, of eyes, hair, lips, a light that moves and smiles, looks and speaks.

« Hail, Mary, full of Grace, Hail! » The voice is a sweet arpeggio as of pearls thrown on a precious metal plate.

Mary is startled and lowers Her head. And She is even more startled when She sees the shining creature kneeling at about a metre from Her and looking at Her with infinite veneration, his hands crossed over his chest.

Mary jumps to Her feet and She squeezes against the wall. She turns pale and red alternately. Her face shows surprise and fear. She subconsciously presses Her hands against Her breast hiding them under Her large sleeves. She stoops, endeavouring to conceal Her body as much as possible. An attitude of gentle modesty.

« No. Do not fear. The Lord is with You! You are blessed amongst all women! » But Mary continues to be afraid. Where has that extraordinary being come from? Is he a messenger of God or of the Deceiver?

« Do not fear, Mary! » repeats the Archangel. « I am Gabriel, the Angel of God. My Lord has sent me to You. Do not be afraid, because You have found grace in the eyes of God. And You will conceive and bear a Son and You will call Him "Jesus": He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High (and such He will really be). And the Lord God will give Him the throne of His Ancestor David and He will rule over the House of Jacob for ever, and His reign will have no end. Understand, o Holy Virgin loved by God, Daughter blessed by Him, called to be the Mother of His Son, what Son You will generate! »

« How can this come about, since I do not know man? Perhaps the Lord God will no longer accept the offer of His maidservant and does not want Me a Virgin for His love? »

« Not by deed of man You will be a mother, Mary. You are the Eternal Virgin, the Holy Virgin of God. The Holy Spirit will come upon You and the power of the Most High will cover You with its shadow. So the Child born of You will be called Holy and Son of God. Our Lord God can do everything. Elizabeth, the barren one, in her old age has conceived a son who will be the Prophet of Your Son, and will prepare His ways. The Lord has removed her disgrace and her memory will remain amongst peoples together with Your name, as the name of her creature will be joined to the name of Your Holy Son, and until the end of centuries you will be called blessed, because of the grace of the Lord which has come to you both and particularly to You, by means of Whom Grace has come to all peoples. Elizabeth is in her sixth month and her burden lifts her to joy, and will lift her even more when she hears of Your joy. Nothing is impossible to the Lord, Mary, full of Grace. What shall I tell my Lord? Let no thought whatsoever disturb You. He will protect Your interests if You trust in Him. The world, Heaven, the Eternal Father are awaiting Your word! »

Mary crosses Her hands over Her breast and bowing down deeply, She says: « I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let what you have said be done to Me.»

The Angel shines out of joy. He kneels in adoration because he certainly sees the Spirit of God descend upon the Virgin bent down in assent, and he disappears without moving the curtain, but leaves it well drawn over the holy Mystery.

17. The Disobedience of Eve and the Obedience of Mary.
5th March 1944.

Jesus says:

«...Do we not read in Genesis that God made man the overlord of everything on the earth, that is everything except God and His angelical ministers? Do we not read that He made the woman the companion of man in his joy and his domination over all living beings? Do we not read that they were allowed to eat of everything with the exception of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil? Why? What is the meaning of the words "that he might rule"? And what is the meaning of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil? Have you ever asked these questions, you man, who ask so many useless ones and never ask your soul about heavenly truths? Your soul would tell you, if it were alive, because a soul in grace is held like a flower in the hands of your angel, and like a flower it is kissed by the sun and sprinkled with dew by the Holy Spirit, Who warms and illuminates it, sprays and decorates it with heavenly lights. How many truths your soul would tell you, if you only knew how to converse with it, if you loved

your soul that makes you like God, Who is a spirit, as your soul is a spirit. What a great friend you would have if you loved your soul instead of hating it to the extent of killing it; what a great and sublime friend with whom you could talk of celestial matters, since you men are so eager to talk and you ruin one another with friendships which, if they are not unworthy ones (as sometimes they are), they are almost always useless and they turn into a vain and damaging tumult of worldly words.

Did I not say: "If anyone loves Me he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make Our home with him"? The soul in grace possesses love, and by possessing love it possesses God, that is the Father Who preserves it, the Son Who teaches it, the Spirit Who illuminates it. It therefore possesses Knowledge, Science, Wisdom, Light. Consider therefore what sublime conversations your soul could hold with you. Such conversations filled the silence of prisons, the silence of cells, the silence of hermitages, the silence of the rooms of holy sick people. Such conversations were the consolation of prisoners awaiting martyrdom, of cloistered monks and nuns searching for the Truth, of hermits longing for an advanced knowledge of God, of sick people in bearing, nay, in loving their crosses.

If you knew how to question your soul, you would be told that the true, extensive meaning -as comprehensive as creation itself- of the words "that he might rule" is this: "That man might dominate everything, that is his three states. The lower state, the animal one. The middle state, the moral one. The superior state, the spiritual one. And all three of them are to be directed to one sole aim: to possess God". To possess Him by deserving Him through a strict control which subdues all the power of one's ego and conveys it to one only purpose: to deserve to possess God. Your soul would tell you that God had forbidden the knowledge of good and evil, because He had already granted good to His creatures gratuitously, and He did not want you to know evil, because it is a sweet fruit to taste, but once its juice becomes part of your blood, it causes a fever that kills you and produces a parching thirst, so that the more one drinks of that false juice, the more thirsty one becomes.

You may object: "And why did He put it there?" Because evil is a force that originated by itself like certain monstrous diseases in the most wholesome body. Lucifer was an angel, the most beautiful of all the angels, a perfect spirit, inferior only to God, and yet in his bright essence a vapour of pride arose and he did not scatter it. On the contrary, he condensed it by brooding over it. And Evil was born of this incubation. It existed before man. God had hurled him out of Paradise, the cursed incubator of Evil, who had desecrated Paradise. But he is the eternal incubator of Evil and as he can no longer soil Paradise, he has soiled the earth.

That metaphorical tree proves this truth. God had said to the man and the woman: "You know all the laws and the mysteries of creation. But do not infringe on My right of being the Creator of man. My love will suffice for the propagation of the human race and it will spread among you and will excite the new Adams of the race without any lust of the senses but with purely charitable pulsations. I have given you everything. I am only keeping for Myself this mystery of the formation of man".

Satan wanted to deprive man of this intellectual virginity and with his venomous tongue he blandished and caressed Eve's limbs and eyes, exciting reflections and a perspicacity which they did not have before, because malice had not yet intoxicated them.

She "saw". And seeing, she wanted to try. Her flesh was aroused. Oh! If she had called to God! If she had hurried to Him saying: "Father! The Serpent has caressed me and I am upset". The Father would have purified and healed her with His breath, which could have infused new innocence into her as it had infused life. And it would have made her forget the snake's poison, nay it would have engendered in her a disgust for the Serpent, as it happens in those who bear an instinctive dislike for diseases of which they have just been cured. But Eve does not go to the Father. Eve goes back to the Serpent. The sensation is a sweet one for her. "Seeing that the fruit of the tree was good to eat and pleasing and agreeable to the eye, she took it and ate it".

And "she understood". Now Malice was inside her and was gnawing at her intestines. She saw with new eyes and heard with new ears the habits and voices of beasts. And she craved for them with insane greed.

She began the sin by herself. She accomplished it with her companion. That is why a heavier sentence is laid on woman. Because of her, man has become rebellious towards God and has become acquainted with lewdness and death. Because of her, he was no longer capable of dominating his three reigns: the reign of the spirit, because he allowed the spirit to disobey God; the moral reign, because he allowed passions to master him; the reign of the flesh, because he lowered it down to the instinctive level of beasts. "The Serpent seduced me" says Eve. "The woman offered me the fruit and I ate of it" says Adam. And the triple greed has ruled the three dominions since then. Only Grace can relax the hold of this ruthless monster. And if Grace is alive, nay thoroughly alive, and kept more and more alive by the good will of a faithful son, it will succeed in strangling the monster and will no longer have anything to fear. It will not be afraid of internal tyrants, which are the flesh and passions; neither will it be afraid of external tyrants, these are the world and the mighty ones on the earth. It will dread neither persecutions nor death. It is as Paul the Apostle says: "I fear none of these things, neither do I care for my life more than I care for myself, provided I carry out the mission and the ministry the Lord Jesus gave me, and that was to bear witness to the Good News of God's Grace".[...]

8th March 1944.

Mary says:

« I obeyed in My joy, because when I understood the mission to which God called Me, I was full of joy, My heart opened like a closed lily and it shed that blood which was to become the soil for the Lord's Seed.

The joy of being a mother.

I had consecrated Myself to God since My childhood, because the light of the Most High had shown Me the cause of evil in the world and, as far as it was in My power, I wanted to remove from Myself every trace of Satan.

I did not know I was without stain. I could not think I was. That simple thought would have been presumption and pride, because, since I was born of human parents, it was not right for Me to think that I was the Chosen One to be the Faultless One. The Spirit of God had informed Me of the pain of the Father because of the corruption of Eve, who had lowered herself to the level of inferior creatures, whereas she was a creature of grace. It was My intention to soothe that pain by remaining unprofaned by human thoughts, wishes and contacts and thus restoring an angelical purity in My body. The palpitations of My heart were to be only for Him, and only for Him My whole being.

But if there was no passion of the flesh in Me, there was still the sacrifice of not being a mother. Also Eve had been granted by the Father Creator the gift of maternity, a maternity devoid of what now degrades it. The sweet and pure maternity without a sensual burden! I experienced it! Of how much did Eve divest herself by giving up such wealth! More than immortality. And do not think that I am exaggerating. My Jesus and I, His Mother, with Him, have experienced the languor of death. I, the sweet languor of a tired person who falls asleep, Jesus, the intense languor of who dies sentenced to death. So we also experienced death. But only I, the new Eve, experienced maternity without any kind of profanation, that I might tell the world how sweet was the destiny of woman called to be a mother without any bodily pain. And the desire of such pure maternity was possible and actually existed in the Virgin wholly devoted to God, because that maternity is the glory of woman.

If you consider in what high esteem the Israelites held a mother, you will realise even more what sacrifice I had made when I consecrated Myself to virginity. Now the Eternal Good Father granted Me, His servant, this gift, without divesting Me of the purity I had clothed Myself in to be a flower on His throne. And I rejoiced with the double joy of being the mother of a man and the Mother of God.

The joy of being the Woman by means of Whom peace was reestablished between Heaven and earth.

Oh! What a joy to have desired this peace for the sake of God and of men and to know that it was coming to the world through Me, the poor handmaid of the

Almighty! What a joy to say: "Men, do not cry any longer. I have in Me the secret that will make you happy. I cannot tell what it is because it is sealed in Me, in My heart, just as the Son is enclosed in My inviolate womb. But I am already bringing it to you, and the moment when you will see Him and hear His Holy name is getting nearer and nearer".

The joy of having made God happy: the joy of the believer for his God made happy.

Oh! The joy of removing from God's heart the bitterness of Eve's disobedience, pride and disbelief!

My Jesus explained the fault with which the first Couple got stained. I redeemed that sin by going up the same stages as they descended.

Disobedience was the beginning of the downfall: "Do not eat and do not touch of that tree" said God. And man and woman did not respect that prohibition, although as kings of creation they were allowed to touch and eat of everything except of that tree because God wanted them to be inferior only to angels.

The tree: the means to test their obedience. What does obedience to God's commands imply? It implies all possible good, because God commands nothing but good. What is disobedience? It is evil, because it brings about a rebellious mental state in which Satan can be active.

Eve goes toward the tree, which, if avoided, would have caused her welfare, if approached, would cause her ruin. She goes there led by the childish curiosity of seeing what is special about it, and by a rashness that makes her consider God's command a useless one since she is strong and pure, the queen of Eden, where everything is subject to her and nothing can hurt her. Her presumption is her ruin. Presumption is the yeast of pride.

At the tree she finds the Seducer, who sings his song of lies to her inexperience, to her beautiful virginal inexperience, to her badly guarded inexperience. "You think there is evil here? No, there isn't. God told you because He wants to keep you as slaves under His power. You think you are king and queen? You are not even as free as wild animals. Animals can love one another with true love. You cannot. Animals are granted the gift of being creators like God. Animals generate little ones and see their families grow as much as they like. You do not. You are denied this joy. Why make you man and woman if you have to live thus? Be gods. You do not know the joy of being two in one flesh, that creates a third one and many more. Do not believe God when He promised you the joy of posterity seeing your children forming new families, leaving their father and mother for their families. He has given you a sham life: real life is to know the laws of life. Then you will be like gods and will be able to say to God: 'We are equal to You' ".

And the allurements continued because there was no will to break it, on the contrary there was the will to continue it and to learn what did not belong to man. And the forbidden tree becomes really mortal for the human race because from its branches there hangs the fruit of bitter knowledge that comes from Satan. And the woman becomes a female and with the yeast of Satanic knowledge in her heart, she moves on to corrupt Adam. With their bodies and souls degraded and their morals corrupted, they became acquainted with sorrow and the death of both their souls deprived of Grace and of their bodies divested of immortality. And Eve's wound engendered suffering, which will not subside until the last couple on earth are dead.

I went along the road of the two sinners, but in the opposite direction: I obeyed. I obeyed in every way. God inspired Me to be a virgin. I obeyed. When I loved virginity that made Me as pure as the first woman before she met Satan, God asked Me to get married. I obeyed, elevating marriage to the degree of purity intended by God when He created the First Parents. I was then convinced that My destiny was solitude in marriage and the contempt of people because of My holy sterility, when God asked Me to be a Mother. I obeyed. I believed that it was possible and that the word came from God, because I was filled with peace when I heard it. I did not think: "I deserved it". I did not say: "Now the world will admire Me, because I am like God, creating the flesh of God". No, I did not. I lowered Myself in My humility.

Joy gushed out of My heart like the stem of a rose. But it was soon decorated with sharp thorns and it was clenched in the tangle of sorrow, like branches enveloped by the bearbines of convolvuli (1). Sorrow for the pain of My spouse: it suffocated My joy. Sorrow for the pain of My Son: a thorn that pierced My

joy.

Eve wanted pleasure, triumph, freedom. I accepted sorrow, humiliation, slavery. I gave up My peaceful life, the esteem of My spouse, My own freedom. I kept nothing for Myself. I became the maid of God in the flesh, in morals, in the spirit, relying on Him not only for the virginal conception, but also for the protection of My honour, for the consolation of My spouse, for the means suitable to elevate him also to the sublimation of marriage, so that we could restore man and woman to their lost dignity. I embraced the will of the Lord for Myself, My spouse and My Creature.

I said "Yes" for the whole three, as I was certain that God would not break His promise to assist Me in My sorrow of a spouse who realises she is considered guilty, and of a mother who knows she is generating a Son to deliver Him to sorrow. I said "Yes" and nothing else. That "Yes" cancelled Eve's "No" to God's command. "Yes, My Lord, as You wish. I will know what You want Me to know. I will live as You want Me to live. I will rejoice if You wish so. I will suffer for what You want Me to suffer. Yes, for ever, My Lord, from the moment Your ray made Me a Mother to the moment You called Me back to You. 'Yes', for ever 'Yes'. All the good voices of the flesh, all the good passions of the spirit were under the weight of My perpetual 'Yes'. And above, on a

(1) A genus of climbing plants, including the bindweed.

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diamond pedestal, there was My spirit, lacking wings to fly to You, but it was the master of the whole 'ego' subdued and made Your servant. Servant in joy, servant in sorrow. But smile, o God. And be happy. Guilt has been defeated. It has been removed and destroyed. It lies under My heel, it was washed in My tears and destroyed by My obedience. The new Tree will be born of My bosom and it will bear the Fruit that knows all the evil because It suffered it all in Itself and will give all the good. All men will be able to come to It and I shall be happy if they take of It, even if they do not remember that It was born of Me.

Providing man is saved and God is loved, let it be done to His handmaid what is done to a clod of earth on which a tree is planted: a step to ascend".

Mary, we must always be steps so that other people may ascend to God. It does not matter if they tread on us, providing they are successful in reaching the Cross. It is the new tree that has the knowledge of Good and Evil, because it tells man what is good and what is evil so that he may choose and live and at the same time it is a medicine that cures those who are intoxicated by the evil they wanted to taste. Let our hearts be under the feet of men, that the number of the redeemed may increase and the Blood of My Jesus not be shed fruitlessly. That is the destiny of the maids of God. But then we deserve to receive the holy Host in our hearts and to say at the foot of the Cross drenched with His Blood and our tears: "Here is, o Father, the immaculate Host which we offer to You for the salvation of the world. Look at us, Father, melted with It and give us Your blessing for Its infinite merits".

And I give you My caresses. Rest now, My dear daughter. The Lord is with you. »

Jesus says:

« My Mother's words should disperse all perplexity of thought also in the minds most confused and muddled by pseudo science [...].

I said: "metaphorical tree". Now I will say: "symbolical tree". Perhaps you will understand better. Its symbol is clear: the inclination to good and to evil of the two children of God, would be understood by their behaviour towards the tree. Like 'aqua regia' that tests gold and the scales of the goldsmith that weigh its carats, that tree, by God's command, became a means of testing and it gave the measure of Adam's and Eve's symbolic metal purity.

I can already hear your objection: "Was the punishment not excessive and the means used to condemn them not childish?"

Not so. Actual disobedience in you, who are their heirs, is not so grave as if it were in them. You have been redeemed by Me. But Satan's poison is always ready to rise again, like certain diseases that never disappear completely in the blood. The First Parents possessed Grace without ever even nearing Disgrace. They were therefore stronger and more firmly supported by Grace that generated love and innocence. The gift given them by God was infinite. Much graver is

therefore their fall notwithstanding that gift.

Also the fruit that was offered and eaten was symbolical. It was the fruit of an experience they wanted to have at Satan's instigation to break God's command. I had not forbidden men love. I only wanted them to love each other without malice; as I loved them in My holiness, they were to love each other in the holiness of affections unsoiled by lewdness.

It must not be forgotten that Grace is light, and whoever possesses it knows what is good and useful to know. Mary, Full of Grace, knew everything, because Wisdom taught Her, Wisdom that is Grace, and She knew how to live in a holy way. Also Eve knew what was good for her to know. But not more, because it is valueless to know what is not good. But she did not have faith in God's word, and was not faithful to her promise of obedience. She believed in Satan, she broke her promise, she wanted to know what was not good, she loved it without regret, she turned love into something corrupt and degraded, which I instead had permitted as something holy. A sullied angel, she wallowed in mud and litter, whereas she could have run happily amongst the flowers of the earthly Paradise and she could have seen her offspring flourish around her, like a plant that is covered with flowers without bending its leaves into the mire.

Do not be like the foolish children mentioned by Me in the Gospel; they heard other children sing and they stopped their ears, they heard them play the pipes and they did not dance, they heard them weep and they wanted to laugh. Do not be narrow-minded, do not be deniers. Accept the Light without malice and stubbornness, without irony and disbelief. Enough said about that.

To make you understand how grateful you must be to Him Who died to elevate you to Heaven and to defeat Satan's concupiscence, I wanted to speak to you, in this period of preparation for Easter, of what was the first link of the chain by which the Word of the Father was dragged to death, the Divine Lamb to the slaughterhouse. I wanted to speak to you about it, because at present ninety per cent of you are like Eve intoxicated by Lucifer's breath and words, and you do not live, to love one another, but to glut yourselves with sensuality, you do not live for Heaven but for filth, you are no longer creatures gifted with soul and reason, but dogs without soul and without reason. You have killed your souls and perverted your reason. I solemnly tell you that brutes surpass you in the honesty of their love.»

18. The Annunciation of Elizabeth's Pregnancy to Joseph.

25th March 1944.

The little house of Nazareth appears to me with Mary in it. Mary, a young girl, as when the Angel of God appeared to Her. This simple sight fills my soul with the virginal perfume of the house. The scent still remains in the room where the Angel gently waved his golden wings. That divine perfume was all concentrated on Mary to make a mother of Her and it now emanates from Her.

It is evening, because shadows begin to invade the room into which so much heavenly light had descended.

Mary is kneeling near Her little bed and is praying with Her arms crossed over Her breast and Her face bowed down very low. She is still dressed as She was at the moment of the Annunciation. Everything is exactly as it was then. The flowery branch is in its vase, the furniture in the same position. Only the distaff and the spindle are now leaning in a corner, the former with its flax, the latter with its bright thread wrapped around it.

Mary stops praying and stands up, Her face is flushed as if it were lit up by a flame. Her lips are smiling, but Her eyes are shining with tears. She takes the oil lamp and lights it with a flint. She checks that everything is in good order in the room. She straightens up the blanket on the bed as it had been displaced. She adds some water to the vase containing the flowery branch and She places it outside, in the cool of the night. She then comes back in. She takes the folded embroidery from the bookcase and the lamp and goes out closing the door. She takes a few steps in the little kitchen garden, along the side of the house and then goes into the little room where I saw the parting goodbye of Jesus and Mary. I recognise it although some pieces of furniture which were there previously are now missing.

Mary disappears into another small adjoining room, taking the lamp with Her, and I am left alone in the company of the embroidery work laid on the corner of the table. I can hear Mary's light steps moving to and fro, She then makes a noise

with water as if She were washing something. Then there is the noise of broken sticks and I understand that She is lighting the fire.

Then She comes back and goes into the little garden. She comes in once again with some apples and vegetables. She puts the apples on the table, on an engraved metal tray, possibly made of copper. She goes back into the kitchen, (for the kitchen is certainly over there). Now the flames of the fireplace are merrily casting light through the open door into this room and make dancing shadows on the wall.

Some time goes by and Mary comes in with a small brown loaf and a bowl of hot milk. She sits down and dips some small slices of bread into the milk. She eats them slowly. Then leaving half of the bowl of milk, She goes into the kitchen and comes back with the vegetables on which She pours some oil and She eats them with the bread. She quenches Her thirst with the milk. She then takes an apple and eats it. The meal of a little girl.

Mary eats and thinks, and She smiles at some inner thought. She looks up and all around the walls and seems to be telling them a secret. Now and again, She becomes serious, almost sad. But soon Her smile is back on Her lips again. There is a knocking at the door. Mary gets up and opens it. Joseph comes in. They greet each other. Then Joseph sits on a stool in front of Mary, on the opposite side of the table.

Joseph is a handsome man in the prime of life. He must be thirty-five years old at most. His face is framed by his dark brown hair and a beard of the same colour and his eyes are very sweet and very dark, almost black. His forehead is large and smooth, his nose thin and slightly aquiline, his cheeks are roundish of a brown hue, but not olive-coloured, on the contrary they are rosy near the cheek-bones. He is not very tall, but he is strong and well built.

Before sitting down he has taken off his mantle and it is the first I have seen of its kind, because it is a full circle. It is held close at the neck by a kind of hook and it has a hood. The colour is light brown and it seems to be made of a cloth of coarse wool proof against water. It looks like the mantle of a mountaineer suitable to shelter from inclement weather.

Also before sitting down he offers Mary two eggs and a bunch of grapes, somewhat withered, but well preserved. And he smiles saying: « The grapes were brought to me from Cana. I was given the eggs by a Centurion for some repair work I did to his cart. A wheel was broken and their carpenter is ill. They are new laid. He took them from the hen house. Drink them. They will do You good.»

« To-morrow Joseph. I have just finished My meal.»

« But You can take the grapes. They are good, as sweet as honey. I carried them very carefully, so that they would not get spoiled. Eat them. There are plenty more. I'll bring them to-morrow in a little basket. I couldn't this evening, because I came straight from the Centurion's house.»

« Well, then, you have not had any supper yet.»

« No, I haven't, but it does not matter.»

Mary gets up at once and goes into the kitchen and She comes back with some milk, some olives and cheese. « I have nothing else » She says. « Take an egg. » But Joseph does not want it. The eggs are for Mary. He eats with relish his bread and the cheese and he drinks the lukewarm milk. He then accepts an apple. And his supper is over.

Mary takes Her embroidery after cleaning the table and Joseph helps Her and he remains in the kitchen even when She comes back here. I can hear him putting things away. He pokes the fire because it is a cool evening. When he comes in, Mary thanks him.

They speak to each other. Joseph tells Her how he spent the day. He talks of his little nephews and he takes an interest in Mary's work and in Her flowers. He promises to bring Her some beautiful flowers which the Centurion has promised him. « They are flowers we haven't got here. They were brought from Rome. And he promised me some little plants. Now, when the moon is in the right quarter I will plant them for You. They have lovely colours and a beautiful scent. I saw them last year, because they bloom in summer. They will scent the whole house for You. Then I will prune the trees when the moon is right. It is time.»

Mary smiles and thanks him. Then there is silence. Joseph looks at Mary's fair head bowed over Her embroidery. A look of angelical love. Certainly, if an angel were to love a woman with the love of a husband, he would look at her thus. Then Mary, as if She were taking a sudden decision, lays the embroidery on Her

lap and says: « I also have something to tell you. I never have anything to say, because you know how retired I live. But today I have some news. I heard that our relative Elizabeth, Zacharias' wife, is about to have a child... »

Joseph opens his eyes wide and exclaims: « At her age? »

« At her age » replies Mary smiling. « The Lord can do everything, and now He is giving this joy to our relative.»

« How do you know? Is the news certain? »

« A messenger came. One who would not tell lies. I would like to go to Elizabeth's, to help her and tell her that I am rejoicing with her. If you will allow Me... »

« Mary, You are my lady and I Your servant. Whatever You do is well done. When would You like to go? »

« As soon as possible. But I shall be away for some months.»

« And I will count the days waiting for You. Go and don't worry. I will look after the house and Your little garden. You will find the flowers as beautiful as if You had taken care of them. Only... wait. Before Passover I must go to Jerusalem to buy certain things for my work. If You can wait for a few days, I will come with You as far as Jerusalem. I can't go any farther, because I must hurry back. But we can go there together. I will be happier if I know that You are not on the road by Yourself. When You want to come back, You can let me know and I will come and meet You. »

« You are so good, Joseph. May the Lord reward you with His blessings and keep sorrow away from you. I always pray Him for that. »

The chaste couple smile at each other angelically. There is silence again for a little while.

Then Joseph gets up. He puts his mantle on and he covers his head with the hood. He says goodbye to Mary Who has also got up, and he goes out.

Mary looks at him going out and She sighs rather sadly. She then lifts Her eyes to Heavens. She is certainly praying. She closes the door carefully. She folds the embroidery. She goes into the kitchen, puts out or covers up the fire. She makes sure that everything is in order. She then takes the oil lamp and goes out closing the door. With Her hand She shields the feeble flame that flickers in the cool evening breeze... She enters Her room and prays once again.

The vision ends thus.

Mary says:

« My dear daughter, when I came back to the reality of earthly life after the ecstasy that had filled Me with inexpressible joy, My first thought was for Joseph: a thought as sharp as a rose thorn, that pierced My heart enraptured among the roses of Divine Love, Who had become My Spouse only a few moments before.

By this time I loved My holy and provident guardian. Since the time when by the will of God, manifested to Me by the word of the Priest, I had become married to Joseph, I had the possibility of knowing and appreciating the holiness of that Just man. When I became united to him, My dismay at being an orphan disappeared and I no longer regretted the lost retreat of the Temple. He was as sweet as My deceased father. With him I felt as safe as with the Priest. All perplexity had disappeared, nay it had been forgotten, so far it was from My virginal heart. I had in fact understood that there was no reason whatsoever for hesitation or fear with regard to Joseph. My virginity entrusted to Joseph was safer than a child in his mother's arms.

But now, how could I tell him that I was a Mother? I endeavoured to find suitable words to give him the news. A difficult task, as I did not want to boast of God's gift and on the other hand there was no way of justifying My maternity without saying: "The Lord has loved Me amongst all women and has made Me, His servant, His Bride". Neither did I wish to deceive him by concealing My condition from him.

And while I was praying, the Spirit of Whom I was full, said to Me: "Be silent. Entrust Me with the task of justifying You with Your spouse". When? How? I did not ask. I had always relied upon God, and I had always allowed Myself to be led by Him exactly as a flower is led away by running water. The Eternal Father had never abandoned Me without His help. His hand had always supported, protected and guided Me so far. It would do so also now.

O My daughter, how beautiful and comforting is faith in our Eternal Good God! He

holds us in His arms as in a cradle, like a boat He steers us into the bright harbour of Goodness, He warms our hearts, comforts and nourishes us, He bestows rest and happiness, light and guidance on us. Reliance in God is everything, and God grants everything to those who trust in Him: He gives Himself.

That evening I elevated to perfection My reliance as a creature. Now I was able to do so, because God was in Me. Before I had the confidence of a poor creature, such as I was: a mere nothing, even if I was so much loved as to be the Faultless One. But now I had a divine confidence, because God was Mine: My Spouse, My Son! Oh! What a joy! To be One with God. Not for My own glory, but to love Him with a total union and say to Him: "You, only You are in Me: please assist Me with Your Divine perfection in everything I do".

If He had not said to Me: "Be silent!", I would probably have dared say to Joseph, with My face bowed to the ground: "The Spirit has penetrated Me and now the Embryo of God is in Me", and he would have believed Me, because he held Me in high esteem and because like those who never lie, he could not believe that others lied. Yes, to avoid hurting his feelings in future, I would have overcome My reluctance to praise Myself. But I obeyed the divine command. And for months after that moment, I felt the first wound pierce My heart.

It was the first pain in My destiny of Co-Redeemer. I offered and suffered it in atonement and to give you a guidance for similar circumstances in life, when it is necessary to suffer in silence for an event that casts a bad light on you in relation to those who love you.

Entrust God with the protection of your reputation and affections. If you deserve God's protection with a holy life, you can proceed safely. Even if the whole world is against you, He will defend you with regard to those who love you and will cause the truth to be known.

Now rest, My dear, and be more and more My dear daughter.»

19. Mary and Joseph Set Out for Jerusalem.

27th March 1944.

I see their departure to go to St. Elizabeth's.

Joseph has come with two little donkeys to fetch Mary: one for himself, the other for Mary: one of the little animals has the usual saddle with a strange gadget attached to it. Later I gather that it is a kind of a luggage-rack on which Joseph fastens a small wooden casket, a small trunk we would call it nowadays, which he brought for Mary's clothes, to prevent them from getting wet.

I hear Mary thank Joseph wholeheartedly for the provident gift, in which She packs what She takes out of a parcel She had made up previously.

They close the door of the house and start off. It is daybreak, for I can see the rosy dawn in the east. Nazareth is still asleep. The two early travellers meet only a shepherd who is driving forward his little sheep, which are trotting along, one against the other, jammed in close flock. They are all bleating. The little lambs with their shrill sharp voices bleat more than the others, and want their mothers' breasts even while moving. But the mothers are hurrying towards the pastures and with their louder bleatings they urge the little ones to follow them.

Mary looks and smiles and since She has stopped to let the herd go by, She bends on the saddle and caresses the mild little beasts that pass near Her donkey.

When the shepherd arrives carrying a newly-born little lamb in his arms and he stops to speak to Mary, She smiles and caresses the pinkish little face of the lamb, that is bleating desperately and She exclaims: «It's looking for its mother. Here is your mother. She won't leave you, of course she won't, little lamb.» In fact the ewe rubs herself against the shepherd, then stands up on her hind legs and licks the face of her little one.

The herd passes by making the noise of water drops falling on leaves. Behind it there is the dust raised by the trotting feet of the sheep and the patterns of their footprints on the dusty road.

Joseph and Mary take to the road again. Joseph is wearing his large mantle, Mary has on a kind of a striped shawl, because it is a very cool morning.

They are now in the country and they are proceeding one beside the other. They seldom speak. Joseph is thinking of his business, Mary is following Her own thoughts and in Her concentration She smiles at them. At times She looks around and smiles at the things She sees. Now and again She looks at Joseph and then an expression of sad gravity darkens Her face; then She smiles again, still

looking at Her provident spouse who speaks so little and when he does speak it is only to ask Her whether She is comfortable and whether She needs anything. By now there are many people on the road, particularly near and inside villages. But Mary and Joseph do not pay much attention to the people they meet. They proceed on their trotting donkeys, in the midst of the noise of the harness bells, and they stop only once in the shade of a thicket, to eat some bread and olives and to drink at a well that runs down from a grotto. They stop later to take shelter from a sudden heavy downpour from a very dark cloud.

They have taken cover under the mountain, against a protruding rock that protects them from most of the heavy rain. Joseph wants Mary to put on his big mantle, which is proof against water and he insists so much that Mary is obliged to yield to the insistence of Her spouse, who to reassure Her of his own immunity, covers his head and shoulders with a small grey blanket which was on the saddle. Probably the donkey's blanket. Now Mary looks like a little monk, with Her face framed by the hood and the mantle closed round Her neck and covering all Her body.

The shower slackens and turns into a tedious drizzling rain. Mary and Joseph start off again along a muddy road. But it is springtime and after a short while the sun makes the journey more comfortable. Also the two little donkeys are now trotting more happily along the road.

I do not see anything else because the vision ends here.

20. From Jerusalem to Zacharias' House.

28th March 1944.

We are in Jerusalem. I know the town very well now, with its streets and gates. The first thing Mary and Joseph do is to go to the Temple. I recognise the stable where Joseph left his donkey on the day of Jesus' presentation in the Temple. Also now he leaves the two donkeys there, after feeding them, and then he goes with Mary to worship the Lord.

When they come out, they enter a house which apparently belongs to people they know. They take some refreshment there and Mary rests until Joseph comes back with a little old man. «This man is going Your way. You will not have to travel a long way by Yourself to get to Your relatives. You can trust him because I know him.»

They get on their donkeys again and Joseph goes with Mary as far as the Gate (it is not the one they entered but a different one) and they part there. Mary proceeds with the little old man who is as talkative as Joseph was silent and takes an interest in many things. Mary answers him patiently. In front of the saddle She has now the little trunk which Joseph's donkey had carried earlier and She is no longer wearing the large mantle. Neither has She on the shawl, which is folded on the trunk, and She is really beautiful in Her dark blue dress and white veil that protects Her from the sun. How beautiful She is!

The old man must be somewhat deaf, because Mary, who is wont to speak in a very low voice, had to speak loudly to make Herself heard. And now he is tired. He has finished with all his questions and news and is dozing on the saddle, led by the donkey that is familiar with the road.

Mary takes advantage of this respite to collect Her thoughts and to pray. It must be a prayer that She sings in a low voice, looking at the blue sky, with Her arms crossed over Her breast, while Her face is bright and happy because of some internal emotion.

I see nothing else.

And even now that the vision is interrupted, as it happened yesterday, I am left with Mother near me, visible to my internal sight so clearly that I can describe for you the light rosy hue of Her cheeks, not very chubby but gently soft, the bright red of Her little lips and Her clear blue eyes sweetly shining between Her dark-blond eyelashes.

I can tell you how Her hair, divided into two on the crown of Her head, falls softly with three undulations on each side, as far down as to cover half of Her little rosy ears, and then disappears with its pale shiny gold behind the veil covering Her head (because I see Her with Her mantle over Her head, wearing a dress of paradisiac silk and a dark mantle, as thin as a veil, of the same cloth

as the dress).

I can tell you that Her dress is tight round Her neck by means of a sheathing inside which runs a cord the ends of which form a knot in front at the base of Her neck. Likewise Her dress is gathered at Her waist by a thicker cord, also of white silk, hanging down Her side with two tassels.

I can even tell you that Her dress, tight as it is at Her neck and waist, forms seven round soft folds on Her breast, the only ornament of Her very modest garment.

I can inform you of the chastity emanating from all Her aspect, from Her so delicate and harmonious forms which make Her such an angelical woman.

And the more I look at Her the more I suffer thinking of how much they made Her suffer and I wonder how they could have had no mercy on Her, so meek and kind, so delicate also in Her physical appearance. I look at Her and I can hear once again all the shouting on Calvary, also against Her, all the mockery and insults, all the maledictions shouted against Her because She was the Mother of the Convict. Now I see Her beautiful and tranquil. But Her present countenance does not cancel the memory of Her tragical face during those hours of agony, or that of Her desolate face in the house in Jerusalem, after Jesus' death. And I would like to be able to caress and kiss Her cheek, so delicately rosy and soft, to remove with my kiss that remembrance of grievous tears, as She certainly remembers as I do.

You cannot believe how much peace it gives me to have Her near me. I think that to die seeing Her must be as sweet and even sweeter than the sweetest hour of one's lifetime. During the time that I did not see Her thus, all for myself, Her absence was a great sorrow to me, just like the absence of a mother. I now feel once again the ineffable joy which was my companion in December and early January. And I am happy, notwithstanding that the sight of the torture of the Passion casts a veil of grief on all my happiness.

It is difficult to explain and make you understand what I feel and what has been happening since February the eleventh, when in the evening I saw Jesus suffer in His Passion. That sight has changed me completely. Whether I die now or in one hundred years' time, that vision will always be the same in intensity and consequences. Previously I used to think of the sorrows of Christ, now I live them, because one word, or a glance at an image is enough to make me suffer all over again what I suffered that evening and be horrified at those tortures; and I grieve over His desolate sufferings, and even if nothing reminds me of them, their remembrance tears my heart.

Mary is beginning to speak and I become silent.

Mary says:

«I will not speak much, because You are very tired, My poor daughter. I only wish to draw your attention and the attention of readers to the constant habit of Joseph and Mine of giving priority to prayer. Tiredness, haste, worries, occupations never hindered our prayer, on the contrary they helped it. It was always the queen of our occupations, our relief, our light, our hope. If in sad moments it was a consolation, in happy ones it was a song. But it was always the constant friend of our souls. It detached us from the earth, from our exile, and it raised us up towards Heaven, our Fatherland.

Not only I, Who by now had God with Me and I had but to look at My bosom to worship the Holy of Holies, but also Joseph felt united to God when he prayed, because our prayers were a true adoration of our whole beings, which melted with God by worshipping Him and by being embraced by Him.

And please note that not even I, although I had the Eternal God in Me, not even I felt exempted from respectful homage to the Temple. The deepest holiness does not exempt anyone from feeling a mere nothing with regard to God and from converting such nothingness into an endless hosanna to God's glory, since He allows us to do so.

Are you weak, poor, faulty? Invoke the holiness of the Lord: "Holy, Holy, Holy!" Invoke the Blessed Holy One to assist you in your misery. He will come and instil His holiness into you. Are you holy and rich in merits in the eyes of God? Invoke the holiness of the Lord just the same. It is infinite and will increase yours. The angels, who are superior to the weaknesses of mankind, do not cease singing their "Sanctus" not even for an instant, and their supernatural beauty increases with each invocation of the holiness of our God.

Imitate the angels.

Never divest yourselves of the protection of prayer, which blunts the weapons of Satan, the malice of the world, the incentives of the flesh and mental pride. Never lay down this weapon, which causes Heaven to open and pour out Its graces and blessings.

The world needs a shower of prayers to be purified from the sins that draw punishments from God. And since only few people pray, those few must pray as if they were many. They must multiply their living prayers to make up the necessary amount to obtain graces. Prayers are living when they are flavoured with true love and sacrifice.

My dear daughter, it is a good thing, pleasing to God and meritorious, that you should suffer because of the sufferings of My Jesus and Mine, in addition to your own. Your sympathetic love is so dear to Me. But do you want to kiss Me? Kiss the wounds of My Son. Dress them with the balm of your love. I suffered spiritually the pangs of the scourges, of the thorns and the torture of the nails and of the cross. And likewise I feel spiritually all the caresses given to my Jesus, as they are as many kisses given to Me. And then come. I am the Queen of Heaven. But I am always the Mother...»
And I am happy.

21. Arrival at Zacharias' House.

1st April 1944.

I am now in a mountainous place. They are not high mountains, neither are they just hills. There are ridges and creeks as we see in our Apennines in Tuscany and Umbria. The vegetation is thick and beautiful and there is plenty fresh water, that keeps the pastures green and the orchards fruitful: apple and fig-trees are mostly cultivated in the orchards and grapes near the houses. It must be springtime because the grapes are rather big, about the size of vetch grains, and the apple-blossoms have already sprung and they look like so many little green pellets; on top of the fig branches the first fruits can be seen, still in the embryo stage, but already well formed. The meadows are real soft multicoloured carpets. Sheep are grazing or resting on them and they look like white spots on the emerald of the grass.

Mary on Her donkey is climbing up a rather well kept road, probably the main road. She is climbing because the village is higher up and it looks quite tidy. My internal warner says to me: «This place is Hebron.» You spoke to me of Montana. I cannot help it. It is indicated to me with this name. I do not know whether Hebron is the whole area or only the village. That is what I hear and that is what I say.

Mary is now entering the village. It is evening. Some women on their doorstep watch the arrival of the stranger and gossip with one another. Their eyes follow Her and they are not happy until they see Her stop in front of one of the prettiest houses, in the centre of the village, with a kitchen garden in the front and rear and a well cultivated orchard around it. The orchard continues into a large meadow that rises and slopes according to the sinuosity of the mountain and ends in a wood of tall trees, beyond which I do not know what there is. The whole place is surrounded by a hedge of blackberries or wild roses. I cannot tell exactly which, because, if you remember, the flowers and leaves of these two thorny hedges are very much alike and until their branches bear fruit it is easy to confuse them. In front of the house, that is on the side that skirts the village, the place is enclosed by a small low white wall, on top of which there are rows of rose-bushes, at present without flowers, but already full of buds. In the centre there is an iron gate. It is easily understood that it is the house of a notable of the village or of a well-to-do family, because everything shows comfort and great order, if not riches and pomp.

Mary gets off the donkey and goes to the gate. She looks through the iron bars, but does not see anyone. She endeavours then to make Herself heard. A little old woman, who more curious than the others has followed Her, shows Her a strange

gadget that is used as a bell. It consists of two pieces of metal balanced on a kind of yoke, at the end of which there is a rope. When the rope is pulled, the two metal pieces strike each other and give the sound of a bell or gong. Mary pulls the rope, but so gently, that there is only a faint tinkling, which no one hears. Then the little old woman, whose face is all nose and slipper-chin and whose tongue is worth ten put together, gets hold of the rope and pulls it several times with all her might. She makes enough noise to raise a dead man! «That's how You do it, woman. Otherwise, how can they hear You? You know, Elizabeth is old and Zacharias also is old. Now he is also dumb, as well as deaf. Also the two servants are old, don't You know? Have You ever been here before? Don't You know Zacharias? Are You...»

Mary is rescued from the deluge of information and questions by a little old man who suddenly appears panting. He must be a gardener or a farmer, for he is holding a hoe in his hand and there is a pruning knife tied to his belt. He opens the gate and Mary enters thanking the little woman but... leaving her fairly recent question unanswered. What a disappointment for the curious soul! As soon as She is inside Mary says: «I am Mary of Joachim and Anne, from Nazareth. I am your masters' cousin ».

The man bows down and welcomes Her, he then calls out in a loud voice: «Sarah! Sarah!» He opens the gate again to let in the donkey that had left outside. Mary, in fact, to get rid of the persistent little woman, had slipped inside very quickly and the gardener just as quickly had closed the gate in the face of the gossip. And while taking the donkey in, he exclaims: «Oh! What a great happiness and what an upheaval to this household! Heaven has granted a child to the barren one, may the Most High be blessed! But seven months ago, Zacharias came back dumb from Jerusalem. He now makes himself understood by gestures or by writing. Perhaps You already know. My landlady has longed so much for You in this joy and this travail! She always spoke to Sarah about You and she would say: "If I only had little Mary with Me! I wish She were still in the Temple! I would send Zacharias to fetch Her. But now the Lord wanted Her married to Joseph of Nazareth. She is the only one who can comfort me in my pain and help me to pray to God, because She is so good. And they all miss Her in the Temple. On the last feast day, the last time I went to Jerusalem with Zacharias to thank the Lord for the child He has given me, Her teachers said to me: 'The Temple seems to be without the Cherubim of the Glory since Mary's voice is no longer heard inside these walls' ".» He then shouts again: «Sarah, Sarah! My wife is a little deaf. But come, please, I'll show You the way.»

Instead of Sarah, a fairly old woman appears at the top of the staircase on one side of the house. Her face is all wrinkles and her hair is very grey. It must have been very black at one time because her eyelashes and eyebrows are still very dark and also from the colour of her face one can tell that she was swarthy. Her present very obvious pregnant condition is a strange contradiction to her evident old age, notwithstanding her wide and loose dress. She looks down shading her eyes with her hand. As soon as she recognises Mary she raises her arms to the sky and utters an «Oh!» of joy and surprise. She then rushes, as fast as she can, towards Mary. Also Mary, who always moves very quietly, now runs, as swift as a little deer, and reaches the foot of the staircase at the same time as Elizabeth. And She embraces with great affection Her cousin who is crying with joy at seeing Her.

They remain embraced for an instant and then Elizabeth detaches herself exclaiming: «Ah!», an exclamation of mingled joy and sorrow and she places her hands on her enlarged abdomen. She bows her face and turns red and pale alternately. Mary and the servant hold out their hands to support her because she staggers, as if she were unwell. But Elizabeth, after a moment of concentration, lifts her face which is now so bright that she looks much younger. She then looks at Mary with evident veneration as if she sees an angel, she bows in a deep salutation exclaiming: «You are blessed amongst all women! Blessed is the Fruit of Your womb! (She says exactly that: two clearly separate sentences). How did I deserve that the Mother of my Lord should come to me, Your servant? There, at the sound of Your voice, the child leaped out of joy in my womb and when I embraced You, the Spirit of the Lord whispered deepest truths to my heart. You are blessed, because You believed that it was possible for God also what does not appear possible to the human mind! You are blessed, because by Your faith You will accomplish the things the Lord predicted to You and the

Prophets foretold for our times! You are blessed, for the Salvation You have brought to the house of Jacob! You are blessed for the Holiness You have brought to my son, whom I feel leaping with joy, like a happy little kid, in my womb, because he feels free from the burden of guilt, and is called to be the Predecessor, sanctified before Redemption by the Holy One Who is growing within You!»

Mary, with two tears that run down like two pearls from Her sparkling eyes to Her smiling lips, with Her face raised to heaven and also Her arms raised up, in the attitude that Her Jesus will take so often, exclaims: «My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord» and She continues the canticle as it has been handed down to us. At the end, at the verse: «He has come to the help of Israel his servant etc. », she puts Her hands on Her breast, kneels down stooping to the ground, adoring God.

The servant, who quite wisely had disappeared when he realised that Elizabeth was not really physically unwell, on the contrary, she was confiding her thoughts to Mary, is now coming back from the orchard with a solemn old man, whose hair and beard are completely white, and who greets Mary from a distance with great gestures and loud guttural sounds.

«Zacharias is arriving» says Elizabeth, touching the shoulder of Mary, engrossed in prayer. «My Zacharias is dumb. God has punished him because he did not believe. I will tell You later. But now I hope that God will forgive him, because You have come. You, full of Grace.»

Mary rises and goes to meet Zacharias. She stoops to the ground in front of him, kissing the hem of his white robe that reaches down to the ground. It is a very wide robe, held tight to the waist by a large embroidered braid.

Zacharias welcomes Mary by gestures and they both move toward Elizabeth. They all enter a room on the ground floor. It is a wide room, tastefully arranged, where they make Mary sit down and they offer Her some new milk -there is still foam on it- and some small cakes.

Elizabeth gives some orders to the maid servant, who has appeared at last, her hands still covered with flour and her hair whiter than usually because of the flour dust on it. Perhaps she was baking bread. She gives orders also to the male servant, whose name I hear is Samuel, and tells him to take Mary's trunk to a room which she indicates to him. She thus fulfils her duties of a landlady towards her guest.

In the meantime Mary is replying to the questions Zacharias is asking Her, writing them on a wax tablet with a style. From Her answers I understand that he is asking Her about Joseph and Her married life with him. I also understand that Zacharias has been denied all supernatural light about Mary's state and Her condition of Mother of the Messiah. Elizabeth goes near her husband and laying her hand on his shoulder, in a loving attitude, as if she were caressing him chastely, she says to him: «Also Mary is a mother. Rejoice over Her happiness.» But she does not say anything else. She looks at Mary. And Mary looks at her but does not encourage her to say more and Elizabeth keeps silent.

A sweet, very sweet vision! It obliterates the horror of the sight of Judas' suicide.

Last night, before falling asleep, I saw Mary crying, bent over the unction stone, on the dead body of Our Redeemer. She was on His right-hand side, with Her back to the opening of the sepulchre grotto. The torches lit up Her face so that I could see Her poor face ravaged by sorrow and washed by tears. She would take Jesus' hand, caress it, warm it against her cheeks, kiss it, stretch its fingers out... kiss them one by one, those poor motionless fingers. Then She would caress His face, would bend down to kiss His open mouth, His half-open eyes, His wounded forehead. The reddish light of the torches made the wounds of the tortured body appear more real and rendered the cruelty of His torture and the realism of His death more true and real.

And I remained in contemplation until my mind was clear. When I came out of my sopor, I prayed and I lay down to go to sleep. Then the above vision began. But Mother said to me: «Don't move. Just look. You will write it tomorrow.» In my sleep I dreamt it all over again. When I woke up at 6.30 I saw what I had already seen both when I was awake and in my sleep. And I wrote while I was seeing. Then you came and I asked you if I could add the following. They are various sketches of Mary's stay in Zacharias' house.

22. Mary and Elizabeth Speak of their Children.
2nd April 1944.

It is morning. I see Mary sewing, sitting in the room on the ground floor. Elizabeth is going to and fro, busy with the housework. And when she comes into Mary's room, she never fails to go and caress Her fair head, which looks even more fair against the rather dark walls and in the beautiful sun rays that enter through the door open on to the garden.

Elizabeth bends down to look at Mary's work -the embroidery She had in Nazareth- and she praises its beauty.

« I have also some linen to spin » says Mary.

« For your Child? »

« No. I had it already when I never thought...» Mary does not say anything else. But I understand: «...when I never thought I was to be the Mother of God.»

« But now You will have to use it for Him. Is it good? Fine? Children, You know, need very soft material. »

« I know. »

« I had begun... Late, because I wanted to be sure that it was not a deception of the Evil One. Although... I felt such a joy within me, that it could not possibly come from Satan. After... I suffered so much. I am old, Mary, really old, to be in this state. I suffered so much. Don't You suffer... »

« No. I don't. I have never been so well. »

« Of course. Quite right. You... there is no stain in You, as God chose You for His Mother. And that is why You are not subject to Eve's sufferings. The One You bear is holy. »

« I feel as if I had a wing in My heart and not a burden. I seem to have within Me all the flowers and all the birds that sing in springtime, and all the honey and all the sunshine... Oh! I am so happy! »

« Blessed Mary! Neither do I feel any longer burden, tiredness or pain, since I saw You. I seem to be new, young, freed from the miseries of woman's flesh. My child, after leaping happily at the sound of Your voice, is now quiet in his joy. And I seem to have him, in me, as in a living cradle, and I see him sleeping satisfied and happy, breathing like a little bird under the wing of its mother... I will now start working. He will no longer be a weight. I cannot see very well, but... »

« Never mind, Elizabeth. I will see to the spinning and weaving both for you and for your baby. I am quick and My sight is very good. »

« But you will have to see to Your... »

« Oh! There will be plenty time!... First I will take care of you, since you are going to have your baby very shortly, and later I will see to My Jesus. »

It is beyond human possibility to tell you how sweet are Mary's expression and voice, how bright Her eyes are with sweet happy tears, and how She smiles in pronouncing that Name, looking at the clear blue sky. She seems to be enraptured simply saying: « Jesus ».

Elizabeth exclaims: « What a beautiful name! The name of the Son of God, of Our Redeemer! »

« Oh! Elizabeth! » Mary becomes sad and She seizes the hands of Her relative who had laid them across her enlarged abdomen. « Tell Me, since you were illuminated by the Spirit of the Lord, when I came here, and you prophesied what the world does not know, tell Me: what will My Creature have to suffer to save the world? The Prophets... Oh! What do the Prophets say of the Saviour? Isaiah... Do you remember Isaiah? "He is the Man of sorrows. Through His wounds we are healed. He was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. Yahweh has been pleased to crush Him with suffering. After being condemned He was lifted up... " What lifting is he referring to? They call Him the Lamb and I cannot help

thinking of the lamb of the Passover, of the lamb of Moses, and I associate it with the serpent elevated by Moses on a cross. Elizabeth!... Elizabeth!... What will they do to My Creature? What will He have to suffer to save the world? » Mary is crying.

Elizabeth comforts Her. « Mary, don't cry. He is Your Son, but He is also the Son of God. God will see to His Son, and will look after You, His Mother. And if so many will be cruel to Him, so many will love Him. So many!... For ever and ever. The world will look at Your Son and will bless You with Him. They will bless You, for You are the Spring from which redemption gushes out. The destiny of Your Son! He will be raised to the rank of King of the whole creation. Just think of that, Mary. King, because He will redeem the whole creation, and as such, He will be universal King. And He will be loved also in the world, in its lifetime. My son will precede Yours and will love Him. The angel told Zacharias. And he wrote it down for me. How painful it is to see him dumb, my Zacharias! But I hope that when the baby is born also the father will be freed from his punishment. Will You pray, too, since You are the Seat of the Power of God and the Cause of delight in the world. To obtain this grace I make my offers to the Lord, as best I can. I offer my creature: because it belongs to Him, as He lent it to His servant to grant her the joy of being called "mother". It is the testimony of what God has done for me. I want his name to be "John". Isn't my son a grace? And didn't God grant me it? »

« And God, I am sure, will grant you the grace. I will pray... with you ».

« I suffer so much seeing him dumb!... » Elizabeth is crying. « When he writes, as he can no longer speak to me, there seem to be mountains and oceans between me and my Zacharias. After so many years of sweet conversation, now there is nothing but silence from his mouth. And particularly now, when it would be so nice to talk about who is about to come. I even refrain from speaking to avoid seeing him getting strained in his efforts to reply to me by gestures. I have cried so much! How much did I long for You! The people of the village watch, talk and criticise. Such is the world. But when one has a pain or a joy, one needs to be understood, not criticised. But now my life seems completely improved. I feel a joy in me since you came here. I feel that my test is about to end and that I will soon be completely happy. I am right, am I not? I have resigned myself to everything. But if God would only forgive my husband! If I could only hear him pray once again! »

Mary caresses and comforts her and in order to divert her attention, she invites her to take a little walk in the sunny garden.

They walk under a well cultivated pergola, as far as a little rustic tower, in the holes of which doves have nested.

Mary scatters the birdseed laughing, because the doves have rushed on Her, cooing loudly and flapping noisily, forming iridescent circles around Her. They alight on Her head, shoulders, arms and on Her hands, stretching their rosy beaks to snatch the grains from Her hands, gracefully pecking the Virgin's rosy lips and Her teeth that shine in the sun. Mary takes the golden corn from a little sack and She laughs in the middle of that tournament of intrusive greed. « How fond they are of You! » points out Elizabeth. « You have only been here a few days and they love You more than me, although I have always taken care of them. »

They continue walking until they reach an enclosure, at the end of the orchard, where there are about twenty goats with their little kids.

« Have you come back from the pasture? » Mary asks a little shepherd, caressing him.

« Yes, because my father said to me: "Go home, because it is going to rain shortly and there are some sheep about to lamb. Make sure they have dry herb and litter". There he is, he is coming.» And he points to the wood, whence a continual trembling bleating can be heard.

Mary caresses a little kid, as fair as a child, which rubs itself against Her, and together with Elizabeth She drinks some new milk that the little shepherd, offers them. .

Then the sheep arrive led by a shepherd as hairy as a bear. But he is obviously a good man because he is carrying a groaning sheep on his shoulders. He puts her down gently and explains: « She is about to lamb. She can only walk with difficulty. I put her on my shoulders and I hurried all the way to get here in time.» The sheep, still limping painfully, is led into the fold by the boy.

Mary is sitting on a stone and is playing with the little kids and the lambs, offering clover flowers to their pretty rosy little faces. A black and white kid puts its little hooves on Her shoulder and smells Her hair. « It is not bread » says Mary laughing. « I will bring you some crumbs tomorrow. Be good, now. » Once again cheerful, Elizabeth also laughs.

I see Mary Who is spinning very quickly under the pergola, where the grapes are growing bigger and bigger. Some time must have elapsed because the apples are beginning to redden on the trees and the bees are humming near the fig flowers already mature.

Elizabeth is now quite stout, and she is walking heavily. Mary looks at her carefully and lovingly. Also Mary's sides appear more round when She gets up to pick up the spindle which has fallen far away from Her. The expression on Her face has changed. It is more mature; before She was a girl, now She is a woman. The women go into the house because it is now getting dark, and the lamps are lit in the room. While waiting for supper, Mary begins to weave.

« Does it never tire You?» asks Elizabeth, pointing to the loom.

« No, you can be sure of that.»

« I am exhausted by this heat. I have not suffered any longer, but now the weight is too heavy for my old kidneys.»

« Take courage. You will soon be free. How happy you will then be. I am longing to be a mother. My Child! My Jesus! What will He be like?»

« As beautiful as You are, Mary.»

« Oh no! More beautiful! He is God. I am His maid. What I meant is, will He be fair or dark? Will His eyes be like a clear sky, or like the eyes of a mountain deer? I imagine Him more beautiful than a cherub, with golden curly hair, His eyes the same colour as the Sea of Galilee when the stars begin to peep on the horizon, His tiny little mouth as red as a pomegranate that bursts when it matures in the sun, and His cheeks as pink as this pale rose, with two little hands that could be contained in the hollow of a lily, they are so small and tiny, and two tiny feet that I can hold in the hollow of My hand, so soft and smooth, even more so than the petal of a flower. See. The idea I form of Him is taken from all the beautiful things that nature suggests to Me. And I can hear His voice. When He cries -because My Child will cry a little when He is hungry or sleepy, and it will always be a great pain for His Mummy Whose heart will be pierced every time She hears Him cry- when He cries, His voice will be like the bleating that now comes from a little lamb, only a few hours old, when it seeks its mother's breast, and her warm maternal fleece to sleep. When He laughs -and My heart in love with my Creature will then be full of Heaven, for I can be in love with Him, because He is My God, and it will not be against My consecrated virginity to love Him as a lover- His voice when He laughs will be like the merry cooing of a happy little dove which is full and content in its cosy little nest. And I think of Him when He is taking His first steps... a little bird hopping on a flowery meadow. The meadow will be His Mother's heart, it will be laid under His tiny pink feet with all Her love, so that He may not tread on anything that may hurt Him. Oh, how I will love My Child! My Son! Also Joseph will love Him.»

« But You will have to tell Joseph.»

Mary's face darkens, and She sighs. «Yes, I will have to tell him... I wish Heaven would tell him, because it is so difficult to tell. »

« Shall I tell him? We will ask him to come for John's circumcision... »

« No. I have entrusted God with the task of informing him of his happy destiny of putative father of the Son of God, and He will do so. The Spirit said to Me that evening: "Be silent. Entrust Me with the task of justifying You". And He will do so. God never lies. It is a great trial, but with the help of the Eternal Father, it will be overcome. No one must learn from My mouth what the benignity of the Lord has done. Certainly you are the exception, because the Spirit revealed it to you. »

« I have not mentioned it to anybody, not even to Zacharias who would have been very happy. He thinks you are a mother according to nature. »

« I know. And I decided that out of prudence. The secrets of God are holy. The angel of the Lord did not reveal My divine maternity to Zacharias. He could have done so, if God had wanted, because God knew that the time for the Incarnation of His Word in Me was already imminent. But God hid this joyful light from

Zacharias, who rejected your late maternity as something impossible. I have complied with the will of God, as you have seen. You perceived the secret living in Me. He did not perceive anything. Until the screen of his incredulity does not fall before the power of God, he will be separated from supernatural lights.

»

Elizabeth sighs and becomes silent.

Zacharias comes in. He offers some parchment rolls to Mary. It is the hour of prayer before supper. Mary prays in a loud voice in place of Zacharias. Then they settle down at the table.

« When You are no longer with us, how we shall regret having no longer anyone to pray for us » says Elizabeth, looking at her dumb husband.

« You will pray then, Zacharias » says Mary.

He shakes his head and writes: « I will never be able to pray again for other people. I became unworthy when I doubted of my God. »

« Zacharias, you will pray. God forgives. »

The old man wipes a tear and sighs.

After supper, Mary goes back to the loom.

« That's enough! » says Elizabeth. « You will become too tired. »

« Your time is approaching, Elizabeth. I want to prepare for your child clothes worthy of him who will precede the King of the House of David. »

Zacharias writes: « Of whom will He be born? And where? »

Mary replies: « Where the Prophets said, and of whom the Eternal Father will choose. Whatever our Most High Lord does, is well done. »

Zacharias writes: « Well, in Bethlehem then! In Judah. We shall go and worship Him, woman. And You will come to Bethlehem, too, with Joseph. »

And Mary, bowing Her head over the loom says: « I will come. »

The vision ends thus.

Mary says:

« The first charity towards our neighbours is to be exerted towards our neighbours. This must not seem a pun to you. There is charity towards God and charity towards our neighbours. Charity towards our neighbours comprises also charity towards ourselves. But if we love ourselves more than our neighbours, we are no longer charitable, we are selfish. Also in lawful matters, we must be so holy as to always give priority to the needs of our neighbour. Be sure, My children, that God provides for the generous by means of His power and His bounty.

It was this certainty that led Me to Hebron to assist My relative in her condition. And to My eagerness, for human help, God, giving beyond measure as He is wont, added an unforeseen gift of supernatural assistance. I went to give material help and God sanctified My good intention by sanctifying, through it, the fruit of Elizabeth's womb, and by means of that sanctification, by which the Baptist was presanctified, He relieved the physical pain of the elderly daughter of Eve, who had conceived at an unusual age.

Elizabeth, a woman of fearless faith and confident submission to God's will, deserved to understand the mystery that was enclosed within Me. The Spirit spoke to her through the bouncing in her womb. The Baptist pronounced his first speech, as the Announcer of the Word, through the veils and the diaphragms of veins and flesh that separated and united him at the same time to his holy mother.

Neither did I deny My prerogative of being the Mother of the Lord, because she was worthy of the information and the Light had revealed Itself to her. To deny it would have meant denying God the praise that it was just should be given to Him, the praise that I bore in Me, and which, since I could not tell anyone, I repeated to the herbs, to the flowers, to the stars, to the sun, to the singing birds and the patient sheep, to the warbling waters, to the golden light that kissed Me descending from Heaven. But it is sweeter to pray together rather than say our prayers by ourselves. I would have liked all the world to know of My destiny, not for My own sake, but that they might join Me in praising My Lord. Prudence forbade me to reveal the truth to Zacharias. That would have implied going beyond the work of God. And if I was His Spouse and Mother, I was still His servant, and I could not take the liberty of substituting Him and exceeding Him in a decree, simply because He had loved Me beyond measure.

Elizabeth in her holiness understood, and was silent. Because a holy person is

always submissive and humble.

The gift of God must increase our goodness. The more we receive from Him, the more we must give. Because the more we receive, the more obvious it is that He is with us and within us. And the more He is with us and within us, the more we must endeavour to reach His perfection.

That is why I worked for Elizabeth, postponing My own work. I was not afraid that I would not have time. God is the master of time. He provides for those who hope in Him, also in normal things. Selfishness does not speed matters up, it delays them. Charity does not delay, it speeds up. Always bear that in mind. How much peace there was in Elizabeth's house! If I had not been worried about Joseph and... and my Child, Who was the Redeemer of the world, I would have been happy. But the cross was already casting its shadow on My life and I heard the voices of the Prophets like a knell...

My name was Mary. Bitterness was always mingled with the sweetness that God poured into My heart. And it increased more and more until the death of My Son. But when God calls us, Mary, to the destiny of victims for His glory, oh! it is sweet to be ground like corn in the millstone, to convert our pain into a bread that can strengthen the weak and make them capable of reaching Heaven!

Now, it is enough. You are tired and happy. Rest now with My blessings.»

23. The Birth of the Baptist.

3rd April 1944.

This vision of peace descends from Heaven, amid the disgusting things which the world nowadays offers us, and I do not know how that can be, because I am like a little twig at the mercy of the wind in my continuous conflicts with human wickedness so discordant with what lives within me.

We are still in Elizabeth's house. It is a beautiful summer evening, still clear in the last rays of the sun, and yet the sky is already decorated with a falcated moon that looks like a silver comma attached to a large deep blue cloth.

The rose-bushes give off strong perfume and the bees, like humming gold drops, are making their last flights in the quiet warm evening air. From the meadows, there is a strong smell of hay dried in the sun, it is almost like that of bread, of warm bread, just taken out of the oven. Perhaps it comes also from the many sheets hanging everywhere to dry, and which Sarah is now folding.

Mary is walking with Her cousin, linking arms with her. They go up and down very slowly, under the semi-dark pergola.

But Mary watches everything and, while taking care of Elizabeth, She sees that Sarah is all at ease in folding a long sheet which she has taken off a hedge. «Sit down here, and wait for me » She says to her relative. And She goes to help the old servant, pulling the sheet to straighten it, and then folding it carefully. «They still smell of sun, they are warm » She says with a smile. And to make the old lady happy, She adds: « This sheet, after your bleaching, has become as beautiful as ever. You are the only one who knows how to do things so wells.»

Sarah goes away, overjoyed, with her load of scented sheets.

Mary goes back to Elizabeth and says: « Let us take a few more steps. They will do you good.» And as Elizabeth is tired, and does not wish to move, Mary says to her: « Let us go only to see if your doves are all in their nests, and if the water in their tub is clear. We shall then come back home.»

Doves must be the favourite pets of Elizabeth. When they are in front of the rustic tower where all the doves are gathered, Elizabeth is deeply moved; in fact the hens are in the nests and the cocks are in front of them, but neither of them move, instead they all start cooing loudly when they see the two women: a gentle form of greeting. Elizabeth is overcome by the weakness of her condition and by fears which make her cry. She expresses her fears to her cousin. « If I should die... what will happen to my poor little doves? You will not be staying here. If You were to remain in my house, it would not matter if I died. I have had the greatest joy a woman can possibly have. The joy which I was no longer expecting to have, and I cannot even complain of death with the Lord, because He has overwhelmed me with His benignity, may He be blessed for it. But there is Zacharias... and then there will be the child. An old man who would

feel as though he were lost in a desert without his woman. And the other is so small, that he would be like a flower, condemned to die of cold because he is without his mother. Poor baby, without the caresses of his mother!...»

« But why are you so sad? God has given you the joy of being a mother, and He will not take it away from you when it is full. Little John will receive all the kisses of his mummy, and Zacharias all the attentions of his faithful wife until the very end of his long life. You are two branches of the same tree. One will not die, leaving the other alone.

«You are good, and You comfort me. But I am so old to have a son. And now that I am about to have one, I am afraid.»

«Oh! No! There is Jesus here. We must not be afraid where there is Jesus. My Child relieved your pain, you said that yourself, when He was just a bud newly formed. Now that He is becoming more and more mature, and He already lives as My Creature -I can feel in My throat the beating of His little heart, and I feel as if a little nestling with a light pulsating heart were resting on My throat- He will remove all dangers from you. You must have faith.»

« I have. But if I should die... don't leave Zacharias at once. I know that You are concerned with Your own house. But please remain here a little longer to help my husband in his first days of sorrow.»

« I shall stay to take delight in your joy and in the joy of your husband, and I will leave you when you are strong and happy. But now be quiet, Elizabeth. Everything will be all right. Nothing will happen to your household while you are suffering. Zacharias will be served by the most loving maid, your flowers will be looked after, and your doves will be attended too, and you will find them all beautiful and happy to rejoice with, when their loved mistress comes back. Let us go in now, because you are getting pale...»

«Yes, I think I am beginning to suffer again. Perhaps my time has come. Mary, pray for me.»

«I will support you with My prayer until your labour ends in joy.»

The two women slowly go back into the house.

Elizabeth withdraws to her rooms. Mary, a capable and provident woman, gives the necessary instructions, prepares everything that may be necessary, and at the same time, She comforts Zacharias who is worried.

In the house that is sleepless that night, and where one can hear the strange voices of women called in to help, Mary is watchful like a lighthouse on a stormy night. The whole house rotates around Her, and She sees to everything, smiling sweetly. And She prays. When She is not called for this or that matter, She concentrates in prayer. She is now in the room where they always gather for their meals and to work. Zacharias is with Her, and he sighs and walks up and down uneasily. They have already prayed together. Then Mary has continued to pray. Also now that the old man, being tired, has sat down on his big chair near the table, and is quiet and sleepy, She prays. And when She sees him sleeping with his head resting on his arms crossed on the table, She takes Her sandals off to make no noise and walks barefooted and, making less noise than a butterfly fluttering around the room, She takes Zacharias' mantle, and lays it on him so gently that he continues to sleep in the comfort of the woollen cloth that protects

him from the cold air of the night that comes in, in gusts from the door, which is very often opened. Then She starts praying again, and She prays more and more intensely, kneeling down, raising Her arms, when the painful cries of Elizabeth become heart-rending.

Sarah comes in and invites Her to go out. Mary goes out barefooted into the garden. « My mistress wants You » she says.

« I am coming.» And Mary walks along the house, goes upstairs... She looks like a white angel, wandering in the peaceful starry night. She goes into Elizabeth's room.

« Oh! Mary! Mary! What a pain! I can't stand it any longer, Mary! How much pain one must suffer to be a mother! »

Mary caresses her lovingly, and kisses her.

« Mary! Mary! Let me put my hands on Your bosom! »

Mary takes the two wrinkled and swollen hands, and lays them on Her round abdomen, pressing them tightly with Her smooth, slender little hands. And She speaks in a low voice, now that they are alone: « Jesus is here, and He hears and sees you. Have faith, Elizabeth. His holy heart is beating more strongly

because He is acting for your good. I can feel it throbbing as though I were holding it in My hands. And I understand the words that My Child says to Me. He is now saying: "Tell the woman not to be afraid. Only a little more pain. And then, with the first rays of the sun, among the many roses awaiting the morning's rays to open out on their stems, her house will have the most beautiful rose, and it will be John, My Predecessor"..»

Elizabeth now presses also her face against Mary's bosom, and weeps gently. Mary stands for some time in that attitude because the pain seems to ease giving a moment's relief. And she beckons everybody to be quiet. She remains standing, beautiful and white in the pale, faint light of an oil lamp, like an angel near a person who suffers. She is praying. I can see Her moving Her lips. But even if I did not see them move, I would understand that She is praying from the enraptured expression on Her face.

Some time goes by, and Elizabeth is in the throes once again. Mary kisses her again, and goes out. She goes downstairs very quickly in the moonlight, and goes to see if the old man is still sleeping. He is sleeping, and moaning in his sleep. Mary makes a gesture of compassion, and starts to pray once again.

More time passes. The old man awakes from his sleep and lifts up his head, and he is confused, because he does not recollect why he is there. Then he remembers, makes a gesture, and utters a guttural exclamation. He then writes: «Is he not born yet? » Mary shakes Her head in denial. Zacharias writes: « How much pain! Oh my poor woman! Will she manage without dying? »

Mary takes the hand of the old man, and reassures him: « At dawn, in a short while, the baby will be born. Everything will be all right. Elizabeth is strong. How beautiful this day will be -it will soon be daybreak- how beautiful this day will be when the child sees the light! It will be the nicest day of your life! The Lord has kept aside great graces for you and your child is the announcer of them.»

Zacharias shakes his head sadly, and points to his dumb mouth. He would like to say many things, but cannot.

Mary understands, and replies: « The Lord will complete your joy. Believe in Him completely, hope in Him indefinitely, love Him totally. The Most High will grant you more than you dare hope for. He wants this total faith from you, to wash out your past mistrust. Say in your heart with me: "I believe". Say it with every beat of your heart. The treasures of God are opened for those who believe in Him and in His powerful bounty. »

The light begins to filter in through the partly open door. Mary opens it. Dawn makes the dewy earth completely white. There is a strong smell of humid earth and green herbs, and the first chirping of the birds, calling one another from branch to branch, can, be heard.

The old man and Mary move towards the door. They are pale because of the sleepless night, and the light at dawn makes them look even more pale. Mary puts on Her sandals, and goes to the foot of the staircase and listens. A woman looks out, nods, and then goes back in. Nothing yet.

Mary goes into the room, and comes back with some warm milk which She gives to the old man. She goes to the doves, comes back, and disappears into the same room. Perhaps it is the kitchen. She moves around watching. She looks as though She had slept the most perfect sleep, She is so quick and serene.

Zacharias is walking up and down the garden very nervously. Mary looks at him compassionately. She then goes again into the usual room, and kneeling near Her loom, She prays intensely, because the cries of Elizabeth are becoming sharper. She bows down to the ground imploring the Eternal Father. Zacharias comes back in, and seeing Her in this prostrate state, the poor old man cries. Mary gets up and takes him by the hand. She is so much younger than he is, but She looks as though She were the mother of the poor old desolate soul, and She pours Her consolation on him.

They are standing thus, one beside the other, in the sun that makes the morning air rosy, and it is thus that the joyful news reaches them: « He is born! He is born! It's a boy! Happy father! A boy as beautiful as a rose, as beautiful as the sun, as strong and good as his mother! Joy for you, father, blessed by the Lord Who gave you a son that you may offer him to the Temple! Glory to God, Who has granted posterity to this house! Blessed are you, and your son who was born to you! May his offspring perpetuate your name for centuries, from generation to generation, and may his descendants always be in union with the Eternal Lord.»

Mary blesses the Lord weeping for joy. Then the two receive the little one, who has been brought to the father, that he may bless him. Zacharias does not go to Elizabeth. He receives the child, who is screaming desperately, but he does not go to his wife. ,

Mary instead goes, carrying with love the little one, who becomes quiet, as soon as She takes him in Her arms. The woman who is following Her notices this, and she says to Elizabeth: « Woman, your child became quiet immediately, when She took him. Look how peacefully he is sleeping, and only Heaven knows how restless and strong he is. But look now! He seems a little dove.»

Mary lays the creature near his mother and caresses her, tidying up her grey hair. « The rose is born » She whispers in a low voice, « and you are alive. Zacharias is happy.»

« Does he speak? »

« Not yet. But hope in the Lord. Rest now. I am staying with you.»

Mary says:

« If My presence had sanctified the Baptist, it did not nullify for Elizabeth the sentence against Eve. "You shall give birth to your children in pain" the Eternal Father had said.

Only I, because I was without stain, and I had not had any human copulation, was exempted from generating with pain. Sadness and pain are fruits of fault. I, Who was the Innocent One, had to know also sorrow and sadness, because I was the Co-Redeemer. But I did not know the torture of generating. No. I did not know that torture.

But believe Me, daughter, that there never was, and never will be a torture of puerperity like Mine as the Martyr of a spiritual Maternity, which was accomplished on the hardest of beds, the bed of My cross, at the foot of the scaffold of My dying Son. Which mother is compelled to generate thus? To blend the torture of Her bowels which contract spasmodically because of the death rattle of Her dying Creature, with the torture which tears Her bowels apart in the strain of overcoming the horror of having to say: "I love you, come to Me Who am your Mother" to each murderer of Her Son, born of the most sublime love that Heaven ever saw, of the love of a God with a virgin, of the kiss of Fire, of the embrace of Light which became Flesh, and made the womb of a woman the Tabernacle of God?

"How much pain to be a mother!" says Elizabeth. So much! But nothing when compared to Mine.

"Let me press my hands on Your bosom". Oh, if you always asked Me for that when you suffer!

I am the Eternal Bearer of Jesus. He is in My womb, as you saw last year, like the Host in the monstrance. Who comes to Me, finds Him. Who leans on Me, touches Him. Who addresses Me, speaks to Him. I am His Dress. He is My Soul. My Son is united to His Mother more, much more now, than He was in the nine months that He was in My womb. And every pain is appeased, every hope flourishes and every grace flows for those who come to Me and rest their heads against My bosom.

I pray for you.. Remember that. The beatitude of being in Heaven, living in the ray of God, does not cause Me to forget My children who are suffering on the earth. And I pray. And all Heaven prays, because Heaven loves. Heaven is living charity. And Charity has mercy on you. But even if I were all by Myself, My prayer would be sufficient for the needs of those who hope in God. Because I never stop praying for you all, for the holy and the wicked, to give joy to the holy, to give repentance to the wicked that they might be saved.

Come, come, o children of My sorrow. I am waiting for you at the foot of the Cross to grant you graces. »

24. The Circumcision of the Baptist.

4th April 1944.

I see the house rejoicing. It is the day of the circumcision.

Mary has made sure that everything is beautiful and in good order. The rooms are bright with light, the most beautiful cloths, the nicest furnishings are shining everywhere. There is a lot of people. Mary moves agile amongst the various groups. She is very beautiful in Her most beautiful white dress.

Elizabeth, respected by everybody as a matron, is enjoying most happily her feast. The child is laid on her lap sated with milk.

It is now the moment for the circumcision.

« We will call him Zacharias. You are old. It is only fair that the child be called after you » say the men.

« Not at all! » exclaims Elizabeth. « His name is John. His name must be the witness of the power of God. »

But has there ever been a John in our kinship? »

« It does not matter, his name is to be John. »

« What do you say, Zacharias? You want your name, don't you? »

Zacharias shakes his head in denial. He takes his tablet and writes: « His name is John. » And as soon as he finishes writing, he adds, with his tongue now free: « because God has granted a great grace to me, his father, and to his mother, and to this new servant of Him who will spend his life for the glory of the Lord, and will be called great for ever in the world and in the eyes of God, because he will give converted hearts to the Most High Lord. The angel said so, and I did not believe. But now I believe, and the Light is now in me. The Light is amongst us, but you do not see it. It is its destiny not to be seen, because the souls of men are encumbered and idle, but my son will see It, and will speak of It, and will turn to It the hearts of the just in Israel. Oh! Blessed are those who believe in It and will always believe in the Word of the Lord. And blessed be You, o Eternal Lord, God of Israel, because You have visited and redeemed Your people, and You have raised up for us a powerful Saviour in the house of Your servant David. As You promised by mouth of the holy Prophets from ancient times, that You would save us from our enemies, and from the hands of all who hate us, to show Your mercy to our ancestors, and thus remember Your holy covenant. This is the oath You swore to our father Abraham; that You would grant us, free from fear, deliverance from the hands of our enemies, to serve You in Heaven and thrive in Your presence all our days » and he continues to the end.

The people present are most surprised at the name, at the miracle, at the words of Zacharias.

Elizabeth, who at the first words of Zacharias had uttered a cry of joy, is now weeping, embracing Mary, Who is caressing her happily.

I do not see the circumcision. I only see them bring back John, who is screaming at the top of his voice. Not even his mother's breast can calm him down. He is kicking like a little colt. Then Mary takes him, and lulls him, and he becomes quiet, and lies down peacefully.

« Now just look! » says Sarah. « He is quiet only when She picks him up! »

The people begin to go away slowly. In the room now there are only Mary, holding the baby in Her arms, and Elizabeth who is most happy.

Zacharias comes in, and closes the door. He looks at Mary with his eyes full of tears. He wants to speak. Then he is silent. He moves forward. He kneels down in front of Mary. « Bless the poor servant of the Lord » he says to Her. « Bless him, because You can do so, since You are carrying Him in Your womb. The word of the Lord was spoken to me when I admitted my error and I believed everything I had been told. I see You, and Your happy destiny. I adore the God of Jacob in You. You are my first Temple, where once again a priest, I can pray the Eternal Father again. You are blessed, because You obtained grace for the world and You are now bringing the Saviour to it. Forgive Your servant if he did not see Your majesty before. When You came here, You brought us all the graces, because everywhere You go, o Full of Grace, God works His miracles, and holy are those walls which You enter, holy become the ears which listen to Your voice, and holy the flesh You touch. Holy the hearts, because You grant graces, Mother of the Most High, Virgin of the Prophets, expected to bring the Saviour to the people of God.»

Mary smiles, full of humility and She speaks: « Praise be to the Lord. To Him only. From Him, not from Me, comes every grace. And He grants it to you, that you may love Him, and that it may help you to reach perfection in the following years to deserve His Kingdom that My Son will open to the Patriarchs, to the Prophets, to the just of the Lord. And since you can now pray before the Holy, please pray for the maidservant of the Most High, because to be Mother of the Son of God is blissful, to be Mother of the Redeemer must be a destiny of deepest sorrow. Pray for Me, because I feel My weight of sorrow increasing from

hour to hour. And I shall have to bear it all My life. And even if I do not see the details, I feel that it will be heavier than if the whole world were placed on My shoulders of a woman, and I were to offer it to Heaven. I, I alone, poor woman! My Child! My Son! Ah! Your son no longer cries if I lull him. But shall I be able to lull Mine, to soothe His pain?... Pray for Me, priest of God. My heart shudders like a flower in a storm. I look at men, and I love them. But I see the Enemy appear behind their faces, and make them enemies of God, and of My Son Jesus... »

And the vision ends with the paleness of Mary, and Her tears, that cause Her eyes to shine brightly.

Mary says:

« God forgives him who acknowledges his sin, repents and confesses it with a humble and sincere heart. He does not only forgive, He rewards. Oh! How good is My Lord to those who are humble and sincere! To those who believe in Him, and trust in Him!

Clear your souls of what encumbers them and makes them insipid. Prepare your souls to receive the Light. As a light in darkness, It is a guide and a holy consolation.

O holy friendship with God, beatitude of His faithful ones, wealth unequalled by anything else, who possesses you is never alone, and never tastes the bitterness of despair. O holy friendship, you do not eradicate sorrow, because sorrow was the destiny of a God incarnate and can thus be the destiny of man. But you make this sorrow sweet in its bitterness, and you mingle with it a light and a caress which relieve the cross with a celestial touch.

And when Divine Bounty grants you graces, make use of the gift received to give glory to God. Do not be like foolish people who turn a good thing into a harmful weapon, or like lavish persons who convert their wealth into misery.

You give Me too much sorrow, My children, behind whose faces I see the Enemy appear, that is, he who hurls himself against My Jesus. Too much sorrow! I would like to be the Source of Grace for everybody. But too many among you do not want Grace. You ask for "graces", but with a soul devoid of Grace. How can Grace succour you if you are Her enemies?

The great mystery of Good Friday is approaching. It is commemorated and celebrated in churches. But it is necessary to celebrate and commemorate it in your hearts, and to beat your breasts like those who were descending from Golgotha and say: "In truth, this Man was the Son of God, the Saviour", and say: "Jesus, for the sake of Your Name, save us", and say: "Father, forgive us", and finally say: "I am not worthy, but if You forgive me and come to me, my soul will be healed, and I no longer want to commit sin, because I no longer wish to be ill and hateful to You".

Pray, children, with the words of My Son. Say to the Father for your enemies: "Father, forgive them". Call the Father Who has withdrawn indignant at your errors: "Father, Father, why have You forsaken me? I am a sinner. But if You forsake me, I will perish. Come back, Holy Father, that I may be saved". Entrust your eternal good, your spirit, to the Only One Who can preserve it unhurt from the demons: "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit". Oh! If with humility and love you surrender your spirit to God, He will lead it as a father leads his little one, neither will He allow anything to hurt your spirit.

Jesus, in His agony, prayed to teach you how to pray. I am reminding you of it in these days of His Passion.

And you, Mary, since you see My joy of a Mother and you are enraptured by it, consider and remember that I possessed God through an ever increasing sorrow. It descended into Me with the Seed of God and like a gigantic tree it has grown until it touched Heaven with its top, and hell with its roots, when I received on My lap the lifeless remains of the Flesh of My flesh, and I saw and counted His tortures, and I touched His torn Heart to consume My sorrow right until the last drop

25. The Presentation of the Baptist in the Temple.
5th and 6th April 1944.

This is what I see the night between the Wednesday and Thursday of the Holy

Week.

I see Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary and Samuel getting off a comfortable waggon, to which also Mary's little donkey is tied. Mary is holding little John in Her arms and Samuel has a lamb and a basket with a pigeon in it. They get off at the usual stable, which must be the halting place for all the pilgrims to the Temple, who leave their mounts there.

Mary calls to the owner and asks him whether anybody arrived from Nazareth the day before or early that morning. « Nobody, woman » replies the little old man. Mary is surprised, but does not say anything else.

She gets Samuel to fix her little donkey, and then She joins the two elderly parents, and She explains Joseph's delay: « He must have been held up by something. But he will certainly come today.» She takes the child again from Elizabeth to whom She had handed him before, and they all set out for the Temple.

Zacharias is received with honour by the guards, and is greeted and congratulated by other priests. He is very handsome today, in his priestly robes and his joy of happy fatherhood. He looks like a patriarch. I think that Abraham must have been like him when he rejoiced offering Isaac to the Lord.

I see the ceremony of the presentation of the new Israelite and the purification of his mother. The ceremony is more stately than Mary's, because the priests celebrate it solemnly for the son of another priest. They all rush round the group of women and the child, and are happily engaged with them.

Also some curious people have come near and I can hear their comments. Since Mary is holding the child in Her arms while they move to the appointed place, the people think She is the mother.

But a woman says: « It's not possible. Can't you see that She is pregnant? The baby is only a few days old and she is already with child.»

« And yet » points out another one « only She can be the mother. The other woman is old. She must be a relative. But she certainly cannot be the mother at her age.»

« Let us follow them, and we will see who is right.»

And their surprise becomes even greater when they see that it is Elizabeth who fulfils the purification rite: she offers the bleating lamb in holocaust and the pigeon for sin.

« She is the mother. Didn't I tell you? »

« No! »

« Yes.»

The people whisper, still incredulous. They whisper so much that a peremptory « Ssst! » comes from the group of priests present at the rite. They are silent for a moment, but start whispering even louder when Elizabeth, radiant with holy pride, takes the child and moves forward in the Temple to make the presentation to the Lord.

« It is she! »

« It's always the mother who makes the offering.»

« What miracle can this be? »

What will that child be, who has been granted to that woman at such an old age?

»

« What sign can it be? »

« Don't you know? » says one, who has just arrived panting. « It's the son of Zacharias, the priest of the house of Aaron, the one who became dumb when he was offering incense in the Sanctuary.»

« It's a mystery! A mystery! And now he speaks once again! The birth of his son has untied his tongue.»

« I wonder what spirit spoke to him and paralysed his tongue to accustom him to be silent about the secrets of God! »

« It is a mystery! What secret truth does Zacharias know? »

« Will his son be the Messiah expected by Israel? »

« He was born in Judaea. Not in Bethlehem and not of a virgin. He can't be the Messiah! »

« Who is he, then? »

But the answer remains in the silence of God and the people are left to their curiosity.

The ceremony is over. The priests are now joyfully paying compliments to the mother and her child. The only one who is hardly noticed, nay, is avoided almost

with disgust when they become aware of Her condition, is Mary. After all the congratulations, most of them go out on to the road. Mary wants to go to the stable to see whether Joseph has arrived. He has not. Mary is disappointed and worried.

Elizabeth is anxious about Her. « We can stay until midday, then we must go, to be home before night. He is too young to be out at night.»

And Mary, calm and sad: « I will stay in one of the yards of the Temple. I will go to My teachers... I do not know. I will do something. »

Zacharias puts forward a proposal which is immediately accepted as a good solution: « Let us go to Zebedee's relatives. Joseph will certainly look for You there. If he should not come there, it will be quite easy for You to find someone who will accompany You to Galilee, because the fishermen from Gennesaret are continuously going to and coming from that house.»

They take the little donkey, and go to Zebedee's relatives, who are the very same people with whom Joseph and Mary stayed four months before.

The time passes quickly, but there is no sign of Joseph. Mary controls Her grief lulling the baby, but it is obvious that She is worried. Although it is so warm that everybody is perspiring, She has not taken off Her mantle, concerned as She is to conceal Her condition.

At long last, Joseph is announced by a loud knocking at the door. Mary's face shines, cheerful again.

Joseph greets Her, because She is the first to go and meet him and greet him reverently. «The Lord's blessing on you, Mary! »

« And on you, Joseph. And praised be the Lord that you have come! Here, Zacharias and Elizabeth were about to leave, to be at home before night.»

« Your messenger arrived in Nazareth, when I was at Cana, working there. I was told the other evening. And I left at once. But although I have travelled without stopping, I am late, because the donkey lost one of his shoes. Please forgive me.»

« I am to be forgiven by you, because I have been away from Nazareth for such a long time! But see, they were so happy to have Me with them, that I decided to please them up till now.»

« You have done well, Woman. Where is the baby? »

They enter the room where Elizabeth is giving suck to little John, before departing. Joseph congratulates the parents on the sturdiness of the child, who screams and kicks, as if they were thrashing him, because he has been taken away from his mother's breast to be shown to Joseph. They all laugh at his protests. Also Zebedee's relatives, who have come in with fresh fruit, milk and bread for everybody, and a large tray of fish, laugh and join in the conversation.

Mary speaks very little. She is sitting quiet and silent in Her little corner, with Her hands on Her lap under Her mantle. Also when She drinks a cup of milk, and eats a bunch of golden grapes with a little bread, She speaks very little, and hardly moves. Her looks at Joseph are a mixture of pain and enquiry.

He also looks at Her. And after some time, bending over Her shoulder, he asks Her: «Are You tired or are You not well? You look pale and sad.»

« I am sorry I have to part from little John. I am very fond of him. I held him on My heart only a few minutes after he was born...»

Joseph does not ask any more questions.

It is time for Zacharias to depart. The waggon stops at the door and they all go towards it. The two cousins embrace each other fondly. Mary kisses the baby many times before putting him in the lap of his mother, who is already sitting in the waggon. She then says goodbye to Zacharias, and asks him to bless Her. When kneeling before the priest, Her mantle slips off Her shoulders, and Her figure appears in the bright light of the summer afternoon. I do not know whether Joseph notices Her figure at this moment, because he is intent on saying goodbye to Elizabeth. The waggon leaves.

Joseph goes back into the house with Mary, Who sits down again in the dim corner. « If You do not mind travelling by night, I would suggest we leave at sunset. It is very warm during the day. The night instead is cool and quiet. I am saying that for You, because I don't want You to get sunstroke. It makes no difference to me to be in a scorching sun. But You...»

« As you wish, Joseph. I also think it is better to travel by night.»

« The house has been all tidied up. And the little orchard. The flowers are beautiful, as You will see. You are arriving just in time to see them all in

bloom. The apple-tree, the fig-tree, the vines are laden with fruit as was never seen before, and I had to put a support for the pomegranate, because its branches were so heavily laden with fruit already fully grown, a thing which has never been seen before at this time of the year. The olive-tree... You will have plenty oil. It blossomed in a miraculous way, and not one flower was lost. All the flowers are now little olives. When they are mature, the tree will seem full of dark pearls. There isn't another orchard as beautiful in the whole of Nazareth. Also Your relatives are surprised. Alphaeus says it is a miracle.»

« Your hands have worked it! »

« Oh! no! Poor me! What can I have done? I took care of the trees and I gave some water to the flowers... Do You know? I built a fountain for You down at the end, near the grotto, and I put a large basin there. So You will not have to go out to get water. I brought the water down from the spring which is above Matthew's olive-grove. It is pure and plentiful. I brought a little stream down to You. I dug a small duct in the ground, I covered it properly, and now the water comes down, singing like a harp. I was not happy that You should go to the village fountain, and then carry back home the jars full of water.»

« Thank you, Joseph. You are so good! »

Joseph and Mary are now silent, as if they were tired. And Joseph is also dozing. Mary is praying.

It is now evening. The host insists that they should eat something before leaving. Joseph, in fact, eats some bread and fish, while Mary takes only some milk and fruit.

They then depart. They get on their donkeys. Joseph has fastened Mary's little trunk to his saddle, as he had done when coming to Jerusalem. And before She gets on Her donkey, he makes sure that Her saddle is properly fastened. I see that Joseph looks at Mary when she mounts Her saddle. But he does not say anything. Their journey starts when the first stars begin to twinkle in the sky. They hurry to the town gates to reach them before they close. When they come out of Jerusalem, and they take the main road towards Galilee, the clear sky is already crowded with stars. There is solemn quietness in the country. One can hear only a few nightingales singing, and the beating of the hooves of the two donkeys on the hard road, baked by the sun.

Mary says:

« It is the eve of Maundy Thursday. Some people may think that the vision is out of place. But your grief of lover of My Jesus Crucified is in your heart and will remain there even if a sweet vision is shown to you. It is like the tepidity emanating from a flame, which is still fire but is no longer fire. The flame is fire, not its tepidity which comes from it. No beatific or peaceful vision will be able to remove that grief from your heart. And regard it as something precious, more precious than your own life. Because it is the greatest gift that God can grant a believer in His Son. Further, my vision is not discordant, in all its peace, with the commemorations of this week.

Also My Joseph suffered his passion. It began in Jerusalem when he noticed My condition. And it lasted several days, exactly as it had happened to Jesus and to Me. Neither was it less painful for his soul. And only because of the holiness of My just spouse, it was contained in such a dignified and secret form, that it has been hardly noticed throughout centuries.

Oh! Our first Passion! Who can feel its intimate and silent intensity? Who can describe My pain when I realised that Heaven had not yet heard My prayer by revealing the mystery to Joseph?

I understood that he was not aware of it when I saw that he was respectful to Me as usual. If he had known that I bore in Me the Word of God, he would have adored that Word enclosed in My womb, with the acts of veneration which are due to God and which he would not have failed to accomplish, as I would not have refused to receive, not for My own sake, but for Him Who was within Me and that I bore, as the Ark of the Alliance carried the stone code and the vases of manna.

Who can measure My struggle against the dismay that endeavoured to overwhelm Me in order to convince Me that I had hoped in vain in the Lord? Oh! I think it was the furious rage of Satan! I perceived doubt rising behind My back, and stretching its icy claws to imprison My soul and prevent it from praying. Doubt is so dangerous and lethal to the spirit. It is lethal because it is the first

agent of the deadly disease called "despair", against which we must react with all our strength, so that our souls may not perish, and we may not lose God. Who can truly tell Joseph's pain, his thoughts, the perturbation of his feelings? Like a little boat caught in a great storm, he was in a vortex of conflicting ideas, in a turmoil of reflections, of which one was more piercing and painful than the other. He was, to all appearances, a man betrayed by his wife. He saw his good reputation and the esteem of his world collapse around him; because of Her he saw scornful fingers pointed at himself and felt pitied by the village people. Above all, he perceived that his love and esteem for Me had fallen, struck to death, before the evidence of a deed.

In this respect, his holiness shines brighter than Mine. And I give this witness with the affection of a spouse, because I want you to love My Joseph, this wise, prudent, patient and good man, who is not separated from the mystery of Redemption, on the contrary, he is closely connected to it, because he suffered for it, consuming himself in sorrow for it, saving your Saviour at the cost of his own sacrifice because of his holiness.

Had he not been so holy, he would have acted in a human way, denouncing Me as an adulteress so that I should be stoned, and the Son of My sin should perish with Me. If he had been less holy, God would not have granted him His light as guidance in his trial. But Joseph was holy. His pure spirit lived in God. His charity was ardent and strong. And out of charity he saved your Saviour for you, both when he refrained from accusing Me to the elders, and when he saved Jesus in Egypt, leaving everything with prompt obedience.

The three days of Joseph's passion were short in number, but deep in intensity. And they were tremendous also for Me, those days of My first passion. Because I was aware of his suffering, which I could not alleviate, in fact I had to obey God's command Who had said to Me: "Be silent!"

And when, after we arrived in Nazareth, I saw him go away with a laconic goodbye, and bent as if he had aged in a short time, and I noticed that he no longer came to see Me in the evening as he used to do, then I tell you, My children, that My heart wept very bitterly. Closed in My house, all alone, in the house where everything reminded Me of the Annunciation and the Incarnation, and where everything reminded Me of Joseph, married to Me with spotless virginity, I had to fight despair and Satan's insinuation, and hope, hope, hope. And pray, pray, pray. And forgive, forgive, forgive Joseph's suspicion, his disturbance and just despair.

My children: it is necessary to hope, to pray, to forgive to obtain God's intervention in our favour. You must live your passions, because you deserved them with your sins. I can teach you how to overcome them and turn them into joy. Hope beyond measure. Pray with confidence. Forgive to be forgiven. God's forgiveness will be the peace you desire, My children.

I will not say anything else for the time being. There will be silence until after the Easter triumph. It is Passion time. Have pity on your Redeemer. Listen to His cries, and count His wounds and tears. The former were suffered, the latter shed for you. Let every other vision disappear before that one which reminds you of the Redemption accomplished on your behalf.»

26. Mary of Nazareth Clarifies the Matter with Joseph.
31st May 1944.

After fifty-three days Mother shows Herself again in this vision which She tells me to put in this book. Joy is renewed in me. Because to see Mary is to possess joy.

I see the little orchard in Nazareth. Mary is spinning in the shade of a very thick apple-tree overloaded with apples which begin to redden and are so rosy and round that they look like so many cheeks of children.

But Mary is not rosy at all. The beautiful colour that brightened Her cheeks at Hebron has disappeared. Her face is as pale as ivory, only Her lips are a curve of pale coral. Under Her lowered eyelashes there are two dark shadows and Her eyes are swollen as if She had cried. I cannot see Her eyes, because Her head is

bowed, intent on Her work and even more on a thought which is obviously distressing Her, in fact I can hear Her sighing like a person sad at heart. She is all dressed in white, in white linen, because it is very warm, notwithstanding that the freshness, still intact, of the flowers makes me understand that it is morning. Her head is uncovered, and the sun playing among the apple-tree leaves, which are stirred by a very gentle breeze, filters with its thin rays down to the dark brown earth of the flower-beds and forms small circles of light on Her blond head, so that Her hair looks like pure gold. There is no noise whatsoever from the house or from the neighbourhood. One can only hear the babbling of the tiny stream of water that runs down into the large basin at the bottom of the orchard.

Mary starts at a loud resolute knocking at the door. She lays the distaff and spindle down and rises to go and open. Although Her dress is loose and wide it does not conceal the rotundity of Her pelvis.

Joseph is standing in front of Her. Mary turns pale, also in Her lips. Her face is so bloodless that it looks like a host. Mary looks at Joseph with sad enquiring eyes. Joseph looks at Her with imploring ones. They are both silent, looking at each other. Then Mary says: « At this time, Joseph? Is there anything you need? What do you want to tell Me? Come in.»

Joseph enters and closes the door. He is still silent.

« Speak, Joseph. What is it you want from Me? »

« I want You to forgive me.» Joseph bends down as if he wanted to kneel down. But Mary, who is always so reserved in touching him, seizes him resolutely by his shoulders and stops him.

Mary's face blushes and blanches in rapid succession, one moment it is all red and immediately afterwards it is as white as snow, as it was before. « You want Me to forgive you? I have nothing to forgive you, Joseph. I can but thank you once again for everything you have done here while I was away and for your love for Me. »

Joseph looks at Her, and I can see two large tears welling up in the cavity of his deep eyes, they remain there as if they were on the rim of a vase, and they then roll down on to his cheeks and his beard. « Forgive me, Mary. I mistrusted You. Now I know. I am not worthy of having such a treasure. I lacked in charity, I accused You in my heart, I accused You unfairly, because I did not ask You to tell me the truth. I sinned against God's law, because I did not love You as I loved myself ...»

« Oh! no! You have not sinned! »

« Yes, I have, Mary. If I had been accused of such a crime, I would have defended myself. But You... I was not giving You the possibility of defending Yourself, because I was about to take a decision without questioning You. I have been unfair to You, because I offended You with my suspicion. Also a single suspicion is an offence, Mary. Who suspects does not know. And I did not know You as I should have done. But for the torment I suffered... three days of torture, forgive me, Mary. »

« I have nothing for which to forgive you. On the contrary, I ask you to forgive Me for the pain I caused you.»

« Oh! Yes, it was a great pain! What a torture! Look! I was told this morning that my temples are white haired and my face wrinkled. These past days have been more than ten years of my life! But why, Mary, have You been so humble as to conceal Your glory from me, Your spouse, and thus allow me to suspect You? »

Joseph is not on his knees, but he is bent so low that he is as good as kneeling down, and Mary lays Her tiny hand on his head and smiles. She seems to be absolving him. And She whispers: « If I had not been humble in the most perfect manner, I would not have deserved to conceive the Expected One, Who is coming to pay for the sin of pride that ruined man. And then I obeyed... God had requested such obedience. It cost Me so much... because of you, because of the pain that you were to suffer. But I could but obey. I am the Handmaid of the Lord, and servants do not discuss the orders they receive. They fulfil them, Joseph, even if they cause bitter tears.» Mary weeps quietly while speaking. So quietly that Joseph, bent down as he is, does not notice it until a tear falls on the floor. He then lifts his head and - it is the first time I see him do this - he presses Mary's little hands in his dark strong ones and he kisses the tips of the rosy slender fingers that protrude like fresh buds of a peach-tree from the circle formed by his own hands.

« Now we shall have to arrange for... » Joseph does not say anything else, but he looks at Mary's body and She becomes purple and sits suddenly, to avoid Her figure being exposed to eyes watching Her. « We shall have to make haste. I will come here... We will complete the wedding... Next week. Is that all right? » « Whatever you do is all right, Joseph. You are the head of the family, I am your servant. »

« No. I am Your servant. I am the happy servant of my Lord Who is growing in Your womb. You are blessed amongst all the women of Israel. This evening I will warn my relatives. And after... when I am here, we will work to prepare everything to receive... Oh! How can I receive God in my house? God... in my arms? I will die of joy!... I will never dare touch Him! I will never be able...! »

« You will be able, as I will, by the grace of God. »

« But You are... I am a poor man, the poorest of God's children!... »

« Jesus is coming to us, poor people, to make us rich in God, He is coming to us two, because we are the poorest and we admit it. Rejoice, Joseph. The House of David has the King long waited for and our home will become more splendid than Solomon's palace, because Heaven will be here and we shall share with God the secret of peace that men will be acquainted with later. He will grow among us, our arms will be the cradle for the Redeemer and our work will procure bread for Him... Oh! Joseph! We will hear the voice of God calling us "father and Mother!" Oh!... » Mary cries with joy. Such happy tears!

And Joseph, who is now kneeling at Her feet, is weeping with his head almost hidden in Mary's wide dress, which falls in folds on to the plain pavement of the room.

The vision ends here.

Mary says:

« No one must interpret My pallor erroneously. It was not caused by human fear. From a human point of view I should have expected to be stoned to death. But I was not afraid because of that. I was suffering because of Joseph's pain. Neither was I upset by the thought that he might accuse Me. I was only sorry and afraid that he might be lacking in charity if he should insist in his accusation. That is why all My blood rushed to My heart when I saw him. It was the moment when even a just man might have offended Justice by offending charity. And I would have been extremely upset if a just man were to commit an error since he never erred.

Had I not been humble to the very extreme limit, as I told Joseph, I would not have deserved to bear within Me Him Who was lowering Himself: God, to the humiliation of being a man in order to make reparation for the pride of the human race.

I have shown you that scene which is not described by any of the Gospels, because I want to draw the excessively misguided attention of men to the conditions which are essential to please God and receive His continuous calls to your hearts.

Faith: Joseph believed the heavenly messenger's words unquestioningly. He wanted but to believe, because he was sincerely convinced that God is good and that since he had hoped in the Lord, the Lord would not have reserved for him the torture of being betrayed, disappointed and sneered at by his neighbours. He asked for nothing, but to believe in Me, because, being honest, it was painful for him to think that other people were not honest. He lived according to the Law and the Law says: "Love your neighbour as you love yourself". We love ourselves so much that we think we are perfect even when we are not. Can we therefore not love our neighbour simply because we think he is faulty?

Unrestricted Charity. A charity that knows how to forgive, that wants to forgive, and forgive in advance excusing wholeheartedly the imperfections of our neighbours. It is necessary to forgive immediately, accepting every extenuating circumstance.

Humility, as unrestricted as charity. You must admit that you can be faulty even in simple thoughts, and you must not be so proud as to refuse to say: "I made a mistake", because such pride would be more harmful than the previous fault.

Everybody makes mistakes, with the exception of God. Who can say: "I am never wrong"? And there is a more difficult humility: the one that knows how to keep silent about God's wonderful things in us, when it is not necessary to proclaim

them for His glory, so that we might not discourage our neighbour who has not received such special gifts from God. If He wants, oh! if He only wants, God reveals Himself In His servant! Elizabeth "saw" Me for what I was, My spouse knew Me for what I was, when it was time for him to know.

Leave to the Lord the care of proclaiming you His servants. He is anxious to do so, because every creature that rises to a particular mission, is a new glory which is added to His infinite glory, and is a witness of what man is, as God wanted him to be: a lesser perfection that reflects its Author. Remain in shadow and silence, you who are beloved by Grace, so that you may hear the only words of "life", that you may deserve to have on you and in you the Sun that shines eternally.

Oh! Most Blessed Light, God, joy of Your servants, do shine on those servants of Yours that they may exult in their humility, praising You, only You, because You disperse the proud but raise the humble, who love You, to the splendour of Your Kingdom.»

27. The Census Edict.

4th June 1944.

I see the house in Nazareth once again: the little room where Mary usually takes Her meals. She is now working at a white piece of cloth. She lays Her work down to light a lamp, because it is getting dark, and She can no longer see well in the greenish light which comes in through the door half open on to the orchard. She closes the door, too.

Her abdomen is now very big. But She is still so beautiful. Her pace is always agile and all Her gestures are gentle. There is none of the heavy awkward movements which are generally noticed in a woman when she is about to give birth to her child. Only Her face has changed. Now She is « the woman.» Before, at the time of the Annunciation, She was a young girl with the serene innocent face of a child. Afterwards, in Elizabeth's house, when the Baptist was born, Her face had become more refined and gracefully mature. Now it is the serene but sweetly majestic face of a woman who has reached her full perfection in maternity. She no longer resembles the « Annunciation » of Florence, so dear to you, Father. When She was a girl, I saw the resemblance. Her face is now longer and thinner, Her eyes are more pensive and larger. In brief, it is like what Mary is now in Heaven. Because Her countenance and age are once again as they were when the Saviour was born. Her youth is the eternal youth which not only has not known the corruption of death, but has not even experienced the withering of age. Time has not touched our Queen and Mother of the Lord Who created time; and if in Her torture at the time of Passion - a torture which had begun for Her a long time previously, I could say since Jesus began to evangelise - She looked old, such aging was like a veil cast over Her incorruptible person.

In fact since the moment that She sees Jesus risen, She becomes once again the fresh perfect creature She was before such torture, as if by kissing His Most Holy Wounds She had drunk a balm of youth which cancels the action of time, and even more so, of sorrow. In fact even eight days ago, when I saw the descent of the Holy Spirit on Whitsunday, I saw that Mary was "beautiful, most beautiful and all of a sudden looked younger" as I wrote and had written previously: "She looks like a blue angel". Angels do not grow old. They are eternally beautiful, because they reflect the eternal youth and the eternal present of God. The angelical youth of Mary, blue angel, is perfected now, but not in the secrecy of a room unknown to the world and with only one archangel as witness. It reaches the perfect age which She took with Her to Heaven and which She will keep for ever in Her holy glorified body, when the Spirit adorns Her with the bridal ring and crowns Her in the presence of everybody.

I wanted to make this digression because I thought that it was necessary. I will now revert to the description.

Mary, thus, is now really a « woman » full of dignity and grace. Also Her smile has gained in sweetness and majesty. How beautiful She is!

Joseph comes in. He seems to be coming from the village, because he comes in through the main door, not from the workshop. Mary lifts Her head and smiles at him. Also Joseph smiles. But his smile seems to be a forced one, as if he were worried. Mary looks at him inquisitively. She then gets up to take the mantle that Joseph is taking off and She folds it and lays it on a chest.

Joseph sits at the table. He rests one elbow on it and lays his head on one

hand, while with the other hand, absent-mindedly, he combs and ruffles his beard with alternate strokes.

« Is there anything worrying you?» asks Mary. « Can I help you? »

« You always comfort me, Mary. But this time, I have a big problem... that concerns You. »

« Me, Joseph. And what is it? »

« They have posted an edict on the synagogue door. It orders the census of all Palestinians. And everybody must go and register in his place of origin. We must go to Bethlehem...»

« Oh! » exclaims Mary, interrupting him and putting one hand on Her bosom.

« It's a shock, isn't it? And a sad one. I know! »

« No, Joseph. That's not it. I am thinking... I am thinking of the Holy Scriptures: Rachel, Benjamin's mother and Jacob's wife of whom the Star will be born: the Saviour. Rachel buried in Bethlehem, of which it is said: "But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, the least of the clans of Judah, out of you will be born the Ruler". The Ruler who was promised to the House of David. He will be born there...»

« Do You ... do You think it is already the time?... Oh! What shall we do? »

Joseph is completely dismayed. He looks at Mary with two pitiful eyes.

She realises this and smiles. But She smiles more at Herself than at him. A smile that seems to say: « He is a man, a just man, but a man. And he sees as a man. He thinks as a man. Have pity on him, o soul of Mine, and guide him so that he may see as a spirit. » But Her kindness induces Her to reassure him. She is not untruthful. She simply diverts his anxiety. « I do not know, Joseph. My time is very close. But could the Lord not delay it to relieve you from this worry? He can do everything. Don't fear.»

« But the journey!... Think of the crowds. Will we find good lodgings? Will we be in time to come back? And if... if You are to become a Mother there, what will we do? We have no home there... We do not know anybody any longer.»

« Don't be afraid. Everything will be all right. God finds a shelter for the animal about to give birth. Do you think He will not find one for His Messiah? We trust in Him, don't we? We always trust in Him. The harder the trial, the more we trust. Like two children we put our hands in His fatherly ones. He is our guide. We rely entirely on Him. Consider how He has led us with love so far. A father, even the best of fathers, could not do it with greater care. We are His children and His servants. We fulfil His will. No harm can befall us. Also this edict is His will. What is Caesar after all? An instrument in the hands of God. Since the time when the Father decided to forgive man, He pre-arranged the events so that His Christ may be born in Bethlehem. Bethlehem, the smallest town in Judah did not yet exist and its glory was already destined. And there... a powerful man has risen, very far from here, and he conquered us, and now he wants to know all his subjects, now, while the world is in peace... so that the glory of Bethlehem may be accomplished and the word of God may not be belied, - as it would be if the Messiah were to be born elsewhere. Oh! What is our small trouble if we consider the beauty of this moment of peace? Just think, Joseph: a period of time when there is no hatred in the world! Can there be a happier hour for the rising of the "Star", the light of which is divine and its influence is redemption? Oh! Do not be afraid, Joseph. If the roads are not safe, if the crowds will make the journey a difficult one, the angels will defend and protect us. Not us: but their King. If we find no accomodation, their wings will be our tents. No mishap will befall us. It cannot: God is with us.»

Joseph looks at Her and listens to Her, happy. The wrinkles on his forehead smooth away. He gets up, no longer tired or worried. He smiles. « You are blessed, Sun of my soul! You are blessed, because You see everything through the Grace, of which You are full! Don't let us waste time, then. Because we must leave as soon as possible, and come back as soon as Possible, because everything is ready here for the... for the...»

« For our Son, Joseph. He must be such in the eyes of the world, remember that. The Father has covered His coming with the veil of mystery and we must not lift that veil. Jesus will do it, when the time comes...»

The beauty of Mary's face, look, expression and voice, when She says this «Jesus » cannot be described. It is already an ecstasy. And the vision ends on it.

Mary says:

« I will not add much more, because My words are already a lesson. But I wish to draw the attention of wives to one point. Too many marriages break up through the fault of women, who do not possess that love, which is everything: kindness, pity and solace to their husbands. The physical suffering that lies heavy on women does not lie heavily on men. But all the moral worries do: necessities of work, decisions to be taken, responsibilities before the established authorities and one's own family... oh! how many things weigh on man! And how much comfort he also needs! And yet, a woman's selfishness is such that she adds the weight of useless and sometimes unfair complaints to the burden of her tired, disheartened, worried husband. And all this because she is selfish. She does not love. Love is not the satisfaction of one's senses and utility. To love is to satisfy him whom we love, beyond senses and utility, giving him the help he needs so that he may always be able to keep his wings open in the skies of hope and peace.

There is another point to which I wish to draw you attention. I have already spoken of it. But I wish to insist: trust in God. Trust summarises the theological virtues. Who trusts has faith. Who trusts hopes. Who trusts loves. When we love, we hope, we believe in a person, we trust. Otherwise we do not. God deserves our trust. If we trust poor men who may fail, why should we not trust God Who can never fail?

Trust is also humility. The proud man says: "I will do it by myself. I do not trust him because he is an incapable man, a liar, an overbearing fellow..." The humble man says: "I trust him. Why should I not? Why should I think that I am better than he is?" And more rightly he says of God: "Why should I mistrust Him Who is so good? Why should I think that I can do it by myself?" God gives Himself to the humble, but withdraws from the proud.

Trust is also obedience. And God loves the obedient man. Obedience implies that we acknowledge ourselves as His children and we acknowledge God as our Father. And a father can but love when he is a real father. God is our real Father and a perfect Father.

The third point I want you to consider. It is always based on trust. No event can happen unless God allows it. Are you powerful? You became so, because God permitted it. Are you a subject? You are such, because God permitted it. Endeavour, therefore, powerful one, not to turn your power to your own detriment. It would always be "your detriment even if at the beginning, it may appear detrimental to others. Because if God allows, He does not over-allow, and if you go beyond the mark, He will strike you and crush you. Endeavour, therefore, o subject, to make of your condition a magnet that will draw the protection of Heaven upon you. And never curse anyone. Leave that to God's care. It is for Him, the Lord of all, to bless and curse His creatures. Go in peace.»

28. The Journey to Bethlehem.
5th June 1944.

I see a main road which is very crowded. Little donkeys, loaded with goods and chattels or with people, are going one way. Other little donkeys are going the opposite way. The people are spurring their mounts and those on foot are walking fast because it is cold.

The air is clear and dry. The sky is serene, but everywhere there is the sharp atmosphere common to winter days. The barren country seems vaster, the short grass in the pastures has been nipped by the winter winds; on the grazing ground, the sheep are looking for some grass and they are also looking for some sunshine, as the sun is rising very slowly. They are standing very close together one against the other, because they also are cold, and they bleat, lifting their heads and looking at the sun as if they were saying: « Come quick because it is cold! » The ground is undulating and its undulations are becoming clearer and clearer. It is a real hilly place. There are valleys and slopes covered with grass, and ridges. The road runs through the centre and goes south-east.

Mary is on a little grey donkey. She is all enveloped in a heavy mantle. In front of the saddle there is the fitting already seen in Her journey to Hebron, and on it there is the little trunk with the basic essential things. Joseph is walking on the side holding the reins. « Are you tired? » he asks Her now and again.

Mary looks at him smiling and replies: « No, I am not.» The third time She adds: « You must be tired walking.»

« Oh! Me! It's nothing for me. I was only thinking that if I had found another donkey You would have been more comfortable, and we could have travelled faster. But I just could not find another one. Everybody needs a mount nowadays. But take heart. We shall soon be in Bethlehem. Ephrathah is beyond that mountain.» They are both silent. The Virgin, when She does not speak, seems to concentrate on internal prayer. She smiles mildly at one of Her thoughts and if She looks at the crowd, She does not seem to see it for what it is: a man, a woman, an old man, a shepherd, a rich or a poor man, but only for what She sees.

« Are you cold? » asks Joseph when the wind starts blowing.

« No, thank you.»

But Joseph is not too happy. He touches Her feet, which are shod in sandals and are hanging down along the side of the donkey and can hardly be seen coming out from under Her long dress, and he must feel them cold, because he shakes his head and takes a blanket which he has across his shoulders and envelops Mary's legs in it and he spreads it also on Her lap, so that Her hands may be kept warm, being covered by the blanket and Her mantle.

They meet a shepherd, who cuts across the road with his herd, moving from the grazing ground on the right-hand side of the road to the one of the left-hand side. Joseph bends down to say something to him. The shepherd nods in assent. Joseph takes the donkey and drags it behind the herd into the grazing ground. The shepherd pulls a coarse bowl out of his knapsack, he milks a big sheep with swollen udders and hands the bowl to Joseph who offers it to Mary.

« May God bless you both » exclaims Mary. « You for your love, and you for your kindness. I will pray for you. .»

« Are you coming from far? »

« From Nazareth » replies Joseph.

« And where are you going? »

« To Bethlehem.»

« A long journey for a woman in Her state. Is She your wife? »

« Yes, She is.»

« Have you got a place where to go? »

« No, we haven't.»

« That's bad! Bethlehem is overcrowded with people who have come from all over to register there, or are on their way to register elsewhere. I don't know whether you will find lodgings. Are you familiar with the place? »

« Not very.»

« Well... I will explain it to you... for Her... (and he points to Mary). Find the hotel, but it will be full. But I will tell you just the same, to guide you. It's in the square, in the largest one. This main road will take you to it. You can't miss it. There is a fountain in front of it, it is a long and low building with a very big door. It will be full. But if you do not find room in the hotel, or in any of the houses, go round to the back of the hotel, towards the country. There are some stables in the mountain, which are used sometimes by merchants to keep their animals there, on their way to Jerusalem, when they don't find room in the hotel. They are stables, you know, in the mountain: they are damp and cold and there are no doors. But they are always a shelter, because your wife... She can't be left on the road. Perhaps you will find room there... and some hay to sleep on and for the donkey. And may God guide you.»

« And may God give you joy » answers Mary. Joseph instead replies: «Peace be with you.»

They take to the road again. A wider valley can be seen from the crest they have climbed over. In the valley, up and down the soft slopes surrounding it, there are many houses. It is Bethlehem.

« Here we are in David's land, Mary. Now You will be able to rest. You look so tired...»

« No. I was thinking... I think... » Mary gets hold of Joseph's hand and says to him with a blissful smile: « I really think that the time has come.»

« O Lord of mercy! What shall we do? »

« Don't be afraid, Joseph. Be steady. See how calm I am? »

« But You must be suffering a lot.»

« Oh! No. I am full of joy. Such a joy, so great, so beautiful, so uncontainable, that My heart is thumping and thumping and it is whispering to Me: "He is coming! He is coming!" It says so at each beat. It is My Child knocking at My heart and saying: "Mother, I am here and I am coming to give You the kiss of God". Oh! What a joy, My dear Joseph! »

But Joseph is not joyful. He is thinking of the urgent need to find a shelter and he quickens his pace, He goes from door to door asking for a room. Nothing. They are all full. They reach the hotel. Even the rustic porches surrounding the large inner yard are full of campers.

Joseph leaves Mary on the donkey inside the yard and he goes out looking in other houses. He comes back thoroughly disheartened. He has not found anything. The fast winter twilight is beginning to spread its shadows. Joseph implores the hotel-keeper. He implores also some of the travellers. He points out that they are all healthy men, that there is a woman about to give birth to a child. He begs them to have mercy. Nothing.

There is a rich Pharisee who looks at them with obvious contempt and when Mary goes near him, he steps aside as if he had been approached by a leper. Joseph looks at him and his face blushes with disdain. Mary lays Her hand on his wrist to calm him and says: « Don't insist. Let us go. God will provide.»

They go out and they follow the wall of the hotel. They turn into a little street which runs between the hotel and some poor houses. They then turn behind the hotel. They look for the stables. At last, here are some grottos, a kind of cellars, I would say, rather than stables, because they are so low and damp. The best have already been taken. Joseph is utterly disheartened.

« Ehi! Galilean! » an old man shouts. « Down there, at the end, under those ruins, there is a den. Perhaps there is nobody in it yet.»

They hurry to the « den ». It is really a den. Among the ruins of an old building there is a hole, beyond which there is a grotto, an excavation in the mountain, rather than a grotto. It seems to consist of the foundations of the old building, with the roof formed by rubble supported by coarse tree trunks. There is hardly any light, and to see better Joseph pulls out tinder and flint and he lights a little lamp that he takes out of the knapsack he is carrying across his shoulders. He goes in and greeted by a bellow. « Come in, Mary. It is empty. There is only an ox.» Joseph smiles. « It's better the' nothing!...»

Mary dismounts from Her donkey and goes in.

Joseph has hung the little lamp on a nail of one of the supporting trunks. They see the vault covered with cobwebs, the soil - stamped ramshackle earth, with holes, rubbish, excrement - the soil is strewn with straw. In the rear, an ox turns its head round and looks with his large quiet eyes while some hay is hanging from its lips. There is a rough seat and two big stones in a corner near a loop-hole. The blackness in that corner is a clear sign that a fire is generally lit there.

Mary goes near the ox. She is cold. She puts Her hands on its neck to feel its warmth. The ox bellows but does not stir. It seems to understand. Also when Joseph pushes it aside to take a large quantity of hay from the manger and make a bed for Mary, the ox remains calm and quiet. The manger is a double one: that is, there is one out of which the ox eats, and above it there is a kind of a shelf, with some spare hay, which Joseph pulls down. The ox makes room also for the little donkey that, tired and hungry as it is, starts eating at once.

Joseph discovers also a battered bucket, turned upside down. He goes out, because he saw a little stream outside, and he comes back with some water for the little donkey. He then takes possession of a bunch of twigs in a corner and he tries to sweep the floor with it. He next spreads the hay and makes a bed with it near the ox, in the most sheltered and dry corner. But he realizes that the poor hay is damp, and he sighs. He then lights a fire, and with the patience of Job, he dries the hay, a handful at the time, holding it near the fire.

Mary is sitting on the stool, She is tired, She watches and smiles. The hay is now ready. Mary sits down more comfortably on the soft hay, with Her back leaning against one of the tree trunks. Joseph completes... the furnishings hanging his mantle as a curtain on the hole that serves as a door. It is a makeshift protection. He then offers some bread and cheese to the Virgin, and he

gives Her some water out of a flask.

« Sleep now » he says. « I will sit up and watch that the fire does not go out. There is some wood, fortunately, let us hope that it will burn and last. Thus I will be able to save the oil of the lamp.»

Mary lies down obediently. Joseph covers Her with Her own mantle and with the blanket that She had round Her feet earlier.

« But you... you will be cold. .»

« No, Mary. I'll be near the fire. Try and rest now. Things will be better tomorrow.»

Mary closes Her eyes without insisting. Joseph creeps into his little comer, sits on the stool, with some dry shoot near him. They are very few. I do not think they will last long.

They are placed as follows: Mary is on the right hand side, with Her back to the... door, half hidden by the tree trunk and the ox which has lain down on the litter. Joseph is on the left side, towards the door, and since he is facing the fire, his back is turned towards Mary. But he turns round now and again to look at Her, and he sees She is lying quietly, as if She were sleeping. He breaks the little sticks as noiselessly as possible and throws them one at a time on to the little fire, so that it may not go out and may give some light and yet make the wood last longer. There is only the dim light of the fire: at times bright at times very faint. The lamp in fact has been put out and in the half light only the whiteness of the ox and of Joseph's hands and face can be seen. All the rest is a confused mass in the dull dim light.

« There is no dictation » says Mary. « The vision speaks by itself. It is for you to understand the lesson of charity, humility and purity emanating from it. Rest. Rest watching, as I used to keep watch waiting for Jesus. He will come to bring you His peace.»

29. The Birth of Our Lord Jesus.
6th June 1944.

I still see the inside of the poor stony shelter, where Mary and Joseph have found refuge, sharing the lot of some animals.

The little fire is dozing together with its guardian. Mary lifts Her head slowly from Her bed and looks round. She sees that Joseph's head is bowed over his chest, as if he were meditating, and She thinks that his good intention to remain awake has been overcome by tiredness. She smiles lovingly and making less noise than a butterfly alighting on a rose, She sits up and then goes on Her knees. She prays with a blissful smile on Her face. She prays with Her arms stretched out, almost in the shape of a cross, with the palms of Her hands facing up and forward, and She never seems to tire in that position. She then prostrates Herself with Her face on the hay, in an even more ardent prayer. A long prayer.

Joseph rouses. He notices that the fire is almost out and the stable almost dark. He throws a handful of very slender heath on to the fire and the flames are revived, he then adds some thicker twigs and finally some sticks, because the cold is really biting: the cold of a serene winter night that comes into the ruins from everywhere. Poor Joseph must be frozen sitting as he is near the door, if we can call a door the hole where Joseph's mantle serves as a curtain. He warms his hands near the fire, then takes his sandals off and warms his feet. When the fire is gaily blazing and its light is steady, he turns round. But he does not see anything, not even Mary's white veil that formed a clear line on the dark hay. He gets up and slowly moves towards Her pallet.

« Are You not sleeping, Mary? » he asks.

He asks Her three times until She turns round and replies: « I am praying.»

« Is there anything you need? »

« No, Joseph.»

« Try and sleep a little. At least try and rest.»

« I will try. But I don't get tired praying. .»

« God be with You, Mary.»

« And with you, Joseph.»

Mary resumes Her position. Joseph to avoid falling asleep, goes on his knees near the fire and prays. He prays with his hands pressed against his face. He removes them now and again to feed the fire and then he resumes his ardent prayer. Apart from the noise of the crackling sticks and the noise made now and again by the donkey stamping its hooves on the ground, no other sound is heard. A thin ray of moonlight creeps in through a crack in the vault and it seems a blade of unearthly silver looking for Mary. It stretches in length as the moon climbs higher in the sky and at last reaches Her. It is now on Her head, where it forms a halo of pure light.

Mary lifts Her head, as if She had a celestial call, and She gets up and goes on to Her knees again. Oh! How beautiful it is here now! She raises Her head, and Her face shines in the white moonlight and becomes transfigured by a supernatural smile. What does She see? What does She hear? What does She feel? She is the only one who can tell what She saw, heard and felt in the refulgent hour of Her Maternity. I can only see that the light around Her is increasing more and more. It seems to come down from Heaven, to arise from the poor things around Her, above all it seems to originate from Herself.

Her deep blue dress now seems of a pale myosotis blue, and Her hands and face are becoming clear blue as if they were placed under the glare of a huge pale sapphire. This hue is spreading more and more on the things around Her, it covers them, purifies them and brightens everything. It reminds me, although it is somewhat softer, of the hue I see in the vision of holy Paradise, and also of the colour I saw in the visit of the Wise Men.

The light is given off more and more intensely from Mary's body, it absorbs the moonlight. She seems to be drawing to Herself all the light that can descend from Heaven. She is now the Depositary of the Light. She is to give this Light to the world. And this blissful, uncontainable, immeasurable, eternal, divine Light which is about to be given, is heralded by a dawn, a morning star, a chorus of atoms of Light that increase continuously like a tide, and rise more and more like incense, and descend like a large stream and stretch out like veils...

The vault, full of crevices, of cobwebs, of protruding rubble balanced by a miracle of physics, the dark, smoky repellent vault, now seems the ceiling of a royal hall. Each boulder is a block of silver, each crack an opal flash, each cobweb a most precious canopy interwoven with silver and diamonds. A huge green lizard, hibernating between two stones, seems an emerald jewel forgotten there by a queen: and a bunch of hibernating bats is like a precious onyx chandelier. The hay from the upper manger is no longer grass blades: it is pure silver wires quivering in the air with the grace of loose hair.

The dark wood of the lower manger is a block of burnished silver. The walls are covered with a brocade in which the white silk disappears under the pearly embroidery of the relief, and the soil... what is the soil now? It is a crystal lit up by a white light. Its protrusions are like roses thrown in homage of the soil; the holes are precious cups from which perfumes and scents are to arise. And the light increases more and more. It is now unbearable to the eye. And the Virgin disappears in so much light, as if She had been absorbed by an incandescent curtain... and the Mother emerges.

Yes. When the light becomes endurable once again to my eyes, I see Mary with the new-born Son in Her arms. A little Baby, rosy and plump, bustling with His little hands as big as rose buds and kicking with His tiny feet that could be contained in the hollow of the heart of a rose: and is crying with a thin trembling voice, just like a new-born little lamb, opening His pretty little mouth that resembles a wild strawberry, and showing a tiny tongue that trembles against the rosy roof of His mouth. And He moves His little head that is so blond that it seems without any hair, a little round head that His Mummy holds in the hollow of Her hand, while She looks at Her Baby and adores Him weeping and smiling at the same time, and She bends down to kiss Him not on His innocent head, but on the centre of His chest, where underneath there is His little heart beating for us... where one day there will be the Wound. And His Mother is doctoring that wound in advance, with Her immaculate kiss.

The ox, woken up by the dazzling light, gets up with a great noise of hooves and bellows, the donkey turns its head round and brays. It is the light that rouses them but I love to think that they wanted to greet their Creator, both for

themselves and on behalf of all the animals.

Also Joseph, who almost enraptured, was praying so ardently as to be isolated from what was around him, now rouses and he sees a strange light filter through the fingers of his hands pressed against his face. He removes his hands, lifts his head and turns round. The ox, standing as it is, hides Mary. But She calls him: « Joseph, come.»

Joseph rushes. And when he sees, he stops, struck by reverence, and he is about to fall on his knees where he is. But Mary insists: « Come, Joseph » and She leans on the hay with Her left hand and, holding the Child close to Her heart with Her right one, She gets up and moves towards Joseph, who is walking embarrassed, because of a conflict in him between his desire to go and his fear of being irreverent.

They meet at the foot of the straw bed and they look at each other, weeping blissfully.

« Come, let us offer Jesus to the Father » says Mary. And while Joseph kneels down, She stands up between two trunks supporting the vault, She lifts up Her Creature in Her arms and says: « Here I am, On His behalf, O God, I speak these words to You: here I am to do Your will. And I, Mary, and My spouse, Joseph, with Him. Here are Your servants, O Lord. May Your will always be done by us, in every hour, in every event, for Your glory and Your love.»

Then Mary bends down and says: « Here, Joseph, take Him », and offers him the Child.

« What! I?... Me?... Oh, no! I am not worthy! » Joseph is utterly dumbfounded at the idea of having to touch God.

But Mary insists smiling: « You are well worthy. No one is more worthy than you are, and that is why the Most High chose you. Take Him, Joseph, and hold Him while I look for the linens.»

Joseph, blushing almost Purple, stretches his arms out and takes the Baby, Who is screaming because of the cold and when he has Him in his arms, he no longer persists in the intention of holding Him far from himself, out of respect, but he presses Him to his heart and bursts into tears exclaiming: « Oh! Lord! My God! » And he bends down to kiss His tiny feet and feels them cold. He then sits on the ground, and holds Him close to his chest and with his brown tunic and his hands he tries to cover Him, and warm Him, defending Him from the bitterly cold wind of the night. He would like to go near the fire, but there is a cold draft there coming in from the door. It is better to stay where he is. No, it is better to go between the two animals which serve as a protection against the air and give out warmth. Thus, he goes between the ox and the donkey, with his back to the door, bending over the New-Born to form with his body a shelter, the two sides of which are a grey head with long ears, and a huge white muzzle with a steaming nose and two gentle soft eyes.

Mary has opened the trunk and has pulled out the linens and swaddling clothes. She has been near the fire warming them. She now moves towards Joseph and envelops the Baby with lukewarm linen and then with Her veil to protect His little head. « Where shall we put Him now? » She asks.

Joseph looks round, thinking... « Wait » he says. « Let us move the animals and their hay over here, we will then pull down that hay up there and arrange it in here. The wood on the side will protect Him from the air, the hay will serve as a pillow and the ox will warm Him a little with its breath. The ox is better than the donkey. It is more patient and quiet.» And he bustles about, while Mary is lulling the Baby, holding Him close to Her heart, and laying Her cheek on His tiny head to warm it.

Joseph makes up the fire, without economy this time, to have a good blaze, and he warms the hay and as it dries up, he keeps it near his chest, so that it will not get cold. Then, when he has gathered enough to make a little mattress for the Child, he goes to the manger and sorts it out as if it were a cradle. « It is ready » he says. « Now we would need a blanket, because the hay stings, and also to cover Him.»

« Take My mantle » says Mary.

« You will be cold.»

« Oh! It does not matter! The blanket is too coarse. The mantle is soft and warm. I am not cold at all. Don't let Him suffer any longer! »

Joseph takes the wide mantle of soft dark blue wool, he double folds it and lays it on the hay, leaving a strip hanging out of the manger. The first bed for the

Saviour is ready.

And the Mother, with Her sweet, graceful gait, moves to the manger, lays Him in it, and covers Him with the strip of Her mantle. She arranges it also around His bare head, almost completely covered by the hay, from which it is protected only by Mary's thin veil. Only His little face, the size of a man's fist, is left uncovered. Mary and Joseph, bending over the manger, are blissfully happy watching Him sleep His first sleep, because the warmth of the clothes and of the hay has appeased His crying, and made Him sleepy.

Mary says:

« I promised you that He would come to bring you His peace. Do you remember the peace you enjoyed at Christmas! When you saw Me with My Child? Then it was your time of peace. Now it is your time of pain. But you know by now. It is by means of pain that we achieve peace and every grace for ourselves and our neighbours. Jesus-Man became Jesus-God again, after the tremendous suffering of His Passion. He became Peace, once more. Peace from Heaven, from where He had come and from where He now pours out His peace for those who love Him in the world. But in the hours of His Passion, He, Peace of the world, was deprived of that peace. He would not have suffered if He had had it. And He had to suffer: and to suffer excruciatingly, to the very end.

I, Mary, redeemed woman by means of My divine Maternity. But that was only the beginning of woman's redemption. By refusing a human marriage in accordance with My vow of virginity, I had rejected all lustful satisfactions, deserving thus grace from God.

But it was not yet sufficient, because Eve's sin was a four branched tree: pride, avarice, gluttony and lust. And all four were to be cut off, before making the roots of the tree sterile.

By deeply humiliating Myself, I defeated pride.

I abased Myself before everybody. I am not referring to My humility towards God. Such humility is due to the Most High by every creature. Even His Word had it. It was necessary for Me, a woman, to have it. But have you ever considered what humiliation I had to suffer from men, without defending Myself in any way?

Even Joseph, who was a just man, had accused Me in his heart. The others, who were not just, had committed a sin of disparagement with regard to My condition, and the rumour of their words had come like a bitter wave to break up against My humanity. And they were the first of the infinite humiliations I was to suffer in My life as Mother of Jesus and of mankind.

Humiliations of poverty, of a refugee, humiliations for reproaches of relatives and friends who, being unaware of the truth, judged Me a weak woman with regard to My behaviour as a Mother towards Jesus, when He was a young man, humiliations during the three years of His public life, cruel humiliations in the hour of Calvary, humiliation in having to admit that I could not afford to buy a place and the perfumes for the burial of my Son.

I overcame the avarice of the First Parents renouncing My Creature before the time.

A mother never renounces her creature unless she is forced to. Whether her heart is asked to renounce her creature by her country or by the love of a spouse or even by God Himself, she will resent and struggle against the separation. It is natural. A son grows in our womb and the tie that links him to us can never be completely broken. Even if the umbilical cord is cut, there is a nerve that always remains: it departs from the mother's heart and is grafted into the son's heart: it is a spiritual nerve, more lively and sensitive than a physical one. And a mother feels it stretching even to exceedingly severe pangs if the love of God or of a creature or the need of the country take her son away from her. And it breaks, tearing her heart, if death snatches her son from her.

And I renounced My Son from the very moment I had Him. I gave Him to God. I gave Him to you. I deprived Myself of the Fruit of My womb to make amends for Eve's theft of God's fruit.

I defeated gluttony, both of knowledge and of enjoyment, by agreeing to know only what God wanted Me to know, without asking Myself or Him more than what I was told. I believed unquestioningly. I overcame the innate personal delight of enjoyment because I denied Myself every sensual pleasure. I confined flesh, the

instrument of Satan, together with Satan, under My heel and made of them a step to rise towards Heaven. Heaven! My aim. Where God was. My only hunger. A hunger which is not gluttony, but a necessity blessed by God, Who wants us to crave for Him.

I defeated lust, which is gluttony carried to the extreme of greed. Because every unrestrained vice leads to a bigger vice. And Eve's gluttony, which was already blameworthy, led her to lust. It was no longer enough for her to enjoy pleasure by herself. She wanted to take her crime to a refined intensity and thus she became acquainted with lust and was a mistress of lust for her companion.

I reversed the terms and instead of descending I have always ascended. Instead of causing other people to descend, I have always attracted them towards Heaven: of My honest companion, I made an angel.

Now that I possessed God and His infinite wealth with Him, I hastened to divest Myself of it saying: "Here I am: may Your will be done for Him and by Him". He is chaste who chastises not only his flesh but also his affections and his thoughts. I had to be the Chaste One in order to annul the One who had been Unchaste in her flesh, her heart and her mind. And I never abandoned My reservedness, not even by saying of My Son: "He is Mine, I want Him", since He belonged only to Me on earth, as He belonged only to God in Heaven.

And yet all this was not sufficient to achieve for woman the peace lost by Eve. I obtained that for you at the foot of the Cross: when I saw Him dying, Whom you saw being born. When I felt My bowels being torn apart by the cry of My dying Creature, I became void of all femininity. I was no longer flesh, but an angel. Mary, the Virgin Spouse of the Spirit, died that moment. The Mother of Grace remained, Who gave you the Grace She generated from Her torture. The female reconsecrated "woman" by me on Christmas night, achieved at the foot of the Cross the means to become a creature of Heaven.

This I did for you, depriving Myself of all satisfactions, even of holy ones. And whereas you had been reduced by Eve to females not superior to the mates of animals, I made of you, if you only wish so, saints of God. I ascended for you. As I had done for Joseph, I lifted you higher up. The rock of Calvary is My Mount of Olives. From there I took My leap to carry to Heaven the resanctified soul of woman together with My flesh, now glorified because it had borne the Word of God and had destroyed in Me the very last trace of Eve. It had destroyed the last root of that tree with four poisonous branches, a root stuck in the sensuality that had dragged mankind to fall and that will go on biting at your intestines until the end of time and to the last woman. From there, where I now shine in the ray of Love, I call you and I show you the Medicine to control yourselves: the Grace of My Lord and the Blood of My Son.

And you, My voice, rest your soul in the light of this dawn of Jesus, to gain strength for the future crucifixions which will not be spared you, because we want you here and one comes here through pain, because we want you here and the higher one comes the more one has suffered to obtain Grace for the world.

Go in peace. I am with you.»

30. The Adoration of the Shepherds.

7th June 1944. Eve of Corpus Christi.

I am writing in the presence of my Jesus-Master. He is here for me, all for me. He has come back, after such a long time, all for me.

You will say: « How? You have been hearing and seeing for almost a month and you say that He is with you after a long time? »

I will reply once again telling you what I have already told you several times both by word of mouth and in writing.

There is a difference between seeing and hearing. And above all there is a difference between seeing and hearing on behalf of other people, and seeing and hearing all for myself, exclusively for myself. In the former case I am a spectator and I repeat what I see and hear, but if that gives me joy because they are always things which bring great joy, it is also true that it is, so to say, an external joy. The word is a bad expression of what I feel so clearly. But I cannot find a better one. In brief, just imagine that my joy is like that of one who reads a lovely book or sees a beautiful scene. One is moved, enjoys

it, admires its harmony and thinks: « How lovely It is to be in the place of this person! » Instead in the latter case, that is, when I hear and see for myself, then I am «that person.» The word that I hear is for me, the person I see is for me. It is He and I, Mary and I, John and I. Alive, real, true, close to each other. Not in front of me, as if I were watching a film being shown, but beside my bed, or moving about my room, or leaning on pieces of furniture, or sitting, or standing, like real people alive, as my guests, which is quite different from a vision on behalf of everybody. In a word all that « is mine ». And Jesus is here today, in actual fact He has been here since yesterday afternoon, in His usual white woollen garment, which is rather ivory-white, and is so different in weight and shade from the magnificent one which He wears in Heaven and which seems to be made of immaterial linen, and is so white that it seems to be woven with yarn as clear as light. He is here with His long tapering fingers which are white verging to old ivory, with His handsome long pale face in which His dominating sweet eyes of dark sapphire shine between His thick brown eyelashes sparkling with blond-red reflections. He is here with His long soft hair, which is brighter blond-red where exposed to light and darker in the deep folds. He is here! He is here! And He is smiling at me while I write about Him. As He used to do at Viareggio... and as He stopped doing as from the Holy Week... causing all the distress which almost became a fever of despair, when in addition to the grief of being deprived of Him I was also bereft of the comfort of living where at least I had seen Him and I could say: « He used to lean there, to sit down here, here He bent to lay His hand on my head » and where my relatives had died.

Oh! unless one has experienced that, one cannot understand! It is not a question of pretending to have all that. We know very well that they are gratuitous graces and that we do not deserve them, neither can we expect them to last when they are granted to us. We know that. And the more they are given to us, the more we lower ourselves in humility, acknowledging our disgusting misery as compared with the Infinite Beauty and Divine Wealth which bestows itself upon us. But what do you think, Father? Does a son not wish to see his father and mother? Or a wife her husband? And when death or a long absence prevents them from seeing their dear ones, do they not suffer and do they not find comfort by living where they lived, and if they have to leave that place, do they not suffer twice as much, as they lose also the place where their love was reciprocated by the absent relative? Can those who suffer thus be reproached? No. And what about me? Is Jesus not my Father and Spouse? Dearer, much dearer than the dearest father and spouse?

And that He is such to me, you can judge by how I behaved at my mother's death. I suffered, you know? I still weep, because I loved her, notwithstanding her character. But you know how I got over that difficult hour. Jesus was there. And He was dearer to me than my mother. Shall I tell you something? I suffered and I am suffering more now because of my mother's death, which took place eight months ago, than I suffered then. Because during these last two months I have been without Jesus for me and without Mary for me, and also now, if They leave me for a moment, I feel more than ever the desolation of being a sick orphan and I fall again into the deep human grief of those cruel days.

I am writing while Jesus is looking at me and therefore I am not exaggerating or distorting anything. In any case it is not my custom, and even if it were, it would be impossible to persist in it while He is watching me.

I have written this here, where it is not my habit to do so, because with regard to Mary's visions I never interpose my poor ego, as I already know that I must continue describing Her glories. Was Her Maternity not a crown of glories every moment? I am very ill and it is burdensome for me to write. And afterwards I feel extremely weak. But in order to make Her known, so that She may be loved more, I disregard everything. Are my shoulders aching? Is my heart giving in? Am I suffering from a racking headache? Is my temperature rising? It does not matter! Let Mary be known, beautiful and dear as I see Her through God's kindness and Hers, and that is enough for me.

Later I see a very wide country. The moon is at its zenith and she is sailing smoothly in a sky crowded with stars. They look like diamond studs fixed to a huge canopy of dark blue velvet and the moon is smiling in the middle of them with her big white face, from which streams of light descend and make the earth white. The barren trees seem taller and darker against so white a ground,

whereas the low walls which rise here and there on the boundaries, look as white as milk and a little house far away seems a block of Carrara marble.

On my right I see a place enclosed by a thorn-bush hedge on two sides and by a low rugged wall on the other two. The wall supports a kind of low wide shed, which inside the enclosure is built in masonry and part in wood, as if in summer the wooden part should be removed and the shed should become a porch. From the enclosure intermittent short bleatings can be heard now and again. It must be the little sheep which dream or perhaps sense that it is almost daybreak because of the very bright moonlight. The brightness is intense to an excessive degree and it is increasing more and more as if the planet were coming near the earth or were sparkling because of a mysterious fire.

A shepherd looks out of the door, and lifting one arm to his forehead to shield his eyes, he looks up. It seems improbable that one should protect one's eyes from moonlight. But the moonlight in this case is so bright that it blinds people, particularly those who come out from a dark enclosure. Everything is calm. But the bright moonlight is surprising. The shepherd calls his companions. They all come to the door: a group of hairy men of various ages. Some are just teen-agers, some are already white haired. They comment on the strange event and the younger ones are afraid. One in particular, a boy about twelve years old, starts crying, and the older shepherds jeer at him.

« What are you afraid of, you fool? » the oldest man says to him. « Can't you see that the air is very quiet? Have you never seen clear moonlight? You have always been tied to your mother's apron-strings, haven't you? But there are many things for you to see! Once, I had gone as far as the Lebanon mountains, even farther. High up. I was young, and walking was a pleasure. And I was also rich, then... one night I saw such a bright light that I thought Elijah was about to come back in his chariot of fire. And an old man -he was the old man then- said to me: "A great adventure is about to take place in the world". It was for us a misadventure, because the Roman soldiers came. Oh! Many things you will see, if you live... long enough.»

But the little shepherd is no longer listening to him. He looks as if he is no longer frightened, because he leaves the threshold and steals from behind the shoulders of a brawny herdsman, behind whom he had previously sought shelter, and goes out on to the grassy fold in front of the shed. He looks up and walks about like a sleep-walker or one hypnotised by something that compellingly attracts him. At a certain moment he shouts: « Oh! » and remains petrified with his arms slightly stretched out. His mates look at one another dumbfounded.

«But what is the matter with the fool? » says one.

« I will send him back to his mother tomorrow. I don't want mad people as guardians of the sheep » says another.

And the old man who had spoken earlier says: « Let us go and see before we judge him. Call also the others who are sleeping and bring your sticks. It might be a wild animal or some robber...»

They go in, they call the other shepherds and they come out with torches and clubs. They join the boy.

« There, there » he whispers smiling. « Above the tree, look at the light that is coming. It seems to be coming on the ray of the moon. There it is, it is coming near. How beautiful it is! »

« I can only see a rather brighter light.»

« So can I.»

« So can I » say the others.

« No. I see something like a body » says one whom I recognise to be the shepherd who gave the milk to Mary.

« It is... it is an angel » shouts the boy. « Here he is, he is coming down, he is coming near... Down! On your knees before the angel of God! »

A long and venerable « Oh! » comes from the group of shepherds, who fall down face to the ground and the older they are, the more they appear to be crushed by the refulgent apparition. The young ones are on their knees, looking at the angel who is coming nearer and nearer, and then he stops mid-air above the enclosure wall, waving his large wings, a pearly brightness in the white moonlight surrounding him.

« Do not fear. I am not bringing you misfortune. I announce you a I great joy for the people of Israel and for all the people of the world.» The angelic voice is the harmony of a harp and of singing nightingales.

« Today, in the City of David, the Saviour has been born.» In saying so, the angel spreads out his wings wider and wider, moving them as a sign of overwhelming joy, and a stream of golden sparks and precious stones seem to fall from them: a real rainbow describing a triumphal arch above the poor shed.

«...the Saviour, Who is Christ.» The angel shines with a brighter light. His two wings, now motionless, pointed upright towards the sky like two still sails on the sapphire of the sea, seem two bright flames ascending to Heaven.

«...Christ, the Lord! » The angel gathers his sparkling wings and covers himself with them as if they were a coat of diamonds on a dress of pearls, he bows down in adoration, with his arms crossed over his heart, while his head bent down as it is, disappears in the shade of the tops of the folded wings. Only an oblong bright motionless form can be seen for a few moments.

But now he stirs. He spreads out his wings, lifts his head, bright with a heavenly smile, and says: « You will recognise Him from the following signs: in a poor stable, behind Bethlehem, you will find a baby in swaddling clothes, in a manger for animals, because no roof was found for the Messiah in the city of David.» The angel becomes grave, almost sad, in saying that.

But from the Heavens many angels -oh! how many!- come down, all like him -a ladder of angels descending and rejoicing and dimming the moonlight with their heavenly brightness. They all gather round the announcing angel, fluttering their wings, exhaling perfumes, playing notes in which the most beautiful voices of creation find a recollection, but elevated to uniform perfection. If painting is the expression of matter to become light, here melody is the expression of music to give men a hint of the beauty of God. To hear this melody is to know Paradise, where everything is harmony of love which emanates from God to make the blessed souls happy, and then from them returns to God to say to Him: « We love You! »

The angelical « Glory » spreads throughout the quiet country in wider and wider circles and the bright light with it. And the birds join their singing to greet the early light, and the sheep add their bleatings for the early sun. But, as previously in the grotto for the ox and the donkey, I love to believe that the animals are greeting their Creator, Who has come down among them to love them both its a Man and as God.

The singing slowly fades away, as well as the light, and the angels ascend to Heaven...

The shepherds come back to reality.

« Did you hear? »

« Shall we go and see? »

« And what about the animals? »

« Oh! Nothing will happen to them! We are going to obey God's word!...»

« But where shall we go? »

« Didn't he say that He was born today? And that they did not find lodgings in Bethlehem? » It's the shepherd who gave the milk who is speaking now. «Come with me, I know where He is. I saw the woman and I felt sorry for Her. I told them where to go, for Her sake, because I thought they might not find lodgings, and I gave the man some milk for Her. She is so young and beautiful, and She must be as good and kind as the angel who spoke to us. Come. Let us go and get some milk, cheese, lambs and tanned hides. They must be very poor... and I wonder how cold He must be Whose name I dare not mention! And imagine! I spoke to the Mother as I would have spoken to a poor wife!...»

They go into the shed and they come out shortly afterwards, some with little flasks of milk, some with little nets interwoven with esparto containing small whole round cheeses, some with baskets, each containing a little bleating lamb and some with tanned hides.

« I am taking them a sheep. She lambed a month ago. Her milk is very good. It will be useful if the woman should have no milk. She seemed a young girl to me and so pale! A jasmine face in moonlight » says the shepherd who gave the milk. And he leads them.

They set out in the moonlight aided by their torches, after closing the shed and the enclosure. They go along country paths, among thorn-bush hedges stripped by winter.

They go round Bethlehem. They reach the stable not the way Mary came, but from the opposite direction, so that they do not pass in front of the better stables, instead they find this one first. They go near the hole.

« Go in! »
« I wouldn't dare! »
« You go in! »
« No.»
« At least have a look.»
« You, Levi, who saw the angel first, obviously because you are better than we are, look in.» Before they said he was mad.... but now it suits them if he dare what they do not.
The boy hesitates, but then he makes up his mind. He goes near the hole, pulls the mantle a little to one side, looks... and remains enraptured.
« What can you see? » they ask him anxiously in low voices.
« I can see a beautiful young woman and a man bending over a manger and I can hear... I can hear a little baby crying, and the woman is speaking to Him in a voice... oh! what a voice! »
« What is She saying? »
« She is saying: "Jesus, little one! Jesus, love of Your Mummy! Don't cry, little Son". She is saying: "Oh! If I could only say to You: 'Take some milk, little one'. But I have not got any yet". She says: "You are so cold, My love! And the hay is stinging You! How painful it is for Your Mummy to hear You crying so, without being able to help You!" She says: "Sleep, soul of Mine! Because it breaks My heart to hear You crying and see Your tears!" and She kisses Him, and She must be warming His little feet with Her hands, because She is bent with Her arms in the manger.»
« Call Her! Let them hear you.»
« I won't. You should call Her, because you brought us here and you know Her! »
The shepherd opens his mouth, but he only utters a faint moaning noise.
Joseph turns round and comes to the door. « Who are you? »
« Shepherds. We brought you some food and some wool. We have come to worship the Saviour.»
« Come in.»
They go in, and the stable becomes brighter because of the light of the torches. The older men push the young ones in front of them.
Mary turns round and smiles. « Come » She says. « Come! », and She invites them with Her hand and Her smile, and She takes the boy who saw the angel and She draws him to Herself, against the manger. And the boy looks, and is happy.
The others, invited also by Joseph, move forward with their gifts and they place them at Mary's feet with few deep-felt words. They then look at the Baby Who is weeping a little and they smile moved and happy.
And one of them, somewhat bolder than the rest, says: « Mother, take this wool. It's soft and clean. I prepared it for my child who is about to be born. But I offer it to You. Lay your Son in this wool. It will be soft and warm.» And he offers the sheep hide, a beautiful hide, well covered with white soft wool.
Mary lifts Jesus, and puts it round Him. And She shows Him to the shepherds, who, kneeling on the hay on the ground, look at Him ecstatically!
They become bolder, and one suggests: « He should be given a mouthful of milk, better still, some water and honey. But we have no honey. We give it to little babies. I have seven children, and I know...»
« There is some milk here. Take it, Woman.»
« But it is cold. It should be warm. Where is Elias? He has the sheep.»
Elias must be the shepherd who gave the milk. But he is not there. He remained outside and is looking from the hole, but he cannot be seen in the dark night.
« Who led you here? »
« An angel told us to come, and Elias showed us the way. But where is he now? »
The sheep declares his presence with a bleat.
« Come in. You are wanted.»
He enters with his sheep, embarrassed because they all look at him.
« It's you! » says Joseph, who recognises him, and Mary smiles at him saying: « You are good.»
They milk the sheep and with the hem of a piece of linen dipped into the warm creamy milk, Mary moistens the lips of the Baby Who sucks the sweet cream. They all smile, and even more so, when Jesus falls asleep in the warmth of the wool, with the little bit of linen still between His lips.
« But You can't stay here. It's cold and damp. And... there is too strong a smell of animals. It's not good... it's not good for the Saviour.»

« I know » replies Mary with a deep sigh. « But there is no room for us in Bethlehem.»

« Take heart, Woman. We will look for a house for You. »

« I will tell my mistress » says Elias. « She is good. She will receive You, even if she had to give You her own room. As soon as it is daylight, I will tell her. Her house is full of people. But she will find room for You.»

« For My Child, at least. Joseph and I can lie also on the floor. But for the Little One...»

« Don't worry, Woman. I will see to it. And we will tell many people what we were told. You will lack nothing. For the time being, take what our poverty can give You. We are shepherds...»

« We are poor, too. And we cannot reward you » says Joseph.

« Oh! We don't want it. Even if You could afford it, we would not want it. The Lord has already rewarded us. He promised peace to everybody. The angels said: "Peace to men of good will". But He has already given it to us, because the angel said that this Child is the Saviour, Who is Christ, the Lord. We are poor and ignorant, but we know that the Prophets say that the Saviour will be the Prince of Peace. And he told us to come and adore Him. That is why He gave us His peace. Glory be to God in the Most High Heaven and glory to His Christ here, and You are blessed, Woman, Who gave birth to Him: You are holy, because You deserved to bear Him! Give us orders as our Queen, because we will be happy to serve You. What can we do for You? »

« You can love My Son, and always cherish the same thoughts as you have now.»

« But what about You? Is there anything You wish? Have You no relatives whom You would like to inform that He has been born? »

« Yes, I have them. But they are far away. They are at Hebron...»

« I will go » says Elias. «Who are they? »

« Zacharias, the priest, and My cousin Elizabeth.»

« Zacharias? Oh! I know him well. In summer I go up those mountains because the pastures are rich and beautiful, and I am a friend of his shepherd. When I know you are settled, I will go to Zacharias.»

« Thank you, Elias.»

« You need not thank me. It is a great honour for me, a poor shepherd, to go and speak to the priest and say to him: "The Saviour has been born".»

« No. You must say to him: "Your cousin, Mary of Nazareth, has said that Jesus has been born, and that you should come to Bethlehem".»

« I will say that.»

«May God reward You. I will remember you, Elias, and every one of you.»

« Will You tell Your Baby about us? »

« I certainly will.»

« I am Elias.»

« And I am Levi.»

« And I am Samuel.»

« And I Jonah.»

« And I Isaac.»

« And I Tobias.»

« And I Jonathan.»

« And I Daniel.»

« And I Simeon.»

« My name is John. .»

« I am Joseph and my brother Benjamin, we are twins. »

« I will remember your names.»

« We must go... But we will come back... And we will bring others to worship Him.»

« How can we go back to the sheep-fold, leaving the Child? »

« Glory be to God Who has shown Him to us! »

« Will You let us kiss His dress? » asks Levi, with an angelic smile. And Mary lifts Jesus slowly, and sitting on the hay, envelops the tiny little feet in a linen, and offers them to be kissed. And the shepherds bow down to the ground and kiss the tiny feet, veiled by the linen. Those with a beard clean it first; almost everyone is crying, and when they have to go, they walk out backwards, leaving their hearts there...

The vision ends thus, with Mary sitting on the straw with the Child on Her lap and Joseph who, leaning with his elbow on the manger, looks and adores.

Jesus says:

« I will speak today. You are very tired, but have a little more patience. It is the eve of Corpus Christi. I could speak to you about the Eucharist and the saints who became apostles of Its cult, as I spoke to you of the saints who were apostles of the Sacred Heart. But I want to speak to you of something else and of a class of worshippers of My Body who are the forerunners of Its cult. That is: the shepherds. They were the first worshippers of My Body of the Word, Who had become Man.

Once I told you and also My Church says this, the Holy Innocents are the protomartyrs of Christ. Now I tell you that the shepherds are the first worshippers of the Body of God. And they have all the qualifications to be the worshippers of My Body, o Eucharistic souls.

Firm faith: they believe the angel promptly and unquestioningly.

Generosity: they give all their wealth to their Lord.

Humility: they approach people, who from the human point of view, are poorer than they, and they do so with a modest attitude that does not humiliate them, and they profess themselves their servants.

Desire: what they are unable to offer, they endeavour to obtain by means of charitable work.

Prompt obedience: Mary wishes to inform Zacharias and Elias goes at once. He does not postpone the matter.

Love finally: they suffer in departing from the grotto and you say: "They leave their hearts there". And you are right.

But should the same not happen with My Sacrament?

And there is another point, and it is entirely for you: note to whom the angel reveals himself first and who deserves to hear Mary's love effusions. Levi: the boy. God shows Himself to those who have a child's soul and He shows them also His mysteries and allows them to hear His divine words and Mary's. And those with a child's soul have also Levi's holy daring and they say: "Let us kiss Jesus' dress". They say that to Mary. Because it is always Mary Who gives you Jesus.

She is the Bearer of the Eucharist. She is the Living Pyx. Who goes to Mary, finds Me. Who asks Her for Me receives Me from Her. When a creature says to Mary: "Give me Your Jesus that I may love Him", My Mother's smile causes Heaven's colours to change into a more lively brightness because of its greater delight.

Say, therefore, to Her: "Let me kiss Jesus' dress, let me kiss His wounds". And dare even more: "Let me rest my head on Your Jesus' Heart, that I may delight in It". Come. And rest. Like Jesus in His cradle, between Jesus and Mary.»

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* ON-LINE

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Maria Valtorta

THE POEM OF THE MAN-GOD

VOLUME TWO

THE SECOND YEAR OF THE PUBLIC LIFE

141. Instruction to the Disciples while Going towards Arimathea.
19th April 1945.

«My Lord, what shall we do with this man? » Peter asks Jesus pointing at a man, whose name is Joseph, and who has been following them since they left Emmaus. Joseph is now listening to the two sons of Alphaeus and to Simon, who are paying particular attention to him.

«I have told you. He is coming with us as far as Galilee.»

«And then?...»

«And then... he will be staying with us. You will see that that is what is going to happen.»

«Is he going to be a disciple, too? With that foul story about him? »

«Are you a Pharisee, too? »

«Not me! But... I think that the Pharisees are too keen on keeping an eye on us...»

«And they will cause us trouble if they see him with us. That is what you mean. So, we should allow a son of Abraham to be plunged into grief, because we are afraid of being annoyed. No, Simon Peter. It is a soul that can be lost or saved according to how its deep wound is healed.»

«But, are we not Your disciples?...»

Jesus looks at Peter and smiles sweetly. He then says: «One day, many months ago, I said to you: "Many more will come". The field is vast, very vast. Because of its vastness, the workers will never be sufficient... also because many, like Jonah, will die working hard. But you will always be My favoured ones » concludes Jesus, drawing gloomy Peter close to Himself and His promise cheers the apostle.

«So, he is coming with us.»

«Yes, until his heart is refreshed. He is deeply disillusioned by all the bitter hatred he has had to endure. He is indeed poisoned.»

Also James, John and Andrew have joined the Master and are listening to Him.

«You cannot appraise the enormous harm that a man can do another man by means of his hostile intolerance. I ask you to remember that your Master was always very benign towards those who were suffering from a spiritual disease. You think that My greatest miracles and My main virtue consist in the curing of bodies. No, My friends... Yes, you too, who are ahead of us and you, who are behind Me, come here. The road is wide and we can walk in a group.»

They all gather round Jesus Who continues: «My main deeds, the ones that bear the clearest witness to My nature and My mission, the ones upon which the Father looks with joy, are the healing of hearts, whether they are freed from one or more capital vices, or relieved from grief. Hearts are discouraged by grief when they are convinced that they have been struck and abandoned by God. What is a soul that has lost the certainty of the help of God? It is a thin bearbline crawling in the dust, as it is no longer able to clutch at the idea that was its strength and its joy. It is horrible to live without hope. Life is beautiful, in its hardship, only because it receives such warmth from the Divine Sun. The aim of life is that Sun. The days of man may be dismal, wet with tears and smeared with blood. But the Sun will rise again. Then there will be no more grief, no separations, no harshness, no hatred, no misery or solitude in an enveloping fog. Instead there will be brightness and singing, serenity and peace, there will be God. God: the eternal Sun! See how gloomy the earth is when there is an eclipse. If man were compelled to say: "The sun is defunct" would he not feel as if he were to live for ever in a dark hypogeum, buried and dead before dying? But man knows that behind the planet that hides the sun and makes the world look dismal there is still God's bright sun. And the thought of being united to God during life is like that. If men hurt, steal, calumniate, God cures, grants, justifies. And He does so in full measure. Men may say: "God has rejected you". But a confident soul thinks, must think: "God is just and good. He knows all reasons and is benign. He is more benign than the most benign of men. He is infinitely so. Therefore He will not reject me if I lean my tear-stained face on His bosom and I say to Him: 'Father, I have but You. Your son is in anguish and depressed. Give me Your peace.... ' ". I have been sent by God to gather those

whom man has upset and Satan has overwhelmed and I save them. That is really My work. A miracle on a body is a manifestation of divine power. The redemption of souls is the work of Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer. I think, and I am not mistaken, that those who have been rehabilitated by Me in the eyes of God and in their own, will be My faithful disciples, the ones who with greater strength will be able to lead crowds of people to God saying: "Are you sinners? So am I. Are you depressed? So am I. Are you desperate? So was I. And yet you can see that the Messiah had mercy on my spiritual distress and He wanted me to be His priest. Because He is mercy and He wants the world to be convinced of that, and no man is more suitable to convince than he who has experienced such mercy in himself". Now I will put them on a par with My friends, and with those who have worshipped Me since I was born, that is, I will associate them with you and with the shepherds. Nay, I will set them alongside the shepherds, with those who have been cured, with those who without any special election, like you twelve, have followed My way and will follow it as long as they live. Isaac is near Arimathea, as requested by our friend Joseph. I will take Isaac with Me, so that he may join Timoneus when the latter arrives. You may join them, Joseph, if you think that there is peace in Me and a purpose for a whole life. They will be good brothers to you.»

«O my Comfort! It is exactly as You say. My deep wounds, both as a man and as a believer, are being cured very quickly. I have been with You three days. And I feel that what was my torture only three days ago, is a dream that is fading away. I had that dream, but the more time elapses, the more its harsh details vanish before reality. During the past nights I have pondered over things. I have a good relative at Joppa. He was... the involuntary cause of my trouble, because it was through him that I met that woman. And that will tell You whether we were in a position to know whose daughter she was... True, she may have been the daughter of my father's first wife. But he was not the father. Her name was different and she came from far away. She became acquainted with my relative through business transactions. And that is how I met her. My relative was very fond of my business. I am going to make him an offer. The business would come to an end without a master. I am sure he will buy it, also because thereby he will not feel remorse for the trouble he caused me. I will then be self-sufficient and I will be able to follow You without any worry. I only ask You to grant me that man Isaac You mentioned. I am afraid of being all alone with my thoughts. They are still too sad...»

«I will let you have Isaac. He is a kind soul. Sorrow has perfected him. He has carried his cross for thirty years. He knows what it means to suffer... In the meantime we will go ahead. And you will join us at Nazareth.»

«Are we not stopping at Joseph's? »

«Joseph is probably in Jerusalem... The Sanhedrin is very busy... We will find out from Isaac. If he is there, we will take him our peace. If he is not there we will stop only one night, to rest. I am anxious to reach Galilee. There is a Mother Who is suffering. You must remember that there are people who are keen on distressing Her. I want to reassure Her. »

142. Instruction to the Apostles Going towards Samaria.
21st April 1945.

Jesus is with the twelve apostles. The region is still mountainous, but since the road is quite wide, they are all in a group and are speaking among themselves.

«But, now that we are all by ourselves, we can talk about it: why so much jealousy between the two groups? » asks Philip.

«Jealousy? It is nothing but pride! » replies Judas of Alphaeus.

«No. I say that it is only a pretext to justify, somehow, their unjust behaviour

towards the Master. Under the cover of zeal for the Baptist, they succeed in driving Him away, without alienating the crowds too much » says Simon.

«I would unmask them.»

«Peter, we would do many things that He does not do.»

«Why does He not? »

«Because He knows it is better not to do so. All we have to do is to imitate Him. It is not for us to guide Him. And we must be happy about it. It is a great relief to have only to obey...»

«You are quite right, Simon » says Jesus, Who was walking ahead of them apparently pensive. «You are quite right. It is easier to obey than to command. It does not seem so, but it is. It is certainly easy when the spirit is good. And likewise it is difficult to command when the spirit is upright. Because a spirit that is not righteous, gives irrational orders and worse than irrational. Then it is easy to command. But... how more difficult it is to obey! When a man is responsible for a place or a group of people, he must always be charitable and fair, wise and humble, moderate and patient, firm but not obstinate. Oh! It is difficult!... For the time being you have but to obey. You must obey God and your Master. You, and you are not the only one, wonder why I do or do not do certain things, you wonder why God allows or does not allow such things. See, Peter, and all of you, My friends. One of the secrets of the perfect believer is not to set oneself as the interrogator of God. "Why do You do that?" a soul that is not completely formed asks God. And that soul seems to be taking the attitude of a wise adult before a little schoolboy and says: "That is not to be done. It is silly. It is wrong". Who is above God?

You now see that under the pretence of zeal for John I am being driven away. And you are scandalised. And you would like Me to put matters right by polemizing with those who maintain such principles. No, never. You have heard what the Baptist said through the mouths of his disciples: "He must grow greater, I must grow smaller". There is no regret in him, no clinging to his position. A saint is not attached to such things. He does not work to increase the number of his "own" followers. He has no followers of his own. He works to increase the believers in God. God alone is entitled to have followers. Therefore, as I do not regret that some people, in good or in bad faith, remain disciples of the Baptist, so he is not distressed, as you have heard, if some of his disciples come to Me. He disregards such numerical pettiness. He looks at Heaven. And I look at Heaven. Do not argue, therefore, among yourselves, whether it is fair or unfair that the Jews should accuse Me of snatching disciples from the Baptist, whether it is just or unjust to allow people to say that. Those are altercations of talkative women round the village fountain. Saints help one another, they give and exchange spirits with unreserved ease, smiling at the idea of working for the Lord.

I have baptized, nay, I made you baptize, because the spirit is so dull, nowadays, that it is necessary to present piety, miracles and doctrine in a material form to it. Because of such spiritual dullness I will have to avail Myself of the help of material substances when I want to make you work miracles. But believe Me, the evidence of holiness is neither in the oil, nor in the water, nor in any other ceremony. The time is about to come when an impalpable, invisible thing, which materialists cannot conceive, will be the queen, the "returning queen", powerful and holy with every holy thing and in every holy thing. Through it man will become again the "son of God" and will work what God works, because he will have God with him: Grace. That is the returning queen. Then baptism will be a sacrament. Then man will speak and understand the language of God and will give life and Life, he will give power of science and of strength, then... oh! then! But you are not yet mature to learn what Grace will grant you. Please help its coming by continuously training yourselves and forget useless and mean things.

There is the boundary of Samaria. Do you think I ought to speak there? »

«Oh! » They are all more or less scandalised.

«I solemnly tell you that there are Samaritans everywhere, and if I should not speak where there is a Samaritan, I should not speak anywhere. Come therefore. I will not make any effort to speak. But I will not disdain to speak of God if I am asked. One year is over. The second is beginning. It is between the beginning and the end. At the beginning the Master was still predominant. Now the Saviour is being revealed. The end will see the face of the Redeemer. Let us go. The

more a river approaches its estuary, the more it grows. I also am increasing the work of mercy because the end is approaching.»
«Are we going towards some big river after Galilee? Perhaps to the Nile? Or the Euphrates? » whisper some of the disciples.
«Perhaps we are going amongst the Gentiles...» reply others.
«Do not speak among yourselves. We are going towards "My" end. That is, towards the fulfilment of My mission. Listen carefully to what I say to you, because afterwards I will leave you and you will have to continue in My name. »

143. Photinai, the Samaritan Woman.
22nd April 1945.

«I will stop here. You go into town and buy what is necessary for our meal. We shall eat here.»
«Shall we all go? »
«Yes, John. You had better be all together.»
«And what about You? You will be left alone... They are Samaritans...»
«They will not be the worst enemies of Christ. Go. I will pray, while waiting for you. I will pray for you and for them. »
The disciples reluctantly go away, and they turn round three or four times to look at Jesus, Who has sat down on a little wall, exposed to the sun, near the low broad edge of a well. It is a big well, so wide that it seems a cistern. In summer it is shaded by tall trees, which are now bare. It is not possible to see the water, but the little puddles and ring marks of wet pitchers on the ground near the well, are clear signs that water has been drawn. Jesus sits down and meditates, in His usual attitude, His elbows resting on His knees, His hands stretched out and joined, His body slightly bent forward and His head lowered. When He feels the mild warmth of the sun, He lets His mantle drop from His head and shoulders and holds it round His waist. He raises His head and smiles at a flight of wrangling sparrows quarrelling over a large crumb of bread, which someone has dropped near the well.
But the sparrows fly away when a woman arrives near the well. With her left hand she is holding an empty amphora by one of its handles, whilst her right hand with a gesture of surprise pushes aside her veil to see who the man is who is sitting there. Jesus smiles at the thirty-five/ forty year old woman. She is tall, with a beautiful strongly marked figure. A Spanish type, we would say: a pale olive complexion, rather thick bright-red lips, dark eyes which are even exceedingly large, very dark eyebrows and hair, visible through her transparent veil. Also her rather plump features are typically oriental and slightly soft, as is customary with Arab women. Her dress is a multicoloured striped robe, which is held very tight round her waist and her plump sides and breast, and then falls to the ground in a kind of wavy fringe. She is wearing several rings on her rather plump dark fingers and bracelets on her wrists, which appear under her linen sleeves. Round her neck she wears a heavy necklace from which some medals are hanging I should call them amulets because they are of all shapes. Heavy ear-rings hang down as far as her neck and shine under her veil.
«Peace be with you, woman. Will you give Me some water to drink? I have walked a long way and I am thirsty.»
«Are You not a Judaeen? And You ask me, a Samaritan woman, to give You a drink? What has happened? Have we been rehabilitated, or have you been routed? A great event must have taken place, if a Judaeen speaks kindly to a Samaritan woman. But I should say to You: "I will not give You anything, to punish in You all the insults the Jews have been heaping on us for centuries".»
«You are right. A great event has taken place. And because of it many things have changed and many more will change. God has granted a great gift to the world and through it many things have changed. If you knew the gift of God and Who is saying to you: "Give Me a drink", perhaps you would have asked Him to give you a drink and He would have given you living water.»
«Living water is in the veins of the earth. It is in this well. But it is ours.»
The woman's tone is derisory and arrogant.
«Water comes from God. As bounty comes from God. As life comes from God. Everything belongs to the One Only God, woman. And all men come from God:»

Samaritans and Judaeans. Is this not Jacob's well? And is not Jacob the head of our race? If later on an error divided us, that does not change our origin.»

«Of course, it was our error, was it not? » the woman asks aggressively.

«Neither ours nor yours. It was the error of one who had lost sight of Charity and Justice. I do not wish to offend you or your race. Why do you wish to strike an offensive attitude? »

«You are the first Judaeans whom I hear speak thus. The others... But reverting to the well, yes, it is Jacob's and its water is so plentiful and clear that we in Sychar prefer it to other fountains. But it is very deep. You have neither amphora nor bucket. How could You, therefore, draw living water for me? Are You greater than our holy Patriarch Jacob, who found this abundant vein for himself, his sons and his cattle and left it to us as his souvenir and gift? »

«You are right. But whoever drinks this water, will be thirsty again. I instead have a water and whoever drinks it will not be thirsty again. But it is only Mine. And I will give it to whoever asks Me for it. And I solemnly tell you that whoever has the water I give him, will always be satisfied and will never be thirsty again, because My water will be an unfailing eternal spring.»

«What? I do not understand. Are You a magician? How can a man become a well? A camel drinks and lays a supply of water in his big stomach. But he then consumes it and it does not last all his life. And You say that Your water lasts a whole lifetime? »

«Even longer: it will last until eternal life. In those who drink it, it will gush until eternal life and will give germs of eternal life, because it is a spring of health.»

«Give me some of that water, if You really have it. I get tired coming here. If I have it, I will not be thirsty any more and I will never be ill or become old.»

«Is that the only thing of which you get tired? Of nothing else? And you feel only the need of drawing water to drink and satisfy your poor body? Think about it. There is something more important than your body. Your soul. Jacob did not procure only the water of the earth for himself and his sons. He was anxious to be holy and to bestow holiness, the water of God.»

«You call us heathens... If what You say is true, we cannot be holy...» The woman's tone is no longer insolent and ironical and she is submissive and somewhat confused.

«Also a heathen can be virtuous. And God, Who is just, will reward him for the good he has done. It will not be a complete reward, but I can tell you that between a guilty believer and an innocent heathen, God looks at the latter with less severity. And if you know you are such, why do you not come to the True God? What is your name? »

«Photinai.»

«Well, tell me, Photinai, are you sorry that you cannot aspire to holiness because you are a heathen, as you say, or because you are in the haze of an old error, as I say? »

«Yes, I am sorry.»

«Well, then, why do you not live at least as a virtuous heathen? »

«Lord!...»

«Yes, can you deny it? Go and call your husband and come back here with him.»

«I have no husband.» The embarrassment of the woman increases.

«You have spoken the truth. You have no husband. But you have had five men and you have one with you now who is not your husband. Was that necessary? Also your religion condemns lewdness. You have the Decalogue, too. Why, then, Photinai, do you live thus? Are you not tired of the exertion of being flesh for everybody, instead of being the honest wife of one man only? Are you not afraid of the evening of your life, when you will be all alone with your memories and regrets? And with your fears? Yes, all those. Fear of God and of ghosts. Where are your children? »

The woman lowers her head completely and does not reply.

«You have none in this world. But their little souls, whom you prevented from seeing the day of their birth, are reproaching you. And they always will. Jewels... beautiful dresses... a splendid house... a bountiful table... But emptiness, and tears, and interior misery. You are forlorn, Photinai. And only through sincere repentance, through God's forgiveness and consequently through your children's forgiveness, you can become rich again.»

«Lord, I see that You are a prophet. And I am ashamed...»

«And when you were doing evil things, were you not ashamed of yourself before the Father Who is in Heaven? Do not weep out of dejection before the Man... Come here, Photinai. Come near Me. I will speak to you of God. Perhaps you did not know Him well. And that is why you have been so faulty. If you had known the True God well, you would not have degraded yourself so much. He would have spoken to you and supported you...»

«Lord, our ancestors have worshipped on this mountain. You say that one must worship only in Jerusalem. But You said that there is only One God. Help me to see what I must do and where...»

«Woman, believe Me. Before long the Father will be worshipped neither on the mountain in Samaria nor in Jerusalem. You worship Him Whom you do not know. We worship Him Whom we know, because salvation comes from the Judaeans. I remind you of the Prophets. But the time will come, nay, it has already arrived, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, no longer according to the ancient rite, but to the new one, where there will be no sacrifice of animals consumed by fire. There will be the eternal sacrifice of the Immaculate Victim consumed by the Fire of Charity. It will be a spiritual cult in a spiritual Kingdom. And it will be understood by those who are able to worship in spirit and truth. God is Spirit. Those who worship Him must do so spiritually.»

«You speak holy words. I know, because we also know something, that the Messiah is about to come: the Messiah, He Who is called also "Christ". When He comes, He will teach us everything. Not far from here there is also one who is said to be His Precursor. And many go and listen to him. But he is so severe!... You are kind... and the souls of poor people are not afraid of You. I think that Christ will be good. They say that He is the King of Peace. Will it be long before He comes? »

«I have told you that His hour has already come.»

«How do You know? Are You perhaps one of His disciples? The Precursor has many disciples. Also Christ will have them. »

«I, Who am speaking to you, am Jesus Christ.»

«You!... Oh!...» The woman, who had sat down near Jesus, stands up and is about to run away.

«Woman, why are you running away? »

«Because I am struck with terror at being near You. You are holy.»

«I am the Saviour. I came here, although it was not necessary, because I knew that your soul was tired of wandering. You are disgusted with your food... I have come to give you a new food, which will remove your nausea and tiredness... Here are My disciples coming back with My food. But I have already been fed by giving you the first crumbs of your redemption.»

The disciples glance at the woman out of the corners of their eyes, more or less prudently, but no one speaks. She goes away forgetting about her amphora and the water.

«Here, Master » says Peter. «The people have treated us very well. Here is some cheese, fresh bread, olives and apples. Take what You want. It's a good job that woman left her amphora. We shall draw water with it quicker than with our small flasks. We shall have a drink and then we shall fill them. And we shall not have to ask the Samaritans for anything else. Neither shall we have to go near their fountains. Are You not eating? I wanted to get some fish for You, but there was none. Perhaps You would have preferred it. You look tired and pale.»

«I have a food which is unknown to you. I will have some of it and it will restore Me considerably.»

The disciples look at one another inquisitively.

Jesus replies to their silent questions: «My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to accomplish the work which He wants Me to complete. When a sower sows the seed, can he say that he has done everything and thus state that he can reap the harvest? Most certainly not. How much more there is still to be done before he may say: "My work is accomplished". And he cannot rest until that moment. Look at these little fields in the bright midday sunshine. Only a month ago, even less than a month ago, the soil was bare and dark because it was wet with rain. Look now. It looks as if it were covered by a light whitish veil, because of the many very pale-green corn stems, which have just come up and look even lighter because of the bright sunshine. That is the future crop and seeing

it you say: "It will be harvest time in four months. The sowers will employ reapers, because if one man is quite sufficient to sow his field, many men are required to reap the harvest. And they are all happy. Both the man who sowed a small sack of corn and now must prepare his granaries to store the crop, and those who in a few days earn enough to live on for a few months". Also in the spiritual field those who reap what I have sown will rejoice with Me and like Me, because I will give them the wages and crops due to them. I will give them what to live on in My eternal Kingdom. You have but to reap. I have done the hardest work. And yet I say to you: "Come. Reap the harvest in My field. I am glad that you burden yourselves with the sheaves of My corn. When you have harvested all the corn that I, without ever tiring, have sown everywhere, then the will of God will be fulfilled and I will sit at the banquet in the Celestial Jerusalem". Here the Samaritans are coming with Photinai. Be kind to them. They are souls coming to God.»

144. With the People of Sychar.
23rd April 1945.

A group of Samaritan dignitaries are coming towards Jesus, led by Photinai. «God be with You, Rabbi. This woman has told us that You are a prophet and that You do not disdain speaking to us. We beg You to stay with us and not to refuse to speak to us, because if it is true that we are cut off from Judah, that does not mean that only Judah is holy and that all the error is in Samaria. Also amongst us there are some just people.»

«I told her exactly the same. I will not impose Myself, neither will I reject those who seek Me. »

«You are just. The woman told us that You are Christ. Is that true? Reply to us in the name of God.»

«I am. The Messianic epoch has come. Israel is united by her King. And not only Israel.»

«But You will be the Messiah for those who... are not in error, as we are » remarks an imposing elderly man.

«Man, I see that you are their leader and I also see that you are honestly seeking the Truth. Now, listen to Me since you are learned in the holy scriptures. I was told what the Spirit said to Ezekiel, entrusting him with the prophetic mission: "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels, who have rebelled against Me... They are impudent and stubborn children... They may listen to you and then not keep your words, which are My words, because they are a rebellious house, but at least they will know that there is a prophet among them. Therefore, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, because they are unbelieving and rebellious... And you shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear you. Do what I tell you, hear what I say to you, be not rebellious like them. Eat, therefore, whatever food I give you". And I came. I do not flatter Myself and I do not expect to be received as a triumphant victor. But since the will of God is My honey, here I am to fulfil it, and if you wish I will tell you the words which the Spirit said to Me.»

«How can the Eternal Father have thought of us? »

«Because He is love, My children.»

«Not all the Rabbis in Judah say so.»

«But that is what the Messiah of the Lord tells you.»

«It is written that the Messiah is to be born of a virgin in Judah. Of whom and where were You born? »

«In Bethlehem Ephrata, of Mary of the House of David, by means of a spiritual conception. I ask you to believe Me.» Jesus' beautiful voice is a declaration of triumphant joy in proclaiming His Mother's virginity.

«Your face is shining with a bright light. No, it is not possible for You to lie. The faces of the children of darkness are gloomy and their eyes are grim. You are bright; Your eyes are as bright as the morning star and Your words are true. Please come to Sychar and teach the children of this people. Then You will go away... and we will remember the Star that appeared in our sky...»

«Why would you not follow it? »

«How can we? » They are talking while walking towards the town. «We are cut off. At least that is what they say. But we were born in this faith and we do not know whether it is right to abandon it. Further... well, I feel I can tell You. After all we have eyes to see and minds to think. When we pass through your country, on journeys or on business, not everything we see is so holy as to persuade us that God is with you Judaeans or with you Galileans.»

«I solemnly tell you that the remainder of Israel will be charged with not persuading and leading you back to God by means of good examples and charity, instead of offending and anathematising you.»

«How much wisdom there is in You. Have you all heard Him? »

They all nod assent whispering their admiration.

They have in the meantime reached the town and many people draw near while they walk towards a house.

«Listen, Rabbi. Since You are wise and good, please resolve a doubt of ours. A great deal of our future depends on it. As You are the Messiah and thus the Restorer of David's Kingdom, You must be happy to rejoin this severed limb to the body of the state. Are You not? »

«I am taking care not so much to reunite the severed parts of what is perishable and transient, as to lead back to God all the souls, and I am happy when I restore the Truth to a heart. But express your doubt.»

«Our fathers sinned. Since then the souls of Samaritans have been disliked by God. What benefit will we receive if we follow Good? We will always be like lepers in the eyes of God. »

«Your regret is the eternal dissatisfaction of all schismatics. Once again I will reply to you with Ezekiel: "All souls are Mine" says the Lord. "The soul of the father as well as the soul of the son. Only the soul that sins shall die. If a man is righteous, if he is not an idolator, if he does not fornicate, or steal or lend at an interest, if he has mercy both on the body and on the soul of his neighbour, he is righteous in My eyes and shall live a true life". And further on. "If a just man has a rebellious son, shall that son live because his father was a just man? He shall not live". And also: "If the son of a sinner is a righteous man, will he die like his father, because he is his son? No, he shall live eternal life because he was just". It would not be fair if one had to suffer for the iniquity of another. The soul that has sinned shall die. The soul that has not sinned shall not die. And if he who has sinned is repentant and comes to the justice, behold, he shall have true life, too. The Lord God, the One and Only Lord, says: "I do not want the death of the sinner, but I want him to repent and live". That is why He sent Me, o wandering children: that you may have true life. I am the Life. Who believes in Me and in Him Who sent Me will have eternal life, even if up to the present moment he was a sinner.»

«Here we are at my house, Master. Do You not detest entering it? »

«I detest only sin.»

«Come in, then, and stay. We shall break our bread together and then, if it is not a burden to You, You will explain the word of God to us. That word has a different flavour when it is explained by You... and we are tortured by a doubt: we do not feel sure that we are right...»

«Everything would be appeased if you dared to come openly to the Truth. May God speak to your hearts. It is getting dark. Tomorrow, at the third hour I will speak to you at some length, if you wish so. Go now with the Mercy which is close to you.»

145. Evangelization at Sychar.

24th April 1945.

Jesus is speaking to a large crowd in the centre of a square. He has climbed on a stone bench near the fountain. The crowds are around Him. Also the Twelve are

around Him... their faces are dismayed, or annoyed, or they clearly show disgust at certain contacts. Bartholomew and the Iscariot in particular clearly show their embarrassment and to be as far as possible from the Samaritans, the Iscariot is sitting astride the branch of a tree as if he wanted to dominate the scene, while Bartholomew is leaning against a door in a corner of the square. The prejudice is evident and clearly visible in all of them.

Jesus, on the contrary, has not changed His usual attitude in the least. Nay, I would say that He is endeavouring to prevent His majesty from frightening the people and at the same time He tries to let it shine to remove all doubts. He caresses two or three little ones and asks them their names, He takes an interest in an old man to whom He gives alms Himself, He replies to two or three questions, which are put to Him on private matters, not on general problems. The first one is the request of a father whose daughter had eloped and is now begging to be forgiven.

«Forgive her at once.»

«But I suffered because of her, Master. And I still suffer. In less than a year I have grown ten years older.»

«Forgiveness will relieve you.»

«It is not possible. The wound is still there.»

«That is true. But in the wound there are two parts that hurt. One is the undeniable affront you received from your daughter. The other is the effort to cease loving her. Remove at least the latter. Forgiveness, which is the highest form of love, will remove it. You must consider, poor father, that your daughter was born of you and is always entitled to your love. If you knew that she was suffering from a physical disease and that she would die, unless you cured her yourself, would you let her die? Most certainly not. Consider then that you, with your forgiveness can put an end to her trouble and bring her back to her wholesome instinct. Because you must realise that she was overwhelmed by the basest material instinct.»

«So You would advise me to forgive her? »

«You must.»

«How will I be able to see her move about the house, and not curse her for what she has done? »

«In that case you would not forgive her. Your forgiveness must not consist in opening once again the door of your house to her, but in reopening your heart. Be good, man. What? Shall we not have for our own child the patience we have for a restless steer? »

A woman, instead, asks Jesus whether she ought to marry her brother-in-law to give a father to her little orphans.

«Do you think he will be a real father to them? »

«Yes, Master, I do. They are three boys. It takes a man to guide them.»

«Marry him, then, and be a faithful wife to him, as you were to your first husband.»

The third man asks Him whether he will be doing the right thing or not by accepting an invitation to go to Antioch.

«Man, why do you want to go there? »

«Because I have not enough means here for myself and my large family. I met a Gentile who would employ me because he saw how skilful I am in my work and he would take on also my sons. But I would not like... the scruple of a Samaritan may seem strange to You, but there it is. I would not like to lose our faith. That man, You know, is a heathen! »

«So? Nothing contaminates unless one wants to be contaminated. Go to Antioch and be of the True God. He will guide you and you will be the benefactor of your master, who will acquire the knowledge of God through your honesty.»

He then begins speaking to the crowd.

«I have heard many of you and I have perceived that each of your hearts is rent by a secret sorrow, a grief, of which you are not even aware. Your sorrow has been accumulating for centuries and neither the reasons expressed by you nor the insults hurled at you can dissolve it. On the contrary it becomes deeper and deeper and weighs like snow that becomes ice.

I am not one of you, neither am I one of those who accuse you. I am Justice and Wisdom. And once again I will quote Ezekiel to solve your case. He speaks of Samaria and Jerusalem in a prophetic style, and he says that they are daughters of one mother and calls them Oholah and Oholibah. The first to fall

into idolatry was the former, whose name is Oholah, because she was already deprived of the spiritual help from union with the Father of Heaven. Union with God is always salvation. She changed true wealth, true power, true wisdom with the poor wealth, power and wisdom of one who was inferior to God, who was even lower than she was, and she was seduced to such an extent as to become the slave of the way of living of her seducer. She wanted to be strong, and instead became weak. She wanted to be superior, and became inferior. She became insane because she was imprudent. It is not easy for one to get rid of an infection, when one has imprudently become infected by it. You may say: "Inferior? No. We were great". Yes, you were great, but how? At what cost? You know. How many people, also amongst women, become rich at the dreadful cost of their honour! They achieve something that may come to an end. They lose something that never ends: their reputation.

When Oholibah saw that Oholah's folly had brought her wealth, she wanted to imitate her and became more deranged than her sister, and was twice as guilty, because she had the True God with her and she should never have trodden on the strength that she received from that union. And a terrible severe punishment was inflicted on the twice crazy fornicatrix Oholibah, and a more severe punishment will be imposed. God will turn His back on her. He is already doing so, in order to go to those who do not belong to Judah. Neither can God be accused of being unfair, because He does not impose Himself. He opens His arms to everybody, He invites everybody, but if one says to Him: "Go away", He goes away. He goes to seek love elsewhere, to invite other people, until He finds someone who says to Him: "I will come". I therefore say to you that you can find relief from your torture, you must find it, by meditating on what I told you. Oholah, recover your consciousness. God is calling you.

The wisdom of man consists in acknowledging his faults, the wisdom of the spirit lies in loving the True God and His Truth. Do not look at Oholibah, or Phoenicia, or Egypt, or Greece. Look at God. That is the Fatherland of every righteous soul: Heaven. There are not many laws, but one only: God's. Through the law one achieves Life. Do not say: "We sinned", but say: "We do not want to sin any more". You have the proof that God still loves you and that He has sent His Word to say to you: "Come". I say to you: "Come". Have you been offended and proscribed? By whom? By your own fellow creatures. But God is above them and He says to you: "Come". The day will come when you will rejoice because you were not in the Temple... Your hearts will rejoice at that. But souls will rejoice even more because God's forgiveness will already have descended upon the righteous hearts scattered throughout Samaria. Prepare His coming. Come to the universal Saviour, o children of God, who have lost your way.»

«Some of us at least would come. But those on the other side do not want us.»
«And once again with the priest and prophet I say to you: "I am about to take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Israel associated with him and I will join it to the stick of Judah and make them one stick..." Do not go to the Temple. Come to Me. I do not reject anyone. I am called the King dominating over everybody. I am the King of kings. I will purify all peoples if they wish to be purified. I will gather you together, o herds without shepherds or with idol-shepherds, because I am the Good Shepherd. I will give you one tabernacle only and I will place it in the midst of My believers. That tabernacle will be the source of life, the bread of life, it will be light, salvation, protection, wisdom. It will be everything, because it will be the Living One given as food to the dead to make them live, it will be God Whose holiness will overflow to sanctify. That is what I am and will be. The days of hatred, of incomprehension, of fear have come to an end. Come! People of Israel! People separated! People afflicted! People remote! You are a dear people, infinitely dear, because you are ill and weak, because you have been wounded by an arrow that has opened the veins of your souls and has let the vital union with your God escape. Come! Come to the bosom where you were born, come to the breast from which you received life. Kindness and warmth are still here for you. Come! Come to Life and to Salvation.»

Jesus says to the Samaritans of Sychar: «Before leaving you, as I have other children to evangelize, I want to show you the shining paths of hope, and set you on them saying to you: you may go safely as the goal is certain. Today I will not quote the great Ezekiel; I will quote Jeremiah's favourite disciple, a most great Prophet.

Baruch speaks for you. Oh! He really takes your souls and speaks on behalf of them all to the Sublime God Who is in Heaven. Your souls. I do not mean only the souls of the Samaritans, but all your souls, o families of the chosen people who have fallen into manifold sins; and He takes also your souls, o Gentile peoples, who feel there is an unknown God among the many gods you worship, a God Whom your souls perceive to be the Only True God and Whom your dullness prevents you from seeking and knowing, as your souls would wish. At least a moral law was given to you, o Gentiles and idolaters, because you are men, and man has in himself an essence that comes from God, and its name is spirit, which always speaks of and suggests nobility and urges to holy things in life. And you have compelled it to become the slave of your vicious flesh, infringing the human moral law that you had, thus becoming sinners, also from a human point of view and you lowered the concept of your faith and yourselves to a level of brutality that makes you inferior to animals. And yet listen. You all listen. The deeper your knowledge of the moral supernatural Law given to you by the True God, the more you will understand and, consequently, act accordingly.

He prays - and this is the prayer that is to be said by your hearts humiliated by a noble humility, which is not degradation or pusillanimity, but an exact knowledge of one's miserable conditions, as well as a holy desire to find means of improving them spiritually - Baruch thus prays: "Look down, Lord, from Your holy dwelling place, take heed of us and listen. Look at us, Lord and consider; the dead down in Sheol, whose breath has been taken from their bodies, are not the ones to give glory and due observance to the Lord; the person overcome with affliction, who goes his way bowed down and frail, with failing eyes and hungering soul, he is the one to give You glory, Lord, and due observance". And Baruch weeps humbly and every just soul should weep with him, seeing and calling by their true names the misfortunes that have turned a strong people into a sad, divided and subdued one: "We did not listen to Your voice and so You carried out what You had promised through Your servants the prophets... and behold the bones of our kings and of our ancestors have been dragged from their resting places and have been tossed out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night and people died in dreadful agony, from famine, sword and plague. And so because of the wickedness of the House of Israel and the House of Judah, You have reduced this Temple, where Your Name was invoked, to what it is today".

Oh! Children of the Father, do not say: "Both our Temple and yours have been rebuilt and are beautiful". No. A tree split by a thunderbolt from its top down to the roots will not survive. It may just vegetate in a miserable manner through an effort to live by means of the shoots coming from the roots, which are reluctant to die, but it will be barren brushwood, it will no longer be a healthy tree, laden with wholesome sweet fruit. The ruin that started with the separation, grows worse and worse, although the material structure does not appear to be damaged, on the contrary it looks beautiful and new. It crushes down the consciences that live in it. And then the hour will come when every supernatural flame will be extinguished and the Temple will be deprived of its very life, the Temple, an altar of precious metal, which can subsist only if it is continuously smelted by the warmth of its ministers' faith and charity; and icy, dull, soiled, full of dead bodies, it will become putrefaction upon which foreign crows and the avalanche of divine punishment will rush to ruin it completely.

Pray, children of Israel, weeping with Me, your Saviour. May My voice support yours and reach up to the throne of God, as it is able to. Who prays with Christ, the Son of the Father, is heard by God, the Father of the Son. Let us say the old just prayer of Baruch: "And now, Almighty Lord, God of Israel, every soul in anguish, every troubled heart cries to You. Listen and have pity, o Lord. You are a Merciful God, have mercy on us for we have sinned in Your sight. You sit enthroned for ever, and shall we perish continually? Almighty Lord, God of Israel, hear the prayer of the dead of Israel and of their sons, who have sinned against You. They did not listen to the voice of the Lord their God,

hence the disasters that have befallen us. Do not call to mind the misdeeds of our ancestors, but remember instead Your power and Your Name... Because we invoke Your Name and we turn from the wickedness of our ancestors, have mercy on us".

Pray thus and be truly converted, by returning to true wisdom, which is the wisdom of God. It can be found in the Book of God's commandments and in the Law that lasts for ever, and that I, the Messiah of God, have now come to bring to the poor of the world in its simple unchangeable form, announcing them the Gospel of the time of Redemption, of Forgiveness, of Love, of Peace. Who believes in that Word will reach eternal life.

I leave you, citizens of Sychar, who have been good to the Messiah of God. I leave you with My peace.»

«Stay a little longer.»

«Come back again.»

«No one will ever speak to us as You did.»

«May You be blessed, good Master.»

«Bless my little one.»

«Pray for me, since You are a Saint.»

«Allow me to keep one of Your fringes, as a blessing.»

«Remember Abel.»

«And me, Timothy.»

«And me, Jorai.»

«I will remember you all. Peace be with you.»

They go with Him for a few hundred yards out of town, and then they slowly go back...

147. Instruction to the Apostles and the Miracle of the Woman of Sychar.
26th April 1945.

Jesus is walking ahead of the apostles, alone, close to a hedge of prickly cactus, the leaves of which are shining in the sun and seem to be deriding all the other bare plants. One can see on them a few surviving fruits which age has coloured brick-red and an odd early flower pleasantly bright in its yellow-cinabar hue.

Behind Him, the apostles are whispering to one another, and I get the impression that they are not really speaking in praise of the Master. All of a sudden Jesus turns round and says: «Keep watching the wind and you will never sow, stare at the clouds and you will never reap. It is an old proverb and I follow it. And you can see that where you were afraid of ill winds and did not want to stop, I found a fertile soil and the possibility of sowing. And notwithstanding "your" clouds, which, may I tell you, you ought not to display where Mercy wants to show His sunshine, I am sure I have already harvested.»

«However, no one asked You for a miracle. Their faith in You is very odd! »

«And do you think, Thomas, that faith is evidenced only by requesting miracles? You are wrong. It is the very opposite. If a man wants a miracle to be able to believe, it means that without the tangible proof of the miracle, he would not believe. Who instead says: "I believe" in somebody else's word, shows the greatest faith.»

«So the Samaritans are better than we are! »

«I am not saying that. But in their state of spiritual disability they have shown a much greater capacity for understanding God than the believers in Palestine. You will find that very often in your lifetime, and I would ask you to remember this instance, so that you will know how to behave with the souls who turn to the faith in Christ.»

«But, Jesus, forgive me for telling You, I think that with all the hatred against You, it does You no good to give rise to new accusations. If the members of the Sanhedrin knew that You have...»

«You may very well say: "loved", because that is what I have done and I do, James. And since you are My cousin, you can understand that I can but love. I

have shown to you that I always love also those who were against Me amongst My kinsfolk and countrymen. And should I not love those people who respected Me, although they did not know Me? The members of the Sanhedrin can do all the harm they like. But it will not be the thought of such future evil that will stop the effusion of My omnipresent and omnieffective love. In any case... even if I did... I would not prevent the Sanhedrin from finding accusations in their hatred.»

«But, Master, You are wasting Your time in an idolatrous country, whilst so many places in Israel are expecting You. You say that every hour is to be consecrated to the Lord. Are the hours spent here not lost? »

«The day spent in gathering the lost sheep is not lost. It is not lost, Philip. It is said: "A man multiplies offerings by keeping the Law... but by having mercy he offers a sacrifice". It is said: "Give the Most High as He has given to you, generously as your means can afford". I do that, My friend. And the time devoted to sacrifice is not wasted. I show mercy and I make use of the means I received by offering My work to God. Therefore be calm. In any case... Who wanted a request for a miracle to be convinced that the people in Sychar believe in Me, is now satisfied. That man is certainly following us for some reason. Let us stop.»

A man in fact is coming towards them. He seems to be bent under a large bundle that he is carrying on his shoulders. When he sees the group stop, he stops, too.

«He wants to harm us. He stopped because he saw that we noticed him. Oh! They are Samaritans! »

«Are you sure, Peter? »

«Of course I am! »

«Well, then. You all stay here. I will go and meet him.»

«Never, my Lord. If You go, I will come, too.»

«Come, then.»

Jesus walks towards the man. Peter jogs along beside Him, curious and hostile at the same time. When they are a few yards from the man, Jesus says: «What do you want, man? Whom are you looking for? »

«For You.»

«Why did you not look for Me when I was in town? »

«I did not dare... If You had rejected me in the presence of everybody, I would have suffered too much and would have been ashamed.»

«You could have called Me as soon as I was alone with My disciples.»

«I was hoping to reach You when You were alone, as Photinai did. I also have a grave reason for being alone with You...»

«What do you want? What are you carrying on your shoulders so heavily? »

«My wife. A spirit has taken possession of her and has turned her into a dead body and a dull intelligence. I have to feed her, dress her and carry her like a baby. It happened all of a sudden, without any disease... They call her the "possessed woman". It causes me much pain. And work. And expenses. Look.» The man lays on the ground his bundle containing an inert body enveloped in a mantle, as if it were a sack, and he uncovers the face of a woman, who is still young. If she did not breathe, one would say that she was dead. Her eyes are closed, her mouth is half open... her face looks as if she had breathed her last.

Jesus bends over the poor woman lying on the ground, looks at her, looks at the man: «Do you think that I can? Why do you believe it? »

«Because You are Christ.»

«But you have not seen anything that proves it.»

«I heard Your word. That is enough.»

«Peter, do you hear him? What do you think I should do now, in the presence of such good faith? »

«Well..... Master..... You..... I..... As You wish, after all...» Peter is very embarrassed.

«Yes, I will do as I wish. Man, look.» Jesus takes the woman by the hand and says: «Go out of her. I want it.»

The woman, so far motionless, is shaken by a dreadful convulsion: at first she is silent, then she shouts and groans and finally bursts into a loud cry, during which she opens her eyes wide as if she were awaking from a nightmare. She then calms down and somewhat bewildered she looks around, staring first at Jesus, the

Unknown Man smiling at her..... she then looks at the dust on the road where she is lying, she gazes at a tuft of grass that has grown on the edge of the road and on which the tiny white-red heads of daisies seem pearls about to open out in a halo of rays. She looks at the cactus hedge, at the deep blue sky, and looking round she sees her husband..... who full of anxiety is watching every movement of hers. She smiles and now, fully free, she jumps to her feet and seeks refuge on the chest of her husband, who caresses and embraces her, weeping.

«What is it? How am I here? Why? Who is that man? »

«He is Jesus, the Messiah. You were ill and He has cured you. Tell Him that you love Him.»

«Oh! Yes. Thank You... But what was the matter with me? My children... Simon... I do not remember the past, but I remember I have some children...»

Jesus says: «You need not remember the past. Always remember the present day. And be good. Goodbye. Be good and God will be with you.» And Jesus withdraws quickly, followed by the blessings of both of them.

When He reaches the others who remained behind, close to the hedge, He does not speak to them. But He addresses Peter: «So? You were sure that that man wanted to hurt Me, what are you going to say now? Simon, Simon! How much you still lack to be perfect! How much you all lack! With the exception of their well known idolatry, you have all the sins of those people and arrogance in judging over and above. Let us have our meal now. We cannot reach before night the place I wanted to. We shall sleep in some barn, if we do not find anything better.» The Twelve, with a sense of reproach in their hearts, sit down without speaking and take their food. It is a peaceful day and the sun shines on the country which slopes towards a plain in mild undulations.

After their meal they stop for a little while, until Jesus stands up and says: «Simon and Andrew, come with Me. I am going to see whether that house is a friendly one or not.» And He goes away while the others stay and are silent, until James of Alphaeus says to Judas Iscariot: «Is that woman coming here not the woman of Sychar? »

«Yes, she is. I know her by her dress. I wonder what she wants.»

«She will be wanting to go her way » replies Peter sulkily.

«No, she is looking in our direction, shielding her eyes with her hand.»

They watch her until she is near them and asks in a low voice: «Where is your Master? »

«He has gone away. Why do you want Him? »

«I need Him.»

«He does not waste His time with women » replies Peter curtly.

«I know. He doesn't with women. But I am the soul of a woman who needs Him.»

«Leave her alone » suggests Judas of Alphaeus. And he replies to Photinai:

«Wait. He will soon be back.»

The woman withdraws to a little corner where the road bends and she remains still and silent, while no one pays attention to her. Jesus is soon back and Peter says: «Here is the Master. Tell Him what you want and be quick.»

The woman does not even reply to him, but goes towards Jesus and kneels down at His feet. She is silent.

«Photinai, what do you want from Me? »

«Your help, my Lord. I am so weak. And I do not want to sin any more. I have already told the man. But now that I am no longer a sinner, I know nothing. I do not know what good is. What shall I do? Please tell me. I am mud. But Your feet tread on the road to go towards souls. Trample on my mud, but come to my soul with Your advice.» She is weeping.

«You cannot follow Me, a lonely woman as you are. But if you really do not want to sin any more and you want to learn how not to sin, then go back to your house with a repentant mind and wait. The day will come, when amongst many more women who have also been redeemed, you will be able to be near your Redeemer and learn the science of Goodness. Go. Be not afraid, Persevere in your present will not to sin. Goodbye.»

The woman kisses the ground, stands up, retreats for a few yards, then goes away, towards Sychar.....

27th April 1945.

It is a clear moonlight night, so clear that the ground appears in all its details and the fields, covered with corn which has just come up, look like green-silver plush carpets, on which the country paths seem dark stripes, watched over by the tree trunks that are white on the moonlit side and completely dark on the other.

Jesus is walking steadfast and alone. He proceeds very fast along His way until He reaches a stream that is flowing down gurgling towards the plain in a north-east direction. He goes upstream as far as a lonely spot near a woody slope. He moves to one side, climbs up a steep path and arrives at a natural cave on the side of the hill.

He goes in and bends over a body that is lying on the ground and can be seen only indistinctly in the moonlight, which shines on the path outside, but does not illuminate the cave. He calls him: «John.»

The man awakes and sits up, still drowsy. But he soon realises Who is calling him and jumps to his feet, then prostrates himself saying: «How is it that my Lord came to me? »

«To make your heart and Mine happy. You wanted Me, John. Here I am. Get up. Let us go out into the moonlight and sit and talk on the rock near the grotto.»

John obeys, gets up and goes out. But when Jesus sits down, he kneels down in front of Christ. He is wearing a sheepskin, which hardly covers his very lean body, and he pushes back his long dishevelled hair, which had fallen over his eyes, to see the Son of God better.

The contrast between them is very strong. Jesus is pale and fairhaired, His hair is soft and tidy and His beard is trimmed round the lower part of His face. John is like a bush of very dark hairs, in which two deep set eyes can be seen: two feverish eyes, I would say, as they shine so much in their jet black setting.

«I have come to thank you. You have fulfilled and are fulfilling, with the perfection of Grace within you, your mission as My Precursor. When the hour comes, you will enter Heaven beside Me, because you will have deserved everything from God. And in the expectation, you will already be in the peace of the Lord, My beloved friend.»

«I will enter peace very soon, my Master and God, bless Your servant to strengthen him for his last trial. I am aware it is now near and that there is still one witness I have to bear: the witness of my blood. And You are aware more than I am, that my hour is about to arrive. The merciful bounty of Your Divine heart has brought You here, to fortify the last martyr of Israel and the first of the new era. Tell me only one thing: will I have to wait long for Your coming? »

«No, John. Not much longer than the time that elapsed between your birth and Mine.»

«May the Most High be blessed for that. Jesus... may I call You so? »

«You can, because of our blood and your holiness. The Name, which also sinners pronounce, can be pronounced by the holy one in Israel. It is salvation for them, let it be kindness to you. What do you want from Jesus, your Master and cousin? »

«I am about to die. As a father is anxious for his children, so I am anxious for my disciples. My disciples... You are a Master and You know how fondly we love them. My only fear in dying is that they may get lost like sheep without a shepherd. Will You please gather them. I give You back the three who are Yours and who have been perfect disciples while waiting for You. They, and Matthew in particular, really possess wisdom. I have some more and they will come to You. Allow me to entrust those three to You personally. They are the dearest.»

«And they are dear to Me. Do not worry, John. They shall not perish. Neither those three, nor the other true disciples of yours. I will collect your inheritance and look after it as the dearest treasure received from the perfect friend and servant of the Lord.»

John prostrates himself to the ground, and what seems impossible in such an austere personage, he bursts into tears sobbing out of spiritual joy.

Jesus lays a hand on his head: «Your joyful and humble tears are in unison with a song of long ago at the sound of which your little heart leapt out of joy. The song and your tears are the same hymn of praise to the Eternal Father, Who "has done great things, He that is Mighty, to humble souls". Also My Mother is about

to intone once again the song that She sang then. But later, the greatest glory will come also to Her as to you after your martyrdom. I convey also Her greetings to you. You deserve all respect and comfort. Here it is only the hand of the Son of man, which is laid on your head, but Light and Love are descending from the open Heavens to bless you, John.»

«I do not deserve so much. I am Your servant.»

«You are My John. That day at the Jordan, I was the Messiah Who was being revealed; here, now, it is your cousin and God Who wishes to give you the viaticum of His love as God and as a relative. Get up, John. Let us kiss each other goodbye.»

«I do not deserve so much. I have longed so much for it, all my life. But I dare not do that to You. You are my God.»

«I am your Jesus. Goodbye. My soul will be near yours until peace comes. Live and die in peace for the sake of your disciples. That is all I can give you for the time being. But in Heaven I will give you one hundredfold, because you have found grace in the eyes of God.»

Jesus has lifted him and embraced him, kissing him on his cheeks and being kissed by him. Then John kneels once again and Jesus lays both hands on his head and prays with His eyes turned to Heaven. He seems to be consecrating him. He is impressive. They are silent for some time. Then Jesus takes His leave with His kind salutation: «May peace be always with you » and He resumes the same road as before.

149. Jesus Teaches the Apostles.

28th April 1945.

«My Lord, why do You not rest during the night? Last night I got up and did not find You. Your place was empty.»

«Why were you looking for Me, Simon? »

«I wanted to give You my mantle. I was afraid You might feel cold in the limpid but very cold night.»

«And were you not cold? »

«In many years of misery I got accustomed to being badly dressed, badly fed and badly lodged... That valley of the dead!... How horrible! Just now it was not the case. But the next time we go to Jerusalem, because we will certainly go there, come, my Lord, to that place of death. There are so many unhappy people there... and their physical misery is not the worst... What most tortures and consumes them is their desperation.... Do You not think, my Lord, that lepers are too harshly treated? »

The Iscariot replies to the Zealot, who is pleading the cause of his old companions, before Jesus does: «So you would leave them amongst the people? So much the worst for them if they are lepers! »

«That's all we need to make the Jews martyrs! How lovely it would be to have lepers walking in the streets with the soldiers and other things!...» exclaims Peter.

«I think it is a fair and wise step to keep them confined » remarks James of Alphaeus.

«Yes. But it should be done in a charitable manner. You do not realise what it is to be a leper. You cannot speak about them. If it is fair to take due care of our bodies, why are we not equally fair to the souls of lepers? Who speaks to them of God? And God only knows how much they need to think of God and of peace in their utter desolation! »

«Simon, you are right. I will go to them. Because it is just and to teach you all such mercy. So far I have cured the lepers that I met by chance. So far, that is, until I was driven out of Judaea. I addressed the great people in Judaea, as they are the most remote and in the greatest need of redemption, in order to be of help to the Redeemer. As I am now convinced that such an attempt is quite useless, I am abandoning it. I will no longer address the mighty ones, but the lower and miserable people in Israel. And the lepers in the valley of the dead will be amongst them. I will not disappoint the faith that those, who have been evangelized by the grateful leper, have in Me.»

«How do You know, my Lord, that I did that? »

«As I know what friends and enemies, whose hearts I search, think of Me.»
«Goodness gracious! You really know everything about us, Master! » shouts Peter.
«Yes, I do. Also that you, and not only you, wanted to send Photinai away. Do you not know that you are not allowed to send a soul away from good? Do you not know that to get to the heart of a town you must be most kind and merciful also towards those whom human society, which is not holy because it is not identified with God, calls and judges unworthy of mercy? But do not be upset because I know all that. Be sorry only that the sentiments of your hearts are not approved of by God and endeavour not to have them in future. I told you, the first year is over. In the new year I will proceed along My way with new forms. In the second year you must make progress, too. Otherwise it would be useless for Me to get tired evangelizing, and super-evangelizing you, My future priests.»
«Did You go and pray, Master? You promised to teach us Your prayers. Will You do that this year? »
«I will. But I want to teach you to be good. Goodness is already a prayer. But I will do it, John.»
«And will You teach us also to work miracles this year? » asks the Iscariot.
«Miracles are not taught. They are not the game of a juggler. A miracle comes from God. Who has grace in the eyes of God obtains it. If you learn to be good, you will have grace and obtain miracles.»
«But You are not answering our question. Simon asked You and John asked You, but You have not told us where You went last night. It could be dangerous to go out alone in a heathen country.»
«I went to make a righteous soul happy and since he is doomed to death, I went to collect his inheritance.»
«Did You? Was it a large one? »
«Yes, Peter, very large and of great value. The fruit of the work of a true just man.»
«But I have not seen anything in Your bag. Are they jewels which You are carrying on You? »
«Yes, jewels that are most dear to My heart.»
«Let us see them, Lord.»
«I will have them when the man doomed to death dies. For the time being he needs them, and I need them, leaving them where they are.»
«Has he invested them at an interest? »
«Do you think that money is the only valuable thing? It is the most useless and filthy thing on earth. It is only useful for material things, for crimes and for hell. Only rarely man makes use of it for a good purpose.»
«Well, if it is not money, what is it? »
«Three disciples formed by a saint.»
«You have been to the Baptist. Oh! Why? »
«Why You always have Me with you. And you all together are not worth a single finger nail of the Prophet. Was it not right that I should go to take God's blessing to the holy one in Israel to fortify him for his martyrdom? »
«But if he is holy... he does not need to be fortified. He can manage by himself!...»
«The day will come when "My" saints will be brought before judges and condemned to death. They will be saints, in the grace of God, comforted by faith, hope and charity. And yet I can already hear their cries, the cries of their souls: "Lord, help us in this hour!". Only with My help My saints will be strong in persecutions.»
«We are not the ones You are referring to, are we? Because I am utterly incapable of suffering.»
«That is true. You are not capable of suffering. But, Bartholomew, you have not been baptized yet.»
«Yes, I have.»
«With water. You still need another baptism. Then you will be able to suffer.»
«I am already old.»
«And when very old, you will be stronger than a young man.»
«But You will help us just the same, will You not? »
«I shall always be with you.»
«I will endeavour to get accustomed to suffering » says Bartholomew.
«I will always pray, from now on, to obtain this grace from You » says James of Alphaeus.

«I am old and all I ask for is to precede You and enter peace with You » says Simon Zealot.

«I... I do not know what I would like. Whether to precede You or to be near You and die together » says Judas of Alphaeus.

«I will be unhappy if I survive You. But I will be comforted by preaching You to the people » states the Iscariot.

«I am of the same opinion as Your cousin » says Thomas.

«I, instead, am with Simon the Zealot » says James of Zebedee.

«And what about you, Philip? »

«Well... I say that I do not know what to think about it. The Eternal Father will give me what is best.»

«Oh! Keep quiet. You would think that the Master is to die soon! I do not want to think of His death! » exclaims Andrew.

«You are quite right, my dear brother. You are young and healthy, Jesus. You will have to bury us all, I mean the ones who are older than You.»

«What if they killed Me? »

«Let that never happen to You, but I will avenge you.»

«How By a blood vengeance? »

«Well... also by that means, if You will allow me. Otherwise, by my profession of faith amongst peoples, I will confute the accusations moved against You. The world will love You because I Will be indefatigable in preaching You.»

«That is true and that is what will happen. And what about you, John, and you, Matthew? »

«I must suffer and wait until I have washed my soul by suffering a great deal» says Matthew.

«And I... I do not know. I would like to die at once so that I would not see You suffer. I would like to be near You to comfort you in Your agony. I would like to live for a long time to serve You. I would like to die with You to enter Heaven with You. I would like everything, because I love You. And I think that I, the least of my brothers, will be able to do all that, if I know how to love You properly. Jesus, increase Your love! » says John.

«You mean: "Increase my love"» remarks the Iscariot.

«No. I say: "Increase Your Love". Because the more He will inflame us with His love, the more we shall love.»

Jesus draws the pure passionate John to Himself and kisses his forehead saying:

«You have revealed a mystery of God about the sanctification of hearts. God effuses Himself to just souls, and the more they surrender to His love, the more He increases it and their holiness grows greater. That is the mysterious and ineffable work of God and of souls. It is accomplished in mystical silence, and its power, which cannot be described by human words, creates indescribable masterpieces of holiness. It is not a mistake, but a wise prayer, to ask God to increase His love in one's heart.»

150. Jesus at Nazareth. «Son, I Will Come with You.»
30th April 1945.

Jesus is alone. He is walking fast along the main road near Nazareth. He enters the village and directs His steps towards His house. When He is near it He sees His Mother. She is also going towards the house and Her nephew Simon is with Her, carrying a bundle of firewood. Jesus calls Her: «Mother! »

Mary turns round exclaiming: «Oh! My Blessed Son! » and they both run to meet each other, while Simon drops the bundle to the ground and like Mary runs towards Jesus and greets Him wholeheartedly.

«Mother, I have come. Are You happy now? »

«So happy, Son. But... If You came only because I begged You, I tell You that it

is not right for Me or for You to listen to the call of blood, rather than to Your mission.»

«No, Mother. I have come for other reasons as well.»

«Is it really true, Son? I thought, I wanted to believe that they were false rumours and that You were not hated so much...» There are tears in Mary's voice and in Her eyes.

«Do not weep, Mother. It grieves Me so much. I need Your smiles.»

«Yes, Son. That is true. You see so many harsh faces of enemies, that You need so much smiling love. But here, see? Here is She Who loves You on behalf of everybody...» Mary is leaning lightly on Her Son, Who embraces Her shoulders, and while walking slowly towards the house, She endeavours to smile, to expel all grief from Jesus' heart.

Simon has picked up his bundle and is walking beside Jesus.

«You are pale, Mother. Have they grieved You so much? Have You not been well? Have You tired Yourself excessively? »

«No, Son, no one has grieved Me. My only sorrow is that You are far from Me and they do not love You. Here everybody is good to Me. I will not even mention Mary and Alphaeus; You know what they are like. Also Simon, see how good he is. He is always like that. He has helped Me all these past months. He is now supplying Me with wood. He is so good. Also Joseph is. They are so thoughtful of their Mary.»

«May God bless you, Simon, and may He bless also Joseph. I forgive you for not loving Me yet as the Messiah. Oh! You will eventually love Me as Christ! But how could I forgive you for not loving Her? »

«It is fair and peaceful to love Mary, Jesus. You are loved, too..... only, see, we are too much afraid for You.»

«Yes, you love Me with a human love. You will come to the other love.»

«You, too, Son, are pale looking and thin.»

«Yes, You look older. I can see that, too » remarks Simon.

They go into the house, and Simon, after laying the firewood in its place, withdraws discreetly.

«Son, now that we are alone, tell Me the truth. The whole truth. Why did they drive You away? » Mary speaks holding Her hands on Jesus' shoulders and staring at His thin face.

Jesus smiles kindly but sadly: «Because I tried to bring man back to honesty, justice and to the true religion.»

«But who accuses You? The people? »

«No, Mother, the Pharisees and the scribes, with the exception of a few just ones amongst them.»

«But what have You done to incur their accusations? »

«I told them the truth. Do You know that it is the biggest mistake with men? »

«What could they say to justify their accusations? »

«They told lies. The ones You know and many more.»

«Tell Your Mother. Place Your sorrow, all Your sorrow on My bosom. A mother's bosom is accustomed to sorrow and is happy to consume it, to remove it from the heart of her son. Give Me Your sorrow, Jesus. Come here, as You were wont to do when a child, and leave all Your bitterness.»

Jesus sits on a little stool at His Mother's feet and tells Her all about the months spent in Judaea, without any grudge and without concealing anything.

Mary caresses His hair with a heroic smile on Her lips to fight back the tears shining in Her blue eyes.

Jesus mentions also the necessity of approaching women to redeem them and His grief at not being able to do so owing to the wickedness of men.

Mary nods assent and then She decides: «Son, You must not deny Me what I want. From now on I will come with You when You go away. I will come at any time, in any season, to any place. I will defend You from false accusations. My simple presence will cause the mud to fall off. And Mary will come with Me. She is so anxious to. That is what is needed near the Holy One, against the demon and against the world: a mother's heart.»

Jesus is possibly going towards the lake. He certainly arrives at Cana and directs His steps towards Susanna's house. His cousins are with Him. While they are in the house and they rest and take some food, Jesus, to Whom His relatives and friends are listening as they should always do, teaches those good people in a very simple way. He also comforts the husband of Susanna, who appears to be ill. She is in fact absent and while I hear them talk continuously of how much she suffers, a well dressed man enters and prostrates himself at Jesus' feet.

«Who are you? What do you want? »

While the man is still sighing and weeping, the landlord pulls Jesus by the hem of His tunic and whispers: «He is an officer of the Tetrarch. Don't trust him too much.»

«Speak up. What do you want from Me? »

«Master, I heard that You are back. I have been waiting for You as one waits for God. Come to Capernaum at once. My son is so ill that his hours are numbered. I saw John, Your disciple. He told me that You were coming here. Come, please come at once, before it is too late.»

«What? Can You, a servant of the persecutor of the Holy One in Israel, believe in Me? You do not believe in the Precursor of the Messiah. So, how can you believe in the Messiah? »

«That is true. We are guilty of incredulity and of cruelty. But have mercy on a father! I know Chuza. I have seen Johanna. I have seen her before and after the miracle. And I believed in You.»

«Quite! You are such an incredulous and wicked generation that you will not believe without signs and miracles. You lack the essential quality that is necessary to obtain a miracle.»

«It is true. It is all very true. But You can see... I believe in You now and I beg You: come to Capernaum at once! I will have a boat ready for You at Tiberias, so that You may come quicker. But please come before my child dies! » and he weeps desolately.

«I am not coming just now. But go to Capernaum. Your son is cured as from this moment and he will live.»

«May God bless You, my Lord. I believe You. But as I want all my household to welcome You when You come to Capernaum, come to my house.»

«I will come. Goodbye. Peace be with you.»

The man rushes out and soon after the trot of a horse can be heard.

«But is the boy really cured? » asks Susanna's husband.

«Is it possible for you to think that I tell lies? »

«No, my Lord. But You are here and the boy is there.»

«There is no barrier, no distance for My spirit.»

«Well, then, my Lord. You changed water into wine at my wedding, please change my tears into happy smiles. Cure my Susanna.»

«What will you give Me in exchange for that? »

«The amount of money You want.»

«I will not stain what is holy with Mammon's blood. I am asking your spirit what it will give Me.»

«Myself, if You wish so.»

«And if I asked, without any words, a great sacrifice? »

«My Lord, I ask You to grant physical health to my wife and the sanctification of us all. I don't think I can say that anything is too much to have that...»

«You are suffering agonies because of your wife. But if I restored her to health and I got her to become My disciple for ever, what would you say? »

«That... You are entitled to do it and that... I will imitate Abraham in his readiness to the sacrifice.»

«You are right. Listen, everybody: the time of My Sacrifice is approaching. Like a course of water it is running fast and incessantly to the sea. I must accomplish what I have to do. And human hardness precludes so much of the field of My mission. My Mother and Mary of Alphaeus will come with Me when I go away amongst people that do not love Me yet or will never love Me. My wisdom knows that women will be able to help the Master in those precluded fields. I have come to redeem also women and in the future century, in My time, women will be seen serving the Lord and the servants of the Lord as priestesses. I have chosen My disciples. But to elect women who are not free, I must ask fathers and husbands to do it. Do you agree? »

«Lord, I love Susanna. And so far I have loved her more as a body than as a soul. But after Your teaching, something is already changed in me and I look at my wife as a soul besides as a body. A soul belongs to God and You are the Messiah, the Son of God. I cannot deny Your right on what belongs to God. If Susanna wants to follow You, I will not oppose her. I only beg You to work the miracle that will cure her body and my feelings...»

«Susanna is cured. In a few hours' time she will come here to tell you how happy she is. Let her soul follow its impulse without any mention of what I have just said. You will see that her soul will come to Me spontaneously as a flame tends upwards. But because of that, her love of a wife will not be stifled. On the contrary it will rise to the highest degree, which is to love each other with the better part: with your souls.»

«Susanna belongs to You, Lord. She was to die a very painful slow death. And once she was dead, I would have lost her for ever in this world. But as You say, I will still have her beside me, to lead me on to Your way. God gave me her, and God is taking her away from me. Blessed be the Most High in giving and in taking.»

152. In Zebedee's House. Salome Is Accepted as a Disciple.
2nd May 1945.

Jesus is in a house, which, from what the people living in it say, I understand to be the house of John and James. With Jesus, beside the two apostles, there are Peter and Andrew, Simon Zealot, the Iscariot and Matthew. I do not see the others.

James and John are most happy. They come and go from their mother to Jesus and viceversa, like butterflies which do not know which of two equally loved flowers they should prefer. Mary Salome, who is also most happy, caresses each time her big boys, while Jesus smiles.

They must already have had their meal, because the table is still laid. But the two disciples at all costs want Jesus to eat some bunches of white grapes, which their mother has preserved and which must be as sweet as honey. What would they not give Jesus?

But Salome wants to give and receive something better than grapes and caresses. And after being lost in thought for a little while, looking at Jesus, then at Zebedee, she makes up her mind. She goes near Jesus Who is sitting with His back to the table, and kneels down before Him.

«What do you want, woman? »

«Master, You have decided that Your Mother, and the mother of James and Judas should come with You, and also Susanna is coming, and the great Johanna of Chuza will certainly come as well. If only one woman comes, all the others who venerate You, will come. I would like to be one of them. Take me, Jesus. I will serve You with all my love. »

«You have Zebedee to look after. Do you not love him any more? »

«Oh! Of course I love him. But I love You more. Oh! I do not mean that I love You as a man. I am sixty years old, I have been married for almost forty, and I have never seen any other man but my husband. I am not going to be crazy now that I am old. Neither is my love for my Zebedee going to end because of my old age. But You... I am not good at speaking. I am a poor woman. I will tell You as best I can. Thus: I love Zebedee with my constant inborn femininity. I love You with the spirit You have aroused in me with Your words and what James and John have told me. It is something completely different... but so beautiful.»

«It will never be so beautiful as the love of a very good husband.»

«Oh! No. It is much more beautiful. Oh! Don't take it amiss, Zebedee! I still love you with all my heart. But I love Him with something, which is still Mary, but it is no longer Mary, your poor wife, it is something more... Oh! I do not know how to tell you! »

Jesus smiles at the woman who does not wish to offend her husband, but cannot conceal her new great love. Also Zebedee smiles gravely, and goes near his wife, who, still on her knees, turns round to look at her husband and at Jesus alternately.

«Do you realise, Mary, that you will have to leave your home? And you are so

proud of it! Your doves, your flowers... this vine that bears such sweet grapes of which you are so proud... your beehives, which are the most famous ones in the village... and you will no longer have your loom on which you have woven so much linen and so much woollen cloth for your dear ones... And what about your little nephews? What will you do without your little nephews? »
«Oh! My Lord! What do all these things matter: walls, doves, flowers, vines, beehives, looms, they are all good and dear things, but so insignificant as compared to You and to loving You?! My little nephews... well! Yes! I will feel sorry that I cannot put them to sleep on my lap or hear them call me... But You are worth more! Oh! You are worth more than all the things You mentioned! And if those things were taken all together and because of my weakness they were as dear or dearer than serving and following You, I would cast them aside, with the tears of a woman, to follow You with the smile of my soul. Take me, Master. John, James, will you tell Him... and you too, my husband. Be good. Help me. »
«All right. You will come with the others. I wanted you to meditate carefully on the past and the present, on what you leave and what you get. But come, Salome. You are mature to enter My family. »
«Oh! Mature! I am less than a child. But You will forgive my errors and hold me by the hand. You... because, coarse as I am, I will be much ashamed before Your Mother and before Johanna. I will be ashamed before everybody. Except You. Because You are the Good One and You understand, pity and forgive everything.»

153. Jesus Speaks to His Disciples of Women's Apostolate.
3rd May 1945.

«What is the matter with you, Peter? You look discontented » asks Jesus, Who is walking along a country path under almond-trees in blossom, which announce to men that the worst season is over.
«I am thinking, Master.»
«You are thinking. I know. But you do not seem to be thinking of happy things! »
«As You know everything about us, You already know my thoughts.»
«Yes, I do. Also God the Father knows the needs of men, but He wants in man the intimacy that discloses his needs and asks for help. I can tell you that you are wrong in being vexed.»
«So my wife is not less dear to You? »
«Of course not, Peter. Why should she? There are many dwelling places of My Father in Heaven. And many are the tasks of men on the earth. And they are all blessed, provided they are fulfilled in a holy manner. Could I possibly say that all the women who do not imitate the Maries and Susanna are disliked by God? »
«Certainly not! Also my wife believes in the Master, but she does not follow the example of the other women » says Bartholomew.
«Neither does my wife nor my daughters. They are staying at home, but they are always ready to give us hospitality, as they did yesterday » says Philip.
«I think my mother will do the same. She cannot leave everything... she is all by herself » says the Iscariot.
«It is true! I was sad because I thought mine was so... so little... oh! I cannot explain! »
«Do not criticise her, Peter! She is an honest woman » says Jesus.
«She is very shy. Her mother had them all under her thumb, both her daughter and her daughters-in-law » says Andrew.
«But she should have changed in all the years she has been with me! »
«Oh! Brother! You are not all that sweet-tempered yourself, you know. If a person is shy you are like a spoke in his wheel. My sister-in-law is very good and the best proof is that she has always tolerated with patience her mother and her bad temper, and you and your overbearance.»

They all laugh at Andrew's outspoken conclusion and at Peter's astonished face when he hears of his overbearance.

In addition Jesus laughs heartily. He then says: «The faithful women who do not feel like leaving their homes to follow Me are equally useful to Me by staying at home. If they all wanted to come with Me, I would have to ask some of them to remain. Now that some women are going to join us, I will also have to see to them. It would be neither decent nor wise for the women to be without a dwelling place while they move about. We can rest anywhere. A woman has different necessities from men, and needs a shelter. We can all sleep in one place. But they could not stay with us, both because of the respect due to them and because of their more delicate constitution. We must never tempt Providence and nature beyond their limits. Now, of every friendly house, where there is one of your women, I will make a shelter for their sisters. I will do that with your house, Peter, with yours, Philip, with yours, Bartholomew, and with yours, Judas. We cannot expect our women to travel around incessantly, as we do. Instead we shall have them waiting for us, at the meeting place, from which we shall move in the morning and go back in the evening. We shall give them instructions for the hours of rest and the world will no longer be able to grumble, if other unhappy women come to Me, neither shall I be prevented from listening to them. The mothers and wives that follow us will defend their sisters and Me against the slander of the world. You can see that I am making a quick trip to greet My friends or where I know that I will have friends. I am not doing that for Myself. I am doing that for the weaker disciples who by means of their weakness will support our strength and make it helpful to many more creatures.»

«You said that we are going to Caesarea now. Who is there? »

«Creatures seeking the True God are to be found everywhere. Springtime is already announced by the pinkish-white almond blossoms. The cold days are over. In a few days' time I will decide upon the places where we shall stop and shelter the women disciples, and we shall start moving around again, to spread the word of God, without worrying about our sisters, without any fear of slander and both their patience and their kindness will be a lesson to you. The hour of rehabilitation of women is almost here. There will be a great flowering of holy virgins, wives and mothers in My Church. »

154. Jesus at Caesarea on Sea Speaks to the Galley-Slaves.
4th May 1945.

Jesus is in the centre of a beautiful wide square, from which a very wide road leads off, one which is almost an extension of the square as far as the seaside. A galley must have left the harbour only recently and it is taking to the open sea driven by the wind and by the oarsmen. Another one is manoeuvring to enter the harbour, because its sails are being furled and the oars are worked on one side only to veer round into a suitable position. The harbour cannot be seen from the square, but it must be nearby. On the sides of the square there are rows of large houses, the typical walls of which have almost no openings. There are no shops.

«Where are we going now? You wanted to come here, instead of going to the eastern side and this is the heathen district. Who do You think will listen to You here? » says Peter reproachfully.

«Let us go over there, to that corner towards the seaside. I will speak there.»

«You will be speaking to the waves.»

«Also the waves were created by God.»

They go. They are now just at the corner and they can see the harbour into which the galley they saw before is now slowly entering and is moored at its place. Some sailors are idling along the quays. Some fruit-sellers chance going towards the Roman boat to sell their goods. Nothing else.

Jesus, leaning with His back against the wall, really seems to be speaking to the waves of the sea. The apostles, not very happy with the situation, are all around Him, some standing, some sitting on stones scattered here and there, to be used as benches.

«Foolish is the man who, seeing that he is powerful, healthy and happy, says: "What do I need? Whom do I need? Nobody. I need nothing, I am self-sufficient; therefore God's decrees and moral laws mean nothing to me. My only law is to do what I can, without considering whether it is good or bad for other people".»

A vendor turns round on hearing the sonorous voice and comes near Jesus Who continues: «That is how a man and a woman without wisdom and faith speak. But if that proves a more or less great power, it also evidences a relationship with Evil.»

Some men come off the galley and other boats and come towards Jesus.

«A man, not by words of mouth, but by deeds proves that he is related to God and to Virtue, when he considers that life is more changeable than the waves of the sea, which one moment are calm and soon after stormy. Likewise the power and wealth of today may turn into misery and incapacity tomorrow. Then what will a man do if he is bereft of union with God? How many on the galley were one day happy and mighty and are now slaves and considered criminals! Criminals: therefore twice slaves, of the human law, which is derided in vain because it exists and punishes its transgressors, and of Satan who for ever takes possession of criminals, who do not repent and hate their crimes.»

«Hail, Master! You are here!? Do You know me? »

«May God come to you, Publius Quintilianus. See? I have come.»

«And You are here, in the Roman district. I was not hoping to see You again. But I am very happy to hear You.»

«And I am happy, too. Are there many men chained to the oars on that galley?»

«Yes, quite a large number. Mostly war prisoners. Are You interested in them? »

«I would like to approach that boat.»

«Come. Get away from here » he orders the few people who had come near and who draw back at once, mumbling rude remarks.

«You may leave them. I am accustomed to being pressed by crowds.»

«I can take You so far, not any farther. It's a military galley.»

«It is enough. May God reward you.»

Jesus resumes speaking while the Roman, in his splendid uniform, seems to be mounting guard beside Him.

«Slaves by misfortune, that is, slaves only once. Slaves for a lifetime. But every tear that falls on their chains, every blow that strikes them writing pain on their flesh, files their handcuffs, adorns what does not die, opens to them the peace of God, Who is the friend of His poor unhappy children, and Who will give them as much joy as the pain they suffered here.»

Some men of the crew look out from the bulwarks of the galley and listen. None of the galley slaves are there, of course. But Jesus' powerful voice certainly reaches them through the rowlock sockets and it spreads through the quiet air at low tide. Publius Quintilianus is called by a soldier and goes away.

«I want to tell these unhappy men who are loved by God, to be resigned to their misfortune, and to turn their pains into flames that will soon unfasten the chains of the galley and of their lives, ending in a desire for God. Having endured the poor day, which is our life, a dark, stormy, fearful, painful day, they thus enter the day of God, a bright, serene, fearless and joyful day. You will enter the great peace, the infinite freedom of Paradise, o martyrs of a painful destiny, provided you are good in your suffering and you aspire to God.» Publius Quintilianus comes back with other soldiers and he is followed by a litter carried by slaves, and the soldiers make room for it.

«Who is God? I am speaking to Gentiles who do not know who God is. I am speaking to the children of the peoples subdued who do not know who God is. In your forests, o Gauls, Iberians, Thracians, Germans, Celts, you have a sham god. A soul is naturally inclined to worship, because it remembers Heaven. But you

cannot find the True God, Who put a soul into your bodies, a soul equal to the soul we people of Israel have, equal to the soul of the mighty Romans who have subdued you, a soul that has the same duties and the same rights to Good and to which the Good One, that is the true God will be faithful. Be equally faithful to Good. The god or gods that you have worshipped so far, learning his or their names on your mothers' knees; the god of whom you no longer think because you do not feel any comfort coming from him to relieve your suffering, the god that perhaps you hate and curse in your daily despair, is not the True God. The True God is Love and Piety. Were perhaps your gods like that? No, they were not. They were also hard, cruel, false, hypocrites, vicious, thieves. And now they have abandoned you, without the least comfort, which is the hope of being loved and the assurance of a rest after so much suffering. It is so because your gods do not exist. But God, the True God, Who is Love and Piety, and Who I can assure you exists, is He Who made the sky, the seas, the mountains, the forests, the plants, the flowers, the animals and man. He is the One Who inspires conquerors to treat the poor people of the world with mercy and love, as He is Mercy and Love.

O mighty masters, consider that you all come from the same origin. Do not act cruelly against those who by misfortune have come under your power, and be human also to those whom a crime has tied to the bench of a galley. Man sins many times. No man is without sins which are more or less secret. If you considered that, you would be really good to your brothers, who, not so lucky as you are, have been punished for crimes which you also have committed, without, however, being punished for them.

Human justice is such a doubtful thing in judging, that it would be dreadful if divine justice were like it. There are guilty people who do not appear to be so, whereas innocent people are considered guilty. Let us not ask why. It would be too grave an accusation against unjust men who hate their fellow men! There are people who are really guilty, but have been led to perpetrate a crime by overbearing circumstances that somewhat extenuate their crime. Be therefore human, you who are in charge of galleys. Above human justice there is a much higher divine justice. The justice of the True God, Who created kings and slaves, rocks and grains of sand. He watches you; both you on the oars and you who are in charge of the crew; woe betide you if you are cruel without any reason. I, Jesus Christ, the Messiah of the True God can assure you: at your death He will tie you to an eternal galley, and will entrust the demons with a blood-stained lash and you will be tortured and struck exactly as you did. Because, if according to human law a criminal is to be punished, you must not overstep all limits. Remember that. A man who is powerful today may be miserable tomorrow. God only is eternal.

I would like to change your hearts, and above all I would like to untie your fetters, give you back your freedom and send you back to your fatherlands. But, My dear galley-slaves, you are My brothers, you cannot see My face, but your sorely wounded hearts are well known to Me; instead of the freedom and fatherlands, which I cannot give you now, while you are the poor slaves of mighty men, I will give you a greater freedom and Fatherland. For your sake I have become a prisoner Myself, far from My fatherland, I will redeem you by offering Myself in ransom, because you are not the disgrace of the world, as men call you, but the shame of man, who forgets the limits of the rigours of war and justice. I will make a new law for you on the earth and a pleasant abode for you in Heaven. Remember My Name, o children of God, who are weeping. It is the name of a Friend. Repeat it in your suffering. Be sure that, if you love Me, you will have Me, even if we never see one another on the earth. I am Jesus Christ, the Saviour, your Friend. I comfort you in the name of the True God. May peace come to you soon.»

A crowd of people, mainly Romans, have gathered round Jesus, Whose new ideas have astonished everybody.

«By Jove! You have made me ponder on new things, of which I had never thought before. I feel they are true...» Publius Quintilianus looks at Jesus, pensive and moved at the same time.

«It is so, My friend. If man used his brains, he would never go so far as to commit a crime.»

«By Jove, by Jove! Wonderful words! I must remember them! You said: "If man used his brains..."»

«... he would never go so far as to commit a crime.»
«It is true. You are really a great man, You know? »
«Every man who wanted, could be as great as I am, if he were all one with God.»
The Roman continues his sequence of «by Joves » in increasing admiration.
Then Jesus says to him: «Can I give some solace to those galley-slaves? I have some money... some fruit, some comfort, that they may know that I love them.»
«Give me it. I can do that. On the other hand there is a lady over there who can do much. I will ask her.» Publius goes to the litter and speaks through the curtains that have been slightly drawn. He comes back. «I am authorised to do it. I will see to the distribution, so that the jailors may not take advantage of it. And it will be the only time a soldier of the Empire deals mercifully with war slaves.»
«The first, but not the only time. The day will come when there will be no slaves, and even before that My disciples will go among galley-men and slaves and call them brothers.»
A further sequence of «by Joves » can be heard in the calm air while Publius is waiting to have enough wine and fruit for the galley-slaves. Before going on board the galley he whispers near Jesus' ear: «Claudia Procula is in there. She would like to hear You again. In the meantime she wants to ask You something. Go and see her.»
Jesus goes towards the litter.
«Hail, Master.» The curtain is drawn a little, showing a beautiful woman about thirty years old.
«May the desire for wisdom come upon you.»
«You said that a soul remembers Heaven. Therefore, that thing which You say we have within us, is it eternal? »
«Yes, it is eternal. That is why it remembers God. It remembers the God Who created it.»
«What is the soul? »
«The soul is the true nobility of man. You are famous because you belong to the Claudi family. A man is even more so because he belongs to God. In your veins there is the blood of the Claudi, the mighty family, which, however, had a beginning and will come to an end. In man, because of his soul, there is the blood of God. Because a soul is the spiritual blood - as God is a Most Pure Spirit - of the Creator of man: of the Eternal, Almighty, Holy God. Because of the soul, which is in him and which is alive as long as it is united to God, man is eternal, powerful and holy.»
«I am a pagan. So I have no soul...»
«You do have it. But it has fallen into a state of lethargy. Wake it up to the Truth and to Life...»
«Goodbye, Master.»
«May Justice conquer you. Goodbye.»
«As you have seen, here also I had people listening to Me » says Jesus to the disciples.
«Yes, but with the exception of the Romans, who will have understood You? They are barbarians! »
«Who? All of them. Peace is with them and they will remember Me more than many others in Israel. Let us go to the house where they are offering us hospitality for our meal.»
«Master, that woman is the same one who spoke to me on the day that You cured the sick man. I saw her and I recognised her » says John.
«You can see, therefore, that even here there was someone waiting for us. But you do not seem to be very happy about it. I will have accomplished a great deal when I succeed in persuading you that I have come not only for the Jews, but for all the peoples, and I have prepared you for them all. And I tell you: remember everything of your Master. There is no event, however trifling it may seem, that may not be a lesson for you one day during your apostolate.»
No one replies and a sad smile of pity appears on Jesus' lips.
This morning He had such a smile also for me...
I was in a state of such deep depression that I began to weep over so many things, the tiredness of writing and writing with the firm belief that so much bounty of God and work of little John are utterly useless, not being the least. And weeping I invoked my Master, and when out of kindness He came exclusively for me, I told Him what worried me.

He shrugged His shoulders as if He wished to say: «Forget about the world and its nonsense », and then He caressed me saying: «So what? Would you not like to help Me any more? Does the world not want to know My words? Well, let us repeat them to each other, for My joy in mentioning them to a faithful heart, for yours in hearing them. The weariness of the apostolate!... More depressing than any other work! It deprives the serenest day of its light and the sweetest food of its sweetness. Everything becomes ashes and dirt, nausea and bitterness. But, My dear soul, these are the hours in which we take upon ourselves the weariness, the doubts, the misery of the worldly people who die because they do not possess what we have. And they are the hours in which we do more. I told you also last year. "To what advantage?" wonders the soul submerged by what submerges the world, that is, by the waves sent by Satan. And the world drowns. But the soul nailed to the cross with its God does not drown. It is in darkness for a moment and sinks under the nauseating wave of spiritual tiredness, then it emerges fresher and more beautiful. Your expression: "I am no longer good for anything" is the consequence of such tiredness. You would never be good for anything. But I am always I, and thus you will always be good for your task of mouthpiece. Of course, if I saw that My gift were hidden avariciously like a heavy most valuable gem, or it were used imprudently, or out of indolence it were not protected by means of the safety precautions commanded by human wickedness in such cases, to guard the gift and the person through whom the gift is granted, I would say: "Enough of that". And this time without any possible recurrence. Enough for everybody, with the exception of My little soul, which today looks just a little flower in a downpour. And with such caresses can you doubt My love for you! Cheer up! You helped Me in wartime. Help Me again, now... There is so much to be done.»

And I calmed down under the caress of the long hand and of the very kind smile of My Jesus, so candid as when He is all for me.

155. Cure of the Little Roman Girl at Caesarea.
5th May 1945.

Jesus says:

«Little John, come with Me, as I have to make you write a lesson for the consecrated people of the present time. Watch and write.»

Jesus is still at Caesarea on Sea. He is no longer in the same square as yesterday, but further inland, from where the harbour and ships can still be seen. There are many warehouses and shops and as on the ground, in this open space, there are mats with various kinds of goods, I realise that it is near the market place, which was perhaps located near the harbour and warehouses, for the convenience of seamen and of the people buying goods brought by sea. There is a lot of shouting and bustling among the people. Jesus with Simon and His cousins, is waiting for the others who are buying the food that is needed. Some children look curiously at Jesus, Who caresses them lovingly while speaking to His apostles. Jesus says: «I am sorry to see dissatisfaction because I approach the Gentiles. But I can but do what I must do and be good to everybody. At least you three and John must endeavour to be good; the others will follow you and imitate you.»

«How can one be good to everybody? After all they despise and oppress us, they do not understand us, they are full of vices...» says James of Alphaeus apologetically.

«How can one do that? Are you happy that you were born of Alphaeus and Mary? »

«Of course I am. Why do You ask me? »

«And if God had asked you before you were conceived, would you have chosen to be born of them? »

«Certainly. But I do not understand.»

«If instead, you were born of a Gentile, and you heard someone accuse you of wanting to be born of a heathen father, what would you have said? »

«I would have said... I would have said: "It is no fault of mine. I was born of him, but I might have been born of someone else". I would have said: "You are unfair in accusing me. If I do no harm, why do you hate me?".»

«Exactly, also these people, whom you despise because they are pagans, can say the same. It is no merit of yours, if you were born of Alphaeus, a true Israelite. You can only thank the Eternal Father, Who granted you a great gift, and out of gratitude and humility you can endeavour to take to the True God those who did not receive such a gift. One must be good.»

«It is difficult to love those whom we do not know.»

«No. It is not. Look. You, little fellow, come here.»

A little boy, about eight years old, who is playing in a corner with two other little lads, comes near Jesus. He is a strong boy, with very dark hair and a fair complexion.

«Who are you? »

«I am Lucius, Caius Lucius, of Caius Marius, a Roman, the son of the Decurion of the guards, who remained here after he was wounded.»

«And who are those? »

«They are Isaac and Toby. But we must not say, because they are not allowed to play with us. The Jews would hit them.»

«Why? »

«Because they are Jews and I am a Roman. They are forbidden to associate with us.»

«But you are playing with them. Why? »

«Because we are fond of one another. We always play together dice or jumping. But we have to hide.»

«And would you love Me? I am a Jew, too, and I am not a boy. Just imagine: I am a Master, something like a priest.»

«What do I care? If You love me, I will love You. And I love You because You love me.»

«How do you know? »

«Because You are good. Who is good, loves.»

«There you are, My friends. That is the secret to love: to be good. Then you love without considering to which faith other people belong.»

And Jesus, holding little Caius Lucius by the hand, goes and caresses the little Jewish children, who are frightened and hide in a passage way and He says to them: «Good children are angels. Angels have one fatherland only: Paradise. They have only one religion: the religion of the One God. They have only one Temple: the Heart of God. Like little angels, always love one another.»

«But if they see us they will hit us...»

Jesus shakes His head sadly but does not reply...

A tall shapely woman calls Lucius, who leaves Jesus saying: «My mother! » and shouts to the woman: «I have a big friend. He is a Master!...»

The woman does not go away with her son, on the contrary, she comes near Jesus and asks Him: «Hail. Are You the Galilean who spoke at the harbour yesterday? »

«Yes, I am..»

«Wait for me, then. I'll be back in a moment » and she goes away with her little son.

In the meantime the other apostles have also arrived, with the exception of Matthew and John, and they ask: «Who was she? »

«A Roman, I think » reply Peter and the others.

«What did she want? »

«She told us to wait here. We shall soon find out.»

Some people have come near them in the meantime and are waiting curiously.

The woman comes back with other Romans. «So You are the Master? » asks one who looks like a servant of a rich family. After receiving an answer in the affirmative, he asks: «Would it upset You if You had to cure the little daughter of one of Claudia's friends? The child is choking to death and the doctor does not know the cause of it. She was all right last night. This morning she is in agony.»

«Let us go.»

They take a few steps along a street towards the place where they were yesterday

and they arrive at a wide open main entrance of a house where Romans appear to be living.

«Just a moment.» The man rushes in and almost immediately looks out again and says: «Come in.»

But before Jesus can go in, a young ladylike woman comes out. Her extremely pitiful state is very obvious. She is holding in her arms a little child, only a few months old, completely inert, livid with suffocation. I would say that she is suffering from a lethal diphtheritis and is about to breathe her last. The woman clings to Jesus' chest like a shipwrecked person to a rock. Her tears prevent her from speaking.

Jesus takes the baby, whose very pale tiny hands with nails already blue are shaken by fits, and lifts her up. Her little head hangs down motionless. The mother, no longer a proud Roman in front of a Jew, has fallen at Jesus' feet, in the dust, sobbing, her face raised, her hair dishevelled, pulling at Jesus' tunic and mantle with her outstretched arms. Behind and round her there are Romans of the household and Jewish women of the town, looking at her.

Jesus wets His right hand forefinger with saliva, puts it into the little panting mouth, pressing it down the throat.

The child writhes and becomes darker in the face. The mother cries: «Don't! Don't! » and she writhes as if she were pierced by a blade. The people are holding their breath.

Jesus pulls His finger out with a mass of putrid membranes. The child writhes no longer, cries for a few seconds, then calms down and smiles innocently, shaking her hands and moving her lips like a little bird, that chirps flapping its little wings while waiting to be fed.

«Take her, woman. Feed her. She is cured.»

The mother is so bewildered that she takes the child and still kneeling in the dust she kisses and caresses her and breast-feeds her. She seems to be out of her wits, as if she had forgotten everything except her child.

A Roman asks Jesus: «How did You do that? I am the Proconsul's doctor and I am clever. I tried to remove the obstruction, but it was too far down!... But You... so...»

«You are clever. But the True God is not with you. May He be blessed. Goodbye.» And Jesus is about to go away.

But a small group of Israelites feel they should interfere. «Why did You take the liberty of approaching foreigners? They are corrupted and unclean, and whoever approaches them, becomes such.»

They are three and Jesus stares at them severely and then says: «Are you not Haggai, the man from Azotus, who came here last Tishri to negotiate business with the merchant at the foundation of the old fountain? And are you not Joseph of Ramah, who came here to consult the Roman doctor, and you know, as well as I do, why? So? Do you not feel unclean? »

«A doctor is never a stranger. He cures bodies and all bodies are alike.»

«And souls are even more so. After all, what did I cure? The innocent body of a child and by doing so I hope to cure the souls of strangers, which are not innocent. Therefore both as a doctor and as the Messiah I can approach anybody.»

«No, You cannot. »

«No, Haggai? And why do you deal with the Roman merchant? »

«I only approach him through goods and money.»

«And as you do not touch his body, but only what was touched by his hands, you do not think that you are contaminated. Oh! How blind and cruel you all are!

Listen, everybody. In the very book of the Prophet, whose name this man bears, it is written: "Ask the priests this question on the Law: 'If a man carries consecrated meat in the fold of his gown and with this fold touches bread, broth, wine or food of any kind, does such food become holy?'. The priests answered: 'No, it does not'. Haggai then said: 'If a man made unclean by contact with a corpse touches any of this, does it become unclean?'. The priests answered: 'Yes, it does'."

By means of such shifty, false, inconsistent behaviour, you bar and condemn God and accept only what is profitable to you. Then there is no more indignation, no disgust, no horror. Provided no personal detriment is caused to you, you decide whether a thing is clean or unclean, whether it makes one clean or not. And how can you, liars as you are, state that what has been sanctified by contact with holy flesh or some holy thing, does not make holy what it touches; and what has

touched an unclean thing can make unclean what it touches?

Do you not realise that you are belying yourselves, false ministers of a Law of Truth, exploiters of that very same Law, which you twist as if it were a hempen rope, when you are anxious to profit by it, you hypocritical Pharisees? Under religious pretexts you give vent to your human envious malice, entirely human, you desecrators of what belongs to God, revilers and enemies of the Messenger of God. I solemnly tell you that every action, every conclusion, every movement of yours is motivated by a complex shrewd mechanism, where the wheels, springs, weights and rods are your selfishness, your passions, your insincerity, your hatred, your anxiety to overwhelm people, your envy.

Shame! Greedy, trembling, spiteful, you live in the supercilious fear of being overcome by someone who may not belong to your own caste. You thus deserve to be like the one who frightens and irritates you! As Haggai says, of a heap of twenty measures you make one of ten, and of fifty barrels you make twenty, and you pocket all the difference, whereas to set an example to men and for the love to be given to God, you should add something of your own to the heap of the measures and to the number of the barrels, for the benefit of those who are hungry, instead of taking it away. You thus deserve to be made barren by a burning wind and by rust and hail stones, in all the deeds of your hands. Who are those amongst you who come to Me? Those whom you consider dung and filth, who are so ignorant that they do not even know that there is a true God, they come to the One Who brings them that God, Who is present in His deeds and in His words. You, instead, have built a niche for yourselves and you stay in there, as arid and cold as idols awaiting incense and worship. And since you consider yourselves gods, you deem it useless to think of the True God, as one should think of Him, and you consider dangerous that other people, who are not like you, should dare what you do not dare. In fact you cannot dare, because you are idols and servants of the Idol. But he who dares, can do it, because not he, but God works in Him.

Go! Tell those who sent you to spy on Me, that I disdain merchants who do not feel contaminated if they sell goods or their fatherland or the Temple to those from whom they receive money. Tell them that I feel disgusted at the brutes, who worship only their own flesh and blood, for the recovery of which they do not consider the contact with a foreign doctor to be contaminating. Tell them that the measure is the same for everybody and that there are not two measures. Tell them that I, the Messiah, the Just Admirable Counsellor, upon Whom the Spirit of the Lord shall rest with His seven gifts, Who will not judge by what appears to the eyes, but by the secrets of hearts, Who will not condemn according to what His ears hear, but by the spiritual voices He will hear in every man, Who will side with the humble and judge the poor with righteousness, the One Who I am, because that is Who I am, is already judging and smiting those who on the earth are nothing but earth. And the breath of My lip will slay the wicked and destroy their dens, but will be Life and Light, Freedom and Peace for those who desirous of justice and faith will come to My Holy Mountain to be sated with the Science of the Lord. That is Isaiah, is it not?

My people. Everything comes from Adam and Adam comes from My Father. Everything is therefore the work of the Father and it is My duty to gather all men together for the Father. And I bring them to You, o Holy, Eternal, Almighty Father. I shall lead the stray children back to You, after gathering them together by means of loving words, under My pastoral rod, which is like the one Moses raised against the deadly snakes. That You may have Your Kingdom and Your people. And I make no difference because in the depths of all men I see something that shines brighter than fire: a soul, a spark of Your Eternal Brightness. O My eternal desire! O My untiring will!

This is what I want and what I crave for. That the whole earth may sing Your Name. That mankind may call You Father. A Redemption that will save everybody. A fortified will that will make every man obedient to Your will. An eternal triumph that will fill Paradise with an everlasting hosanna... Oh! Multitude of Heavens! Behold, I see the smile of God... and that is the reward compensating all human harshness.»

The three men have fled in the hail of reproaches. All the others, both Romans and Jews, are gaping. The Roman woman, with her child, who has sucked her fill and is sleeping peacefully in her lap, is still where she was, almost at Jesus' feet, weeping, overwhelmed by maternal joy and spiritual emotion. Many are moved

to tears by the last words of Jesus Who seems to be flashing with glory in His ecstasy.

And Jesus, lowering His eyes and returning with His spirit from Heaven back to the earth, sees the crowd and the mother... and passing by, after waving goodbye to everybody, He caresses her lightly, blessing her for her faith. And He walks away with His disciples, while the crowds, still amazed, remain where they were...

(The young Roman woman, unless it is a casual resemblance, is one of the Roman women who were with Johanna of Chuza on the way to Calvary. As no one here called her by her name, I am not sure.)

156. Annaleah Devotes Herself to God as a Virgin.

6th May 1945.

Jesus with Peter, Andrew and John, knocks at the door of His house in Nazareth. The door is opened at once by His Mother, Whose face brightens with a beautiful smile on seeing Jesus.

«Welcome home, My Son! Since yesterday I have had with Me a pure dove waiting for You. She came from far away. The person who brought her here could not stay longer. As she asked for My advice, I told her what I could. But only You, My Son, are the Wisdom. You are welcome, too » She says to the disciples. «Come in and refresh yourselves.»

«Yes, stay here. I am going at once to see the girl who is waiting for Me.» The three disciples are very curious, but show their curiosity in different ways. Peter stares intently in all directions, almost hoping to see through the walls. John looks as if he wanted to read on Mary's face the name of the unknown girl. Andrew, who on the other hand has blushed, stares intently at Jesus and both his eyes and his lips seem to be trembling with a silent entreaty. Jesus pays no attention to any of them. While the three make up their minds and go into the kitchen, where Mary offers them some food in the warmth of the fireplace, Jesus draws the curtain that conceals the door opening on to the kitchen garden and goes out into it.

The mild sunshine makes more airy and dream-like all the blooming branches of the tall almond-tree. The only tree in blossom, the tallest in the kitchen garden, looks splendid in its silk white-pink dress, compared with the poverty of all the others: the pear-tree, the apple-tree, the fig-tree, the pomegranate, the vines which are still all barren, stately in its soft bright veil, which contrasts with the drab humility of the olive trees: it seems to have caught with its long branches a wispy cloud, lost in the blue field of the sky, and to have adorned itself with it to say to everybody: «The wedding of springtime is coming. Rejoice, plants and animals. It is the time for kisses with the winds, the bees, the flowers. It is the time for kisses under the tiles, or in the thick of woods, o little birds of God and snow-white sheep. Kisses today, offspring tomorrow, to perpetuate the work of our Creator God.»

Jesus with His arms folded on His chest, standing in the sun, smiles at the serene gracefulness of His Mother's kitchen garden, with its bed of lilies recognizable from their first leaves, its still bare rose-bushes and silvery olive leaves, and many other families of flowers spread among the humble beds of legumes and vegetables, which are just becoming green. Clean, tidy and unassuming, it also seems to exhale the purity of perfect virginity.

«Son, come to My room. I will bring her to You, because she ran there when she heard so many voices.»

Jesus enters His Mother's room, the chaste, the most chaste little room, which

heard the words of the angelical conversation and which exhales, even more than the kitchen garden, the virginal, angelical, holy essence of Her Who has lived in it for years and of the Archangel who venerated his Queen in it. Have thirty years gone by or did the meeting take place only yesterday? Also today a distaff holds its soft and almost silvery tuft of wool and the thread is on the spindle, folded embroidery is on the shelf near the door, between a parchment roll and a copper amphora in which there is a thick almond branch in bloom; also today the striped curtain, lowered on the mystery of the virginal dwelling, is moved by a gentle breeze, and the bed, neat in its corner, still has the genteel look of the bed of a girl who has just reached the threshold of youth. What will one dream or has dreamt of on the low pillow?...

The curtain is softly raised by Mary's hand; Jesus, Who was contemplating that abode of purity, standing with His back to the door, turns round.

«Here, My Son. I have brought her to You. She is a little lamb. You are her Shepherd » and Mary, Who has come in holding by the hand a slender brunette young girl, who blushes vehemently when she appears in Jesus' presence, quietly withdraws letting the curtain down.

«Peace to you, child. »

«Peace... Lord...» The girl, deeply moved, is speechless, but she kneels down and bows her head.

«Stand up. What do you want from Me? Do not be afraid...»

«I am not afraid... but... now that I am in front of You... after longing so much... what seemed easy and necessary to tell You... I cannot remember... it does not seem what it was... I am silly... forgive me, my Lord...»

«Do you want a grace for this world? Do you need a miracle? Have you souls to convert? No? What, then? Speak up! You had so much courage and now are losing heart? Do you not know that I am the One Who increases strength? Yes? You do? Well, then, speak as if I were a father for you. You are young. How old are you? »

«Sixteen years, my Lord.»

«Where have you come from? »

«From Jerusalem.»

«What is your name? »

«Annaleah ... »

«The dear name of My grandmother and of many more holy women of Israel, and joined to it, to make one only, the name of the good, faithful, loving, meek wife of Jacob. It will be a good omen to you. You will be a model wife and mother. No? You are shaking your head? You are weeping? Have you been rejected? No? Your fiancé perhaps died? Has no one proposed to you yet? »

The girl always shakes her head. Jesus takes a step forward, caresses her and forces her to raise her head and look at Him... Jesus' smile overcomes the girl's excitement. She takes heart: «My Lord, I could be a wife and a happy one, thanks to You. Do You not recognise me, my Lord? I am the girl who suffered from tuberculosis, the dying fiancée, whom You cured at Your John's request... After Your grace I... I have had another body: this healthy one in the place of the dying one I had before; and I have had another soul... I do not know. I did not feel the same... The joy of being cured, and consequently the certainty I could get married - my regret in dying was that I could not get married - they only lasted for a few hours. And then...» The girl becomes franker and franker, she finds the words and the ideas that she had lost in the excitement of being alone with the Master... «...And then I felt that I should not be only selfish, and say only: "Now I will be happy", but that I should think of something else, something that came to You and to God, Your Father and mine. Something that, although small, should express my gratitude. I gave the matter a lot of thought and when the following Sabbath I saw my fiancé I said to him: "Listen, Samuel. Without the miracle I would have died in a few months' time and you would have lost me for ever. Now I would like to offer a sacrifice to God, with you, to say to God that I praise Him and thank Him". And Samuel, because he loves me, said at once: "Let us go to the Temple together and offer a sacrifice". But that was not what I wanted. I am a poor and common girl, my Lord. I know very little and I can do much less. But through Your hand, which You laid on my diseased breast, something had come not only into my corroded lungs, but also into my heart. It was health to my lungs, and wisdom to my heart. And I realised that the sacrifice of a lamb was not the sacrifice wanted by my soul that... that loved

You.» The girl becomes silent, blushing after her profession of love.

«Go on without any fear. What did your soul want? »

«To sacrifice something worthy of You, the Son of God! And so... so I thought it should be something spiritual like what comes from God, that is, the sacrifice of postponing my wedding, for Your sake, my Saviour. A wedding, You know, is a great joy. When one is in love it is a great thing! One longs to... is anxious to celebrate it!... But I was no longer the same person as a few days previously. I no longer wanted my wedding as the dearest thing... I told Samuel... and he understood me. He also wanted to be a nazirite for one year, starting on the day which was to be the day of our wedding, that is the day after the calends of Adar. In the meantime he has been looking for You, because he wanted to love and know Him Who had given him back his fiancée: You. And he found You, after many months, at the Clear Water. I came too... and Your word completed the change of my heart. Now my previous vow is no longer sufficient for me... Like that almond-tree out there, which in the warmer and warmer sunshine has revived after being dead for months and has blossomed and will leaf and then bear fruit, so I have continuously grown in the knowledge of what is better. The last time, when I was already sure of myself and of what I wanted - I have pondered on the matter all these past months - the last time I went to the Clear Water, You were no longer there... They had driven You away. I wept and prayed so much that the Most High heard me and persuaded my mother to send me here with a relative who was going to Tiberias to speak to the courtiers of the Tetrarch. The steward told me that I would find You here. I found Your Mother... and Her words, only listening to Her and being beside Her these two days, have completely matured the fruit of Your grace.» The girl has knelt down as if she were in front of an altar, her arms folded on her breast.

«All right. But what do you want exactly? What can I do for you? »

«Lord, I would like... I would like a great thing. And only You, the Donor of life and health, can give it to me, because I think that what You can give, You can also take away... I would like You to take the life You gave me, during the year of my vow, before it ends...»

«Why? Are you not grateful to God for the life you received? »

«So grateful! Infinitely! But for one thing only: because by living by His grace and by Your miracle I have understood what is best.»

«Which is? »

«Which is to live like angels. As Your Mother, my Lord... as You live... as Your John lives... The three lilies, the three white flames, the three beatitudes of the earth, my Lord. Yes. Because I think that it is a beatitude to possess God and God is possessed by the pure. I believe that who is pure is a Heaven with God in its centre and the angels around... Oh! My Lord! That is what I would like... Little have I heard of what You, Your Mother, the disciple and Isaac have said. Neither have I approached anyone else who could tell me Your words. But I feel as if my soul heard You all the time and You were its Master... I have told You everything, my Lord...»

«Annaleah, you are asking for very much and are giving very much... Daughter: you have understood God and the perfection to which a creature may rise to be like the Most Pure and to please the Most Pure.»

Jesus has laid His hands on the sides of the head of the dark-haired girl, who is kneeling in front of Him and speaks bending over her: «He Who was born of a Virgin - because He could but build His nest on a pile of lilies - is nauseated, My dear daughter, by the triple lechery of the world and He would be crushed by so much nausea if His Father, Who knows on what His Son lives, did not intervene with loving help to support My soul in anguish. The pure are My joy. You are giving Me what the world takes from Me through its unexhausted baseness. May the Father and you, dear girl, be blessed for that. Go happily. Something will intervene to make your vow an eternal one. Be one of the lilies scattered on the blood-stained ways of Christ.»

«Oh! my Lord... there is still one thing I would like...»

«Which? »

«Not to be present at Your death... I could not see Him die, Who is my Life.»

Jesus smiles kindly and with His hand He wipes the tears streaming down her little dark face. «Do not weep. Lilies are never in mourning. You shall smile with all the pearls of your angelical crown when you see the crowned King enter His Kingdom. Go. May the Spirit of the Lord teach you while I am away. I bless

you with the fire of Eternal Love.»

Jesus looks out on to the kitchen garden and calls: «Mother! Here is a little daughter, she is all Yours. She is now happy. But immerse her in Your purity every time we go to the Holy City, that she may become snow of celestial petals spread on the throne of the Lamb.» And Jesus goes back to His disciples, while Mary caresses the girl and stays with her.

Peter, Andrew and John look at Him inquisitively. And Jesus' bright face tells them that He is happy. Peter cannot help asking: «To whom did You speak so long, my Master? And what have You heard to be so beaming with joy? »

«To a woman at the dawn of life, to her who will be the dawn of many more that will come.»

«Who? »

«The virgins.»

Andrew mumbles, in a low voice, to himself: «It is not her...»

«No. It is not she. But do not tire of praying, be good and patient. Every word of your prayer is like a call, a light in the dark and it supports and guides her.»

«But who is my brother waiting for? »

«For a soul, Peter. A great poverty that he wants to change into a great wealth.»

«And where did Andrew find it, since he never goes about, he never speaks, and he is a helpless sort of chap? »

«On My way. Come with Me, Andrew. Let us go and see Alphaeus and bless Him amongst his many grandchildren. You wait for Me at James and Judas'. My Mother wants to be left alone all day.»

And while they go away, some here, some there, secrecy envelops the joy of the first girl consecrated to virginity for Christ's sake.

157. Instruction to the Women Disciples at Nazareth.

7th May 1945.

Jesus is still at Nazareth, at home. Rather, He is in the old carpenter's shop. The twelve apostles are with Him as well as Mary, Mary mother of James and Judas, Salome, Susanna, and, something new, Martha. A really sorrowful Martha, with clear signs of tears below her eyes. A Martha who is lost and frightened at being alone in the presence of other people and above all of the Lord's Mother. Mary endeavours to familiarise her with the other women and to relieve her of the feeling of uneasiness from which She sees she is suffering. But poor Martha's heart seems to be swelling more and more with Her caresses. She flushes and weeps alternately under her veil, which she has pulled very low over her sorrow and discomfort.

John comes in with James of Alphaeus. «She is not in, my Lord. She and her husband are the guests of a friend of hers. So the servants said » says John. «She will certainly be very sorry. But she will always be able to see You and receive Your instructions » concludes James of Alphaeus.

«All right. The group of women disciples is not here as I expected it. But, you can see, Martha, Theophilus' daughter and Lazarus' sister, is present in the place of the absent Johanna. The disciples know who Martha is. So does My Mother. You, too, Mary, and perhaps also you, Salome, have already heard from your sons who Martha is, not so much as a woman according to the world, but as a creature in the eyes of God. And you, Martha, on the other hand, know who these women are, who consider you as their sister and will love you so much. You are their sister and daughter. And you are in great need of their love, My dear Martha, that you may enjoy the comfort of their kind fondness, which God does not condemn, but has given to man to support him in the weariness of life. And God has brought you here just when I had chosen to lay the foundation, I could say, to give you the canvas on which you will embroider your perfection of

disciples.

Disciple means to follow the discipline of the Master, of His doctrine. Therefore, in a wide meaning, all those who now and in future centuries will follow My doctrine, will be called disciples. And to avoid mentioning many names, saying: disciples of Jesus according to the teaching of Peter and Andrew, of James or John, of Simon or Philip, of Judas or Bartholomew, or of Thomas and Matthew, they will be called christians by one word only, which will unite them all under one sign. But in the great mass of the followers of My discipline I have already selected the first and the second ones and the same will be done throughout centuries in My memory. As in the Temple, and even before, in Moses' days, there was a Pontiff, the priests, the Levites, those responsible for various services, offices and duties, the singers and so on, so in My new Temple, as large as the earth, which will last as long as the earth, there will be superiors and inferiors, all of them useful and loved by Me, and besides, there will be women, the new category, whom Israel has always despised, confining them to the virginal songs in the Temple or to the teaching of the virgins in the Temple. But nothing more.

Do not discuss whether that was fair or not. In the closed religion of Israel and in the days of Wrath it was fair. All the shame fell upon women, the origin of sin. In the universal religion of Christ and in the days of Forgiveness all that is changed. All the Grace was assembled in one Woman and She delivered it to the world, that it might be redeemed. Woman is therefore no longer the anger of God, but the help of God. And through the Woman, beloved by the Lord, all women can become disciples of the Lord, not only as the mass of followers, but as minor priestesses, assistants to the priests, to whom they can give so much help beside them and among the believers and non-believers, among those who will be brought to God not so much by the call of holy words as by the holy smile of one of My women disciples.

You have asked to follow Me, as men do. But, as far as you are concerned, it is too little for Me, if you only come, only listen and only practise. It would be your sanctification. A great thing. But not yet enough for Me. I am the Son of the Absolute One and I want the absolute for My beloved ones. I want everything, because I have given everything.

Further, not only I exist, there is also the world. This terrible thing, the world. It should be tremendous in holiness: a boundless holiness, in number and power, of the multitude of the children of God. Instead it is tremendous in wickedness. Its full iniquity is really unlimited owing to the number of its manifestations and the power of its vices. All sins are in the world, which is no longer a multitude of the children of God, but a multitude of the children of Satan, and above all, the sin bearing the clearest sign of its paternity is most alive: hatred. The world hates. Who hates sees evil even in the most holy things, and wants other people to see evil, even if they do not see it. If you asked the world why I came, it would not say to you: "To do good and redeem". But it would say: "To corrupt and usurp". If you asked the world what it thinks of you who follow Me, it would not say: "You follow Him to become holy and give comfort to the Master, through holiness and purity". But it would say: "You follow Him because you have been seduced by the man".

Such is the world. And I am telling you also that, so that you may consider everything before showing yourselves to the world as the chosen women disciples, the founders of a family of future women disciples, the cooperators of the servants of the Lord. Take your hearts in your hands, and say to them, to those sensitive hearts of women, that you, and your hearts with you, will be scorned at, calumniated, spit at, trampled on by the world, by contempt, by falsehood, by the cruelty of the world. Ask your hearts whether they are capable of receiving all the wounds without shouting out of indignation, cursing those who wound it. Ask them whether they feel they can face the moral martyrdom of slander without going to the extent of hating the slanderers and the Cause for which they are calumniated. Ask them whether, sated and covered with the envy of the world, they will always be able to exhale love, whether poisoned with absinth they will be able to squeeze out honey, whether when suffering all tortures of incomprehension, of scorn, of malicious gossip, they will still be able to smile, pointing to Heaven, their goal, to which you wish to lead other people, out of womanly charity, which is motherly charity also in young girls, still motherly even if bestowed upon old people who could be your ancestors, but

are spiritual babies just born and incapable of understanding and conducting themselves in the way, the life, the truth, the wisdom that I have come to bring, by giving Myself: Way, Life, Truth, divine Wisdom. I will love you just the same if you say to Me: "I have not the strength, my Lord, to challenge the whole world for You".

Yesterday a girl asked Me to immolate her, before the hour of her wedding strikes, because she feels that she loves Me, as God is to be loved; that is with her whole self, with the absolute perfection of giving herself. And I will do it. I have concealed the hour from her, that her soul may not tremble with fear, or her body more than her soul. Her death will be like the end of a flower, that closes its corolla in the evening, thinking it will reopen it the following day, but never opens it again, because the kiss of the night has sucked its life. And I will do it, according to her desire, by bringing forward her repose of death to a few days before Mine. So that this first virgin of Mine may not be kept waiting in limbo, and I may find her immediately after My death...

Do not weep! I am the Redeemer... This holy girl did not ask to follow Me, but she did not limit herself to hosannas immediately after the miracle, but she worked the miracle as if it were money invested at an interest, and from human gratitude she passed to a supernatural one, from an earthly desire to a heavenly one, showing a maturity of spirit, which is superior to almost everybody else's. I say "almost" because amongst you who are listening to Me, there are perfections that are equal and even greater. She did not ask to follow Me, nay she showed the desire to accomplish her evolution from a girl to an angel in the secrecy of her abode. And I love her so much that in the hours of disgust at what the world is, I will recall this kind creature, blessing the Father, Who wipes away My tears and perspiration of a Master in a world that does not want Me, by means of such flowers of love and purity.

But if you want, if you have the courage to remain the chosen women disciples, behold, I will point out to you the work you have to do to justify your presence and your election near Me and near the saints of the Lord. You can do so much amongst your fellow creatures and for the ministers of the Lord.

I have already mentioned it to Mary of Alphaeus many months ago. How great is the necessity of a woman near the altar of Christ! The infinite miseries of the world can be cured much more and much better by a woman than by a man, and then taken to man to be completely cured. Many hearts, particularly of females, will open to you, o women disciples. You must receive them as if they were dear children led astray, who are coming back to their father's house and dare not face their parent. You are the ones who will recomfort the culprit and placate the judge. Many will come to you seeking God. You will welcome them as if they were tired pilgrims, saying: "This is the house of the Lord, He will be here at once", and in the meantime you will envelop them with your love. A priest of Mine will come, if I do not.

A woman knows how to love. She was made to love. She degraded love into sensual lust, but true love, the gem of her soul, is still imprisoned in the depth of her heart: love devoid of foul sensual mud, made of angelical wings and perfumes, of pure flame and remembrances of God, of its origin from God and its creation by God. Woman: the masterpiece of goodness near the masterpiece of creation, which is man: "And now I will make Adam a helpmate that he may not feel alone", must not abandon the Adams. Take therefore that faculty of loving and make use of it in the love of Christ and for Christ amongst your neighbours. Be most charitable to repentant culprits. Tell them not to be afraid of God. Is it possible for you, mothers and sisters, not to be able to do that? How often your little ones, your young brothers were ill and needed a doctor! And they were afraid. But with caresses and loving words you relieved them of their fear and they, no longer terrified as before, with their little hands held by yours, let the doctor cure them. Culprits are your sick brothers and children, who are afraid of the doctor's hand, and of his sentence... No, it must not be so. Since you know how good God is, tell them that God is good and no one must be afraid of Him. Even if He is frank and resolute in saying: "You shall not do it again", He will not reject who has already done it and has fallen ill. But He will cure him to restore him to health.

Be mothers and sisters to holy living people. They, too, need love. They will become tired and worn out in evangelizing. They will not be able to do all that

is to be done. Help them, discreetly and diligently. Women know how to work at home, near tables and beds, at looms and everything that is needed for everyday life. The future of the Church will be a continuous flow of pilgrims to the places of God. Be their kind hotel-keepers, taking upon yourselves all the most humble work, so that the ministers of God may be free to continue the work of the Master.

Then difficult, sanguinary, cruel times will come. Christians, also the holy ones, will undergo hours of terror and weakness. Man is never very strong in suffering. Women, instead, as compared to men, enjoy the true kingliness of being able to suffer. Teach men, supporting them in the hours of fear, discouragement, tears, tiredness and bloodshed. In our History we have examples of wonderful women, who performed deeds of liberating daring. We have Judith, Jael. But believe Me, no one is greater, so far, than the mother who was eight times a martyr, seven times with each of her sons, and once herself, in the times of the Maccabees. Then there will be another one... And after Her, there will be countless numbers of heroines of sorrow and in sorrow, women who will be the solace of martyrs and martyrs themselves, who will be angels for those who are persecuted, silent priestesses who will preach God by their way of living, and who, with no other consecration but the one they received from the God-Love, will be consecrated and worthy of it.

Those are the outlines of your main duties. I will not be able to devote much time to you in particular. But you will be formed by listening to Me. And you will be formed even more under the perfect guidance of My Mother.

Yesterday this maternal hand (and Jesus takes Mary's hand in His own) brought Me the girl of whom I have spoken to you and who told Me that to listen to Her and be beside Her for a few hours had matured the fruit of the grace she had received and had carried it to perfection. It is not the first time that My Mother has worked for Christ, Her Son. You and you, who are My disciples as well as cousins, know what Mary is for the formation of souls to God and you will be able to tell both those men and women who may be afraid that I have not prepared them for their mission or that they are still insufficiently prepared when I shall no longer be with you. My Mother will be with you now, when I am not amongst you, and later when I shall no longer be with you. She will remain with you, and with Her will remain the wisdom of all Her virtues. As from now you may follow all Her advice.

Yesterday evening, when we were alone, and I was sitting near Her, as I used to when I was a child, My head resting on Her shoulder, which is so soft and so strong, My Mother said to Me we had been talking of the girl who had left early in the afternoon, with enclosed in her virginal heart a sun, brighter than the one in the sky: her holy secret - She said to Me: "How lovely it is to be the Redeemer's Mother!" Yes, how lovely it is when the creature coming to the Redeemer is already a creature of God, a creature in whom there is only the stain of origin, that can only be washed away by Me. All the other small stains of human imperfection have been washed away by love.

But, My sweet Mother, Most Pure Guide of souls to Your Son, Holy Star of orientation, Kind Teacher of saints, Pious Foster Mother of the most little ones, Healthy Cure of sick people, not always such creatures who are not repugnant to holiness will be coming to You... But lepers, horrors, stench, a tangle of snakes and foul things, will creep to Your feet, o Queen of mankind, and will shout: "Have mercy! Succour us! Take us to Your Son!". And You will have to put this pure hand of Yours on their wounds, and bend with Your eyes of a heavenly dove on hellish deformities, inhale the stench of sin and not run away. Nay, You will have to press to Your heart those who have been mutilated by Satan, those abortions, that filth, and wash them with Your tears and bring them to Me... And then You will say: "How difficult it is to be the Redeemer's Mother!". But You will do it because You are the Mother... I kiss and bless these hands of Yours from which so many creatures will come to Me, and each of them will be a glory of Mine. But before Mine, it will be a glory of Yours, Holy Mother.

My dear women disciples, follow the example of My Teacher, of the Teacher of James and Judas, of everyone who wishes to be formed in Grace and Wisdom. Follow Her word. It is the same as Mine, but made sweeter. Nothing is to be added to it because it is the word of the Mother of Wisdom.

And you, My friends, endeavour to acquire the humbleness and firmness of women,

and demolishing manly pride, do not despise the women disciples, but mitigate your strength, and I could say also your hardness and your intolerance, in contact with the kindness of women. And above all, learn from them how to love, to believe and to suffer for the Lord, because I solemnly tell you that they, the weak ones, will become the strongest in faith, in love, in daring, in sacrificing themselves for their Master, Whom they love with their whole selves, without asking for anything, without pretending anything, satisfied only with loving to give Me solace and joy.

Go now to your homes, or to the houses where you are guests. I will stay with My Mother. God be with you.»

They all go away except Martha.

«Martha, you stay here. I have already spoken to your servant. Today it is not Bethany that is giving hospitality, but it is Jesus' little house. Come. You will eat beside Mary and sleep in the little room near Hers. The spirit of Joseph, our comfort, will comfort you while you are resting, and tomorrow you will go back to Bethany stronger and more sure of yourself, to prepare women disciples also there, while waiting for the one dearest to Me and to you. Do not doubt, Martha. I never promise in vain. But it takes time to turn a desert full of vipers into a heavenly thicket. The first work is not noticed. Nothing seems to have taken place. Instead the seed has already been sown. The seeds. All of them. And then tears will come, to act as rain that opens the seeds... And the good trees will come... Come! Weep no more! »

158. Jesus Speaks to Johanna of Chuza on the Lake.

8th May 1945.

Jesus is on the lake, in Peter's boat, behind two other boats; one is a common fishing boat, like that of Peter, the other is a slender expensive pleasure boat. It belongs to Johanna of Chuza. But the owner is not in her boat. She is at Jesus' feet, in Peter's humbler craft.

I would say that they met by chance somewhere on the flowery shore of Gennesaret, most beautiful in this first appearance of Palestinian springtime, which strews its clouds of blossoming almond-trees and lays the pearls of future flowers on pear and apple-trees, on pomegranates, quince-trees, on all the trees which are most fruitful and bear the most beautiful blossoms and fruit. When the boat keeps close to the shore exposed to the sun, one can already see millions of buds swelling on the branches, awaiting to blossom, while the petals of the early almond-trees flutter in the quiet air until they alight in the clear water. The shores, covered with the new grass, which looks like bright green silk, are studded with the golden eyes of buttercups, or radiate-star daisies, near which the beautiful, thin bluish forget-me-nots, stiff on their stems like little crowned queens, smile gently, as placid as children's eyes, and they seem to be saying "yes, of course" to the sun, to the lake, to the other herbs, which are happy to bloom, under the sky-blue eyes of their Lord.

At the beginning of spring the lake has not yet the opulence that will turn it into a triumph the following months, it has not the luxurious pomp, which I would call sensual, of the many thousand rigid or supple roseries, in the form of tufts in gardens or veils against walls, of the many thousand corymbs of cytisi and acacias, of the thousands and thousands of groups of tuberose, of the thousands and thousands of waxed stars of citrus trees, of all the blending of hues, of strong, soft, inebriating perfumes, which form the environment and spur of human great desire for enjoyment that desecrates this corner of the earth, which is so pure, and is the lake of Tiberias, the place chosen centuries ago to be the theatre of the greatest number of miracles worked by our Lord Jesus.

Johanna looks at Jesus absorbed in the beauty of His Galilean lake and her face smiles reflecting, like a faithful mirror, His smile. They are speaking in the other boat. There is silence here. The only noise is the thud of the bare feet of Peter and Andrew, who are manoeuvring the boat, and the sigh of the water opened by the prow and whispering its pain to the sides of the boat, and then changing into laughter at the stern, when the wound heals and becomes a silvery wake that the sun causes to sparkle as if it were diamond dust.

At last Jesus ends His contemplation and turns His eyes towards Johanna. He smiles at her and asks her: «We are almost there, are we not? And you will be saying that your Master is not a very pleasant companion. I have not spoken one word to you.»

«But I have read them on Your face, Master, and I heard everything You said to these things which are around us.»

«Well, then, what was I saying? »

«Love, be pure, be good. Because you come from God, and nothing bad or impure has come out of His hands.»

«You have read right.»

«But, my Lord, the herbs will do that... Also the animals will do it. Man... Why will he not, although he is the most perfect? »

«Because Satan's tooth has pierced man only. He pretended to demolish the Creator through His greatest prodigy, most like Him.»

Johanna lowers her head in thought. She seems to be hesitating and weighing two opposite desires. Jesus is watching her. She then raises her head and says:

«Would You mind approaching some friends of mine, who are pagans? You know...

Chuza is a courtier... And the Tetrarch - and even more so the true mistress of the Court: Herodias, to whose will every desire of Herod yields, as it is... fashionable, to show that they are more refined than any other Palestinian, to be protected by Rome by worshipping Rome and everything that is Roman - flirts with the Romans of the proconsular household... and almost imposes them on to us. Really I must say that the women are not worse than we are. Also amongst us, on these very shores, there are some women who have fallen very low. And what can we speak of, unless we speak of Herodias?... When I lost my child and I was ill, they were very good to me, although I did not seek them. And after, we have remained friends. But if You tell me that it is wrong, I will put an end to it. No? Thank You, my Lord. The day before yesterday I was with one of these friends. It was a friendly visit, as far as I was concerned, a duty call with regard to Chuza. It was an order of the Tetrarch who... would like to come back here but does not feel too safe and so... he enters into more interested relations with Rome, in order to be protected. Nay... please... You are a relative of the Baptist, are You not? Well, tell him not to be too trustful. He should never leave Samaria. On the contrary, if he does not mind, he should hide there for some time. The snake is going near the lamb and the lamb has a lot to be afraid of. Of everything. Let him be watchful, Master. But it must not be known that I said it. It would be the end of Chuza.»

«Do not worry, Johanna. I will inform the Baptist in such a way that no harm will be done.»

«Thank You, my Lord. I want to serve You... but by doing so, I would not like to harm my husband. Nay... I... will not always be able to come with You.

Sometimes, I will have to stay, because he wants me to, and it is just...»

«You will stay, Johanna. I understand everything. Say no more, because it is not necessary.»

«But will You want me to be near You in the most dangerous hours for You?»

«Certainly, Johanna.»

«Oh! What a burden it was for me having to say that and actually giving voice to the words! But now I am relieved...»

«If you have faith in Me, you will always be relieved. But you were talking about a Roman lady friend...»

«Yes. She is a close friend of Claudia and I think she must be a relative of hers, too. And she would like to speak to You, or at least, listen to You. And she is not the only one. Now that You have cured Valeria's child, and the news travelled as quick as lightning, they are more anxious than ever. At the banquet the other evening, there was a lot of talking, in your favour and against You. Because some Herodians were present, as well as some Sadducees... although, if you asked them they would deny it... and there were also some women... rich... but... but not honest. There was... I regret telling You because I know that You are a friend of her brother... but there was Mary of Magdala with her new friend and another woman, a Greek, I think, as dissolute as she. You know... among heathens, women are at table with men and that is very... very... What a nuisance! My friend was so kind as to choose my husband as my companion and that was a great relief. But the others... oh!... Well... They were talking about You, because Faustina's miracle caused a stir and if the Romans admired You as a

great doctor or magician - forgive me, my Lord - the Herodians and the Sadducees vomited venom on Your Name. And Mary! Oh Mary! How horrible!... She began sneering and then. No, I will not tell You. I wept all night over it...»
«Never mind. She will recover.»
«But she is all right, You know? »
«Her body is. All the rest is poisoned. She will recover.»
«You say so... The Roman women, You know what they are like... said: "We are not afraid of witchcraft, neither do we believe in lies. We want to judge by ourselves"; and after they said to me: "Could we not hear Him?"»
«Tell them that at the end of the month of Shebat I will be in your house.»
«I will tell them, my Lord. Do You think they will come to You? »
«There is a world to be rebuilt in them. First it is necessary to destroy, then to build. But it is not impossible. Johanna, there is your house and your garden. Work in it for your Master, as I told you. Goodbye, Johanna. The Lord be with you. I bless you in His name.»
The boat draws near to the shore. Johanna begs: «Are You really not coming?»
«Not now. I must revive the flames. In the absence of a few months, they have almost gone out. And time flies.»
The boat stops in the little bay which penetrates into Chuza's garden. Some servants rush to assist their mistress in getting off. Her boat arrives at the wharf after Peter's, and John, Matthew, the Iscariot and Philip come off it and get on board Peter's boat, which slowly departs and resumes its voyage to the opposite shore.

159. Jesus at Gherghesa. John's Disciples.
9th May 1945.

Jesus is speaking in a town which I have never seen before. At least, that is what I think, because all the towns are alike in style and it is difficult to tell one from the other at first sight. Also here a road coasts the lake and all the boats are on the shore. Large and small houses are set in a row on the other side of the road, but the hills are much more distant and so the little town is on a charming plain which stretches along the eastern shores of the lake, protected from the winds by the range of hills, and warmed by the sun which here, more than in the other parts of the country, increases the blossoming of the trees.

I think that Jesus' sermon has already begun because He says: «... It is true. You say: "We will never abandon You because to abandon You is to abandon God". But, o people of Gherghesa, remember that nothing is more changeable than the human mind. I am convinced that at present that is what you really think. My word and the miracle that took place have encouraged you in that direction and at the present moment you are sincere in what you say. But I wish to remind you of one event, I could quote a thousand both remote and recent. I will mention only this one.

Joshua, the servant of the Lord, on the eve of death, gathered around him all the tribes with their elders, leaders, judges and scribes and he spoke to them in the presence of the Lord, reminding them of all the benefits gained from and prodigies worked by the Lord through His servant. And after enumerating all these things, he asked them to repudiate any god which was not the Lord or at least to be frank in their faith, choosing with sincerity either the True God or the gods of Mesopotamia and of the Amorites, so that there should be a clear separation between the sons of Abraham and the paganizing people.

An openly declared error is always better than a hypocritical profession and mixture of faiths, which is an insult to God and death to souls. And nothing is easier to maintain and more commonly met than such mixture. The appearance is good; the substance underneath it is not good. That state applies also nowadays. Those believers who mix the observance of the Law with what is forbidden by the Law, those miserable fellows who stagger like drunken people between loyalty to the Law and the profit of business and compromise with outlaws from whom they hope to receive some advantage, those priests or Scribes or Pharisees who no longer make the service of God the aim of their lives, but indulge in shrewd politics to triumph over other people and thus be able to do anything against

more honest persons, because they are not the servants of God, but they serve a power which they know is strong and useful for their purposes, all those people are nothing but hypocrites who mix our God with false gods.

The people replied to Joshua: "Never let it be that we shall abandon the True God to serve false gods". Joshua told them what I have just told you about the holy jealousy of the Father, about His will to be loved exclusively, with our whole selves, about His justice in punishing those who are untruthful.

Punishment! God can punish just as He can reward us. It is not necessary to be dead to receive our reward or punishment. Consider, o people of Israel, whether God, after giving you so much, freeing you from the Pharaohs, leading you safely through the desert and the snares of enemies, all owing you to become a great and respected nation, full of glory, has not punished you once, twice, ten times, for your sins! Consider what you have become now! And I, Who see you throwing yourselves headlong into the most sacrilegious idolatry, I see also into which abyss you are about to fall because you always persevere in the same faults. And because of that I rebuke you, o people who are twice Mine, because I am your Redeemer and because I was born of you. My reproach is not hatred, it is not grudge, nor intolerance, it is love, even if it is severe.

Joshua then said: "You are witnesses: you have chosen the Lord" and they all replied: "Yes, we are". And Joshua, who was wise besides being brave, knowing how fleeting the will of man is, wrote in the book all the words of the Law and of the covenant and he put them in the temple, and also in the sanctuary of the Lord in Shechem, which contained the Tabernacle for the occasion, he set a great stone as witness and said: "This stone which has heard all your words to the Lord shall remain here as a witness so that you may not lie and deny the Lord your God".

A stone, no matter how great and hard it may be, can always be reduced to powder by man, by thunderbolt or by the erosion of water and time. But I am the Eternal Corner-Stone. And I cannot be destroyed. Do not lie to this Living Stone. Do not love it only because it works miracles. Love it because through it you will touch Heaven. I would like you to be more spiritual, more faithful to the Lord. I am not saying to Me. I am, only because I am the Voice of the Father. By trampling on Me, you wound Him Who sent Me. I am the mediator. He is everything. Take what I offer you and keep within yourselves what is holy so that you may reach God. Do not love the Man, love the Messiah of the Lord not because of the miracles He works, but because He wants to work in you the intimate and sublime miracle of your sanctification.»

Jesus blesses and directs His steps towards a house. He is almost at the door when He is stopped by a group of elderly men who greet Him respectfully saying: «May we ask You a question, Lord? We are disciples of John and as he always speaks of You and also because the fame of Your miracles reached us, we wish to make Your acquaintance. We have just listened to You and we have a question to ask You.»

«Ask it. If you are disciples of John, you are already on the path of justice.»
«You said, speaking of the idolatries which are common amongst believers, that there are people amongst us who come to compromise between the Law and those who are out of the Law. But You also are a friend of theirs. We know that You do not disdain the Romans. So? »

«I do not deny it. But can you say that I do it to make a profit? Can you say that I caress them even to receive only their protection? »

«No, Master. And we are more than certain. But the world is not made only of us, who want to believe only in the evil that we see and not in the evil we are told about. Now tell us the convincing reason for approaching Gentiles, for our own guidance and to defend You in the event of someone slandering You in our presence.»

«It is evil to have contact when one does it for human purposes. It is not evil when one approaches them to take them to the Lord our God. That is what I do. If you were Gentiles, I could spend some time explaining to you how every man comes from One God only. But you are Jews and disciples of John. You are therefore the cream of Jews, and I need not explain that to you. You can therefore understand and believe that it is My duty, as the Word of God, to take His word to all men, the sons of the Universal Father.»

«But they are not His sons, they are pagans...»

«With regard to Grace they are not. Because of their erroneous faith, they are

not. That is true. But until I redeem you, man, also a Jew, will have lost Grace, he will be deprived of it, because the Stain of Origin prevents the ineffable ray of Grace from descending into men's hearts. But with regard to creation, man is always a son. From Adam, the founder of the human family, descend both the Jews and the Romans and Adam is the son of the Father Who gave him His spiritual likeness.»

«That is true. Another question, Master. Why do John's disciples fast very sternly and Yours do not? We do not mean that You should not eat. Also the Prophet Daniel was holy in the eyes of God although he was a great man at the court in Babylon, and You are greater than he. But they...»

«What very often is not achieved by rigorism, is achieved by cordiality. There are people who would never come to the Master, and the Master must go to them. There are others who would go to the Master, but are ashamed of going amongst the crowd. The Master must go also to them. And since they say to Me: "Be my guest that I may know You" I go, bearing in mind, not the pleasure of a rich table, and of a conversation that sometimes is very painful for Me, but only and always the interest of God. That is as far as I am concerned. And as often at least one of the souls which I approach is converted to God, and every conversion is a wedding feast for My soul, a great feast in which all the angels in Heaven take part and which is blessed by the Eternal God. My disciples, the friends of Me-the Spouse, rejoice with the Spouse and Friend. Would you like to see My friends in pain while I rejoice? While I am with them? But the time will come when they will no longer have Me. And then they will fast. New methods for new times. Up to yesterday, in the days of the Baptist, there was the ash of Penance. Today, in My days, there is the sweet manna of Redemption, of Mercy, of Love. The old methods could not be engrafted into Mine, as My method could not have been used then, not even yesterday. Because Mercy was not yet on the earth. It is now. No longer the Prophet, but the Messiah, to Whom everything has been entrusted by God, is on the earth. Each day has what is useful to it. Nobody sews a new cloth on to an old garment, lest the new piece of cloth, particularly when being washed, should shrink and thus tear the old cloth and the hole would become bigger. Likewise no one puts new wine into old wineskins, otherwise the new wine would burst the wineskins, which cannot stand the effervescence of the new wine, and it would run out of the burst wineskins. But the old wine, which has already been decanted several times, is put into old wineskins, and the new wine into new ones. So that one force may be compensated by another equal one. The same happens now. The force of the new doctrine suggests new methods to divulge it. And I, Who am aware of it, make use of them.»

«Thank You, Lord. We are now happy. Pray for us. We are old wineskins. Will we be able to restrain Your force? »

«Yes, because the Baptist shaped you and because his prayers and Mine will make you capable of so much. Go with My peace and tell John that I bless him.»

«But... according to You, is it better for us to stay with the Baptist or with You? »

«As long as there is old wine, drink it, if its flavour is agreeable. Later... as the putrid water which is everywhere will disgust you, you will love the new wine.»

«Do You think that the Baptist will be recaptured? »

«Yes, most certainly. I have already sent him a warning. Go now. Enjoy your John as long as you can and make him happy. Afterwards you will love Me. And you will find it hard... also because no one who has become used to old wine will all of a sudden wish to have new wine. One says: "The old one was better". And in fact I will have a different flavour, which will seem sour to you. But you will relish its vital flavour day by day. Goodbye, friends. May God be with you.»

160. From Naphtali to Giscala. Meeting with Rabbi Gamaliel.

10th May 1945.

«Master! Master! Do You know who is ahead of us? There is rabbi Gamaliel! He is sitting with his servants, in a caravan, in the shade in a wood, sheltered from the winds! They are roasting a lamb. What are we going to do now? »

«What we were going to do, My friends. We will proceed along our way...»

«But Gamaliel is of the Temple.»

«Gamaliel is not wicked, Do not be afraid. I will go ahead.»

«Oh! I am coming too » say His cousins at the same time, as well as all the

Galileans and Simon. Only the Iscariot, and to a lesser degree, Thomas, do not seem very anxious to proceed. But they follow the others. They walk for a few yards along a mountainous road deep set between the wooded slopes of the mountain. The road then bends and opens on to a kind of tableland and crosses it, widening out, and soon after that it becomes once again narrow and winding under a roof of interwoven branches. In a sunny bare patch, which is however shaded by the first leaves of the wood, there are many people under a rich tent, while other people are busy in a corner turning the lamb on the fire. There is no doubt about it! Gamaliel took very good care of himself. For one person travelling he set a crowd of servants in motion with I do not know how much luggage. He is now sitting in the centre of his tent: a cloth supported by four gilt poles, a kind of canopy under which there are low seats covered with cushions and a table the top of which rests on carved wooden legs. A very fine table-cloth is spread on the table and the servants are laying valuable dishes on it. Gamaliel looks like an idol. With his hands open on his knees, stiff and hieratic, he looks like a statue to me. The servants move round him like large butterflies. But he pays no attention to them. He is pondering, his eyelashes rather lowered on his severe eyes, and when he raises them, his deep very dark pensive eyes are displayed in all their severe beauty at the sides of a long thin nose and under the high rather bald forehead of an elderly man. His forehead is marked by three parallel wrinkles and by a large bluish vein which forms a V shaped angle in the centre of his right temple. The noise of the oncoming people causes the servants to turn round. Gamaliel also looks round. He sees Jesus approaching ahead of everyone and he makes a gesture of surprise. He stands up and moves to the edge of the tent, but no farther. From there he bows low with his arms crossed on his chest. Jesus replies to him in the same way.

«You are here, Rabbi? » asks Gamaliel.

«I am here, rabbi » replies Jesus.

«May I ask You where You are going? »

«It is a pleasure for Me to tell you. I am coming from Naphtali and I am going to Giscala.»

«On foot? But it is a hard and long road along these mountains. You are tiring Yourself too much.»

«Believe Me. If I am welcomed and listened to, all tiredness disappears.»

«Well, then... allow me to be for once the one who will remove Your fatigue. The lamb is ready. We would have left the leavings to the birds because I never take them with me. You can see that it is no trouble for me to offer food to You and to Your followers. I am friendly to You, Jesus. I do not consider You inferior to me, but greater than I am.»

«I believe you. And I accept your hospitality.»

Gamaliel speaks to a servant who appears to be the highest in authority and who passes on the order. The tent is extended and more seats and dishes for Jesus' disciples are taken off the many mules. They bring bowls to purify their fingers. Jesus performs the rite with the greatest courtliness, whereas the apostles, on whom Gamaliel is casting sharp sidelong glances, do so as well as they can, with the exception of Simon, Judas of Kerioth, Bartholomew and Matthew, who are more accustomed to Jewish refinements.

Jesus is beside Gamaliel who is alone on one side of the table. The Zealot is in front of Jesus. After the prayer of thanksgiving, which Gamaliel says with calm solemnity, the servants carve the lamb and divide it among the guests and they fill the cups with wine or water sweetened with honey, for those who prefer it.

«We have met by chance, Rabbi. I was never expecting to see You and on the way to Giscala.»

«I am going towards the whole world.»

«Yes, You are the indefatigable Prophet. John is the stationary one, You are the roaming One.»

«It is easier, therefore, for souls to find Me.»

«I would not say so. Your continuous moving about, disorients them.»

«I disorientate My enemies. But those who want Me, because they love the Word of God, find Me. Not everybody can come to the Master. And the Master, Who wants everybody, goes to everybody, helping thus the good and warding off the conspiracies of those who hate Me.»

«Are You referring to me? I do not hate You.»

«Not to you. But since you are just and frank, you can say that I am speaking the truth.»

«Yes, it is so. But... see... The fact is that we old people do not understand You well.»

«Yes, old Israel does not understand Me well. That is her misfortune... and because of her will.»

«No, no.»

«Yes, rabbi. They are not willing to understand the Master. And who confines himself to that, does evil, but a comparative evil. Many instead deliberately misunderstand and distort My word to harm God.»

«God? He is above human snares.»

«Yes. But every soul that goes astray or is led astray, - and it is misleading to distort My word or My work, both with regard to oneself and to other people, - harms God in the soul which is lost. Every soul that is lost is a wound to God.»

Gamaliel lowers his head, and closing his eyes, he meditates. He then presses his forehead between his long thin fingers, in an involuntary gesture of pain. Jesus watches him. Gamaliel raises his head, opens his eyes, looks at Jesus and says: «But You know that I am not one of those.»

«I know. But you are one of the former.»

«On! It is true. But it is not true that I am not willing to understand You. The truth is that Your word stops on my mind and does not penetrate farther. My mind admires it as the word of a learned man and the spirit...»

«And the spirit cannot receive it, Gamaliel, because it is encumbered with too many things. And ruined things. A short while ago, coming here from Naphtali, I passed near a mountain, which juts out from the mountain chain. I was pleased to pass there to see the two beautiful lakes of Gennesaret and Merom, from high above, as eagles and the angels of the Lord see them, to say once again: "Thank You, Creator, for the beauty You grant us". Well, whilst the whole mountain is covered with flowers, green meadows, orchards, fields, woods, and the laurels smell sweet near the olive-trees, preparing the white host of thousands and thousands of flowers and also the strong oak-tree seems to become gentler as it dresses itself with wreaths of clematis and woodbine: over there, there is no flowering, no fertility, neither of man nor of nature. All the efforts of the winds, all the toil of men are frustrated because the Cyclopean ruins of ancient Hatzor encumber everything and between one large stone and another only nettles and bushes can grow and snakes can hide. Gamaliel...»

«I understand. We are ruins, too... I understand the parable, Jesus. But... I cannot... I cannot... do otherwise. The stones are too heavy.»

«One in Whom you believed said to you: "The stones shall vibrate hearing My last words". But why wait for the last words of the Messiah? Will you not regret that you did not follow Me before? The last!... Sad words, like those of a friend who is dying, and to whom we have to listen, but too late. But My words are more important than the words of a friend.»

«You are right... But I cannot. I am waiting for that sign, that I may believe.»

«When a piece of ground is barren, a thunderbolt is not sufficient to till it. The soil will not receive it. But the stones that cover the soil will receive it. Endeavour at least to remove them, Gamaliel. Otherwise, if they are left where they are, in the depth of your heart, the sign will not lead you to believe.»

Gamaliel is silent, engrossed in thought. The meal is over.

Jesus stands up and says: «I thank You, My God, both for the meal and for the opportunity of speaking to a wise man. And thank you, Gamaliel.»

«Master, do not go away like that. I am afraid You are angry with me.»

«Oh! no! You must believe Me.»

«Then, do not go away. I am going to Hillel's tomb. Would You disdain coming with me? It will not take us long, because I have mules and donkeys for everybody. All we have to do is to take off their pack-saddles, which the servants will carry. And the hardest part of the road will be shortened for You.»

«I do not mind coming with you or going to Hillel's tomb. It is an honour. Let us go.»

Gamaliel gives the necessary instructions, and while they are all busy taking

down the temporary dining-room, Jesus and Gamaliel mount two mules and they go ahead, one beside the other, along a quiet steep road, on which the ironshod hooves resound loudly.

Gamaliel is silent. Only twice he asks Jesus whether His saddle is comfortable. Jesus replies and then becomes quiet, engrossed in thought. So much so that He does not notice that Gamaliel, holding his mule back a little, lets Him go forward by a full neck, so that he may study every gesture of His. The eyes of the old rabbi are so keen in penetration that they look like the eyes of a hawk gazing at its prey. But Jesus is not aware of it. He proceeds calmly, following the undulant pace of His mount, He is pensive and yet He observes all the features of what is around Him. He stretches out a hand to pick a hanging bunch of golden cytisis, He smiles at two little birds which are building their nest in a thick juniper, He stops the mule to listen to a blackcap and, as a blessing, He nods assent to the anxious cry by which a wild dove urges her mate to work.

«You love herbs and animals very much, do You not? »

«Yes, very much. They are My living book. Man always has the foundations of faith in front of him. Genesis lives in nature. Now, one who knows how to see, knows also how to believe. This flower, so sweet in its scent and in the substance of its pendulous corollas, and in such a contrast with this thorny juniper and with that furze, how could it have made itself by itself? And look: that robin redbreast, could it have made itself with that dried bloodstain on its soft throat? And those two doves, where and how have they been able to paint those onyx collars on the veil of their grey feathers? And over there, those two butterflies: a black one with large gold and ruby rings, while the other, with blue stripes, where have they found the gems and ribbons for their wings? And this stream? It is water. Agreed. But where did it come, from? Which is the first source of the water-element? Oh! To look means to believe, if one knows how to look.»

«To look means to believe. We look too little at the living Genesis that is in front of us.»

«Too much science, Gamaliel. And too little love, and too little humility.»
Gamaliel sighs and shakes his head.

«Here. We have arrived, Jesus. Hillel is buried over there. Let us dismount and leave our mules here. A servant will take them.»

They dismount tying the two mules to a tree trunk and they turn their steps towards a burial ground which protrudes from the mountain near a large house completely closed up.

«I come here to meditate and prepare myself for the feasts of Israel » says Gamaliel pointing at the house.

«May Wisdom grant you all its light.»

«And here (and Gamaliel points at the sepulchre) to prepare myself to meet death. He was a just man.»

«He was a just man. I will be pleased to pray near his ashes. But, Gamaliel, Hillel must not teach you only to die. He must teach you to live.»

«How, Master? »

«"A man is great when he humbles himself" was his favourite saying...»

«How do You know if You have not met him? »

«I did meet him... in any case, even if I had never met Hillel, the rabbi, personally, I know his thought, because there is nothing I ignore of human thoughts.»

Gamaliel lowers his head and whispers: «God only can say that.»

«God and His Word. Because the Word knows the Thought and the Thought knows the Word, and loves Him, communicating with Him and granting Him all His treasures, to make Him participate in Himself. Love fastens the bonds and makes one Perfection of them. It is the Trinity that loves Itself, is divinely formed, generates, proceeds and is completed. Every holy thought was born in the Perfect Mind, and is reflected in the mind of the just man. Can the Word therefore ignore the thoughts of the just, since they are the thoughts of the Thought? »
They pray near the closed sepulchre. They pray for a long time. The disciples and then the servants reach them, the former on horseback, the latter carrying the luggage. But they stop at the edge of the meadow, beyond which is the sepulchre. The prayer is over.

«Goodbye, Gamaliel. Ascend as Hillel did.»

«What do You mean? »

«Ascend. He is ahead of you because he knew how to believe more humbly than you. Peace be with you. »

161. The Grandson of Eli, a Pharisee of Capernaum, is Cured.
11th May 1945.

Jesus is about to arrive in Capernaum by boat. The sun is almost setting and the lake is sparkling with red and yellow hues.

While the two boats are manoeuvring to draw near the coast, John says: «I will go to the fountain and bring You some water for Your thirst. »

«The water is good here » exclaims Andrew.

«Yes, it is good. And your love makes it even better for Me.»

«I will take the fish home. The women will prepare them for supper. After, will You speak to us and to them? »

«Yes, Peter, I will.»

«It is more pleasant now to come back home. Heretofore we looked like so many nomads. But now, with the women, there is more order, more love. And then! When I see Your Mother, I no longer feel tired. I don't know...»
Jesus smiles and is quiet.

The boat grounds on the shingly shore. John and Andrew, who are wearing short undertunics, jump into the water and with the help of some young men they beach the boat and place a board as a wharf. Jesus is the first to come off, and He waits until the second boat is beached, in order to be together with all His disciples. Then, walking with slow steps they go towards the fountain. A natural fountain of spring water, that wells up just outside the village, and plentiful, cold and silvery runs into a stone basin. The water is so limpid that it induces people to drink it. John, who has run ahead with an amphora, is already back and he hands the dripping pitcher to Jesus, Who has a long drink.

«How thirsty You were, my Master! And I, foolishly, did not get any water.»

«It does not matter, John. It is all over » and He caresses him.

They are about to come back when they see Simon Peter arrive, running as fast as he can. He had gone home to take his fish. «Master! Master!» he shouts panting. «The village is in turmoil, because the only grandchild of Eli, the Pharisee, is about to die from a snakebite. He had gone with the old man, and against his mother's wishes, to their olive-grove. Eli was overseeing some works, while the child was playing near the roots of an old olive-tree. He put his hand into a hole, hoping to find a lizard, and he found a snake. The old man seems to have become distraught. The child's mother, who incidentally hates her father-in-law, quite rightly as it happens, is accusing him of being a murderer. The boy is getting colder and colder every moment. Although relatives, they did not love one another! And they could not have been more closely related! »

«Family grudge is never a good thing! »

«Well, Master, I say that the snakes did not love the snake: Eli. And they have killed the little snake. I am sorry that he saw me and he shouted after me: "Is the Master there?". And I am sorry for the little one. He was a nice boy and it is not his fault that he was the grandson of a Pharisee.»

«Of course, it is not his fault.»

They walk towards the village and they see a crowd of people, shouting and weeping, coming towards them, with the elderly Eli in front of them.

«He has found us! Let us go back! »

«Why? That old man is suffering.»

«That old man hates You, remember that. He is one of Your first and fiercest accusers at the Temple.»

«I remember that I am Mercy.»

Old Eli, unkempt and upset, with untidy garments, runs towards Jesus, his arms outstretched, and drops at His feet shouting: «Mercy! Mercy! Forgive me. Do not avenge Yourself on an innocent boy for my harshness. You are the only one who can save him! God, Your Father, has brought You here. I believe in You! I venerate You! I love You! Forgive me! I have been unfair! A liar! But I have

been punished. These hours alone serve as a punishment. Help me! It's the boy! The only son of my dead son. And she is accusing me of killing him » and he weeps striking his head on the ground rhythmically.

«Come on! Do not cry like that. Do you want to die without having to look after your grandson any more? »

«He is dying! He is dying! Perhaps he is already dead. Let me die, too. Don't let me live in that empty house! Oh! My sad last days! »

«Eli, get up and let us go...»

«You... are You really coming? But do You know who I am? »

«An unhappy man. Let us go.»

The old man gets up and says: «I will go ahead, but run, run, be quick! » And he goes away, very quickly, because of the desperation piercing his heart.

«But, Lord, do You think that You will change him? Oh! what a wasted miracle! Let that little snake die! Also the old man will die broken-hearted... and there will be one less on Your way... God has seen to it...»

«Simon! To tell you the truth, you are now the snake.» Jesus severely repels Peter, who lowers his head, and He goes on.

Near the largest square in Capernaum there is a beautiful house before which the crowds are making a dreadful noise... Jesus turns His steps towards it and is about to arrive when the old man comes out from the wide open door, followed by a ruffled woman, who is holding in her arms a little agonizing child. The poison has already paralyzed his organs and death is near. The little wounded hand is hanging down with the mark of the bite at the root of his thumb. Eli does nothing but shout: «Jesus! Jesus! »

And Jesus, squeezed and overwhelmed by the crowds who hamper His movements, takes the little hand to His mouth, sucks the wound, then breathes on the waxen face and the glassy half closed eyes. He then straightens Himself up: «Here » He says, «the child will now wake up. Do not frighten him with your expressions which are so upset. He will already be afraid when he remembers the snake.»

In fact the boy, whose face colours up, opens his mouth in a big yawn, rubs his eyes, opens them and is surprised at being among so many people. He then remembers, and is about to run away, with such a sudden leap, that he would have fallen had Jesus not been ready to receive him in His arms.

«Good, good! What are you afraid of? Look how beautiful the sun is! Over there is the lake, your house, and your mother and grandfather are here.»

«And the snake? »

«It is no longer here. But I am.»

«You. Yes...» The child thinks... and then, in the innocent voice of truth, he says: «My grandfather used to tell me to say "cursed" to You. But I will not say it. I love You, I do.»

«I? I said that? The little one is raving. Do not believe him, Master. I have always respected You.» As fear passes away, the old nature comes to surface again.

«Words are and are not of value. I take them for what they are. Goodbye, little one, goodbye, woman, goodbye, Eli. Love one another and love Me, if you can.»

Jesus turns round and goes toward the house where He lives.

«Why, Master, did You not work a striking miracle? You should have ordered the poison to go out of the little one. You should have shown Yourself as being God. Instead You sucked the poison like any poor man.» Judas of Kerioth is not very happy. He wanted something sensational.

Also others are of the same opinion. «You should have crushed that enemy of Yours, with Your power. You heard him, eh! He became poisonous again at once...»

«His poison is of no importance. But you must consider that if I had done what you wanted Me to do, he would have said that I was helped by Beelzebub. His ruined soul can still acknowledge My power as a doctor. But no more. A miracle leads to faith only those who are already on that way. But in those without humility - faith always proves that there is humility in a soul - it leads to blasphemy. It is better therefore to avoid that danger by having recourse to forms of human appearance. The incurable misery is the misery of the incredulous. No means will eliminate it because no miracle induces them to believe or to be good. It does not matter. I fulfil My task. They follow their ill fate.»

«Why did You do it, then? »

«Because I am Goodness and because no one may say that I was vindictive with My

enemies and provocative with provokers. I am heaping coal on their heads. And they are handing it to Me that I may heap it. Be good, Judas of Simon. Endeavour not to behave as they do! And that is all. Let us go to My Mother. She will be happy to hear that I cured a child.»

162. Jesus in the House in Capernaum after the Miracle on Elisha.
13th May 1945.

From a vegetable garden, which is beginning to flourish in all its furrows, Jesus enters a very large kitchen where the two elder Maries (Mary of Clopas and Mary Salome) are cooking the supper.

«Peace to you! »

«Oh! Jesus! Master! » The two women turn round and greet Him, one holding in her hands a lovely fish, which she is gutting, the other still holding a pot full of vegetables, which are boiling, and which she has just removed from the fire to see whether they were cooked. Their kind withered faces, flushed by the fire and work, smile out of joy and seem to become younger and lovelier in their happiness.

«It will be ready in a moment, Jesus. Are You tired? You must be hungry » says aunt Mary, who has the familiarity of a relative and loves Jesus, I think, more than her own children.

«Not more than usual. But I will certainly eat with relish the good food that you and Mary have prepared for Me. And the others will do the same. Here they are coming.»

«Your Mother is upstairs. You know! Simon came... Oh! I am as happy as a lark this evening! No. Not really because... You know when I would be as happy as a king.»

«Yes, I know.» Jesus draws His aunt close to Himself and kisses her forehead and then says: «I know your desire and your sinless envy of Salome. But the day will come when you will be able to say like her: "All my sons belong to Jesus". I am going to My Mother.»

He goes out, climbs the little outside staircase and goes on to the terrace, which covers a full half of the house, whereas the other half is taken up by a very large room, from which come out the strong voices of men, and at intervals, Mary's gentle voice, the limpid virginal voice of a girl, which years have not affected, the same voice that said: «I am the handmaid of the Lord » and which sang lullabies to Her Baby.

Jesus goes near noiselessly, smiling because He hears His Mother say: «My home is My Son. I do not suffer being away from Nazareth, except when He is away. But if He is near Me... oh! I need nothing else. And I am not afraid for My house... You are there...»

«Oh! Look, there is Jesus! » shouts Alphaeus of Sarah, who facing the door, is the first to see Jesus.

«Yes, here I am. Peace to you all. Mother! » He kisses His Mother on Her forehead and is kissed by Her. He then turns to the unexpected guests, who are His cousin Simon, Alphaeus of Sarah, Isaac the shepherd and one Joseph who was received by Jesus at Emmaus after the verdict of the Sanhedrin.

«We went to Nazareth and Alphaeus told us that we had to come here. We came. And Alphaeus wanted to come with us, and also Simon » explains Isaac.

«I could not believe I was coming » says Alphaeus.

«I also wanted to see You, stay a little time with You and with Mary » concludes Simon.

«And I am very happy to be with you. I did the right thing in not staying any longer as the people of Kedesh desired, where I arrived coming from Gherghesa to Merom and going round the other side of the lake.»

«Is that where You came from? »

«Yes, I visited the places where I had already been and even farther away. I went as far as Giscala.»

«What a long road! »

«But what a great harvest! Do you know, Isaac. We were the guests of rabbi Gamaliel. He was very kind to us. And then I met the synagogue leader of the

Clear Water. He is coming, too. I entrust him to you. And then... and then I gained three disciples...» Jesus smiles frankly, blissfully.

«Who are they? »

«A little old man at Korazim. I helped him some time ago, and the poor man, who is a true Israelite without prejudice, to show Me his love, has worked his area, as a perfect ploughman works the soil. The other is a boy, five years old, perhaps a little more. Intelligent and brave. I spoke also to him the first time I was at Bethsaida and he remembered better than adults. The third is an old leper. I cured him near Korazim one evening a long time ago and then I left him. I have now found him again, announcing Me on the mountains in Naphtali. And to confirm his words he shows what is left of his hands, cured but partly impaired, and his feet, which have also been cured but are deformed, and yet he walks a long way. People realise how ill he was when they see what is left of him and they believe his words which are dressed with tears of gratitude. It was easy for Me to speak there, because there was one who had already made Me known and had led other people to believe in Me. And I was able to work many miracles. So much can be done by one who really believes....»

Alphaeus nods assent without speaking, continuously absent-minded, while Simon lowers his head under the implicit reproach, and Isaac rejoices wholeheartedly because of the joy of his Master, Who is about to tell of the miracle worked shortly before on Eli's little grandchild.

But supper is ready, and the women, with Mary, prepare the table in the large room and take the dishes there and then withdraw downstairs. Only the men remain and Jesus offers, blesses and hands out the portions.

But only a few mouthfuls of food had been taken, when Susanna goes upstairs saying: «Eli has come with servants and many gifts. But he would like to speak to You. »

«I will come at once, or better still, tell him to come up.»

Susanna goes out and comes back shortly afterwards with old Eli and two servants who are carrying a large basket. Behind them the women, with the exception of the Most Holy Mary, are casting curious glances.

«God be with You, my benefactor » greets the Pharisee.

«And with you, Eli. Come in. What do you want? Is your grandson not well again? »

«Oh! He is very well. He is jumping in the kitchen garden like a little kid. Before I was so dumbfounded and bewildered that I failed to fulfil my duty. I wish to show You my gratitude and I beg You not to refuse the little I am offering You. A little food for You and Your friends. It is the produce of my fields. And... I would like... I would like to have You at my table tomorrow. To thank You once again and honour You, with my friends. Do not refuse, Master. I would understand that You do not love me and that if You cured Elisha, it was only for his sake, not mine.»

«Thank you. But no gifts were needed.»

«Every great and learned man accepts them. It's the custom.»

«And I do. But I accept very willingly one gift only, nay, I look for it.»

«Which is? If I can, I will give it to You.»

«Your hearts. Your thoughts. Give Me them. For your own good.»

«But I consecrate mine to You, blessed Jesus! Can You doubt it? Yes, I... I did You wrong. But now I have understood. I have also heard of the death of Doras, who offended You... Why are You smiling, Master? »

«I was remembering somethings.»

«I thought You did not believe what I was saying.»

«Oh! no. I know that you were moved by Doras' death. Even more than by this evening's miracle. But do not be afraid of God, if you have really understood, and if from now on you wish to be My friend.»

«I can see that You really are a prophet. It is true, I was more afraid... I was coming to You more out of fear of punishment like Doras', than because of the accident. And this evening I said: "There you are. The punishment has come. And it is even more severe because it did not strike the old oak in its own life, but in its love, in its joy for life, by striking the little oak, in which I rejoiced". I understood that it would have been just as it was for Doras...»

«You understood that it would have been just. But you did not believe yet in Him Who is good.»

«You are right. But it is no longer so. Now I have understood. So, are You

coming to my house tomorrow? »

«Eli, I had decided to leave at dawn. But I will postpone My departure by one day, that you may not think that I despise you. I will be with you tomorrow.»

«Oh! You really are good. I will always remember it.»

«Goodbye, Eli. Thank you for everything. This fruit is beautiful, and the cheese must be as tasty as butter, and the wine certainly very good. But you could have given everything to the poor in My name.»

«There is something for them, if You wish so, at the bottom, under the rest. It was an offering for You.»

«Well, we will distribute it tomorrow together, before or after the meal, as you prefer. May the night be a peaceful one for you, Eli.»

«And for You. Goodbye » and he goes away with his servants.

Peter who with all the mimicry of which he is capable, has pulled out the contents of the basket, to hand it back to the servants, puts the purse on the table in front of Jesus and says, as if he were concluding an internal speech:

«And it will be the first time that the old owl gives alms.»

«It is true » confirms Matthew. «I was greedy, but he surpassed me. He doubled his capital by usury.»

«Well... if he mends his ways... It's a good thing, is it not? » says Isaac.

«It certainly is a good thing. And it appears to be so » state Philip and Bartholomew.

«Old Eli a convert! Ah! Ah! » Peter laughs heartily.

Simon, the cousin, who has been pensive all the time, says: «Jesus, I would like... I would like to follow You. Not like these. But at least as the women do. Let me join my mother and Yours. They are all coming... I, I, a relative... I do not expect to have a place amongst the disciples. But at least... at least as a good friend...»

«May God bless you, my son! How long have I been waiting to hear you say that! » shouts Mary of Alphaeus.

«Come. I reject no one, neither do I force anyone. I do not even exact everything from everybody. I take what you can give Me. It is a good thing that the women are not always alone, when we go to places unknown to them. Thank you, brother.»

«I am going to tell Mary » says Simon's mother and she adds: «She is down in Her little room, praying. She will be happy.»

...It is rapidly growing dark. They light a lamp to go down the staircase which is already dark in twilight, and some go to the right, some to the left, to rest.

Jesus goes out, and walks to the shore of the lake. The village is quiet, the streets are deserted, there is no one on the shore or on the lake in the moonless night. There are only stars to be seen in the sky and the murmur of the surf to be heard on the shingly shore. Jesus goes on board the beached boat, sits down, lays one arm on the edge and rests His head on it. I do not know whether He is thinking or praying.

Matthew approaches Him very quietly: «Master, are You sleeping? » he asks in a low voice.

«No, I am thinking. Come here beside Me, since you are not sleeping.»

«I thought You were upset and I followed You. Are You not satisfied with Your day's work? You touched Eli's heart, You acquired Simon of Alphaeus as a disciple...»

«Matthew, you are not a simple man like Peter and John. You are astute and learned. Be also frank. Would you be happy because of those conquests? »

«But... Master... They are always better than I am and You told me, on that day, that You were very happy because of my conversion...»

«Yes. But you were really converted. And you were genuine in your evolution towards Good. You came to Me without any elaboration of thought, you came through the will of your spirit. But Eli is not like that... neither is Simon. Only the surface of the former has been touched: the man-Eli is shocked. Not the spirit-Eli. That is always the same. When the excitement caused by the miracles on Doras and his little grandchild is over, he will be the same Eli as yesterday and as always. Simon!... he, too, is nothing but a man. If he had seen Me insulted instead of honoured, he would have pitied Me, and as always, he would have left Me. This evening he heard that a little old man, a child, a leper can do what he, although a relative, cannot do; he saw the pride of a Pharisee bend

before Me and he decided: "Also I". But those conversions brought about by the spur of human evaluations, are not the ones that make Me happy. On the contrary, they dishearten Me. Stay with Me, Matthew. It is not a moonlight night, but at least the stars are twinkling. In My heart this evening there is nothing but tears. Let your company be the star of your distressed Master...»
«Master, if I can... You can imagine! The trouble is that I am always a poor miserable man, a good for-nothing. I have sinned too much to be able to please You. I am not good at speaking. I do not yet know how to say the new, pure, holy words, now that I have left my old language of fraud and lust. And I am afraid I will never be able to speak to You and about You. »
«No, Matthew. You are a man, with all the painful experience of a man. You are the one, who, having tasted mud and tasting now the celestial honey, can tell the two flavours, and give their true analysis, and understand and make your fellow creatures understand now and later. And they will believe you, because you are the man, the poor man, who by his own will, becomes the just man dreamt of by God. Let Me, the Man-God, lean on you, the mankind I have loved to the extent of leaving Heaven for you, and dying for you.»
«No, not to die. Don't tell me that You are dying for me! »
«Not for you, Matthew, but for all the Matthews of the world and centuries. Embrace Me, Matthew, kiss your Christ, for yourself and for everybody. Relieve My tiredness of an unappreciated Redeemer. I relieved you of your tiredness of a sinner. Wipe away My tears, because My bitterness, Matthew, is that I have been so little understood.»
«Oh! Lord, Lord! Yes. Of course!...» and Matthew, sitting near the Master and clasping Him with one arm, comforts Him with his love...

163. Dinner in the House of Eli, the Pharisee of Capernaum.
14th May 1945.

Eli's house is very busy today. Servants and maidservants go and come and amongst them there is little Elisha, a lively little child. Then there are two stately personages and two more. I know the former two, as they are the ones who went with Eli to Matthew's house. I do not know the latter two, but I hear them being called Samuel and Joachim. Jesus comes last with the Iscariot. After solemn reciprocal salutations, there is the question: «Only with this one? And the others? »
«The others are around the country. They will come in the evening. »
«Oh! I am sorry. I thought it was... True, last night I invited only You, meaning all the rest with You. Now I was afraid they might be offended, or... they might disdain to come to my house, owing to past light disagreements... eh! eh! » The old man laughs...
«Oh! no! My disciples do not nourish proud touchiness or incurable grudge.»
«Of course! of course! Very well. Let us go in then.»
The usual purification ceremony and then they go into the dining room, which opens on to a large yard, where the first roses bring a happy note. Jesus caresses little Elisha, who is playing in the yard and who has only four little red marks on his hand from the past trouble. He does not even remember his past fear, but he remembers Jesus and he wants to kiss Him and be kissed by Him, with the spontaneity of children. With his little arms round Jesus' neck, he speaks to Him through His hair, confiding that when he is big he will go to Him and asks: «Do You want me? »
«I want everybody. Be good and you will come with Me.»
The little boy goes away bounding about.
They sit at the table and Eli wishes to be so perfect that he puts Jesus beside him and on the other side Judas, who is thus between Eli and Simon, as Jesus is between Eli and Uriah.
The meal begins. Their conversation at first is inconsequential. It then becomes interesting. And since wounds are sore and chains are heavy, the talk turns to the eternal topic of the enslavement of Palestine by Rome. I do not know whether it was done deliberately or without any evil purpose. I know that the five Pharisees complain of the new Roman abuses, as of a sacrilege, and they want to get Jesus interested in the discussion.

«You know! They want to pry into our income, down to the last coin. And as they have realised that we meet in the synagogue to speak about that and about them, now they are threatening to come in, without any respect. I am afraid they will enter also the houses of priests, one of these days! » shouts Joachim.

«What do You say about that? Do You not feel disgusted? » asks Eli.

Jesus replies to the direct question: «As an Israelite yes, as a man no.»

«Why that distinction? I do not understand. Are You two in one? »

«No. But there is in Me flesh and blood: that is, the animal. And there is the spirit. The spirit of an Israelite, compliant with the Law, suffers because of such violations. The flesh and blood do not suffer, because I lack the goad that hurts you.»

«Which one? »

«Interest. You said that you meet in the synagogues to speak also of business without fear of intrusive ears. And you are afraid you will no longer be able to do so and consequently you are afraid you may not be able to conceal even a small coin from the tax-collectors and that you may be taxed exactly according to your assets. I possess nothing. I live on the charity of My neighbours and on My love for them. I have neither gold, nor fields, nor vineyards, nor houses, except My Mother's house in Nazareth, which is so small and poor as to be ignored by the tax-assessors. Consequently I am not afraid that they may find out that My statement of income is untrue and that I may be fined and punished. All I possess is the Word that God gave Me and that I give. But it is such a sublime thing that man has no means whatsoever to affect it.»

«But if You were in our position what would You do? »

«Well, do not take it amiss if I tell you quite frankly My opinion, which is in contrast to yours. I solemnly tell you that I would behave differently.»

«How? »

«Not offending against the holy truth. It is always a sublime virtue, even when it is applied to such human things as taxes.»

«But... then...! How they would fleece us! But You are not considering that we own a lot and we would have to pay a lot! »

«You have said it. God has granted you a lot. In proportion you must give a lot. Why behave so badly, as unfortunately many do, so that poor people are taxed out of proportion? We are aware of the situation. How many taxes there are in Israel, our taxes, which are unjust! The great, who already have so much, benefit by them. Whereas they are the despair of poor people who have to pay them and have to starve to find the money. Love for our neighbour does not recommend that. We Israelites should be so thoughtful as to take upon us the burden of the poor.»

«You are saying that because You are poor, too.»

«No, Uriah. I am saying that because it is justice. Why has Rome been able to oppress us thus? Because we sinned and we are divided by hatred. The rich hate the poor, the poor hate the rich. Because there is no justice and the enemy takes advantage of the situation and has subdued us.»

«You have mentioned various reasons... Are there any more? »

«I would not like to go against the truth by twisting the nature of a place consecrated to religion and making it a sure shelter for human things.»

«Are You reproaching us? »

«No. I am replying to you. Listen to your own consciences. You are masters and therefore...»

«I would say that it is time to rise, to rebel, to punish the invader and restore our kingdom.»

«True, true! You are right, Simon. But the Messiah is here. He must do it » replies Eli.

«But the Messiah, for the time being, forgive me, Jesus, is only Goodness. He advises everything, except to rebel. We will...»

«Listen, Simon. Remember the book of Kings. Saul was at Gilgal, the Philistines were at Michmash, the people were afraid and dispersed, the prophet Samuel was not coming. Saul decided to precede the servant of God and offer the sacrifice himself. Remember the answer that Samuel, on his arrival, gave to the imprudent Saul: "You have acted like a fool and you have not carried out the order that the Lord had commanded you. If you had not done that, now the Lord would have confirmed your sovereignty over Israel for ever. But now your sovereignty will not last". An untimely and proud action served neither the king nor the people.

God knows the hour. Man does not. God knows the means, man does not. Leave things to God and deserve His help by means of holy behaviour. My Kingdom is not a kingdom of rebellion and ferocity. But it will be established. It is not a preserve for a few people. It will be universal. Blessed are those who will come to it, who are not led into error by My poor appearance, according to the spirit of the world, and who will see the Saviour in Me. Be not afraid. I shall be King. The King who came from Israel. The King who will extend His Kingdom all over Mankind. But you, masters of Israel, must not misunderstand My words and those of the Prophets who announce Me. No human kingdom, no matter how powerful it may be, is universal and eternal. The Prophets say that Mine will be such. That should enlighten you on the truth and spirituality of My Kingdom. I leave you. But I have a request to make to Eli. This is your purse. In a shelter of Simon of Jonas there are some poor people who have come from everywhere. Come with Me to give them the alms of love. Peace be with you all.»

«Stay a little longer » beg the Pharisees.

«I cannot. There are people, whose bodies and hearts are diseased, and they are waiting to be comforted. Tomorrow I will be going away. I want everyone to see Me leave without being disappointed.»

«Master, I... am old and tired. Please go in my name. You have Judas of Simon with You, and we know him well. Do it Yourself. God be with You.»

Jesus goes out with Judas who, as soon as they are in the square, says: «The old viper! What did he mean? »

«Forget about it! Or better still: just think that he wanted to praise you.»

«Impossible, Master! Those mouths never praise who does good. I mean, never sincerely. And with regard to his coming!... It is because he loathes the poor and is afraid of their curses. He has tortured the poor people here so often. I can swear it without any fear. And therefore...»

«Be good, Judas. Be good. Let God judge.»

164. Towards the Retreat on the Mountain before the Election of the Apostles.
15th May 1945.

The boats of Peter and John are sailing on the placid lake, followed by, I think, all the boats that exist on the shores of Tiberias, because they are so numerous, large and small, coming and going, endeavouring to reach and overtake the boat in which Jesus is and then forming a long line behind it. Prayers, entreaties, requests and outcries can be heard over the blue waves.

Jesus promises, replies and blesses. In His boat there is also Mary and the mother of James and Judas, whereas in the other boat there is Mary Salome with her son John and Susanna. «Yes, I will come back. I promise you. Be good.

Remember My words, so that you may connect them with the ones I will tell you later. I will not be away long. Do not be selfish. I have come also for other people. Be good! You will hurt yourselves. Yes, I will pray for you. You will always have Me with you. The Lord be with you. Of course, I will remember your tears and you will be comforted. You must hope and have faith.»

And thus, blessing and promising while the boat is moving, they reach the shore.

It is not Tiberias, but a tiny little village, a handful of poor, almost forlorn houses. Jesus and the disciples disembark and the boats handled by the servants and Zebedee go back. Also the other boats imitate them, but many of the people in them disembark and want to follow Jesus at all costs. Among them I can see Isaac with his two protégés: Joseph and Timoneus. I do not recognise anybody else amongst the many people of all ages, from youngsters to old people.

Jesus leaves the village, the few poorly dressed inhabitants of which remain quite indifferent. Jesus has given alms to them and then reaches the main road.

He stops. «And now, let us part » He says. «Mother, You with Mary and Salome will go to Nazareth. Susanna can go to Cana. I will soon come back. You know what is to be done. God be with you! »

But for His Mother He has a special greeting, a salutation all smiles and also when Mary kneels down, setting an example to the others, in order to be blessed, Jesus smiles most kindly. The women, with Alphaeus of Sarah and Simon, go towards their town.

Jesus addresses those who have stayed: «I leave you, but I am not sending you

away. I leave you for a short time, as I am retiring with My disciples to those mountain gorges, which you can see over there. Who wishes to wait for Me, should do so here on this plain. Those who do not wish to wait, can go home. I am retiring to pray because I am on the eve of great events. Those who love the cause of the Father should pray, joining Me in spirit. Peace be with you, My children. Isaac, you know what you have to do. I bless you, My little shepherd.» Jesus smiles at emaciated Isaac, who is now the shepherd of men gathering round him.

Jesus is now walking away from the lake, turning His steps decidedly towards a gorge between the hills, which stretch in parallel lines, I would say, from the lake westward. A little but very noisy foamy stream runs down between one rocky rugged hill and the next one, which is so steep that it resembles a fjord. Above the stream there is the wild mountain with ugly looking plants, which have grown in all directions, wherever they could, in the crevices between stones. A very narrow steep path climbs up the more rugged hill. And Jesus takes it.

The disciples follow Him with difficulty, in single file, in dead silence. Only when Jesus stops to let them recover their breath, where the path, which looks like a scratch on the impervious mountain side, widens out, they look at one another without uttering a word. Their glances say: «But where is He taking us?» but they do not speak. They only look at one another more and more desolately as they see Jesus resume walking up the wild gorge, with its many caves, crevices and rocks, where it is very difficult to walk, also because of the bramble and thorny bushes, which catch their clothes on all sides, and scratch them and cause them to stumble and hurt their faces. Also the younger ones, laden with heavy sacks, have lost their good humour.

At last Jesus stops and says: «We shall stop here for a week in prayer, to prepare you for a great event. That is why I wanted to be isolated in this desert place, away from all roads and villages. The grottoes here have already been useful to men in the past. They will be useful also to you. The water here is cool and plentiful, whereas the earth is dry. We have enough bread and food for the time we shall be staying. Those who last year were with Me in the desert, know how I lived there. This is a royal palace compared with that place, and the season, which is now mild, is not affected by the icy bitterness of frost or the burning heat of the sun. You may, therefore, stay here cheerfully. Perhaps we shall never again be all together like this and all alone. This retreat must unite you, making not twelve men of you, but one only institution. Are you not saying anything? Are you not asking any questions? Lay on that rock the loads that you are carrying and throw down the valley the other load that you have in your hearts: your humanity.

I have brought you here to speak to your spirits, to nourish your spirits, to make you spiritual. I shall not speak many words. I have told you so many in approximately one year that I have been with you! Enough of that. If I should have to change you by means of words, I would have to keep you ten years... one hundred years, and you would still be imperfect. It is now time that I make use of you. And to make use of you, I must form you. I will have recourse to the great medicine, to the great weapon: to prayer. I have always prayed for you. But now I want you to pray by yourselves. I will not yet teach you My prayer. But I will tell you how to pray and what prayer is. It is the conversation of sons with the Father, of spirits with the Spirit, an open, warm, trustful, quiet and frank conversation. Prayer is everything: it is confession, knowledge of ourselves, repentance, a promise to ourselves and to God, a request to God, all done at the feet of the Father. And it cannot be done in a turmoil, among distractions, unless one is a giant in prayer. And even giants suffer from the clash with the noise of the world in their time of prayer. You are not giants, but pygmies. You are but infants in your spirits. You are deficient in your spirits. You will reach here the age of spiritual reason. The rest will come later.

In the morning, at midday and in the evening, we shall gather together to pray with the old words of Israel and to break our bread, then each of you will go back to his grotto, in front of God and of his soul, in front of what I told you in regard to your mission and to your capabilities. Weigh yourselves, listen to yourselves, make up your minds. I am telling you for the last time. And after you will have to be perfect, as much as you can, without tiredness and without your humanity. Then you will no longer be Simon of Jonah and Judas of Simon. No

longer Andrew or John, Matthew or Thomas. But you will be My ministers. Go. Each by himself. I shall be in that cave. I shall always be present. But do not come without a good reason. You must learn to do things by yourselves and be all by yourselves. Because I solemnly tell you that a year ago we were about to become acquainted with one another, and in two years' time we shall be parting. Woe betide you and Me if you have not learned to act by yourselves. God be with you.

Judas, John, take the foodstuffs into My cave, that one. They must last and I will hand them out.»

«They are not enough!...» objects someone.

«They are sufficient not to die. A too full stomach makes the spirit dull. I want to elevate you and not make you dead weights.»

165. The Election of the Twelve Apostles.

16th May 1945.

It is dawning and the soft light whitens the mountains and seems to soften the wild mountain side. Only the gurgling sound of the foamy stream at the bottom of the valley can be heard, a sound which becomes a strange noise, when echoed by the mountain and its many caves. Where the disciples have rested, there is some gentle rustling among the leaves and the herbs: the first birds to awake, or the last night-birds returning to their hiding places. A group of hares or wild rabbits, gnawing at a low bush of blackberries, run away frightened by a falling stone. Then they go back cautiously, moving their ears in all directions to pick up every sound and when they see that everything is peaceful, they return to the bush. All the leaves and stones are wet with dew and in the wood there is a strong smell of moss, mint and marjoram.

A redbreast flies down to the edge of a cave, the roof of which is formed by a huge protruding stone and standing up straight on its very thin legs, ready to fly away, it moves its little head round, looks into the cave and at the ground, chirping inquisitively and... gluttonously, because of some bread crumbs on the ground. But it does not make up its mind to fly down until it sees that it has been preceded by a big blackbird, which proceeds hopping sideways and is extremely comical in its urchin-like attitude with its profile of an old notary, who wants only a pair of spectacles, to be the complete dignitary. The robin then flies down, hopping behind its daring fellow creature, which now and again thrusts its yellow beak into the moist ground, in archaeological research... for food and then proceeds further, after whistling, just like a real little rascal. The redbreast stuffs itself with the little bread crumbs and is amazed when it sees the blackbird, which had confidently gone into the silent cave, come out of it with a cheese-rind, which it knocks repeatedly against a stone to break it up and make a sumptuous meal of it. It goes back in again, has a look round, and not finding anything else, it whistles scoffingly and flies away to complete its song on the top of an oak-tree, in the blue morning sky. Also the robin flies away, because of a noise from the interior of the cave... and it perches on a thin bough that dangles loosely.

Jesus goes to the entrance of His cave and crumbles some bread, calling the little birds very gently, by means of a modulated whistle, which is a very good imitation of the twittering of many birds. He then moves away, climbing higher up and resting against a rock in order not to frighten His little friends, which soon fly down: the robin being the first and then many more of various kinds. Jesus' stillness and also His look are such that after a short time many birds are hopping only a few inches from Him. I like to believe, also because of my own experience, that also the most distrustful animals go near people when their instinct tells them that they are not enemies but friends. The redbreast, which is now satisfied, flies to the top of the rock against which Jesus is leaning, it rests on a very thin branch of clematis, swings above Jesus' head and seems to be anxious to descend upon His fair hair or His shoulder. The meal is now over. The rising sun gilds the mountain tops and then the highest branches of the trees, whereas down below, the valley is still in the dim dawn light. The little birds, satisfied and full, fly towards the sun and sing at the top of their voices.

«And now let us go and wake up these other children of Mine » says Jesus, and He walks down, as His cave is the highest one, and He enters the various caves calling the sleeping apostles by their names.

Simon, Bartholomew, Philip, James and Andrew reply at once. Matthew, Peter and Thomas take a little longer to reply. And while Judas Thaddeus goes to meet Jesus as soon as he sees Him appear at the entrance of his grotto, as he is already ready and wide awake, the other cousin, the Iscariot and John are fast asleep, so much so that Jesus has to shake them on their beds, made with tree branches and leaves, in order to wake them up.

John, the last one to be called, is so sound asleep, that he does not realise Who is calling him, and in the haze of his interrupted sleep, he whispers: «Yes, mother, I am coming at once...» But he turns round on his other side.

Jesus smiles, sits on the rustic mattress made of foliage picked in the wood, He bends and kisses the cheek of John, who opens his eyes and is dumbfounded at seeing Jesus. He sits up and says: «Do you need me? Here I am.»

«No. I woke you up as I did the others. But you thought it was your mother. So I kissed you, as mothers do.»

John, half naked in his undertunic, because he used his tunic and mantle as bed covers, clasps Jesus' neck and lays his head between Jesus' shoulder and cheek saying: «Oh! You are much more than a mother! I left her for You, but I would not leave You for her! She bore me to the earth. You are bearing me to Heaven. Oh! I know! »

«What do you know more than the others? »

«What the Lord told me in this cave. See, I never came to You and I think my companions said it was due to indifference and pride. But I am not concerned with what they think. I know that You know the truth. I was not coming to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, but to what You are in the bosom of the Fire that is the eternal Love of the Most Holy Trinity, its Nature, its Essence, its Real Essence - oh! I cannot tell, however, what I have understood in this dark gloomy cavern that has become so full of light for me, in this cold grotto where I have been burnt by a featureless fire that has descended into the depth of my being and has inflamed me with a sweet martyrdom, in this silent cave, which has, however, sung celestial truths to me - but to what You are, the Second Person of the ineffable Mystery, which is God and which I penetrated because God has drawn me to Himself and I have always had Him with me. And I have poured all my desires, all my tears, all my requests on Your divine bosom, Word of God. Amongst the many words I have heard from You, there never was one so comprehensive as the one You told me here, You, God the Son, You, God like the Father, You, God like the Holy Spirit, You, centre of the Trinity... oh! perhaps I am blaspheming, but that is what I think, because if You were not the love of the Father and the love for the Father, then the Love, the Divine Love would be missing, and the Divinity would no longer be Trine and it would lack the most becoming attribute of God: His love! Oh! I have so much in here, but it is like water gurgling against a dam and cannot flow out... and I seem to be dying of it, so violent and sublime is the turmoil in my heart, since I have understood You... but I would not like to be freed of it for the whole world... Let me die of that love, my sweet God! » John smiles and weeps, panting, inflamed by his love, relaxing on Jesus' chest, as if he were exhausted by his ardour. And Jesus caresses him, burning with love Himself.

John composes himself and with deep humility he begs: «Do not tell the others what I told You. I am sure that they too have lived with God as I did during these past days. But leave the stone of silence on my secret.»

«Do not worry, John. No one will be aware of your wedding with the Love. Get dressed, come. We must leave.»

«Jesus goes out on to the path where the others are already gathered. Their faces look more venerable and serene. The old ones look like patriarchs, the younger ones have a maturity and dignity, which were previously concealed by their youth. The Iscariot looks at Jesus with a shy smile on his face marked by tears. Jesus caresses him passing by. Peter... is silent. And his silence is so strange that it is more striking than any other change. He looks at Jesus attentively, but with a new dignity that makes his bald forehead look more spacious and his eyes more severe, whereas before they were full of gentle intelligence only. Jesus calls him near Himself and keeps him there while waiting for John, who at last comes out. I could not say whether his face looks

more pale or more flushed, it is certainly burning with a flame that does not change its colour, and yet is most obvious. They all look at him. «Come here, John, near Me. And you, too, Andrew, and you, James of Zebedee. Then you, Simon, and you, Bartholomew, Philip, and you, My cousins, and Matthew. Judas of Simon here, in front of Me. Thomas, come here. Sit down. I must speak to you.»

They all sit down quietly, like good children, all engrossed in their internal world and yet paying attention to Jesus, as they never did before.

«Do you know what I have done to you? You all know. Your souls told your minds. But your souls, which were the queens these past days, have taught your minds two great virtues: humility and silence, the son of humility and prudence, which are the daughters of charity. Only eight days ago you would have come to proclaim your cleverness and your new knowledge, like clever children who are eager to astound people and overcome their rivals. Now you are silent. You have grown from children into adolescents and you are already aware that such a proclamation might humiliate a companion who was perhaps less helped by God, and therefore you do not speak.

You are also like pubescent girls. The holy reserve, concerning the change that revealed the nuptial mystery of souls with God, was born in you. These caves seemed cold, hostile and repulsive on the first day... now you are looking at them as if they were bright scented nuptial rooms. You have met God in them. Before you were aware of Him. But you did not know Him in the intimacy that blends two into one. Amongst you there are some who have been married for years, some who have had but a disappointing relationship with women, some who are chaste owing to various reasons. But the chaste ones now know what perfect love is, as the married ones know. Nay, I can say that nobody knows what perfect love is, as he who is unaware of carnal lusts. Because God reveals Himself in His fullness to the pure, both because He takes delight in giving Himself to those who are pure, as He, the Most Pure One, finds part of Himself in the creature free from lust, and because He wishes to compensate the creature for what it denies itself for His love.

«I solemnly tell you that because of the love I have for you and of the wisdom I possess, if I did not have to accomplish the work of the Father, I would keep you here and be with you, isolated, as I am sure that I would soon make great saints of you, and you would no longer be subject to confusion, defections, failures, slackening, recurrences. But I cannot. I must go. And you must go. The world is waiting for us. The desecrated and desecrating world, which needs teachers and redeemers, is waiting for us. I wanted you to know God, so that you may love Him more than you love the world, which with all its affections is not worth one single smile of God. I wanted to make it possible for you to meditate on what the world is and what God is, so that you may yearn for what is better. At present you are yearning only for God. Oh! I wish I could secure you in your yearning of the present moment! But the world is waiting for us. And we shall go to the world, which is waiting for us, for the sake of the holy Charity that by My order is sending you to the world as it sent Me. But I implore you! Lock in your hearts, like a pearl in a coffer, the treasure of the past days in which you have examined, cured, elevated, renovated and united yourselves to God. And keep and preserve these precious memories in your hearts, like the witness stones erected by the Patriarchs in remembrance of the alliance with God. As from today you are no longer My favourite disciples, but the apostles, the chiefs of My Church. All the hierarchies of the Church, throughout centuries, shall descend from you, and will call you masters, having as their Master your God in His treble power, wisdom and charity. I have not chosen you because you are the most worthy, but for a number of reasons that you need not know now. I have chosen you in place of the shepherds who have been My disciples since I was born. Why did I do it? Because it was right to do so. Amongst you there are Galileans and Judaeans, learned and unlearned, rich and poor people. And that is because of the world, that it may not say that I have chosen one category only. But you will not be sufficient for everything there is to be done. Neither now, nor later.

Not all of you will remember a passage of the Book. I will remind you. Book 2 of Chronicles, Chapter 29, tells how Hezekiah, King of Judah, had the Temple purified, and after it was purified, he had sacrifices offered in atonement, for his kingdom, for the Temple and for the whole of Judah, and then the offerings

of the single individuals began. But as the priests were not sufficient for the sacrifices, the levites, who are consecrated with a shorter rite than the priests, were summoned.

That is what I will do. You are the priests, who have been prepared by Me, the Eternal Pontiff, diligently and for a long time. But you will not suffice for the work, which is much more extensive than the sacrifice of the offerings of individuals to the Lord their God. I will therefore associate with you the disciples who will remain such, those who are waiting for us at the foot of the mountain, those who are already higher up, those who are spread all over Israel and that later will be spread all over the world. They will be entrusted with equal tasks, because the mission is only one, but their position will be different in the eyes of the world. But not in the eyes of God, where there is justice, so that the obscure disciple, ignored by the apostles and by his brethren, who lives a holy life taking souls to God, will be greater than a known apostle, who has only the name of apostle and lowers his apostolic dignity for human purposes.

The task of the apostles and disciples will still be the same as the task of the priests and levites of Hezekiah: to perform the rites of the cult, to demolish idolatries, to purify hearts and places, to preach God and His Word. There is not a more holy task on the earth. Neither is there a dignity higher than yours. That is why I said to you: "Listen to yourselves and examine yourselves". Woe betide the apostle who falls! He drags many disciples with him, and they drag a greater number of believers and the ruin grows larger and larger like a falling avalanche or a ring that expands on the lake when several stones are thrown in the same spot.

Will you all be perfect? No. Will the spirit of the present moment last? No. The world will throw its tentacles to choke your souls. That will be the victory of the world: to extinguish the light in the hearts of saints; the world, a son of Satan for five tenths, a servant of Satan, for three more tenths, indifferent to God for the remaining two tenths. Defend yourselves from yourselves, against yourselves, against the world, flesh and the demon. Above all, defend yourselves from yourselves. Stand on your guard, My children, against pride, sensuality, duplicity, tepidity, spiritual drowsiness and against avarice! When your inferior ego speaks and moans over alleged cruelty to it, hush it up by saying: "For a moment of hardship, which I give you now, I will procure for you, and for ever, the banquet of ecstasy that you enjoyed in the mountain cave at the end of the month of Shebat".

Let us go. Let us go and meet the others who in large numbers are awaiting My coming. And then I will go for a few hours to Tiberias and you, preaching Me, will go to wait for Me at the foot of the mountain that is on the road leading from Tiberias to the sea. I will come up there to preach. Take your bags and mantles. The retreat is over and the election has been made.»

17th May 1945.

Jesus says:

«You are not feeling well and I will leave you in peace. I only wish to point out to you how a sentence omitted or a word wrongly copied can alter everything. And you, My writer, are alive and can make the correction at once. So consider and try to understand how twenty centuries have deprived the Gospel, the apostolic Gospel, of parts that did no harm to the doctrine, but prevented it from being easily understood. This - if we go back to the origin we find that it is still the work of Disorder - explains many things and lends itself to the children of Disorder for so many more things. And you can see how easy it is to make errors in copying... Little John, be good today. You are a broken flower. I will come later and mend your stalk. I need the tears of your wound today. God is with you.»

166. The First Sermon of Simon Zealot and John.

18th May 1945.

Jesus, half way down the mountain, finds many disciples and many more people, who by degrees have joined the disciples. They have come here urged by the need of a miracle, by the desire to hear Jesus' word, and have been guided here either by information of people or by the instinct of their souls. I think that

the guardian angels of men have led them to the Son of God, as they were desirous of God. And I do not think I am telling an idle story. If we consider with what prompt and shrewd perseverance Satan led enemies to God and to His Word, every time his diabolical spirit could exhibit to men the semblance of a fault in Christ, it is admissable to think, rather than admissable it is indeed just to think also that the angels were no way inferior to demons and they led non-demoniacal spirits to Christ.

And Jesus does His utmost for all those who have been waiting for Him patiently and fearlessly and grants them miracles and the comfort of His word. How many miracles! As many as the flowers decorating the mountain crags. Some of the miracles are great, like the one for a boy who was rescued from a blazing straw-barn and was dreadfully burnt. The child was brought here on a stretcher, crying mournfully, a heap of scorched flesh under a linen cloth, with which he had been covered, so dreadful is the appearance of his burnt body. He is about to breathe his last. Jesus breathes over him and heals his burns that disappear completely, so much so that the boy gets up, absolutely naked, and runs happily towards his mother, who, weeping for joy, caresses his body now entirely cured, without any trace of burns. She kisses his eyes, which were expected to be burnt, and instead are bright and shining with joy. His hair is short, but not destroyed, as if the flames had acted as a razor and not as an instrument of destruction. Other miracles are minor, like the one in favour of a little elderly man, suffering from asthmatic spasms, who says: «Not for my own sake, but because I have to act as a father to my little orphan grandchildren and I cannot work the land with this disease here, in my throat, choking me...»

There is also an invisible but real miracle, brought about by Jesus' words: «Amongst you, there is one whose soul is weeping, but dare not say the words: "Have mercy on me!" My reply is: "Let it be done as you wish. You have all My pity, that you may know that I am Mercy". In my turn, however, I say to you: "Be generous". Be generous with God. Break all ties with the past. You perceive God, so come to Him Whom you perceive, with a free heart and complete love.» I do not know to whom, among the crowd, these words are addressed.

Jesus says also: «These are My apostles. They are as many Christs, because I have elected them as such. Apply to them trustingly. They have learned from Me what is needed for your souls...» The apostles, thoroughly afraid, look at Jesus. But He smiles and goes on: «...and they will give your souls the light of stars and the refreshment of dew, to prevent you from languishing in darkness. And then I will come and give you perfect light and consolation and all wisdom to make you strong and happy by means of a supernatural strength and joy. Peace be with you, My children. I am expected by other people who are more unhappy and poorer than you are. But I will not leave you alone. I am leaving My apostles with you, which is the same as if I left the children of My love entrusted to the most amiable and reliable foster-mothers.»

Jesus waves His hand, blesses them and departs, pushing through the crowd, who do not want to let Him go, and just then He works the last miracle. An elderly partly-paralysed woman, brought here by her grandson, joyfully shakes her right arm, which before she could not move, and shouts: «He touched me lightly with His mantle, when passing by, and I am cured! I did not even ask for it, because I am old... But He felt pity also for my secret desire. And with His mantle, the hem of which hardly touched my useless arm, He cured me! Oh! What a great Son our holy David has! Glory be to his Messiah! But look! Look! Also my leg is moving like my arm... Oh! I feel as if I were only twenty years old!»

While many people rush towards the old woman, who is shouting her happiness at the top of her voice, Jesus can sneak away without being detained further. And the apostles follow Him.

When they are in a lonely place, almost down on the plain, they stop for a moment in an area of heathland, which stretches towards the lake. Jesus says: «I bless you! Go back to your work and continue it until I come back, as I told you.»

Peter, who has been quiet so far, bursts out: «But, my Lord, what have You done? Why did You say that we have everything that souls need? It is true that You have told us many things. But we are blockheads, at least I am, and... and of all You gave me, little is left, very little indeed. I am like one, who after a meal, still has in his stomach the heavy part of the food. The rest is no longer there.»

Jesus smiles frankly: «Where is the rest of the food, then? »

«Well... I don't know. I know that when I eat delicate food, after an hour I feel my stomach empty. But if I eat horse-radish, or lentils dressed with oil, eh! it takes a long time to get rid of them! »

«It does. But you can be sure that horse-radish and lentils, which seem to fill you more, are the less nourishing: it is meal that goes through with little benefit. Whereas the delicate dishes that you feel no longer, within an hour, are no longer in your stomach, but in your blood. When food has been digested it is no longer in one's stomach, but its juice is in the blood and is more useful. Now you and your companions think that nothing, or only a little, is left in you of what I told you. Perhaps you remember whatever is more pertinent to one's own nature: the violent the violent parts, the contemplative the contemplative parts, the affectionate the loving parts... But believe Me: everything is within you. Even if it seems to have gone. You have absorbed it. Your thoughts will wind off like a multicoloured thread showing you light or strong hues according to what you require. Be not afraid. Consider that I know and I would never send you if I knew that you were unable to do it. Goodbye, Peter. Cheer up! Smile! Have faith! A good act of faith in the Omnipresent Wisdom. Goodbye, everybody. The Lord is with you.» And He leaves them quickly, while they are still amazed and worried about what they have heard they must do.

«And yet we must obey » says Thomas.

«Yes... of course... Oh! poor me! I feel like running after Him...» grumbles Peter.

«No. Don't. To obey is to love Him » says James of Alphaeus.

«It is only reasonable and also according to holy prudence that we should start while He is still near us and can advise us if we make mistakes. We must help him » suggests the Zealot.

«That's true. Jesus is rather tired. We must relieve Him a little, as best we can. It is not enough to carry the bags, make the beds and prepare the food. Anyone can do that. But we must help Him in His mission, as He wants us to » confirms Bartholomew.

«It's all right for you, because you are a learned man. But I... I am almost completely...» moans James of Zebedee.

«O Lord! There are those who were up there. They are coming here! What shall we do? » exclaims Andrew.

And Matthew says: «Excuse me, if I, the most miserable one, give you my advice. Would it not be better to pray the Lord, instead of standing here complaining about things complaints cannot mend? Come on, Judas, you know the Scriptures so well, say for us all the prayer of Solomon to obtain Wisdom. Quick! Before they arrive here.»

And Thaddeus in his beautiful baritone voice begins: «God of my ancestors, Lord of mercy, Who by Your word have made all things... etc... etc.» down to: «...all those were saved by Wisdom, who pleased You, o Lord, from the beginning.» He finishes in time, just before the people arrive, and gather round them asking thousands of questions as to where the Master has gone, when He will come back, and a more difficult one to be answered, requesting: «How can they follow the Master, not with their legs, but with their souls, along the Way pointed out by Him? »

The apostles are embarrassed by the question. They look at one another and the Iscariot replies: «By following perfection » as if his reply explained everything!...

James of Alphaeus, who is more humble and quiet, becomes pensive, then says: «The perfection to which my companion refers is achieved by obeying the Law. Because the Law is justice and justice is perfection.»

But the crowd are not yet satisfied and one, who appears to be a leader, asks: «But we are like little children with regard to doing good. Children do not know yet the meaning of Good and Evil, they cannot tell one from the other. And on this way, which He points out to us, we are so inexperienced that neither are we able to distinguish between them. There was a way known to us, the old one, which we were taught at school. It is so difficult, long and frightening! Now, listening to His words, we feel that it is like that aqueduct we can see from here. Below, there is the road for animals and men, above, on the light arches, high up in the sun and in the blue sky, near the tallest branches rustling in the wind and resounding with the singing of birds, there is another road, as

smooth, clean and clear, as the inferior one is rough, dirty and dark, there is a way for the gurgling limpid water, which is a blessing, because of the water that comes from God and is caressed by what is of God: rays of the sun and of the stars, new leaves, flowers and wings of swallows. We would like to climb up to that higher way, which is His way, but we do not know how to do so, because we are bound down here, under the weight of the old construction. What shall we do? »

The person who has spoken is a young man about twenty-five years old, dark, strong, with an intelligent mien. He does not seem to be a man of the people like the majority of the crowd present. He is leaning on an older man.

The Iscariot, tall as he is, sees him and whispers to his companions: «Quick, explain things properly. There is Hermas with Stephen, who is loved by Gamaliel!» And that is enough to embarrass the apostles completely.

At last the Zealot replies: «There would be no arch, if there was no foundation in the dark road. The latter is the matrix of the former, which rises from it and climbs towards the blue sky, of which you are desirous. The stones fixed in the ground and holding the weight without enjoying rays or flights are aware that they are set there, because now and again a swallow, squeaking, flies down as far as the mud, and caresses the base of the arch, and a ray of the sun or of a star filters through to say how beautiful is the vault of heaven. Thus, in past centuries, a divine word of promise, a celestial ray of wisdom, descended now and again to caress the stones oppressed by divine wrath. Because the stones were necessary. They are not, were not and never will be useless. Time and the perfection of human knowledge have risen slowly on them and have reached the freedom of present days and the wisdom of supernatural knowledge.

I already see your objection, it is written on your face. It is the one we have all had, before we were able to understand that this is the New Doctrine, the Gospel preached to those who, because of a retarding process, have not become adults through the elevation of the stones of knowledge, but have grown darker and darker like a wall that sinks into a dark abyss.

In order to get out of this affliction of a supernatural darkness, we must bravely free the foundation stone from all the others laid on top of it. Do not be afraid to knock down the high wall that does not carry the pure lymph of the eternal spring. Go back to the foundation, which is not to be changed. It comes from God. It is immovable. But before rejecting the stones, because they are not all bad and useless, examine them one by one, at the sound of the word of God. If you hear that they are sound, keep them and use them again to rebuild. But if you hear in them the dissonant sound of human voice or the rending sound of a satanic voice - and you cannot be mistaken because if it is God's voice it is a sound of love, if it is a human voice it is a sensual sound, if it is a satanic voice it is a sound of hatred - then break the wicked stones into shivers. I say: break them into shivers, because it is charity not to leave behind germs or evil things, which may seduce the wayfarer and induce him to use them to his own disadvantage. Crush literally to smithereens all your deeds, writings, teachings and acts that were not good. It is better to be left with little, to rise by hardly one cubit with good stones, rather than by yards with wicked stones. Sunbeams and swallows descend also to low walls, which hardly rise above the ground and the humble little flowers at the edge of the road easily reach the low stones to caress them. On the contrary, the proud useless rough stones that want to rise higher receive nothing but thorny caresses and poisonous embraces. Demolish in order to rebuild and to ascend, testing the goodness of your old stones to the sound of the voice of God.»

«You are a good speaker, man. We must ascend! But how? We have told you that we are less than babies. Who will enable us to climb the steep column? We will test the stones to the sound of the voice of God. We will break up the ones that are not good. But how can we ascend? We feel giddy only at the thought of it! » says Stephen.

John, who has been listening with his head lowered, smiling to himself, raises his head. His face is bright and he begins to speak:

«Brothers! The thought of ascending makes you feel giddy. It is true. But who told you that it is necessary to attack the ascent direct? Not only babies, but even adults cannot do it. Only angels can glide in the blue skies, because they are free from all material weight. And only heroes in holiness can do it amongst men.

We have a living being, who in this dejected world, is still a holy hero, like the ancient people who adorned Israel, when the Patriarchs were friends of God and the word of the eternal Code was the only one and was obeyed by every righteous creature. John, the Precursor teaches us how to attack the ascent direct. John is a man. But the Grace, which the Fire of God communicated to him, purifying him in his mother's womb, as the lips of the Prophet were cleansed by the Seraph, so that he might precede the Messiah without leaving the stench of original sin along the royal way of Christ, that Grace has given John the wings of an angel and Penance has made them grow, suppressing at the same time the human weight which his nature of a man born of a woman had retained. John, therefore, from the cavern where he preached penance, with his spirit married to Grace burning in his body, can ascend to the top of the arch beyond which is God, the Most High Lord our God, and dominating the past centuries, the present day and the future, with the voice of a prophet and the eye of an eagle that can stare at the eternal sun and recognise it, he can announce: "There is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world". And he can die after this sublime song, which will be sung not only in our limited time, but also in the endless Time in the eternal blessed Jerusalem, to applaud the Second Person, to invoke Him on human miseries, to sing hosannas in the eternal brightness.

But the Lamb of God, the Most Sweet Lamb Who left His bright abode in Heaven, where He is the Fire of God in an embrace of fire - oh! the eternal generation, of the Father Who conceives His Word through His unlimited and most holy thought, and absorbs Him producing an effusion of love, from which the Spirit of Love proceeds, the centre of Power and Wisdom - but the Lamb of God, Who left His most pure incorporeal form, to enclose His infinite purity, holiness and divine nature in mortal flesh, knows that we have not been cleansed by Grace, not yet, and knows that we could not ascend to the high summit, where God, One and Trine is, like the eagle, which is John. We are little sparrows living on roofs and on roads, we are swallows that fly in the sky but feed on insects, we are woodlarks who want to sing imitating the angels, but our singing, when compared to theirs, is a dissonant high-pitched drone of cicadas in summer. The Sweet Lamb of God, Who came to take away the sin of the world, knows that. Because if He is no longer the Infinite Spirit of Heaven, having taken human flesh, His infinity is not diminished thereby and He knows everything because His wisdom is always infinite.

And so He teaches us His way. The way of love. He is the Love, which out of mercy for us, became flesh. And that Merciful Love created for us a way, which also little ones can ascend. And He is the first to ascend it, not because of His own need, but to teach us. Neither would He need to spread His wings to return to the Father. His spirit, I swear it to you, is closed down here, on the miserable earth, but it is always with the Father, because God can do everything, and He is God. But He goes ahead, leaving behind Him the perfume of His holiness, the gold and fire of His love. Look at His way. Oh! It does reach the summit of the arch! But how peaceful and safe it is! It is not straight: it is spiral. It is longer and the sacrifice of His merciful love is revealed by such length where He delays for the sake of us, the weak ones. It is longer, but better suited to our misery. The ascent to love, to God, is as simple as Love. But it is vast, because God is an abyss, which I would say is immeasurable if He did not bend across to be reached, to be kissed by the souls in love with Him (John speaks and weeps, smiling with his lips, in the ecstasy of revealing God). The simple way of love is long, because the Abyss, which is God, is limitless, and one could climb as much as one would like. But the Admirable Abyss calls our miserable abyss. It calls it by means of its light and says: "Come to Me!" Oh! The invitation of God! The invitation of the Father!

Listen! Listen! The kindest words are coming towards us from the Heavens left open, because Christ opened the gates wide and left the angels of Mercy and Forgiveness to keep them open, so that while men are waiting for the Grace, at least light, scents, songs and peace should flow down to attract the hearts of men in a holy manner. It is the voice of God Who is speaking. And the Voice says: "Your childhood? But it is your most valuable money! I would like you to become really little, so that you would have the humility, the sincerity and the love of children, the confident love of children for their fathers. Your inability? But that is My glory! Oh! Come. I do not even ask you to test the sound of the good and bad stones by yourselves. Give them to Me! I will pick

them and you will do the rebuilding. The ascent to perfection? Oh! no, My little children. Join hands with My Son, your Brother now, and thus ascend beside Him... ".

To ascend! To come to You, Eternal Love! To achieve Your likeness, that is Love! To love! That is the secret!... To love! To give oneself... To love! To suppress oneself... To love! To melt... The flesh? It is nothing. Sorrow? It is nothing. Time? It is nothing. Sin itself becomes nothing if I dissolve it in Your fire, o God! Only Love exists. Love. The Love that gave us the Incarnate God, will give us all forgiveness. And no one knows how to love better than children. And no one is loved more than a child.

O you, whom I do not know, who want to know what Good is, to distinguish it from Evil, to possess the blue sky, the celestial Sun, and everything that is supernatural joy, love and you will achieve it. Love Christ. You will die to the life of this world, but you will rise again in your spirit. With your new spirit, without any further need of stones, you will be for ever an inextinguishable fire. A flame rises. It needs neither steps nor wings to rise. Free your ego from every construction, put love into yourself. You will blaze up. Let that happen without any restriction. Nay, kindle the fire, throwing into it your past passions and knowledge. What is not good will be destroyed by the flames, what is already a noble metal will become pure. Cast yourself, brother, into the active joyful love of the Trinity. You will understand what now seems incomprehensible to you, because you will understand God, Who can be understood only by those who give themselves, without any limitation, to His sacrificing fire. You will be fixed, in the end, in God in a loving embrace, praying for me, the child of Christ, who dared to speak to you of Love.»

They are all dumbfounded: the apostles, the disciples, the believers... The man to whom the words were addressed is pale, while John's face is flushed, not so much because of the effort as because of his love.

Stephen at last shouts: «May you be blessed! But tell me, who are you? »

And John - his attitude reminds me so much of the Virgin at the Annunciation - replies in a low voice, bending as if he were adoring Him Whom he mentions: «I am John. You see in me the least of the servants of the Lord.»

«But who was your master before? »

«No one but God. Because I received my spiritual milk from John, the presanctified of God, now I eat the bread of Christ, the Word of God, and I drink God's fire that comes to me from Heaven. Glory be to the Lord! »

«Ah! I am not going to leave you! Neither you nor him, I will part from none of you. Take me with you! »

«When... Oh! But Peter is here, he is our chief » and John takes Peter, who is dumbfounded, and proclaims him «the first ».

And Peter collects himself and says: «Son, a considered reflection is required for a great mission. This man is our angel and he inflames us. But it is necessary to know whether the flame will last in us. Measure yourself and then come to the Lord. We will open our hearts to you as to a most dear brother. In the meantime, if you wish to become better acquainted with our life, you may stay. The flocks of Christ may grow exceedingly so that the true lambs may be separated from the false rams, choosing among the perfect and imperfect ones. » And the first apostolic revelation ends thus.

167. In the House of Johanna of Chuza. Jesus and the Roman Ladies.

19th May 1945.

Jesus comes off a boat at the wharf at Chuza's garden, helped by a boatman who had taken Him there. A gardener who has seen Him runs to open the gate which closes the entrance to the property on the lake side. It is a strong tall gate, which, however, is concealed by a very thick high hedge of laurel and box on the outer side, towards the lake, and by roses of all colours on the inner side, towards the house. The magnificent rose-bushes decorate the bronze laurel and box leaves, they creep through the branches and peep out on the other side, or they pass over the green barrier and let their flowery heads fall on the other side. Only the central part of the gate, across the avenue, is barren and is opened there to let through people going to or coming from the lake.

«Peace to this house and to you, Joanna. Where is your mistress? »

«Over there, with her friends. I will call her at once. They have been waiting for You three days, because they were afraid of being late.»

Jesus smiles. The servant runs away to call Johanna. In the meantime Jesus walks slowly towards the place mentioned by the servant, admiring the wonderful garden, one could say the wonderful rosery, which Chuza had built for his wife. Magnificent early roses of all types, sizes and shapes are a blaze of colours in this sheltered inlet of the lake. There are other flower plants. But they are not yet in bloom and their number is minimal as compared to the quantity of rose-bushes.

Johanna arrives. She has not even laid down the basket half full of roses, nor the scissors she was using to cut them, and she runs thus, her arms stretched out, agile and beautiful in her wide dress of very thin woollen material, of a very light pink hue, the folds of which are held in place by silver filigree studs and buckles, decorated with sparkling pale garnets. On her dark wavy hair a mitre-shaped diadem, also in silver and garnets, hold a very light pink byssus veil, which hangs over her back, leaving uncovered her ears, adorned with earrings matching the diadem, her smiling face and thin neck, round which she wears a shining necklace which is made like the rest of her precious ornaments. She drops her basket at Jesus' feet and kneels down to kiss His tunic, among the roses spread on the ground.

«Peace to you, Johanna. I have come.»

«And I am happy. They have come, too. Oh! Now I seem to have done the wrong thing by organising this meeting! How will you manage to understand one another? They are heathens! » Johanna is somewhat worried.

Jesus smiles, and laying His hand on her head He says: «Be not afraid. We will understand one another very well. You have done the right thing "by organising this meeting". Our meeting will be full of blessings as your garden is full of roses. Now, pick up those poor roses which you dropped and let us go to your friends.»

«Oh! There is any amount of roses. I was picking them to pass the time and then my friends are so... so voluptuous. They love flowers as if they were... I do not know...»

«I love them, too! See, we have already found a subject on which we can understand one another. Come on! Let us pick up these wonderful roses...» and Jesus bends to set the example.

«Not You! Not You, my Lord! If You really want to... well... it's done.»

They walk as far as a bower made by multicoloured interlaced rose-bushes. Three Roman ladies are casting glances at them from the threshold: Plautina, Valeria and Lydia. The first and last ones are hesitant, but Valeria runs out and makes a curtsy saying: «Hail, Saviour of my little Fausta! »

«Peace and light to you and to your friends.»

The friends curtsy without speaking.

We already know Plautina. Tall, stately, with beautiful dark, rather authoritative eyes, under a smooth very white forehead, a perfect straight nose, a well shaped rather tumid mouth, a roundish well defined chin, she reminds me of some beautiful statues of Roman empresses. Heavy rings shine on her beautiful hands and large golden bracelets round her statuesque arms, on her wrists and above her elbows which appear pinkish white, smooth and perfect under her short draped sleeves.

Lydia, on the other hand, is fair-haired, thinner and younger. Her beauty is not the stately beauty of Plautina, but she possesses all the grace of feminine youth which is still a little unripe. And since we are on a pagan subject, I could say that if Plautina looks like the statue of an empress, Lydia could well be Diana or a gentle modest looking nymph.

Valeria, who is not in the desperate situation in which we saw her at Caesarea, appears in the beauty of a young mother, rather plumply shaped but still very young, with the quiet look of a mother who is happy to breastfeed her own child and see it grow healthy. Rosy and brown, her smile is a quiet but very kind one. I am under the impression that the two ladies are of a lower rank than Plautina, whom they respect as a queen, as is obvious also from their attitude.

«Were you attending to flowers? Go on, go on. We can talk also while you pick this beautiful work of the Creator, which flowers are, and while you arrange them in these precious vases with the ability of which Rome is mistress, to

lengthen their lives, which unfortunately are too short... If we admire this bud, which is just opening its yellow pink petal in a lovely smile, how can we not be sorry to see it dying? Oh! How amazed the Jews would be if they heard Me speak thus! But also in a flower we feel there is something which is alive. And we regret to see its end. But plants are wiser than we are. They know that on every wound caused by cutting a stem a new shoot will grow and it will become a new rose. And so we must learn the lesson and make of our somewhat sensual love for flowers a spur to a higher thought.»

«Which one, Master? » asks Plautina, who is listening diligently and is intrigued by the refined thought of the Jewish Master.

«This one. That as a plant does not die as long as its roots are nourished by the soil, it does not die because its stems die, so mankind does not die because one being ends his earthly life. But new flowers are always born. And - a thought which is even higher and will make us bless the Creator - while a flower, once it is dead, will not come to life again, which is sad, man, when he is asleep in his last sleep, is not dead, but he lives a brighter life, drawing, through his better part, eternal life and splendour from the Creator Who formed him. Therefore, Valeria, if your little girl had died, you would not have lost her caresses. The kisses of your creature would have always come to your soul, because, although separated from you, she would not have forgotten your love. See how pleasant it is to have faith in eternal life? Where is your little one now? »

«In that covered cradle. I never parted from her before, because the love for my husband and for my daughter were the only interests of my life. But now that I know what it is to see her dying, I do not leave her even for a moment.»

Jesus goes towards a seat on which there is a kind of wooden cradle, covered by an expensive cover. He uncovers it and looks at the sleeping child, whom the fresher air awakes tenderly. Her little eyes seem surprised when they open and her lips part in an angel's smile, while her tiny hands, which heretofore were closed, are now open and anxious to get hold of Jesus' wavy hair. The twittering of a sparrow marks the progress of speech in her little mind. At last the great universal word trills: «Mummy! »

«Pick her up, pick her up » says Jesus Who moves to one side to let Valeria bend over the cradle.

«She will give You trouble! I will call a slave and have her taken into the garden.»

«Trouble? Oh! No! Children are never any trouble. They are always My friends.»

«Have You any children or grandchildren, Master? » asks Plautina, who watches how Jesus, smiling, teases the baby to make her laugh.

«No, I have neither children nor grandchildren. But I love children as I love flowers. Because they are pure and without malice. Nay, give Me your little one, woman. It is such a great joy for Me to press a little angel to My heart.» And He sits down holding the little baby, who watches Him and ruffles His beard and then finds something more interesting to do playing with the fringes of His mantle and with the cord of His tunic, to which she devotes a long mysterious speech.

Plautina says: «Our good and wise friend, one of the few who does not disdain us and does not become corrupt associating with us, will have told You that we were anxious to see You and hear You, to judge You for what You are, because Rome does not believe in idle stories... Why are You smiling, Master? »

«I will tell you later. Go on.»

«Because Rome does not believe in idle stories and wants to judge with true knowledge and conscience before condemning and extolling. Your people exalt You and calumniate You to the same degree. Your deeds would convince one to exalt You. The words of many Jews would induce people to consider You little less than a criminal. Your words are solemn and wise like a philosopher's. Rome is very fond of philosophic doctrines and... I must admit it, our present philosophers do not have a satisfactory doctrine, also because their ways of living do not correspond to their doctrines.»

«They cannot have a way of living corresponding to their doctrine.»

«Because they are pagans, is that right? »

«No, because they are atheists.»

«Atheists? But they have their gods.»

«They do not even have those any more, woman. I remind you of the ancient

philosophers, the greatest ones. They were heathens, too. However, consider how high was the moral tone of their lives! It was mingled with errors, because man is inclined to err. But when they were confronted with the greatest mysteries: life and death, when they had to face the dilemma of Honesty or Dishonesty, of Virtue or Vice, of Heroism or Cowardice and they considered that if they turned to evil, a great misfortune would befall their fatherland and their fellow citizens, then with a super effort of will they rejected the tentacles of evil polyps and, holy and free, they chose Good, at all costs. That Good which is no one else but God.»

«You are God, so they say. Is that true? »

«I am the Son of the True God, I became flesh, but I still remain God.»

«But what is God? The greatest Master, if we look at You.»

«God is much more than a Master. Do not minimise the sublime idea of Divinity to a limitation of wisdom.»

«Wisdom is a deity. We have Minerva. She is the goddess of knowledge.»

«You have also Venus, the goddess of pleasure. Can you admit that a god, that is, a being superior to men, possesses, raised to the highest degree, all the horrible vices of mortals? Can you conceive that an eternal being has for all eternity the petty, mean, humiliating delights of those who have only one hour's time? And that the superior being makes them the scope of his life? Do you not consider what a desecrated heaven is the one you call Olympus, where the most acrid juices of mankind ferment? If you look at your heaven, what can you see? Lust, crime, hatred, war, thefts, crapulence, snares, revenge. If you wish to celebrate the feast of your gods, what do you do? You indulge in orgies. What cult do you give them? Where is the true chastity of the virgins consecrated to Vesta? On what divine code of law do your pontifices base their judgement? What words can your augurs read in the flight of birds or in the peal of thunder? And what answers can the bleeding entrails of sacrificed animals give to your haruspices? You said: "Rome does not believe in idle stories". Why does she believe, then, that twelve poor men, by sending a pig, a sheep and a bull round the fields and sacrificing them, can gain Ceres' favour, when you have an endless number of deities, one hating the other, and you believe in their revenges? No. God is something quite different. He is Eternal, One and Spiritual.»

«But You say that You are God and yet You are flesh.»

«There is an altar with no god in the fatherland of gods. Man's wisdom has devoted it to the unknown God. Because wise men, the true philosophers, have realised that there is something beyond the illustrated scenario created for the eternal children, that is for men whose souls are enveloped in the swaddling clothes of error. If those wise men - who realised that there is something beyond the false scenario, something really sublime and divine, which created everything that exists and from which comes all the good there is in the world - if those men wanted an altar to the unknown God, Whom they perceived to be the True God, how can you call god what is not god and how can you say that you know what you do not know? Learn, therefore, what God is, that you may know and honour Him. God is the Being Who by His thought made everything from nothing. Can the tale of stones changing into men convince you and satisfy you? I solemnly tell you that there are men more hard and wicked than stones, and stones more useful than men. But is it not more pleasant for you, Valeria, to say, looking at your little baby: "She is the living will of God, created and formed by Him, gifted by Him with a second life which does not end, so that I will have my little Fausta for ever and ever, if I believe in the True God", rather than say: "This rosy flesh, this hair thinner than a spider's web, these clear eyes originate from a stone"? Or to say: "I am entirely like a she-wolf or a mare, and like an animal I mate, like an animal I procreate, like an animal I rear, and my daughter is the fruit of my beastly instinct and she is an animal like me, and tomorrow, when she is dead and I am dead, we shall be two carrions which will dissolve with a foul odour and will never see each other again"? Tell Me! Which of the two choices would your maternal heart prefer? »

«Certainly not the latter, my Lord! If I had known that Fausta was not a thing that could be dissolved for ever, my grief, when she was in agony, would not have been so violent. Because I would have said: "I have lost a pearl. But it still exists. And I will find it".»

«You are right. When I was coming towards you, your friend told me that she was

amazed at your passion for flowers. And she was afraid that it might upset Me. But I reassured her saying to her: "I love flowers, too, so we will understand each other quite well". But I wish to bring you to love flowers, as I have brought Valeria to love her baby, of whom she will now take greater care, as she knows that Fausta has a soul, which is a particle of God enclosed in the body which her mother made for her; a particle which will not die and which her mother will find again in Heaven, if she believes in the True God.

The same applies to you. Look at this beautiful rose. The purple which adorns the imperial robe is not so magnificent as this petal, which is not only a pleasure to the eye because of its hue, but is also a joy to touch because of its smoothness and to smell because of its scent. And look at this one, and this one, and this one. The first one is like blood gushing from a heart, the second is like fresh fallen snow, the third one is pale gold, the last one is like the sweet face of this child smiling in My lap. And further: the first one is stiff on an almost thornless stem, the leaves of which are reddish as if they had been sprayed with blood, the second has only a few thorns, and its leaves are pale and dull on the stem, the third one is as flexible as a reed and its small leaves are as shiny as green wax, the stem of the last one is so thick with thorns, that it seems anxious to prevent all possible access to its rosy corolla. It looks like a file with very sharp teeth.

Now consider this. Who made all that? How? When? Where? What was this place in the mists of time? It was nothing. It was an amorphous stirring of elements. One: God, said: "I want" and the elements separated and gathered in family groups. And another "I want" thundered and the elements arranged themselves, one with the other: the water between the lands; or one on the other: air and light on the formed planet. One more "I want" and plants were made. And then the stars, then animals and at last man. And God, to make man, His favourite creature, happy, granted him, as magnificent toys, flowers, stars and finally the joy of procreating not what dies, but what survives death, by the gift of God, and which is the soul. These roses are as many "wills" of the Father. His infinite power makes it clear in an infinite number of beautiful things. My explanation is rather a difficult one because it clashes with the brazen resistance of your beliefs. But I hope, as it is our first meeting, that we have understood one another a little. Let your souls ponder on what I have told you. Have you any questions to ask? Ask them. I am here to clarify things. Ignorance is not a disgrace. It is disgraceful to persist in ignorance where there is someone willing to clarify doubts.»

And Jesus, as if He were the most experienced father, goes out holding the little child, who is taking her first steps and wants to go towards a jet of water swaying in the sunshine.

The ladies remain where they were, speaking to one another. And Johanna, hesitating between two desires, is standing on the threshold of the bower. At last Lydia makes up her mind and followed by the others goes towards Jesus, Who is laughing because the little one is trying to catch the solar spectrum with her hand and grasps nothing but light, and she insists over and over again, babbling with her rosy lips.

«Master... I have not understood why You said that our masters cannot lead a good life because they are atheists. They believe in Olympus. But they believe...»

«They have but the outward appearance of belief. As long as they really believed, as the truly wise men believed in the Unknown God I mentioned to you, in that God Who satisfied their souls, even if He was nameless, even if inadvertently they did not want to, as long as they turned their thoughts to that Being, by far superior to the poor gods full of the faults of mankind, of the low faults of mankind, the gods that paganism created for itself, they somehow reflected God, by necessity. A soul is a mirror that reflects and an echo that repeats...»

«What, Master? »

«God.»

«It's a great word! »

«It is a great truth.»

Valeria, who is fascinated by the thought of immortality, asks: «Master, tell me where the soul of my child is. I will kiss that spot like a shrine and I will worship it, because it is part of God.»

«The soul! It is like this light that little Fausta wishes to grasp and cannot, because it is incorporeal. But it is there. You, I, your friends can see it. Likewise a soul can be seen in everything that differentiates man from animals. When your little one will tell you her first thoughts, you can say that such understanding is her soul which is revealing itself. When she will love you not by instinct, but with her reason, consider that that love is her soul. When she will grow beautiful beside you, not so much in her body as in virtue, consider that that beauty is her soul. And do not worship her soul, but God Who created it, God Who wishes every soul to be a throne for Him.»

«But where is this incorporeal and sublime thing: in one's heart? in one's brains? »

«It is in the whole of man. It contains you and is contained within you. When it leaves you, you become a corpse. When it is killed by a crime that man commits against himself, you are damned, separated from God for ever.»

«You therefore agree that the philosopher who said that we are "immortal" was right, although he was a heathen? » asks Plautina.

«I do not agree. I will go further. I say that it is an article of faith. The immortality of the soul, that is the immortality of the superior part of man is the most certain and most comforting mystery to believe. It is the one that assures us of where we come from, where we go, who we are, and it removes all the bitterness of every separation. »

Plautina is deeply absorbed in thought. Jesus watches her and is silent. At last she asks: «And have You a soul? »

Jesus replies: «Certainly.»

«But are You or are You not God? »

«I am God. I told you. But now I have taken the nature of Man. And do you know why? Because only by this sacrifice of Mine I was able to resolve the points which were insuperable for your reason, and after demolishing errors and freeing minds, I was able also to free souls from a slavery which I cannot explain to you just now. I therefore enclosed Wisdom and Holiness in a body. I spread Wisdom like seed on the ground and pollen to the winds. Holiness will flow, as from a precious broken amphora, on to the world in the hour of Grace and will sanctify men. Then the Unknown God will become known.»

«But You are already known. Who doubts Your power and Your wisdom, is either wicked or a liar.»

«I am known. But this is only daybreak. Midday will be full of the knowledge of Me.»

«What will Your midday be like? A triumph? Shall I see it? »

«Truly, it will be a triumph. And you will be present. Because you loathe what you know and you crave for what you ignore. Your soul hungers.»

«That is true. I hunger for truth.»

«I am the Truth.»

«Then, give Yourself to me who am hungry.»

«All you have to do is to come to My table. My word is the bread of truth.»

«But what will our gods say if we abandon them? Will they not avenge themselves on us? » asks fearful Lydia.

«Woman: have you ever seen a foggy morning? The meadows are lost in the vapour that conceals them. Then the sun shines and the vapour is dissolved and the glistening meadows are more beautiful. The same applies to your gods, the fog of a poor human thought, which, ignoring God and needing to believe, because faith is a permanent necessity for man, created Olympus, a real non-existent idle story. And thus your gods, when the sun, that is, the True God, rises, will dissolve in your hearts without being able to do any harm. Because they do not exist.»

«We shall have to listen to You again... quite a lot... We are most definitely before the unknown. Everything You say is new to us.»

«But does it disgust you? Can you accept it? »

Plautina replies sure of herself: «No. It does not. I feel more proud of the little I know now, and which Caesar does not know, than I do of my name.»

«Well, then, persevere. I leave you with My peace.»

«What? Are You not staying, my Lord? » Johanna is desolate.

«No, I am not staying. I have a lot to do...»

«Oh! I wanted to speak to You about my trouble! »

Jesus, Who had begun to walk, after saying goodbye to the Roman ladies, turns

round and says: «Come as far as the boat and you will tell Me what your pain is.»

And Johanna goes. And she says: «Chuza wants to send me to Jerusalem for some time and I am not happy about it. He is doing it because he does not want me to be confined any longer now that I am healthy...»

«You, too, are creating useless fogs for yourself! » says Jesus Who is stepping on to the boat. «If you considered that you can thus give Me hospitality or follow Me more easily, you would be happy and would say: "Bounty has seen to it".»

«Oh!... that is true, my Lord. I had not thought about that.»

«So, you can see! Be a good wife and obey. Obedience will give you the reward of having Me as your guest at next Passover and the honour of helping Me to evangelize your friends. My peace be always with you.»

The boat sets out and it all ends.

168. Aglae in Mary's House at Nazareth.

20th May 1945. Pentecost.

Mary is working quietly at a piece of cloth. It is evening, all the doors are closed, a three flame lamp lights up the little room in Nazareth, particularly the table at which the Virgin is sat. The cloth, perhaps a bed sheet, hangs from the chest and from Her knees on to the floor, so that Mary, Who is wearing a dark blue dress, seems to emerge from a pile of snow. She is alone. She is sowing fast, Her head bent on Her work, and the light of the lamp causes the top part of Her hair to shine with pale gold tints. The rest of Her face is in half-light.

There is dead silence in the tidy room. No noise can be heard either from the road, deserted at night, or from the kitchen garden. The heavy door of the room where Mary works, where She takes Her meals and receives Her friends, and which opens on to the kitchen garden, is closed, so that not even the noise of the fountain water running into the basin can be heard. It is really the stillness of the night. I wonder what Mary is thinking of while Her hands are working swiftly...

There is a light tapping at the main door. Mary looks up and listens... The tapping has been so light that Mary must be thinking that it was caused by some night animal or by the wind and She bends Her head once again to Her work. But the knocking is repeated and more loudly. Mary stands up and goes to the door. Before opening She asks: «Who is knocking? »

A thin voice replies: «A woman. In the name of Jesus, have mercy on me.»

Mary opens the door at once holding the lamp up to see the pilgrim. She sees a heap of clothes, through which no one appears. A poor heap of clothes, stooping very low and saying: «Hail! My Lady! » and then once again: «In the name of Jesus, have mercy on me.»

«Come in and tell Me what you want. I do not know you.»

«Nobody and many know me. Vice knows me. And Holiness knows me. But now I need Piety to open Her arms to me. And You are Piety...» and she weeps.

«Come in, then... And tell me... You have said enough to make Me understand that you are unhappy... But I do not yet know who you are. Your name, sister...»

«Oh! no! Not sister! I cannot be Your sister... You are the Mother of Good...

I... I am Evil...» and she cries louder and louder under her mantle, which covers her completely.

Mary lays the lamp on a chair; she takes the hand of the unknown woman kneeling on the threshold and compels her to stand up.

Mary does not know her... but I do. She is the Veiled woman of the Clear Water. She stands up, dejected, trembling, shaken by her sobs, and is still reluctant to go in. She says: «I am a heathen, my Lady. I am filth, for you Jews, even if I were holy. I am twice filth because I am a prostitute.»

«If you come to Me, if you look for My Son through Me, you can only be a repentant heart. This house welcomes those whose name is Sorrow » and She leads her in, closing the door, lays the lamp on the table, and asks her to sit down and says: «Speak.»

But the Veiled woman does not want to sit down; still stooping, she continues to weep. Mary is in front of her, kind and queenly. She waits, praying, for her to calm down. Her whole attitude tells me that She is praying, although nothing

about Her takes the form of prayer: neither Her hands which are holding all the time the little hand of the Veiled woman, nor Her lips which are closed. At last her weeping calms down. The Veiled woman dries her face with her veil and then says: «And yet I have not come from so far as to be unknown. It is the hour of my redemption and I must reveal myself... to show with how many wounds my heart is covered. And You are a mother... and His Mother... You will, therefore, have mercy on me.»

«Yes, My daughter.»

«Oh! yes! Call me daughter! I had a mother... and I left her... I was later told that she died of a broken heart... I had a father... he cursed me... and he says to those in town: "I no longer have a daughter"»... (she resumes crying more bitterly. Mary turns pale with anguish, but lays Her hand on her head to comfort her). The Veiled woman goes on: «No one will call me daughter any more!... Yes, caress me thus, as my mother used to do when I was pure and good... Let me kiss Your hand and wipe my tears with it. My tears alone will not cleanse me. How much have I wept when I realised! Also before I used to weep, because it is horrible to be nothing but flesh, abused and insulted by man. But they were the tears of an ill-treated animal that hates and rebels against him who tortures and fouls it more and more... because I changed master, but I did not change bestiality... I have been weeping for eight months... because I have understood... I understood my misery and my depravity, I am covered and saturated with it and I feel disgusted... But my tears, although more and more conscious, do not yet cleanse me. They mix with my depravity and do not wash it away. Oh! Mother! Wipe my tears and I shall be so cleansed as to be able to go near my Saviour! »

«Yes, My daughter, yes, I will. Sit down. Here, near Me. And speak calmly. Leave your burden here, on My knees of a Mother » and Mary sits down.

But the Veiled woman sinks to the ground at Her feet, as she wishes to speak to Her thus. She begins slowly: «I come from Syracuse... I am twentysix years old... I was the daughter of a steward, as you would call him, we say a procurator, of a wealthy Roman gentleman. I was an only daughter. My life was a happy one. We lived near the seaside, in a beautiful villa, where my father was the steward. Now and again the owner of the villa, or his wife or children would come. They treated us very well and were very good to me. The girls used to play with me... My mother was happy and... proud of me. I was beautiful... intelligent and I succeeded in everything... But I loved frivolous things more than good things. There is a great theatre at Syracuse. A great theatre... Beautiful... huge... It is used for games and plays... Mimers are widely employed in the comedies and tragedies which are performed there. They emphasize the meaning of the chorus by their silent dances. You do not know... but also by means of our hands or through the movements of our bodies we can express the feelings of a man agitated by a passion. Young boys and girls are trained as mimers in a special school. They must be as beautiful as gods and as agile as butterflies... I loved to go to a kind of high spot overlooking that place and see the mimers dance. I then imitated them on the flowery meadows, on the golden sands of my land, in the garden of the villa. I seemed an artistic statue, or a light blowing breeze, so clever I was in assuming statuesque postures or flying about almost without touching the ground. My wealthy friends admired me... my mother was proud of me...»

The Veiled woman speaks, remembers, sees and dreams of her past and weeps. Her sobs are like commas in her speech.

«One day... it was May... The whole of Syracuse was blooming with flowers. The celebrations were just over and I had gone into raptures over a dance performed in the theatre... The owners had taken me there with their daughters. I was fourteen years old... In that dance the mimers, who were to represent the springtime nymphs running to worship Ceres, danced crowned with roses and clad with roses... Only with roses because their dresses were very light veils, a cobweb spread with roses... While dancing they looked like winged Hebes, so light they glided about, while their magnificent bodies appeared through the ruffled strips of their flowery veils, flowing like wings behind them. I studied the dance... and one day... one day »...

The Veiled woman cries louder... She then composes herself.

«I was beautiful. I still am. Look.» She stands up throwing her veil behind her and letting her large mantle drop. And I am dumbfounded, because I see Aglae

emerge from the discarded clothes. She is beautiful, also in her modest dress, in her simple plaited" hair-style, without any jewels, without pompous garments. Her body is like a real flower, slender and perfect, with a beautiful light brown face and velvet eyes full of ardour.

She kneels down again in front of Mary. «I was beautiful, unfortunately. And I was crazy. On that day I put on veils, the daughters of our landlord helped me as they loved to see me dance... I got dressed on a strip of the golden beach, facing the blue sea. On the deserted beach there were white and yellow wild flowers, with the sharp scent of almonds, of vanilla, of clean human bodies. Waves of strong perfumes came also from the citrus gardens and the rose gardens in Syracuse gave off a scent, as well as the sea and the sand on the beach; the sun drew a smell from all things... something panicky that went to my head. I felt as if I were a nymph, too, and I was worshipping... whom? The fertile Earth? The fecundating Sun? I do not know. A heathen amongst heathens, I think I was worshipping Sense, my despotic king, whom I did not know I had, but who was more powerful than a god... I put on a wreath of roses picked in the garden... and I danced. I was enraptured by the light, the scents, by the pleasure of being young, agile and beautiful. I danced... and I was noticed. I saw I was being looked at. But I was not ashamed of appearing nude in the presence of two greedy eyes of a man. On the contrary, I took pleasure in dancing more lively. The satisfaction of being admired lent wings to my feet. And it was my ruin. Three days later I was left all by myself because the landlords left to go back to their patrician dwelling in Rome. But I did not stay at home... The two admiring eyes had revealed something else to me, beyond dancing... They had revealed sensuality and sex.»

Mary makes an involuntary gesture of disgust, which is noted by Aglae. «Oh! but You are pure! Perhaps I disgust You...»

«Speak, My daughter. It is better if you speak to Mary than to Him. Mary is a sea that washes...»

«Yes, it is better if I tell You. I thought that myself when I heard that He had a mother... Because before, seeing Him so different from every other man, the only thoroughly spiritual man - now I know there is the spirit and what it is - before I could not have said of what Your Son was made, as He was without sensuality although a man, and within myself I thought He had no mother, but He had descended upon the earth to save the horrible wretches of whom I am the worst.

Every day I went back to that place hoping to see the young handsome swarthy man... And after some time I saw him again... He spoke to me. He said to me: "Come to Rome with me. I will take you to the imperial court, you will be the pearl of Rome". I replied: "Yes. I will be your faithful wife. Come and see my father". He laughed mockingly and kissed me. He said: "Not my wife. But you shall be the goddess and I your priest and I will reveal the secrets of life and pleasure to you". I was thoroughly infatuated, I was a young girl. But although a young girl, I knew what life is... I was shrewd, I was infatuated, but not yet depraved... and I was disgusted by his proposal. I tore myself away from his embrace and I ran home... But I did not speak to my mother about it... and I did not resist the desire to see him again... His kisses had made me more enthralled than ever... And I went back... I had hardly reached the deserted beach when he embraced me kissing me frenziedly, with a storm of kisses, with loving words, with questions: "Is there not everything in this love? Is this not sweeter than a bond? What else do you want? Can you live without this?"

Oh! Mother... I eloped the same evening with the filthy patrician... and I became a rag trampled on by his beastliness... I was not a goddess: but mud. Not a pearl: but trash. Life was not revealed to me, but the filth of life, the infamy, the disgust, the pain, the shame, the infinite misery of not even belonging to myself... And then... utter ruin. After six months of orgies, he became tired of me and passed on to fresh love affairs and I lived on the streets. I made the most of my dancing talent... I already knew that my mother had died of a broken heart and that I no longer had a home or a father... A dancing master accepted me in his academy. He perfected me... he enjoyed me... and he launched me into the corrupt Roman patriciate as a flower fully skilled in every sensual art. The already dirty flower fell into a cloaca. For ten years I fell lower and lower into the abyss. I was then brought here to delight Herod's leisure time and I was engaged here by a new master. Oh! No chained dog

is more chained than one of us! And there is no dog trainer more brutal than the man who possesses a woman! Mother... You are trembling! I am filling You with horror! »

Mary has taken Her hand to Her heart, as if it had been wounded. But She replies: «No, not you. The Evil, which is such a powerful master on the earth, is horrifying Me. Go on, My poor creature.»

«He took me to Hebron... Was I free? Was I rich? Yes, I was, because I was not in jail and I was covered with jewels. No, I was not, because I could see only those whom he wanted and I had no right to myself.

One day a man, the "Man", Your Son, came to Hebron. The house was dear to Him. I realised it and I invited Him to enter. Shammai was not there... and from the window I had already heard words and seen a sight which had upset my heart. But I swear to You, Mother, that it was not the flesh that drove me towards Your Jesus. It was something that He revealed to me that drove me to the door, defying the quips of the populace, to say to Him: "Come in". It was the soul that I then learned I had. He said to me: "My Name means: Saviour. I save those who are anxious to be saved. I save by teaching to be pure, to desire and accept sorrows with honour, to desire Good at all costs. I am the One Who seeks those who are lost and gives Life. I am Purity and Truth!". He told me that I also had a soul and that I had killed it by my way of living. But He did not curse me, neither did He mock me. And He never looked at me! The first man who did not strip me with his greedy eyes, because I lie under the terrible curse of attracting men... He told me that who looks for Him will find Him because He is where a doctor and a medicine are needed. And He went away. But His words were in here. And they have never come out. I used to say to myself: "His Name means Saviour", as if I were beginning to wish to be cured. I was left with His words and with His friends, the shepherds. And I took the first step by giving them alms and asking for their prayers... And then... I ran away...

Oh! It was a holy flight! I ran away from sin seeking the Saviour. I went about looking for Him. I was sure I would find Him because He had promised me. They sent me to a man whose name is John, thinking it was He. But it was not. A Jew sent me to the Clear Water. I lived selling the large quantity of gold I had. During the months when I wandered about I had to keep my face covered to avoid being captured and also because, really, Aglae was buried under that veil. The old Aglae was dead. Under the veil there was her wounded bloodless soul seeking its doctor. Many a time I was compelled to flee the sensuality of men who persecuted me, although I was so disguised in my attire. Also one of the friends of Your Son...

At the Clear Water I lived like an animal: poor but happy. And the dew and the river did not clean me as much as His words. Oh! Not one was lost! Once He forgave a murderer. I heard... and I was about to say: "Forgive me, too". Another time He spoke of lost innocence... Oh! How many tears of regret! Another time He cured a leper... and I was about to shout: "Cleanse me too, of my sin...". Another time He cured a madman, a Roman... and I wept... and He got someone to tell me that fatherlands pass away, but Heaven remains. One stormy night He sheltered me in His house... and later He asked the steward to give me hospitality and He told a child to say to me: "Do not weep"... Oh! His kindness! My misery! Both so great that I did not dare to take my misery to His feet... notwithstanding that one of His disciples during the night instructed me in the infinite mercy of Your Son. And then, when those who considered sinful the desire of a soul to be reborn, laid snares for Him, my Saviour went away... and I waited for Him... But He was awaited also by the vengeance of those who are by far less worthy of looking at Him than I am. Because I, as a heathen, sinned against myself, whereas they, who already know God, sin against the Son of God... and they hit me and they have hurt me more with their accusations than with stones and they have wounded my soul more than my body, as they led me to despair.

Oh! What a dreadful struggle against myself! Worn out, bleeding, wounded, feverish, without my Doctor, homeless, without food, I looked behind me and in front of me... My past would say to me: "Come back", my present said: "Kill yourself", my future used to say: "Hope". I did hope... I did not commit suicide. I would, if He rejected me, because I do not want to be what I was!... I dragged myself to a village asking for shelter... But they recognised me. Like an animal I had to run away, here, there, always chased, always scorned at,

always cursed, because I wanted to be honest and because I had disappointed those who, through me, wanted to strike Your Son. Following the river I came up to Galilee and I came here... You were not here... I went to Capernaum. You had just left. But an old man saw me. One of His enemies, who wanted me to bear witness against Your Son, and as I was weeping without reacting, he said to me: "Everything could change in your favour if you would become my lover and my accomplice in accusing the Rabbi of Nazareth. It is enough for you to say in the presence of my friends, that He was your lover..." I ran away like a person who sees a snake creep out of a flowery bush.

I thus understood that I can no longer go to Him... and I came to You. Here I am: tread on me, for I am mud. Here I am: reject me, for I am a sinner. Here I am: call me by my name: prostitute. I will accept anything from You. But, Mother, have mercy on me. Take my poor soiled soul and take it to Him. It is a crime to put my lust into Your hands. But only there it will be protected from the world that wants it and it will become penance. Tell me how I must behave. Tell me what I have to do. Tell me which means I must use to be no longer Aglae. What must I mutilate in myself? What must I tear away from myself that I may no longer be sin, or an allurements, that I may no longer have to be afraid of myself and of men? Shall I put out my eyes? Or burn my lips? Or cut my tongue? My eyes, lips and tongue have served me in evil deeds. I no longer want evil and I am willing to punish myself and them by sacrificing them. Or shall I tear off these greedy loins which have driven me to perverted love? Or these unappeasable viscera which I am afraid may be aroused afresh? Tell me, please tell me how can a woman forget she is a female and how can she make other people forget! » Mary is upset. She weeps and suffers, but the only sign of Her grief are the tears that fall on the repentant woman.

«I want to die only after I have been forgiven. I want to die remembering nothing but my Saviour. I want to die knowing that His wisdom is friendly to me... and I cannot go near Him because the world looks at Him and at me suspiciously to accuse us...» Aglae cries, prostrate with grief.

Mary stands up whispering: «How difficult it is to be redeemers! » She is almost breathless.

Aglae, who hears the whisper and understands Her gesture, moans: «See? You can see that You are disgusted, too. I will now go away. I am done for! »

«No, My daughter. You are not done for. No, you are beginning now. Listen, poor soul. I am not moaning because of you, but because of the cruel world. I will not let you go, but I will pick you up, a poor swallow tossed by the storm against the walls of My house. I will take you to Jesus and He will show you your way to redemption...»

«I no longer hope... The world is right. I cannot be forgiven.»

«You cannot by the world. You can by God. Let me speak to you in the name of the Supreme Love, Who gave Me a Son that I may give Him to the world. He took Me out of the blessed simplicity of my consecrated virginity so that the world might receive Forgiveness. He drew My blood not from My childbirth but from My heart by revealing to Me that My Creature is the Great Victim. Look at Me, daughter. There is a large wound in this heart. It has been groaning for over thirty years and it is becoming deeper and deeper and it consumes Me. Do you know its name? » «Sorrow.»

«No. Love. It is love that bleeds Me so that My Son may not be the only one to save. It is love that sets Me on fire that I may purify those who dare not go to My Son. It is love that causes Me to weep that I may wash sinners. You wanted My caresses. I am giving you My tears that will already cleanse you and enable you to look at My Lord. Do not weep thus! You are not the only sinner who has come to the Lord and has left redeemed. Other women came, many more will come. You are not sure that He can forgive you? But can you not see in everything that happened to you the mysterious will of Divine Goodness? Who brought you to Judaea? Who took you to John's house? Who placed you at the window that morning? Who lit a light to illuminate His words for you? Who made you understand that charity, when joined to the prayers of those who have been helped, obtains help from God? Who gave you the strength to run away from Shammai's house and to persevere during the first days until His arrival? Who led you on to His way? Who enabled you to live as a repentant sinner to cleanse your soul more and more? Who gave you a martyr's soul, a believer's soul, a persevering and pure soul?

Do not shake your head. Do you think that only he is pure who has never known sensuality? Do you think that a soul can never again become virgin and beautiful? Oh! My daughter! Between the purity which is entirely a grace of the Lord and your heroic ascent to climb back to the summit of your lost purity, you must believe that yours is the greater. You are building it against sensuality, against need and habit. For Me it is a natural endowment, like breathing. You have to break off your thoughts, your feelings, your flesh, in order not to remember not to desire, not to yield... I... Oh! Can a little child a few hours old, have carnal desires? And does he have any merit thereby? The same applies to Me. I do not know what that tragic hunger is that made mankind a victim. I know but the most holy hunger for God. But you did not know it and you learned it by yourself. But you subdued the other hunger, the tragic and horrible one, for the sake of God, your only love at present. Smile, daughter of divine mercy! My Son is working in you what He told you at Hebron. He has already done that. You are already saved, because of your good will to be saved, because you have come to know of purity, of sorrow, of Good. Your soul has revived. Yes, you need His word saying to you in the name of God: "You are forgiven". I cannot say that. But I give you My kiss as a promise, as a beginning of forgiveness... O Eternal Spirit, a little of You is always in Your Mary! Allow Her to pour forth Your Sanctifying Spirit on this creature who is weeping and hoping. For the sake of Our Son, o God of Love, save this woman who is expecting salvation from God. May the Grace, with which the Angel said that God has filled Me, may that Grace by a miracle rest upon her and support her until Jesus, the Blessed Saviour, the Supreme Priest, absolves her in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Spirit...

It is late, My daughter. You are tired and worn out. Come, Rest. You will go away tomorrow... I will send you to an honest family, because too many people come here now. And I will give you a dress like Mine and you will look like a Jewess. And as I will see My Son only in Judaea, because Passover is near and at the new moon of April we shall be in Bethany, I will speak to Him of you. Come to the house of Simon the Zealot. You will find Me there and I will take you to Him.»

Aglae is weeping again. But now she is at peace.

She is sitting on the floor. Also Mary has sat down again. And Aglae rests her head on Her knees and kisses Her hand... She then moans: «They will recognise me...»

«Oh! They will not. Do not be afraid. Your dress was too well known. But I will prepare you for your journey towards Forgiveness and you will be like a virgin going to her wedding: you will be different and unknown to the people unaware of the rite. Come. There is a little room near Mine. Saints and pilgrims wishing to go to God have rested in it. It will shelter you, too.»

Aglae is about to pick up her large mantle and her veil.

«Leave them. They are the clothes of poor lost Aglae. But she no longer exists... and not even her dress is to remain. It experienced too much hatred... and hatred hurts as much as sin.»

They go out into the dark kitchen garden and then into Joseph's little room. Mary lights the little lamp on the shelf, caresses the repentant woman once again, closes the door and with her treble light she looks to see where She can take Aglae's torn mantle so that nobody may see it the following day.

Jesus is walking fast along a main road. He is alone. He is going towards a mountain, which rises near a main road running eastwards from the lake, and it begins to rise with a low mild elevation, which extends for a good distance, forming a tableland from which one can see all the lake and the town of Tiberias towards the south, as well as other towns, not quite so beautiful, stretching towards the north. There is then a crag and the mountain rises rather steeply up to a peak, and then slopes down and rises once again up to another peak, similar to the previous one, thus forming a kind of strange saddle.

Jesus begins climbing towards the tableland along a mule-track, which is still quite comfortable, and reaches a small village, the inhabitants of which work the tableland, where the corn is beginning to come to ear. He goes through the village and proceeds through the fields and meadows all strewn with flowers and rustling with crops.

The clear day displays all the beauty of the surrounding nature. Besides the lonely little mountain, towards which Jesus is going, to the north lies the imposing peak of Mount Hermon, the top of which looks like a huge pearl laid on a base of emeralds, so white is the peak covered with snow, whereas the woody slope is green. Beyond the lake, which is between the lake and Mount Hermon, the plain is green. Lake Merom is there, but cannot be seen from here. There are more mountains towards the lake of Tiberias on the north-west side and beyond the lake there is a lovely flat country and other mountains, the contours of which are softened by the distance. To the south, on the other side of the main road, I can see the hills, which I think conceal Nazareth. The more one climbs, the wider the view. I cannot see what lies to the west, because the mountain acts as a wall.

Jesus meets first the apostle Philip, who seems to have been posted there as sentinel. «What, Master? You are here? We were expecting to meet You on the main road. I am waiting here for my companions who have gone to get some milk from the shepherds who pasture their flocks on these mountains. Down, on the road, there is Simon with Judas of Simon and Isaac, and... Oh! here... Come! Come! The Master is here! »

The apostles, who are coming down with flasks and containers, begin to run and the younger ones, of course, arrive first. The welcome they give the Master is really touching. At last they are all together and while Jesus smiles, they all want to speak and tell Him...

«But we were waiting for You on the road! »

«We were just thinking that You were not coming even today.»

«You know, there are many people.»

«Oh! We were embarrassed, there are some scribes and even some of Gamaliel's disciples...»

«That's right, my Lord! You left us just at the right moment! I have never been so afraid as I was just then. Don't play such a trick on me again! »

Peter complains and Jesus smiles and asks: «Did anything wrong happen to you? »

«Oh! no! On the contrary... Oh! Master! Don't You know that John gave a sermon?... It sounded as if You were speaking through him. I... we were all dumbfounded... That boy who only a year ago was able only to cast a net... oh!» Peter is still amazed and he shakes John who smiles but is silent. «Do you believe that it is possible that this boy spoke those words with these smiling lips? He sounded like Solomon.»

«Also Simon spoke very well, my Lord. He was really "the chief"» says John.

«No wonder! He took me and pushed me there! Who knows!... They say that I gave a good sermon. Perhaps I did. I don't know... because what with the surprise at John's words, what with the fear of speaking to so many people and causing You to cut a poor figure, I was bewildered...»

«Causing Me to cut a poor figure? But you were speaking and you would have cut a poor figure, Simon » teases Jesus.

«Oh! As far as I am concerned... I was not worried about myself. I did not want them to sneer at You and consider You a fool for choosing a blockhead as your apostle.»

Jesus sparkles with joy because of Peter's humility and love. But He only asks:

«And what about the others? »

«Also the Zealot spoke very well. But he... we all know. But this boy was the great surprise! Of course, since we retired to pray, the boy's soul seems to be

in Heaven all the time.»

«That is true, very true.» They all confirm Peter's words. And they continue telling Jesus...

«You know? Among the disciples now there are two, who according to Judas of Simon, are very important. Judas is very active. Of course! He knows many of those... high up and knows how to deal with them. And he likes to speak... He speaks very well. But the people prefer to hear Simon, Your cousins and above all this boy. Yesterday a man said to me: "That young man speaks very well - he was referring to Judas - but I prefer you". Oh! poor fellow! He prefers me and I can hardly put a few words together!... But why did You come here? The meeting place was the road, and we have been there.»

«Because I knew I was going to find you here. Now listen. Go down and tell the others to come up, also the known disciples. The people are not to come today. I want to speak to you only.»

«In that case it is better to wait until evening. When the sun is about to set, the people spread among the nearby villages and they come back the following morning waiting for You. Otherwise... who will hold them back? »

«All right. Do that. I will wait for you up there, at the top. The nights are mild now and we can sleep in the open.»

«Wherever You wish, Master. Providing You are with us.»

The disciples go away and Jesus resumes climbing up to the top, which is the same one as I already saw last year in the vision for the end of the sermon of the Mount and the first meeting with Mary Magdalene. The view is now wider and is becoming brighter in the sunset.

Jesus sits on a rock and is recollected in meditation. And He remains thus until the shuffling of feet on the path warns Him that the apostles are back. It is getting dark, but the sun still shines on the mountain top, drawing scents from every herb and flower... There is a strong smell of wild lilies of the valley while the tall stems of narcissi shake their stars and buds as if they were asking for dew.

Jesus gets up and greets them: «Peace be with you.»

There are many disciples who come up with the apostles. Isaac leads them smiling. His smiling face is the thin face of an ascetic. They all gather round Jesus Who is greeting Judas Iscariot and Simon Zealot particularly.

«I wanted you all here with Me, to be for a few hours with you alone and speak only to you. I have something to tell you to prepare you for your mission. Let us take our food and then we shall speak, and while you are sleeping your souls will continue to relish the doctrine.»

They have their frugal meal and then form a circle round Jesus Who is sitting on a large stone. They are about one hundred, perhaps more, between disciples and apostles: a circle of attentive faces, which the flames of two fires light up oddly. Jesus speaks slowly, gesticulating quietly. His face looks paler, as it emerges from His dark blue tunic and also because it is lit up by the rays of the new moon, which illuminates the spot where He is, a small comma of a moon in the sky, a ray of light that caresses the Master of Heaven and earth.

«I wanted you here, aside, because you are My friends. I called you together after the first test of the Twelve, to widen the circle of My active disciples, and to hear from you your first reactions to being guided by those whom I am giving to you to continue My work. I know that everything went well. I supported with My prayer the souls of the apostles, who had come out of a praying retreat with a new strength in their minds and in their hearts. A strength that does not come from human effort, but from a complete reliance in God.

Those who have been most unmindful of themselves, have given most. It is difficult to be unmindful of oneself.

Man is made of recollections and the ones that raise their voice most are the memories of one's ego. You must distinguish between ego and ego. There is the spiritual ego of the soul that remembers God and its origin from God, and there is the inferior ego of the flesh that remembers its passions and the numberless exigencies concerning its whole being. They are so many voices as to form a choir, and unless the spirit is quite strong, they overcome the solitary voice of the spirit that remembers its nobility as child of God. It is therefore necessary - with the exception of this holy memory that should always be stimulated and kept green and bright - it is necessary to learn how to forget yourselves, in all the memories, the needs, the timid reflections of the human

ego, in order to be perfect disciples.

In this first test of My Twelve, those who have given most are the ones who forgot themselves most. They forgot not only their past, but also their limited personality. They are the ones who no longer remembered what they were, and were so united to God as to be afraid of nothing. Why were some standoffish? Because they remembered their habitual scruples, their usual considerations and prejudice. Why were others laconic? Because they remembered their doctrinal inability and they were afraid of cutting a bad figure or causing Me to cut one. Why the showy ostentation of others? Because they remembered their usual pride, their desire to show off, to be applauded, to rise above the others, to be "someone". Finally, why the sudden revelation of a triumphal, rabbinic, persuasive, firm eloquence in others? Because they, and they alone did remember God. Like those who so far have been humble and have endeavoured to pass unnoticed and at the right moment were able, all of a sudden, to assume the pre-eminent dignity conferred on them, and which they never wanted to exert before, lest they should presume too much. The first three groups remembered their inferior ego. The other group, the fourth, remembered their superior ego and were not afraid. They felt God with themselves and in themselves and were not afraid. Oh! holy boldness which comes from being with God!

Therefore now listen, both you apostles and you disciples. You apostles have already heard these concepts. But now you will understand them in greater depth. You disciples have never heard of them or you have only heard fragments of them. And you must engrave them on your hearts. Because I will make a wider and wider use of you, as Christ's flock is becoming more and more numerous. Because the world will attack you more and more violently, and its wolves will increase in number against Me, the Shepherd and against the flock and I want to put in your hands the weapons to defend both the Doctrine and My flock. What is sufficient for the herd is not sufficient for you, little shepherds. If the sheep are allowed to make mistakes, browsing in herbs which make the blood bitter or desires crazy, you are not allowed to make the same mistakes, leading a large herd to ruin. Because you must realise that where there is an idolatrous shepherd the sheep either die of poison or are devoured by wolves.

You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. But should you fail in your mission you would become a tasteless and useless salt. Nothing could give you flavour again, since God could not give you it, considering that it was given to you as a gift, and you have desalted it, by washing it in the insipid dirty water of mankind, by sweetening it by means of the corrupt sweetness of sensuality, thus mixing with the pure salt of God the corruption of pride, avarice, gluttony, lust, wrath, sloth, so that there is a grain of salt to seven times seven grains of each vice. Your salt, therefore, is but a mixture of stones in which the poor grain of lost salt cannot be found, a mixture of stones screeching under your teeth and leaving in your mouths the flavour of earth, that makes food disagreeable and disgusting. It is not even useful for inferior use, as the flavour of the seven vices would harm also every human employment. The salt then can only be spread and trodden on by the careless feet of the people. How many people will thus be able to tread heavily on the men of God! Because those chosen men will allow the careless people to trample on them, as they no longer are a substance employed to give the flavour of noble heavenly things, as they are nothing but corruption.

You are the light of the world: You are like this mountain top which was the last to be kissed by the sun and the first to be silvered by the moon. Who is in a high place shines and can be seen because even the most dreamy eye looks now and again at high spots. I would say that the physical eye, which is said to be the mirror of the soul, reflects the yearning of the soul, a yearning often unnoticed but always alive as long as a man is not a demon, a yearning after heights where reason by instinct places the Most High, And searching for Heaven, at least some times in life the eye looks at heights.

I beg you to remember what we all have done, since our childhood, entering Jerusalem. Where do our eyes turn? To Mount Moriah, triumphantly crowned with the marbles and gold of the Temple. And where do we turn our eyes when we are in the enclosure of the Temple? We look at the precious domes shining in the sun. How much beauty there is in the sacred enclosure, spread in its halls, porches and yards! But what is up there strikes our eyes. I also beg you to remember what, happens when we are on the way to some place. Where do we turn our eyes,

almost to forget the length of the journey, the tedium, the tiredness, the heat, the dust of the road? They turn to the mountain tops, even if they are not very high, even if they are far away. And what a relief it is to see them appear if we are walking in a flat unvarying plain! Is there mud on the road? There is neatness up there. Is it sultry on the plain? It is cool up there. Is the view limited down here? It is wide up there. And only by looking at the mountain tops, we feel less the heat of the day, the mud is not so slippery, and walking is not so painful. If there is a town shining on the mountain top, no eye will refrain from admiring it. We could say that even a modest place becomes beautiful if placed, almost like an airy place, on a mountain top. That is why in the true and false religions, the temples were placed, when possible, on high spots, and if there was no hill or mountain, they built a stone pedestal, thus building with human labour the elevation on which to lay the temple. Why is that done? Because men want the temple to be seen so that its sight will remind mankind of God.

Likewise I said that you are lights. When in the evening you light a lamp in the house, where do you put it? In a hole under the oven? In the cave used as a cellar? Or do you close it in a chest? Or do you hide it under a bushel? No, you do not. Otherwise it would be useless lighting it. The light instead is placed on top of a shelf, or it is put on a lamp-stand, so that being high up, it may brighten up the whole room and illuminate the people living in it. And precisely because what is placed on a high place is to remind men of God and illuminate, it must be able to fulfil its task.

You must remember the True God. Thus you must ensure that you do not have within yourselves the sevenfold paganism. Otherwise you would become profane high places with thickets sacred to this or to that god, and you would drag into your paganism those who look at you as the temples of God. You must bear the light of God. A dirty wick, a wick not nourished with oil, smokes and gives no light, it has a bad smell and does not illuminate. A lamp hidden behind a dirty quartz-crystal does not create the splendid gracefulness or the dazzling effects of light on the bright mineral. But it fades behind the veil of black smoke that makes the crystal cover dull.

The light of God shines where wills are zealous in removing daily the scum produced by work itself, with its contacts, reactions and disappointments. The light of God shines where the wick is immersed into plenty liquid of prayer and charity. The light of God multiplies into infinite splendid reflections, as many as the perfections of God, each of which excites in the saint a virtue practised heroically, if the servant of God keeps the unattackable quartz of his soul clear from the smoke of every soiling passion. The unattackable quartz. Unattackable! (Jesus thunders out in this conclusion and His voice resounds in the natural amphitheatre).

Only God has the right and the power to scratch that crystal, to write His Most Holy Name on it with the diamond of His will. That Name then becomes the ornament that emphasizes the brighter facets of supernatural beauty on the most pure quartz. But if the foolish servant of the Lord, losing control of himself and the sight of his mission, a completely and solely supernatural one, allows false ornaments and scratches, instead of engravings to be cut on his quartz, that is, mysterious and satanic figures made by the hot claw of Satan, then the wonderful lamp no longer retains its intact beauty, but it cracks and breaks and the fragments of the splintered crystal suffocate the flame, and even if it does not break, a tangle of marks of unmistakable nature forms on its surface and soot penetrates into them spoiling it.

Woe, three times woe, to the shepherds who lose charity, who refuse to climb day by day to take upwards their flocks that expect their ascent in order to ascend themselves. I will strike them down and remove them from their positions and I will put out their smoke altogether.

Woe, three times woe, to the masters, who reject Wisdom to become saturated with a science, which is often opposed and always proud, sometimes satanic, because it makes them men, whereas - listen and remember - if every man is destined to become like God, through the sanctification that makes man a son of God, a master, a priest should already have in this world the aspect of a son of God, and only such aspect. He should have the aspect of a creature entirely devoted to souls and to perfection. He should have such aspect to lead his disciples to God. Anathema to the masters of a supernatural doctrine, who become idols of

human knowledge.

Woe, seven times woe, to those among My priests who are dead to the spirit, who with their lack of savour and ill-living flesh live as miserable sluggish human beings. Their sleep is full of hallucinated apparitions of everything, except God One and Trine, and is full as well of all sorts of calculations, except the superhuman desire to increase the wealth of hearts and of God; they live a material, miserable dull life, dragging into their dead water those who follow them, believing that they are "Life". The curse of God on those who corrupt My little beloved flock. I shall not ask an account and I will not punish those who perish through your laziness, o negligent servants of the Lord, but I will ask you to account for every hour and all the time lost and all evil consequences and I will punish you.

Remember those words. And now go. I am climbing to the top. You may sleep. Tomorrow the Shepherd will open the pastures of Truth to His flock.»

170. The Sermon of the Mount. The Beatitudes (Part One).
24th May 1945.

Jesus speaks to the apostles allotting a place to each one, so that they may direct and watch over the crowd who are climbing up the mountain since the early hours in the morning, with sick people whom they carry in their arms or in stretchers or who have dragged themselves along on crutches. Among the people there are Stephen and Hermas.

The air is clear and rather chilly, but the sun soon softens the fresh mountain air, which on its turn, moderates the heat of the sun, drawing benefit from it, as it becomes pure and cool but not sharp.

The people sit on the stones scattered in the little valley between the two crests, but some wait for the sun to dry the grass, wet with dew, so that they may sit down on the earth. There is a huge crowd from all the districts in Palestine and the people are of all conditions. The apostles disappear in the multitude, but like bees that come and go from the meadows to the beehives, now and again they go back to the Master to inform Him, to ask for advice, and for the pleasure of being seen near Him.

Jesus climbs a little higher up than the meadow, which is at the bottom of the little valley, He leans against the rock and begins speaking.

«Many have asked Me, during a year of preaching: "You say that You are the Son of God, tell us what is Heaven, what is the Kingdom, what is God. Because our notions are hazy. We know that there is Heaven with God and the angels. But no one has ever come to tell us what it is like, because it is closed to righteous people". They have also asked Me what the Kingdom is and what God is. And I have endeavoured to explain to you what the Kingdom is and what God is. I have striven not because it was difficult for Me to give an explanation, but because it is difficult for many reasons to get you to accept the truth that clashes, as far as the Kingdom is concerned, with a multitude of ideas, which have risen over the centuries and, as far as God is concerned, with the sublimity of His Nature.

Others have also asked Me: "All right. That is the Kingdom and that is God. But how do we achieve them?" Here again I have tried to explain to you patiently the true spirit of the Law of Sinai. Who abides by that spirit conquers Heaven. But to explain the Law of Sinai to you it is necessary to make you hear the loud thunder of the Lawgiver and of His Prophet, who, while promising blessings to obedient believers, threaten terrible punishments and maledictions to those who

disobey. The Epiphany of Sinai was frightful and its dreadfulness is reflected in the entire Law, and has been reflected throughout centuries and in all souls. But God is not only a Legislator... God is a Father. And a Father of immense goodness.

Probably, nay, certainly, your souls are not in a position to rise and contemplate the infinite perfections of God, and His goodness least of all, because goodness and love are the rarest virtues amongst men. The reason is that your souls are weakened by original sin, by passions, by your own sins, by your own selfishness and the selfishness of other people: the former closes your souls, the latter irritates them. Goodness! How sweet it is to be good, with no hatred, no envy, no pride! How sweet it is to have eyes that look only for love and hands that stretch out only in gestures of love, and lips that utter only words of love and a heart, above all a heart, that full only of love, urges eyes, hands and lips to acts of love!

The most learned amongst you know with which gifts God had enriched Adam, both for himself and for his descendants. Also the most ignorant amongst the children of Israel know that there is a soul in us. Only the poor heathens are unaware of this royal guest, of this vital breath and celestial light that sanctifies and gives life to our body. But the most learned know which gifts were given to man and to the soul of man.

God was not less munificent to the soul than to the flesh and blood of the creature made by Him with a little mud and His breath. As He gave the natural gifts of beauty and integrity, of intelligence and will power, and the capability of loving oneself and other people, He also gave moral gifts and the subjection of senses to reason. Therefore the wicked captivity of senses and passions did not permeate the freedom and control of Adam and of his will, with which God had gifted him, thus he was free to love, free to wish, free to enjoy in justice, without what makes you slaves, causing you to feel the bite of the poison that Satan spread and which now overflows, carrying you out of the limpid river-bed on to the slimy fields and putrescent ponds, where the fever of carnal and moral senses fermentates. Because you must realise that also the concupiscence of thought is sensual. And they received supernatural gifts, that is, sanctifying Grace, a heavenly destiny, the vision of God.

Sanctifying Grace: the life of the soul. The most spiritual thing deposited in our spiritual soul. The Grace that makes us children of God, because it preserves us from the death of sin, and who is not dead "lives" in the house of the Father: Paradise; in My Kingdom: Heaven. What is this Grace that sanctifies and gives Life and Kingdom? Oh! Not many words are required! Grace is love. Grace is therefore God. It is God Who admiring Himself in the creature whom He created perfect, loves Himself, contemplates Himself, desires Himself, gives Himself what is His own to multiply it, to delight in the multiplication, to love Himself in the many others who are others Himself.

Oh! My children! Do not defraud God of this right of His! Do not deprive God of what belongs to Him! Do not disappoint God in His desire! Consider that He acts out of love. Even if you did not exist, He would still be Infinite, and His power would not diminish. But He, although He is complete in His infinite immeasurable measure, does not want anything for Himself and in Himself - which He could not, because He is already Infinite - but for Creation, His creature. He wants to increase His love for all rational creatures contained in Creation, and therefore gives you His Grace: Love, that you may carry it in yourselves to the perfection of saints, and you may pour this treasure, taken from the treasure that God has given you with His Grace and increased by all the holy deeds in all your heroic lives of saints, into the infinite Ocean where God is: into Heaven.

You are divine reservoirs of Love! That is what you are, and no death is given to your being, because you are eternal, as God is, being like God. You shall be, and there will be no end to your being, because you are immortal like the holy spirits that supernourished you, returning to you enriched by their own merits. You live and nourish, you live and enrich, you live and form the most holy thing which is the Communion of the spirits, from God, the Most Perfect Spirit, down to the last born baby, who sucks his mother's breast for the first time.

Do not criticise Me in your hearts, o learned men! Do not say: "He is crazy, He is a liar! Because He speaks foolishly saying that there is Grace in us, when Sin has deprived us of it. He lies stating that we are already one thing with

God". Yes, there is sin and there is separation. But before the power of the Redeemer, Sin, the cruel separation between the Father and the children, will collapse like a wall shaken by a new Samson. I have already got hold of it and I am shaking it and it is about to fall and Satan is trembling with wrath and impotence, as he can avail nothing against My power and he realises that so much prey is being snatched from him and that it is becoming more difficult to drag man to sin. Because when I will have taken you to My Father, through Me, and you have been cleansed and strengthened by My Blood and sorrow, Grace will come back to you, lively and powerful and you will be triumphant, if you so wish. God does no violence to your thoughts or your sanctification. You are free. But He gives you back your strength. He gives you back your freedom from Satan's empire. It is up to you to take upon yourselves the infernal yoke or to put angelical wings on your souls. It depends on you, with Me as your brother to guide you and nourish you with an immortal food.

You may ask: "How can one conquer God and His Kingdom through a milder road than the harsh Sinai one?" There is no other road but that one. But let us look at it not from the point of view of a threat, but from the point of view of love. Let us not say: "Woe to me, if I do not do that!" trembling with fear of sinning, of not being able not to sin. But let us say: "How glad I will be if I do that!" and with the impulse of a supernatural joy, full of happiness, let us rush towards these beatitudes, brought about by compliance with the Law, as roses sprout from a thorny bush.

"How happy I will be if I am poor in spirit, because mine shall be the Kingdom of Heaven!

How happy I will be if I am gentle because I shall have the earth for my heritage!

How happy I will be if I mourn without rebelling, because I will be comforted!

How happy I will be if I hunger and thirst for justice more than I do for bread and wine to satisfy the flesh, because Justice will satisfy me!

How happy I will be if I am merciful, because I will have divine mercy shown me!

How happy I will be if I am pure in heart, because God will bend over my pure heart and I will see Him!

How happy I will be if I am peaceful in spirit, because God will call me His

son, because love is in peace and God is Love Who loves whoever is like Him!

How happy I will be if I am persecuted in the cause of right, because God, my Father, to reward me for my earthly persecutions, will give me the Kingdom of Heaven!

How happy I will be if I am abused and accused falsely for being Your son, o God! It must not cause me desolation but joy, as it will make me equal to Your best servants, to the Prophets, who were persecuted for the same reason and with whom I firmly believe I shall share the same great eternal reward in Heaven, which is mine!".

Let us look thus at the way of salvation: through the joy of saints.

"How happy I will be if I am poor in spirit".

Ob! Satanic thirst for wealth, to what frenzy you lead both rich and poor! The rich who live for their gold: the ill-famed idol of their ruined spirits. The poor who live hating the rich because of their gold, and even if they do not murder them physically, they curse the rich wishing them all sorts of evil. It is not enough not to do evil, one must not even wish to do it. He who curses wishing calamities and death is very like him who kills physically, because he wishes the death of the person he hates. I solemnly tell you that such a wish is like an action held back, it is like a foetus conceived in a womb and formed, but not yet ejected. A wicked desire corrupts and ruins man, because it lasts longer than a violent action and is deeper than the action itself.

If a rich man is poor in spirit he does not sin for the sake of his gold but he turns his gold into sanctification, because he turns it into love. Loved and blessed, he is like spring water that saves travellers in a desert, as he gives generously, without avarice, happy to be able to relieve desperate situations.

If he is poor, he is happy in his poverty and eats his bread which is sweetened by the joy of being free from the thirst of gold, he sleeps free from nightmares and gets up well rested for his tranquil work, which is always light when done without greed or envy.

What makes man materially rich is gold, what makes him morally rich are his affections. Gold comprises not only money but also houses, fields, jewels,

furniture, herds, everything, in other words, that which makes life wealthy materially. Affections include: blood or marriage ties, friendship, intellectual soundness, public offices. As you can see, if for the first group a poor man can say: "Oh! as far as I am concerned, providing I do not envy those who are rich, I am all right because I am poor, and thus I am settled by force of circumstances", with regard to the second group also a poor man must be careful, because also the poorest man can become sinfully rich in spirit. Who is immoderately attached to a thing, commits a sin.

You may say: "Are we then to hate the wealth that God granted us? Why then does He command us to love our fathers, mothers, wives, children and say: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself?' ". You must distinguish. We must love our fathers, mothers, wives and our neighbour, but in the degree indicated by God: "As ourselves". Whereas God is to be loved above everything and with our whole selves. We must not love God as we love the dearest people among our neighbours: because a woman suckled us or because she sleeps on our chest and procreates children for us, but we must love Him with our whole selves, that is, with all the ability to love that is in man: the love of a son, of a husband, of a friend and - do not be scandalised - the love of a father. Yes, we must have for the interests of God the same care that a father has for his children, for whom he lovingly protects his wealth and increases it, and he takes care of and is anxious for their physical growth and intellectual education and for their success in the world.

Love is not an evil and must not become an evil. The graces, which God grants us, are not evil and must not become so. They are love, granted out of love. We must make a loving use of such wealth granted to us by God in personal affections and in worldly goods. And only he who does not make an idol of such wealth but uses it to serve God in holiness, shows that he has no sinful attachment to it. One then practises that holy poverty in spirit that deprives itself of everything in order to be more free to conquer God, the Holy Supreme Wealth. To conquer God: that is to have the Kingdom of Heaven.

"How happy I will be if I am gentle".

This may seem to be in contrast with the facts of daily life. Those who are not lowly seem to be prominent and successful in their families, towns and countries. But is theirs a real triumph? No, it is not. It is fear that keeps apparently subdued those who are overwhelmed by the despot, but in actual fact it is nothing but a veil drawn over the rebellion seething against the tyrant. Irascible and overbearing people do not win the love of their relatives, of their own citizens or of their subjects. Neither are intellects or souls convinced to follow the doctrines of masters who impose themselves by stating: "I said so, thus it is". Such masters only create selftaught men seeking the key that can open the closed doors of a wisdom or of a science which they feel to be, and actually is the opposite of what is imposed on them.

Those priests who do not endeavour to conquer souls by means of a patient, humble and loving kindness, do not win any souls to God, but they look like armed warriors who start a fierce attack, such is their intolerant rashness in dealing with souls... Oh! poor souls! If they were holy they would not need you, o priests, to reach the Light. They would already have it within themselves. If they were just, they would not need you, o judges, to be put under the restraint of justice, as they would already have justice within themselves. If they were healthy, they would not need a doctor. Be therefore gentle. Do not put souls to flight. Attract them through love. Because lowliness is love, as poverty in spirit is love.

If you are such you will have the Earth for your heritage and you will take this place to God, whereas before it belonged to Satan, because your lowliness, which besides love is also humility, will have overcome Hatred and Pride, expelling from souls the vile king of hatred and pride, and the world will belong to you, that is, to God, because you will be the just souls that will acknowledge God as the Absolute Master of creation, to Whom praise and blessing are due and everything else which belongs to Him.

"How happy I will be if I mourn without rebelling".

Sorrow is on the earth and sorrow wrings tears from men. Sorrow did not exist but man brought it on to the earth and because of his corrupt intellect he continuously strives to increase it in every possible way. Besides diseases and calamities ensuing from thunderbolts, storms, avalanches, earthquakes, man, in

order to suffer and above all to make other people suffer - because we would like only other people to suffer, and not ourselves, the effects of means studied to make people suffer - man invents deadly weapons, which are more and more dreadful and moral hardships, which are more and more cunning. How many tears man wrings from his fellow man through the instigation of his secret king: Satan! And I solemnly tell you that those tears are not an impairment but a perfection of man.

Man is an absent-minded child, a thoughtless superficial child, a backward born child, until tears make him an adult, thoughtful, intelligent person. Only those who weep or have wept, know how to love and can understand. They know how to love their weeping brothers, how to understand them in their grief, how to help them with their goodness, which is fully aware how bitter it is to weep alone. And they know how to love God, because they have realised that everything is grief except God, because they have understood that sorrow can be soothed if tears are shed on God's heart and they have also realised that resigned tears, which do not cause faith to be lost or prayer to become barren and which loathe rebellion, such resigned tears change nature and instead of sorrow they become comfort.

Yes. Those who weep loving the Lord will be comforted.

"How happy I will be if I hunger and thirst for justice".

From the moment he is born to the moment he dies, man craves eagerly for food. He opens his mouth at his birth to get hold of his mother's nipple, he opens his lips to swallow some refreshment in the throes of death. He works to feed himself. He makes a huge nipple of the world from which he sucks insatiably for that which is perishable. But what is man? An animal? No, he is a son of God. He is in exile for a few or many years. But his life does not come to an end when he changes his dwelling.

There is a life in life as there is a kernel in a nut. The shell is not the nut, but it is the kernel inside the shell that is the nut. If you sow a shell nothing will come up, but if you sow the shell with the kernel inside it, a big tree will grow. The same applies to man. It is not his flesh that becomes immortal, but his soul. And it is to be nourished to take it to immortality, to which the soul, out of love, will take the body in the blessed resurrection.

Wisdom and Justice are the nourishment of the soul. They are taken as food and as drink and they strengthen and the more one takes of them, the more grows the holy eagerness to possess Wisdom and know Justice. But the day will come when the holy insatiable hunger of the soul will be satisfied. It will come. God will give Himself to His child, and will suckle him and the child destined for Paradise will be satisfied with the admirable Mother Who is God Himself, and man will never be hungry again but will rest happily on God's divine bosom. No human science is equal to this divine science. The curiosity of the mind can be gratified, but the necessities of the spirit cannot. Nay, the spirit is disgusted by the difference in taste and makes a wry mouth at the bitter nipple, preferring to suffer the pangs of hunger, rather than be filled with a food that does not come from God.

Be not afraid, o men thirsting or starving for God! Be faithful and you will be satisfied by Him Who loves you.

"How happy I will be if I am merciful".

Who amongst men can say: "I do not need mercy"? No one. Now, if in the Old Law it is written: "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth", why should we not say in the New Law: "Who has been merciful shall find mercy"? Everybody needs forgiveness.

Well, then: forgiveness is not achieved by formulae or by the form of a rite, which are external symbols granted to man's dull mentality, it is instead obtained through the internal rite of love, which is still mercy. If the sacrifice of a goat or a lamb and the offer of a few coins were prescribed, the reason is that every evil is founded on two roots: greed and pride. Greed is punished through the expense for the purchase of the offering, pride by the open confession of the rite: "I am making this sacrifice because I have sinned". It is also done to anticipate the times and the signs of the times, and in the blood which is shed is symbolised the Blood which will be shed to cancel the sins of men.

Blessed therefore are those who are merciful to those who are hungry, nude, homeless, to those who suffer from the greatest misery, which is to have a bad disposition, as it causes grief both to those who have it and to those who live

with them. Be merciful. Forgive, bear with people, help them, teach them, support them. Do not conceal yourselves in a crystal tower saying: "I am pure and I will not descend amongst sinners". Do not say: "I am rich and happy and I will not hear of other people's miseries". Remember that your richness, your health, your family wealth may vanish quicker than smoke blown away by a strong wind. And remember that crystal acts as a lense and consequently what may be unnoticed if you were mixed among the crowds, cannot be concealed if you place yourselves in a crystal tower where you are alone, isolated and illumined on all sides.

Mercy is necessary to offer a continuous, secret, holy sacrifice of expiation and to obtain mercy.

"How happy I will be if I am pure in heart".

God is purity. Paradise is the Kingdom of Purity. Nothing impure can enter Paradise where God is. Therefore, if you are impure, you will not be able to enter the Kingdom of God. Oh! But what a joy the Father grants to His children in advance! Who is pure has in this world an advance of Heaven because God bends over a pure soul and man from the earth can see his God. He is not familiar with the taste of human love, but relishes the flavour of divine love, to the point of being enraptured, and can say: "I am with You and You are in me, I therefore possess You and I recognise You as the most loving spouse of my soul". And believe Me, who has God enjoys substantial changes, of which he himself is unaware, and thus becomes holy, wise, strong; words embellish his lips and his actions acquire a strength that is not of the creature, but comes from God Who lives in it.

What is the life of those who see God? A beatitude. And do you wish to deprive yourselves of such a gift for the sake of fetid impurities?

"How happy I will be if I am peaceful in spirit".

Peace is one of God's characteristics. God is to be found only in peace. Because peace is love, whereas war is hatred. Satan is hatred. God is peace. No man can say that he is the son of God, neither can God call son a man who has an irascible soul always ready to stir up a storm. Not only. Neither can he be called the son of God who, although not a trouble-maker himself, by means of his own great peace does not help to calm the storms stirred up by other people. Who is peaceful propagates peace also without uttering any words. Master of himself and, I dare say, master of God, he divulges Him as a lamp spreads its light, as a thurible exhales its perfume, as a wineskin holds wine, and this sweet oil, which is the spirit of peace issuing from the children of God, gives light in the foggy gloominess of ill-feelings, and purifies the air from the miasmas of malice and calms the raging waves of quarrels.

Let God and men say that you are so.

"How happy I will be if I am persecuted in the cause of right".

Man has become so devilish that he hates good wherever it is, and he hates who is good, as if who is good, even when silent, accuses and reproaches him. In fact the goodness of one person makes the wickedness of a wicked person appear even more wicked... In fact the faith of a true believer makes the hypocrisy of a false believer appear more clearly. In fact, he who by his way of living continuously bears witness to justice can but be hated by the unjust. And then the unjust are pitiless towards the lovers of justice.

The same applies here as in wars. Man makes more progress in the satanic art of persecution than in the holy art of love. But he can persecute only what has a short life. What is eternal in man eludes the snare, nay, it achieves a more energetic vitality than persecution itself. Life escapes through the bleeding wounds or because of the privations that consume those who are persecuted. But the blood makes the purple of the future king and the privations are as many steps to ascend the thrones that the Father has prepared for His martyrs, for whom are reserved the royal seats in the Kingdom of Heaven.

How happy I will be if I am accused and abused falsely".

Strive to have your names written in the celestial books, where names are not written according to human falsehood, which is accustomed to praise those who less deserve praise, where, instead, with justice and love are written the deeds of good people in order to give them the reward promised to the blessed ones by God.

In the past, the Prophets were calumniated and abused. But when the gates of Heaven are opened, they will enter the City of God, like imposing kings, and the

angels will bow singing out of joy. You, too, who have been abused and accused falsely for being the children of God, will have a heavenly triumph and when the time comes to an end and Paradise is full, then every tear will be dear to you, because through it you will have conquered the eternal glory, which I promise you in the name of the Father.

Go. I will speak to you again tomorrow. Only the sick people should remain that I may relieve them from their pains. Peace be with you and may the meditation on salvation lead you, through love, on to the road the end of which is Heaven.»

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Maria Valtorta

THE POEM OF THE MAN-GOD

VOLUME THREE

THE SECOND YEAR OF THE PUBLIC LIFE
(Conclusion)

275. Avarice and the Foolish Rich Man.
10th and 14th September 1945.

Jesus is on one of the hills on the western coast of the lake. The towns and villages spread on both shores are displayed under His eyes. Directly under the hill are Magdala and Tiberias, the former with its luxurious district strewn with gardens, clearly separated from the poor houses of fishermen, peasants and common people by a little torrent now completely dry; the latter magnificent in every quarter, a town unaware of misery and decay, looking beautiful and fresh in the sunshine before the lake. Between the two towns there are a few but well kept vegetable-gardens on the short plain, while olive-trees climb the hill conquering it. From this hill-top one can see behind Jesus the saddles of the Mount of Beatitudes, at the foot of which there is the main road which goes from the Mediterranean Sea to Tiberias. Perhaps Jesus has chosen this place because it is so close to a very busy road, and thus people can come here from many towns both on the lake and in the inland of Galilee, and then go back home in

the evening or find hospitality in many of the towns. The climate is also mild because of the height and also because the tall trees on the upper slopes have replaced the olive-trees.

There are in fact many people besides the apostles and disciples. People who need Jesus for health reasons, or for advice, people who have come out of curiosity, or led by friends or in a spirit of imitation. In brief, there is a large crowd. The season, which is no longer hot but tends to the languid pleasantness of autumn, encourages pilgrims to come in search of the Master. Jesus has cured sick people and has spoken to the crowd on the subject of wealth unjustly attained and detachment therefrom, as is necessary in everyone who wishes to gain Heaven and is essential in those who want to be His disciples. He is now replying to the questions of this or that rich disciple, who is somewhat upset by such requirement.

John, the scribe, says: «Must I destroy what I have, thus depriving my family of what is due to them? »

«No. God gave you some property. Let it be useful to Justice and make just use of it. That is, assist your family by means of it, which is your duty; treat your servants humanely, and that is charity; help the poor, and the poor disciples in need. Your wealth thus will not be a hindrance, but an aid.» Then addressing the crowds He says: «I solemnly tell you that also the poorest disciple can be in the same danger of losing Heaven through attachment to riches, if he acts against justice by coming to terms with rich people, after he has become a priest of Mine. A rich or wicked man will often endeavour to seduce you with gifts to make you agreeable to his way of living and to his sin. And among My ministers there will be some who will yield to the temptation of presents. That must not happen. Follow the Baptist's example. Although he was not a judge or a magistrate, he possessed the perfection of judge and magistrate as pointed out in Deuteronomy: "You must be impartial, you must take no bribes, for a bribe blinds wise men's eyes and jeopardises the cause of the just". Too often man allows the edge of the sword of justice to be blunted by the gold which a sinner rubs on it. No, that must not happen. Learn how to be poor, how to die, but never come to terms with sin. Not even with the excuse of using that gold for the poor. It is cursed gold and would bear no good. It is the gold of a disgraceful compromise. You have been appointed masters that you may be masters, doctors and redeemers. What would you be, if your own interest led you to agree to wickedness? Masters of evil science, doctors who kill their patients, not redeemers but parties to the ruin of hearts.»

One of the crowd comes forward and says: «I am not a disciple. But I do admire You. Answer this question of mine: "Is it lawful to keep the money of another person?" »

«No, man. It is larceny, like robbing the purse of a passer-by.»

«Eaven if it is family money? »

«Of course. It is not right that one should take possession of the money belonging to all the others.»

«Then come to Abelmaim, Master, on the road to Damascus, and order my brother to share with me the inheritance of our father who died without leaving a written will. He took everything for himself. And remember that we are twins, born at the first and only birth. So I have the same rights as he has.»

Jesus looks at him and says: «It is a painful situation and your brother is certainly not behaving righteously. But all I can do is to pray for you and for him, that he may change, and I can come to your village and evangelize and thus touch his heart. The road is no burden to Me if I can bring about peace between you.»

The man becomes furious and bursts out: «What's the use of Your words? It takes much more than that in this case! »

«Did you not tell Me to order your brother to...»

«To order is not to evangelize. An order is always joined to a threat. Threaten to strike his person, if he does not give me what is due to me. You can do that. As You give health You can give a disease.»

«Man, I came to convert, not to strike. But if you have faith in My words, you will have peace.»

«Which words? »

«I told you that I will pray for you and for your brother, that you may be comforted and he may be converted.»

«Nonsense! I am not such a fool as to believe that. Come and order.» Jesus, Who has been meek and patient, becomes impressive and severe. He straightens up - before He was bending over the little stout angry man - and He says: «Man, who appointed Me judge or arbitrator between you? Nobody. But to avoid a rupture between two brothers I was willing to come and practise My mission of conciliator and redeemer, and if you had believed My words, on going back to Abelmaim you would have found your brother already changed. But you will not believe. And you will have no miracle. If you had been able to get hold of the treasure before your brother, you would have kept it, depriving your brother of it, because as it is true that you were born twins, it is also true that you have twin passions and both you and your brother have but one love: gold, and one faith: gold. Be therefore with your faith. Goodbye.» The man goes away cursing Jesus while all the people present are scandalised and would like to punish him.

But Jesus objects saying: «Let him go. Why dirty your hands striking a brute? I forgive him because he is possessed and led astray by the demon of gold. Forgive him as well. Let us rather pray for the unhappy man so that he may become humane again with a beautiful free soul.»

«That is true. Even his countenance was dreadful because of his greed. Did you notice it? » the disciples and those who were close to the miser ask one another.

«That is true, indeed! He did not look the same person as before.»

«Yes. And when he rejected the Master, he almost struck Him while cursing Him, and his countenance was demoniac.»

«A tempting demon. He wanted to lead the Master to wickedness...»

«Listen » says Jesus. «It is true that the alterations of the spirit are reflected on one's face. It is as if the demon appeared on the surface of his possession. Only few people who are demons, either in deeds or appearance, do not disclose what they are. And those few are perfect in evil and perfectly possessed. The countenance of a just man, instead, is always beautiful, even if his face is materially disfigured, because of a supernatural beauty, which from the interior exudes exteriorly. And it is not just a saying, but a real fact, that we notice a bodily freshness as well in those who are free from vices. The soul within us envelops our whole being. The stench of a corrupt soul affects also the body, whereas the scent of a pure soul preserves it. A corrupt soul drives the flesh to obscene sins, which age and disfigure the body. A pure soul incites the body to a pure life, which grants a fresh complexion and imparts majesty.

Endeavour to keep your youth spiritually pure, or to revive it, if you have already lost it, and beware of greed, both for sensual pleasures and for power. The life of man does not depend on the abundance of his wealth, neither in present life and much less in the next one, eternal life. It depends instead on his way of living, as well as his happiness, both on the earth and in Heaven. Because a vicious man is never really happy. On the contrary, a virtuous man is always happy with a celestial joy, even if he is poor and alone. Not even death upsets him. Because he has no sins or remorse making him fear to meet God, neither does he regret what he leaves on the earth. He knows that his treasure is in Heaven and like a man who goes to take the inheritance due to him, a holy inheritance, he goes happily and solicitously towards death, which opens to him the gate of the Kingdom where is his treasure.

Store up your treasure at once. Begin in your youth, you young people; work incessantly, you older people, who are closer to death because of your age. But since the date of death is unknown, and a child often dies before a venerable old man, do not postpone the work of storing up your treasure of virtues and good deeds for the next life, lest death should reach you before you have placed a treasure of merits in Heaven. Many people say: "Oh! I am young and strong! I will enjoy myself for the time being on the earth, and I will turn later". A big mistake!

Listen to this parable. A rich man's estate had yielded a good harvest. A really miraculous harvest. He looks happily at so much abundance piling up in his fields and threshing-floors and which is to be stored in provisional sheds and even in the rooms of his house, since his barns cannot hold it all, and says: 'I have worked like a slave but I have not been disappointed by my fields. I have worked as much as for ten harvests, and I am going to rest just as long. What

shall I do to put away all this crop? I do not want to sell it otherwise I would be compelled to work to have a new crop next year. This is what I will do: I will knock down my granaries and build larger ones, capable of holding all my crops and my goods. And then I will say to my soul: 'Oh, my soul! You have aside goods for many years. Rest, therefore, eat, drink and have a good time' ". The man, like many more people, mistook his soul for his body and mixed the sacred and the profane, because in actual fact a soul does not rejoice in revelries and idleness, but languishes. And the man, like many, after the first good harvest in the fields of virtue, stopped, as he thought he had done everything.

But do you not know that once you have laid your hand on the plough you must persevere for one, ten, one hundred years, as long as your life lasts, because to stop is a crime against oneself, as one denies oneself a greater glory, and it is a regression, because generally he who stops not only does not proceed further, but turns back? The treasure of Heaven must increase year by year to be good. Because if Mercy is benign to those also who had few years to store it up, it will not be an accomplice of lazy people who in a long life do little. It is a treasure increasing continuously. Otherwise it is no longer a fruit-bearing treasure, but an unfruitful one, which is detrimental to the readily available peace of Heaven.

God said to the foolish man: "Fool! You mistake body and wealth of the earth for what is spirit and you turn the grace of God into evil. This very night the demand will be made for your soul, and it will be taken away and your body will lie lifeless. And this hoard of yours, whose will it be then? Will you take it with you? No. You will come to My presence despoiled of earthly crops and spiritual works and you will be poor in the next life. It would have been better if you had used your crops for works of mercy on behalf of your neighbour and yourself. Because if you had been merciful towards others, you would have been merciful to your own soul. And instead of fostering idle thoughts, you could have plied a trade which would have given an honest profit for your body and great merit for your soul until I called you". And the man died that night and was severely judged. I tell you solemnly that that happens to those who store up treasure for themselves but do not grow rich in the eyes of God.

Go now and avail yourselves of the doctrine explained to you. Peace be with you.»

And Jesus blesses and withdraws into a thicket with His apostles and disciples to take some food and rest. And while eating He continues to speak on the same lesson, repeating a subject already explained several times to the apostles and which I think will never be clarified enough, because man is too easily seized with foolish fears.

«You must believe » He says, «that man should worry only about making himself rich in virtue. But mind you: you must not worry anxiously or painfully. Good is the enemy of anxiety, of fears, of haste, which still show too many traces of avarice, jealousy and human mistrust. Let your work be constant, confident, peaceful, without rough starts and stops, as onagers do. But no one makes use of them, unless one is mad, to go on a safe journey. Be peaceful in victory and peaceful in defeat. Also tears shed for an error you made and which grieves you because by it you have displeased God, must be peaceful, comforted by humility and trust. Prostration, anger against oneself are always a symptom of pride and lack of confidence. He who is humble knows that he is a poor man subject to the miseries of the flesh, which at times triumphs. He who is humble puts his trust not so much in himself as in God, and is serene also when defeated and says:

"Forgive me, Father. I know that You are aware of my weakness which overwhelms me at times. I will believe that You pity me. I am fully confident that You will help me in future even more than heretofore, notwithstanding I please You so little". Do not be indifferent or avaricious with regard to the gifts of God. Give generously what you possess of wisdom and virtue.

Be active in spiritual matters as men are with regard to their bodies. And as far as your bodies are concerned do not imitate the people of the world who always tremble for their future, fearing they may lack what is superfluous, that they may be taken ill, or die, that enemies may be harmful, and so on. God knows what you are in need of. Therefore be not afraid for your future. Be free from tears, which are heavier than the chains of galley-slaves. Do not be anxious about the necessities of life: what you will eat, or drink and how you will clothe yourself. The life of the spirit is worth more than the life of the body

and the body is worth more than clothes, because you live with your bodies and not with your clothes and through the mortification of your bodies you help your souls to attain eternal life. God knows how long He will leave your souls in your bodies, and He will give you what is necessary until that hour. He gives it to crows, impure birds which feed on corpses and the reason for their being is just to remove putrifying corpses. And will He not give you what is necessary? Crows have neither larders nor granaries and God feeds them just the same. You are men, not crows. At present you are the cream of men because you are the disciples of the Master, the evangelizers of the world, the servants of God. And can you possibly think that God may neglect you, even for what concerns your clothes, since He takes care of the lilies of the valleys and makes them grow and clothes them with such beautiful robes that Solomon never possessed the like, and yet they do no work but scent worshipping God? It is true that by yourselves you cannot add one tooth to a toothless mouth, or lengthen by one inch a contracted leg, or make dimmed eyes bright. And if you cannot do such things, can you think you may be able to repel misery and diseases and turn dust into food? You cannot. But do not be of little faith. You will always have what you need. Do not worry like the people of the world who strive to satisfy their pleasures. You have your Father Who knows what you need. All you must seek, and it must be your first care, is the Kingdom of God and His justice, and all the rest will be given to you as well.

Be not afraid, My little flock. My Father was pleased to call you to the Kingdom, that you may have His Kingdom. You may, therefore, aspire to it and assist the Father through your good will and holy activity. Sell your property and give the money to charity, if you are alone. Give your relatives means of subsistence as compensation for your abandoning the house to follow Me, because it is unfair to deprive children and wife of their daily bread. And if you cannot sacrifice money, sacrifice the wealth of your affections. They are money which God evaluates for what they are: gold which is purer than any other gold; pearls which are more precious than those taken from the sea, and rubies which are rarer than those found in the bowels of the earth. Because to renounce one's family for My sake is love which is more perfect than the purest gold, it is a pearl made of tears, a ruby made of blood wailing from the wound of one's heart, torn to pieces by the separation from father and mother, wife and children. But such purses never wear out, such treasures never fail. Thieves cannot break into Heaven. Wood-worms cannot eat what is deposited there. And have Heaven in your hearts and your hearts in Heaven near your treasures. Because a heart, whether good or wicked, is with what you consider your dear treasure. So as a heart is there where its treasure is (in Heaven), so the treasure is there where the heart is (within you), nay, the treasure is within the heart and with the treasure of saints, in the heart there is the Heaven of saints.

Be always ready like those who are about to depart or are waiting for their master. You are the servants of the Master-God. He can call you where He is any moment, or come where you are. Be, therefore, always ready to go, or to pay Him homage, with work or travelling belt round your waists and lamps lit in your hands. Coming out of a wedding party with one who has preceded you in Heaven and in being consecrated to God on the earth, God may remember that you are waiting and may say: "Let us go to Stephen or to John, or to James and to Peter". And God is fast in coming or saying: "Come". So be ready to open the door to Him when He arrives or to leave, should He call you.

Blessed are those servants whom the Master finds vigilant on His arrival. I tell you solemnly that to reward them for their faithful waiting, He will gird His waist, make them sit at the table and serve them. He may come at the first, or second or third watch. You do not know, so be always vigilant. And you will be happy if you are so and the Master finds you thus! Do not flatter yourselves by saying: "There is time. He will not come tonight". Evil would befall you. You do not know. If one knew when a thief is going to come, one would not leave the house unguarded so that a robber may force the door and coffers. Be prepared as well, because when you least expect Him, the Son of man will come saying: "It is time".»

Peter, who has even forgotten to finish his food, to listen to the Lord, when he sees that Jesus is silent, asks: «What You said, is it for us or for everybody?»

«It is for you and for everybody. But it is primarily for you, because you are

like stewards put by the Master at the head of the servants and it is your duty to be twice as vigilant, both as stewards and as simple believers. What must a steward be like, once he has been put by his master at the head of the servants, so that he may give each his fair portion at the right moment? He must be shrewd and loyal, in order to fulfil his own duty and make his subordinates fulfil theirs. Otherwise the interests of the master would suffer a loss, whereas he pays so that the steward may act on his behalf and safeguard his interests while he is away.

Happy is the servant whom the master finds acting loyally, diligently and honestly, on his returning home. I tell you solemnly that he will appoint his steward over other estates, over all his estates, and will relax and rejoice in his heart because of the reliability of his servant. But if the servant says: "Well! My master is very far away and has written to me that he will be delayed in coming back home. So I can do what I like and I will do the necessary when I think he is about to come". And he begins to eat and drink until he gets drunk and gives crazy orders and, as the good servants under him refuse to carry them out not to cause damage to their master, he beats servants and maids until they are taken ill and decline. And thinking that he is happy he says: "At last I relish being the master and feared by everybody". But what will happen to him? It will happen that the master will arrive when he least expects him, catching him perhaps in the very act of pocketing money or bribing some of the most unreliable servants. Then, I tell you, the master will throw him out, depriving him of his position as steward, and refusing to keep him among his servants, because it is not right to keep unfaithful traitors among honest people. And the more the master previously loved and instructed him, the more he will be punished.

Because the more one is aware of the will and mind of the master, the more one is obliged to fulfil it accurately. If one does not act as the master explained in so great detail that nobody else was told so clearly, one will be severely beaten, whereas an inferior servant, who knows little and does wrong while he thinks he is doing right, will receive a less severe punishment. Much will be requested of him who was given much, and he who has much in his care, will have to return much, because My stewards will be asked to give an account also of the soul of a baby one hour old.

My election is not a cool relaxation in a flowery little wood. I came to bring fire on the earth; and what can I wish for but that it may light up? That is why I tire Myself and I want you to tire yourselves until you die and until the whole earth is a celestial bonfire. I am to be baptised with a baptism. And how distressed I will be until it is accomplished! Are you not asking why? Because through it I will be able to make you Fire-bearers, agitators who will act in every and against every social stratum, to make it one thing only: the flock of Christ.

Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? And according to the way of thinking of the earth? No. On the contrary, I came to bring discord and separation. Because from now on, and until the whole world becomes one only flock, of five people in one house two will be against three, and the father will be against his son, and the son against the father, the mother against her daughters and the daughters against the mother and mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law will have a further reason not to understand each other, because a new language will be spoken by some lips, and it will be like Babel, because a deep disturbance will agitate the reign of human and superhuman affections. Then the time will come when everything will be unified in a new language, spoken by all those who have been saved by the Nazarene, and feelings will be filtered like water, as the dross will sink to the bottom, while the limpid waves of celestial lakes will shine on the surface.

Truly, it is not restful to serve Me, according to the meaning man attaches to that word. Heroism and indefatigability are required. But I tell you that at the end it will be Jesus, still and always Jesus, Who will gird His waist to serve you, and will sit with you at an eternal banquet and all labour and sorrow will be forgotten.

Now, since no one has been looking for us, let us go to the lake. We shall rest at Magdala. In the gardens of Mary of Lazarus there is room for everybody and she has put her house at the disposal of the Pilgrim and His friends. There is no need for Me to tell you that Mary of Magdala died with her sin and she has

risen again from her repentance as Mary of Lazarus, the woman disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. You are already aware of that because the news spread like the fury of the wind in a forest. But I will tell you something you do not know: all the personal wealth of Mary is for the servants of God and the poor people of Christ. Let us go...»

276. In the Garden of Mary of Magdala: Love for One's Neighbour.
16th September 1945.

Jesus is no longer where He was during the last vision. He is in a large garden which extends as far as the lake, and in the middle of it there is a house surrounded by the garden, which at the rear of the house is at least three times as large as on the front and sides. There are flowers, but above all trees, thickets and green nooks, some around fountain-basins of precious marbles, some like bowers around tables and stone seats. And there must have been statues here and there, both along the paths and in the centre of the basins. Only the pedestals of the statues are now left as a remembrance, near laurel and box shrubs or reflected in the basins full of limpid water.

The presence of Jesus with His disciples and of people from Magdala, among whom there is little Benjamin who dared to tell the Iscariot that he was a bad man, makes me think that they are the gardens of the Magdalene's house... which have been conveniently altered for a new function by removing what might have disgusted or scandalised or reminded one of the past.

The lake is a grey-blue crêpe reflecting the sky, where clouds are sailing swiftly, laden with the first autumn rain. But it is beautiful even so, in the still placid light of a day which is not clear but not entirely rainy. Its shores are no longer covered with flowers, they are however painted by the great painter which is autumn and they show ochre and purple hues and the exhausted pallor of the withering leaves of trees and vineyards, which change colour before yielding to the earth their living clothing. In the garden of a villa overlooking the lake like this one, there is a spot which has turned red, as if it poured blood into the water, due to the presence of a hedge of flexible branches, which autumn has coloured with a blazing copper hue, while the willow-trees spread along the shore, not far from the garden, seem to be trembling, as their slender silver-green leaves quiver and look paler than usual before dying. Jesus is not looking at what I am watching. He is looking at some poor sick people whom He cures. He is looking at some old beggars to whom He gives some money. He is looking at some children offered to Him by their mothers that He may bless them. And He is looking pitifully at a group of sisters, who are informing Him of the behaviour of their only brother, who has caused their mother to die of a broken heart and has brought about their ruin, and the poor women beg Him to give them some advice and to pray for them.

«I will certainly pray for you. I will ask God to give you peace and I will pray for him, that he may turn and remember that you are his sisters, giving you what is fair and above all that he may love you once again. Because if he does that, he will do everything else. But do you love him, or have you a grudge against him? Do you forgive him wholeheartedly or is there anger in your tears? Because he is unhappy, too. More than you are. And notwithstanding his riches, he is poorer than you are, and you must pity him. He no longer loves and is without the love of God. See how unhappy he is? The sad life he made you lead will end in happiness for you and first of all for your mother. But not for him. On the contrary, from the false present enjoyment he would pass to an eternal dreadful torture. Come with Me. By speaking to you I will speak to everybody.»

And Jesus goes towards the centre of a meadow, where once there must have been a statue and the site is now strewn with groups of flowers. Only the pedestal is now left and it is surrounded by a low hedge of myrtle and miniature roses. Jesus goes towards that hedge and begins to speak. The people become silent and crowd round Him.

«Peace be with you. Listen.

It is written: "Love your neighbour as you love yourself". But who is our neighbour? The whole of mankind, in a general meaning. In a narrower sense all our countrymen; in an even narrower sense, all our fellow citizens; then in a

more and more narrow meaning, all our relatives; finally, the last circle of this crown of love closed like the petals of a rose round the heart of the flower, the love for our full-brothers: our first neighbour. God is the centre of the heart of the flower of love, so love for Him is the first to be had. Around His centre there is the love for our parents, the second to be had, because father and mother are really the little "God" on the earth, as they procreated us and cooperated with God to our creation, besides taking care of us with untiring love. The various love rings press round that ovary which shines with pistils and exhales the perfume of the most choice love. The first is the love for our brothers born of the same womb and same blood as ourselves. How is our brother to be loved? Only because his flesh and blood are the same as ours? Even the little birds which are together in one nest can do that. In fact, this is all they have in common: they were born in the same brood and have on their tongues the flavour of their father's and mother's saliva. We men are worth more than birds. We have more than flesh and blood. We have the Father besides having a father and mother. We have a soul and we have God, the Father of all men. So we must love our brother as a brother, because of our father and mother who gave birth to us, and as a brother because of God Who is the universal Father.

We must love him, therefore, spiritually not only corporeally. We must love him not only because of his body and blood, but because of the spirit which we have in common. And we must love, as it is to be loved, the spirit of our brother more than his body. Because the spirit is more important than the body. Because the Father God is more important than the man father. Because the spirit is worth more than the flesh. Because our brother would be much more unhappy if he lost the Father God than he would be if he lost his man father. It is heart-rending to be deprived of the man father, but it is only half an orphanhood. It is detrimental only to what is earthly, that is to our need for help and caresses. But the spirit, if it can believe, is not damaged by the death of the father. On the contrary, in order to join the just father where he is, the spirit of the son rises as if it were attracted by a loving force. And I tell you solemnly that that is love, love for God and for the father, who has ascended with his soul to the place of wisdom. He ascends to the place where he is closer to God and acts with greater rectitude, because he does not lack true help, that is the prayers of the father whom he now loves perfectly, neither does he lack restraint due both to the certainty that the father does now see the deeds of his son, better than he did in his lifetime, and to the desire to be able to join him through a holy life.

That is why one must take greater care of the spirit than of the body of the brother. It would certainly be a very poor love if it took care of what is perishable, neglecting what is not perishable and which, if neglected, may lose eternal joy. Too many people tire themselves with useless things and worry themselves about what is of comparative merit, losing sight of what is really necessary. Good sisters and brothers must not worry only about keeping clothes tidy and having meals ready, or helping their brothers with their work. But they must bend over their spirits and listen to their voices, perceive their faults, and with loving patience busy themselves to give them a wholesome holy spirit, if in those voices and faults they see a danger for their eternal lives. And if their brother has sinned against them, they must forgive him and get God to forgive him, through his return to love, without which God will not forgive. It is written in Leviticus: "You must not bear hatred for your brother in your heart, you must openly tell him of his offence, this way you will not take a sin upon yourself because of him". But there is an abyss between not hating and loving. You may think that aversion, detachment, indifference are not sins, because they are not hatred. No. I have come to bring new light to love, and consequently, to hatred, because what makes the former shine in every detail, makes every detail of the latter shine as well. The very elevation to high spheres of the former, brings out, as a consequence, a greater detachment from the latter, because the higher love ascends, the lower hatred seems to sink. My doctrine is perfection. It is refinement of feelings and judgement. It is truth without metaphors and paraphrases. And I tell you that aversion, detachment and indifference are already hatred. Simply because they are not love. Hatred is the opposite of love. Can you find another name for aversion? For being detached from a being? For indifference? He who loves has a liking for

the person loved. So if he dislikes him, he no longer loves him. He who loves, even if he is separated materially from the person he loves, continues to be near him with his spirit. So if one is detached with one's spirit from the other, one no longer loves the other. He who loves is never indifferent towards the person he loves, on the contrary he is interested in everything concerning that person. So if one is indifferent towards another, it means that one does not love the other. You can thus see that those three attitudes are branches of one plant: hatred. Now what happens when we are offended by one whom we love? In ninety per cent of cases, if hatred does not arise, aversion, detachment or indifference will result. No. Do not do that. Do not freeze your hearts by means of those three forms of hatred. Love.

But you are asking yourselves: "How can we?". I reply to you: "As God can, as He loves those who offend Him. A sorrowful but still good love". You say: "How do we do that?". I am giving a new law on the relationship with a guilty brother, and I say: "If your brother offends you, do not humiliate him by reproaching him in public, but urge your love to cover up your brother's fault in the eyes of the world". Because great will be your merit in the eyes of God, by barring, out of love, every satisfaction to your pride.

Oh! How man loves to let people know that he was offended and grieved thereby! Like a foolish beggar he does not go to a king asking for alms in gold, but he goes to other foolish beggars like himself asking for handfuls of ash and manure and mouthfuls of burning poison. That is what the world gives to the offended person who goes complaining and begging for comfort. God, the King, gives pure gold to him, who, being offended, goes without any grudge to weep only at His feet and ask Him, Love and Wisdom, for comfort of love and how to behave in the sorrowful circumstance. Therefore, if you want comfort, go to God and act with love.

I say to you, correcting the old law: "If your brother has sinned against you, go and correct him by yourself. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother once again. And at the same time you have gained many blessings from God. If your brother does not listen to you, but he rejects you persisting in his fault, take with you two or three grave, clever, reliable witnesses, so that no one may say that you are agreeable to his fault or indifferent to the welfare of his soul, and go back to your brother with them, and kindly repeat your remarks in their presence, so that the witnesses may be able to repeat that you have done everything in your power to correct your brother in a holy way.

Because that is the duty of a good brother, since the sin committed by him against you is detrimental to his soul, and you must take care of his soul. If that is of no avail, inform the synagogue, so that he may be called to order in the name of God. If even so he does not make amends and he rejects the synagogue or the Temple as he rejected you, consider him as a publican and a Gentile".

Do that both with your full brothers and with the people you love. Because also with your remote neighbour you must behave with holiness, generosity, flexibility and love. And when it is a law-suit and it is necessary to go to court and you go with your adversary, I tell you, o man, who often find yourself in greater evils through your own fault, to do everything in your power, while you are on the way, to make your peace with him, whether you are right or wrong. Because human justice is always imperfect and a shrewd man generally defeats justice and the offender might be considered innocent, whilst you, who are innocent, might be found guilty. And then not only your right would not be acknowledged, but you would lose the case and from being innocent you would be found guilty of slander and so the judge would hand you over to the law-executor who would not let you free until you had paid down to the last penny.

Be conciliating. Does your pride suffer by it? Very well. Is money squeezed out of you? Better still. Providing your holiness increases. Do not feel nostalgia for gold. Do not crave for praises. Let God praise you. Ensure that you have your purse in Heaven. And pray for those who offend you. That they may make amends. If that happens, they themselves will give you back honour and goods. If they do not, God will.

Go, now, because it is time for your meal. Let only the beggars stay and sit at the apostolic table. Peace be with you.»

277. Jesus Sends the Seventy-Two Disciples.

17th September 1945.

After the meal Jesus dismisses the poor guests and remains with His apostles and disciples in the garden of Mary of Magdala. They sit at the very end of it, near the calm water of the lake, on which some sailing boats are fishing.

«They will have a good catch » comments Peter who is watching them.

«You will have a good catch, too, Simon of Jonah.»

«Me, my Lord? When? Do You want me to go out and fish for our food for tomorrow? I will go at once and...»

«We do not need any food in this house. You will have a good catch in future, in the spiritual field. And most of these will be very good fishermen like you. »

«Not everyone, Master? » asks Matthew.

«Not everyone. But those who will persevere and become My priests will have good catches.»

«Conversions? » asks James of Zebedee.

«They will convert, forgive, lead back to God. Oh! so many things.»

«Listen, Master. You said before that if a man does not even listen to his brother in the presence of witnesses, the synagogue is to admonish him. Now, if I have understood correctly what You have been telling us since we met, I think that the synagogue will be replaced by the Church, the thing that You want to found. If so, where will we go to have our pig-headed brothers admonished? »

«You will do that yourselves, because you will be My Church. So believers will come to you, for advice for themselves or for advice for other people. I will tell you more. You will not be able only to give advice. You will be able to absolve in My Name. You will be able to release people from the chains of sin and you will be able to join two people who love each other so that they become one body. And what you do will be valid in the eyes of God, as if God Himself had done it. I tell you solemnly that whatever you bind on the earth will be bound in Heaven and whatever you absolve on the earth will be absolved in Heaven. And I say to you also, to make you understand the power of My Name, of brotherly love and prayer, that if two disciples of Mine, and I mean as such all those who will believe in the Christ, will gather together to ask for any just thing in My Name, that thing will be granted to them by My Father. Because prayer is a great power, brother union is a great power, My Name is a very great infinite power and so is My presence among you. And where two or three people are gathered in My Name, I shall be in the midst of them, and I will pray with them and the Father will not refuse anything to those who pray with Me. Many do not get what they ask for, because they pray by themselves, or they ask for what is illicit, or they pray with pride or sin in their hearts. Make your hearts pure, so that I can be with you, then pray and you will be heard.»

Peter is thoughtful. Jesus notices it and asks him why. And Peter replies: «I am thinking of the great duty to which we are destined. And I am afraid of it. I am afraid I cannot accomplish it properly.»

«In fact Simon of Jonah or James of Alphaeus or Philip, and so on, would not do it properly. But Peter the priest, James the priest, Philip the priest or Thomas will do very well because they will be acting together with Divine Wisdom.»

«And... how many times will we have to forgive our brethren? How many times if they sin against the priests; and how many if they sin against God? Because, if things will happen then, as they do now, they will certainly sin against us, since they sin against You so many times. Tell me whether I have to forgive always or a number of times. For instance, seven times, or more? »

«I will not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. An endless number. Because also the Father of Heaven will forgive you many times, a great number of times, and you ought to be perfect. So do as He does with you, because you will represent God on the earth. Nay, listen. I will tell you a parable which will help everybody.»

And Jesus, Who was surrounded by the apostles only, in a box thicket, goes towards the disciples who are respectfully gathered in an open space adorned with a fountain-basin full of clear water. Jesus' smile is like a sign that He is going to speak. And while He walks with long slow steps, so that in a few moments He covers a good distance without rushing, they are all delighted and press round Him as children gather round those who make them happy. It is a circle of keen faces, until Jesus leans against a tall tree and begins to speak.

«What I said before to the people is to be completed for you who have been chosen from the people. The apostle Simon of Jonah asked Me: "How many times must I forgive? Whom? Why?". I replied to him privately and I will now repeat My reply as it is fair that you should know now as well.

Listen how many times, how and why you have to forgive. You must forgive as God forgives, Who forgives a thousand times, if one sins a thousand times and repents. Providing He sees that in man there is no will to sin, no pursuit of what makes one sin and that sin is only the result of man's weakness. In the case of voluntary persistence in sin there can be no forgiveness for sins against the Law. But with regard to the grief such sins cause you individually, you are to forgive them. Always forgive those who harm you. Forgive, so that you may be forgiven, because you have sinned also against God and your brothers. Forgiveness opens the Kingdom of Heaven both to him who is forgiven and to him who forgives. It is like what happened to a king and his servants.

A king wanted to draw up the accounts with his servants. He called them one by one, beginning with those who were in the highest positions. There was one who owed the king ten thousand talents. But the servant could not pay back the advance the king had given him to build his house and purchase all kinds of goods, because in actual fact, for many more or less justified reasons, he had not made a very diligent use of the money lent to him for that purpose. The king and master was angry at his sloth and breakage of his word, and ordered him, his wife, children and all his possessions to be sold until he settled his debt. But the servant threw himself at the king's feet and weeping implored him: "Let me go. Have a little more patience and I will give you back everything I owe you to the last penny". The king was moved by so much distress - he was a good king - and not only agreed to his request, but when he heard that diseases had been the cause of his lack of diligence and failure to pay, he also remitted his debt. The servant went away happily. But on his way out he ran into another servant, a poor fellow to whom he had lent one hundred denarii taken from the ten thousand talents received from the king. As he felt sure of the king's protection he thought everything was permissible to him and he seized the unhappy fellow by the throat saying: "Give me what you owe me". In vain the man stooped weeping to kiss his feet imploring: "Have mercy on me as I have had much bad luck. Have a little patience and I will pay everything back to you to the last penny". The cruel servant sent for militiamen and had the poor wreck taken to prison so that he would make up his mind and pay him, or lose his freedom or his very life. The friends of the unhappy man came to know about it, and being very upset, they went and told the king and master, who, upon hearing the news, ordered the pitiless servant to be brought before him and looking at him severely said: "You wicked servant, I helped you the first time, that you might become merciful, that you might become a rich man, then I helped you by remitting your debt when you implored me to have patience. You did not have pity on your fellow servant, whilst I, a king, had so much pity on you. Why did you not treat your fellow servant as I treated you?". And in his anger he handed him over to the jailors to be kept by them until he paid everything back, saying: "As he did not have pity on one who owed him very little, while he had so much pity from me who am a king, so I will no longer have pity on him".

And that is how My Father will deal with you if you are pitiless towards your brothers, if you are more guilty than a believer, after receiving so much from God. Remember that it is your duty to be more faultless than anybody else. Remember that God gives you a great treasure in advance, but He wants you to render an account of it. Remember that no one must be able to grant love and forgiveness like you.

Do not be servants exacting much for yourselves and giving nothing to those who ask you for help. As you do to others, it will be done to you. And you will be asked to give an account of how other people behave, if they have been led to good or to evil by your examples. Oh! If you have sanctified people, your glory in Heaven will be really great! But, likewise, if you have been corrupters or only sluggish in sanctifying, you will be severely punished.

I say to you once again: if any of you does not feel like being the victim of his own mission, let him go away. But let him not fall in it. I mean: let him not fail in what is pernicious to his own and other people's perfection. And let him have God as his friend, always forgiving your weak brothers from your hearts. Then each of you, who will thus forgive, will be forgiven by God the

Father.

Our stay has come to an end. The time of Tabernacles is close at hand. Those to whom I spoke separately this morning, as from tomorrow will go ahead of Me announcing Me to the people. Those who are staying must not lose heart. I have kept some of them for prudential reasons, not because I disdain them. They will be staying with Me and I will soon send them as I am now sending the first seventy-two disciples.

The harvest is rich, but the labourers are too few compared to what is needed. So there will be work for everyone. But that is not sufficient. So, without being jealous, ask the Lord of the harvest to send new labourers to His harvest. In the meantime, you may go. During the past days, the apostles and I have completed your instructions on the work you have to do, and I have repeated to you what I told the Twelve before sending them.

One of you asked Me: "How will I cure in Your Name?". Always cure the spirit first. Promise the sick people the Kingdom of God if they can believe in Me, and once you have ascertained their faith, order the disease to depart and it will go away. And do likewise with those whose souls are ill. Stimulate their faith first of all. By means of sound words inspire them with Hope. I will then come to grant them Divine Charity, as I put it into your hearts after you believed in Me and hoped for Mercy. And be not afraid of men or of demons. They will not hurt you. The only things you are to fear are: sensuality, pride, avarice. Through them you would hand yourselves over to Satan and devilish men, who also exist.

Go therefore, preceding Me along the roads of the Jordan. And when you arrive in Jerusalem go and join the shepherds in the valley of Bethlehem, and come with them to Me, in the place you know, and we will celebrate together the holy feast, and we will then go back to our ministry more invigorated than ever. Go in peace. I bless you in the holy Name of the Lord.»

278. Jesus Meets Lazarus at the Field of the Galileans.
18th September 1945.

The famous Field of the Galileans - I think that is the meaning of the word used by Jesus to point out the meeting place with the seventy-two disciples sent ahead of Him - is part of the Mount of Olives, towards the road to Bethany, which actually passes there. And it is precisely in this place that in a vision of long ago, I saw Joachim and Anne camp with Alphaeus, then a little boy, near other tents made with branches, at the Feast of the Tabernacles, which preceded the conception of the Blessed Virgin.

The summit of the Mount of Olives is smooth: everything is smooth and pleasant on that mountain: the slopes, the view, the summit. It really inspires peace, clad as it is with olive-trees and silence. But not now. Because it is swarming with people intent on making their tents. But generally it is a place of tranquillity and meditation. On the left hand side, with respect to those facing north, there is a light depression, and then another summit which is even smoother than the previous one.

And it is on this tableland that the Galileans camp. I do not know whether it is an age-old religious custom or whether they do so by order of the Romans to avoid conflicts with Judaeans and peoples of other regions, who are never very kind to Galileans. I do not know. I know that I can see many Galileans, amongst them Alphaeus of Sarah from Nazareth; Judas, the old land owner from Merom; Jairus, the head of the synagogue and other people from Bethsaida, Capernaum and other towns in Galilee, but whose names I do not know.

Jesus points out the place where they should put up their tents, on the eastern edge of the Field of the Galileans. And the apostles, together with some disciples, among whom there is John the priest and John the scribe, Timoneus, the head of the synagogue, Stephen, Ermasteus, Joseph of Emmaus, Abel of Bethlehem in Galilee, begin to make their tents with branches.

While they do so, Jesus speaks to some children from Capernaum, who have pressed round Him asking Him dozens of questions and confiding to Him as many pieces of information, when Lazarus arrives from the Bethany road with Maximinus, his inseparable companion. Jesus is facing the opposite direction and cannot see

him. But the Iscariot does and he informs the Master, Who leaves the children and goes towards His friend smiling. Maximinus stops a few steps behind, to leave the two completely free in their first approach. And Lazarus covers the last few yards, as fast as he can, walking more painfully than ever, with a smile which trembles with pain on his lips and shines with tears in his eyes. Jesus opens His arms and Lazarus falls on to His heart, bursting into tears. «What, My dear friend? Are you still weeping?...» asks Jesus, kissing his temple. He is so much taller than Lazarus, from His shoulders upwards, and looks even taller, as Lazarus is bent in his embrace of love and respect.

At last Lazarus looks up and says: «Yes, I am weeping. Last year I gave You the pearls of my sad tears, it is therefore fair that I give You the pearls of my tears of joy. Oh! Master, my Master! I think that there is nothing more humble and holy than good tears... And I give them to You, to say: "Thank You" for my Mary who is now a kind, happy, serene, pure good girl... Oh, much better than when she was a little girl. And I, I who felt that I was much above her, in my pride of an Israelite faithful to the Law, now I feel I am so tiny, so... nothing, as compared to her, who is no longer a woman, but a flame. A sanctifying flame. I... I cannot understand where she finds the wisdom, the words, the actions, which edify the whole household. I look at her as one looks at a mystery. But how could so much fire, such a jewel be hidden under so much rottenness and be there comfortably? Neither I nor Martha can ascend where she ascends. But how can she, if her wings were broken by vice? I do not understand...»

«And there is no need for you to understand. It is enough that I understand. But I tell you that Mary has turned the powerful energy of her being towards Good. She has bent her character towards Perfection. And since her character is of powerful absolutism, she thrusts herself unreservedly on that way. She makes use of her experience in evil to be as powerful in good as she was in evil and using the same method of giving herself entirely, as she did in evil, she has given herself entirely to God. She has understood the law of "love God with your whole being, with your body, your soul and with all your strength". If Israel were made of Maries, if the world were made of Maries, we would have the Kingdom on God on the earth, as it will be in the most high Heaven.»

«Oh! Master! And it is Mary of Magdala who deserves such words!...»

«It is Mary of Lazarus. The great friend, the sister of My great friend. How did you know that I was here, if My Mother has not yet come to Bethany? »

«The steward of the Clear Water has come to me, by forced marches, and told me that You were coming. Every day I sent a servant here. A little while ago he came saying: "He has arrived and is at the Field of the Galileans". I left immediately...»

«But you are suffering...»

«So much, Master! My legs...»

«And you came. I would have come, soon...»

«My anxiety to tell You my joy was tormenting me. I have had it in my heart for months. A letter! How can a letter say such things? I could not wait any longer... Will You come to Bethany? »

«Of course. Immediately after the Feast.»

«You are anxiously awaited... That Greek girl... What a mind! I speak very much with her, anxious as she is to learn about God. But she is very well educated... and I succumb, because I do not know certain things very well. It takes You.»

«And I will come. Now let us go to Maximinus, and then I beg You to be My guest. My Mother will be happy to see you and you will be able to rest. She will soon be here with the boy.»

And they go to Maximinus who kneels down greeting Him...

279. The Seventy-Two Disciples Report to Jesus What They Have Done.
19th September 1945.

The seventy-two disciples come back at the long twilight of a clear October day with Elias, Joseph and Levi. They are tired and covered with dust, but so happy! The three shepherds are happy that they are now free to serve the Master. They are happy also because, after so many years of separation, they are with their

companions of long ago. The seventy-two are happy because they have accomplished their first mission satisfactorily. Their faces shine more than the little lamps which light up the little tents built for the large group of pilgrims.

Jesus' tent is in the centre and under it there is the Blessed Virgin with Marjiam who helps Her to prepare supper. Around it there are the tents of the apostles. Mary of Alphaeus is in the tent of James and Judas; Mary Salome and her husband are in John and James'; in the one near it there is Susanna with her husband, who is not an apostle or disciple... officially,... but he must have made a claim to stay there, since he granted his wife permission to be entirely of Jesus. Then, around them, there are the tents of the disciples, some of whom are with their families, some without. And those who are alone, as most of them are, have joined one or more companions. John of Endor has taken in the solitary Ermasteus, but he has endeavoured to be as close as possible to Jesus' tent, so that Marjiam often goes to him, taking one thing or another and cheering him up with the words of an intelligent child who is happy to be with Jesus, Mary and Peter, and at a feast as well.

After supper Jesus goes towards the slopes of the olive grove and the disciples follow Him all together.

When they are far from the babel and the crowd, after praying together, they report to Jesus in greater detail than they were able to do before, among those going and coming. And they are amazed and happy when they say: «Do You know, Master, that not only diseases but also demons obeyed us because of the power of Your Name? What a wonderful thing, Master! We poor men were able to release a man from the dreadful power of a demon, only because You had sent us!...» and they tell of many cases which happened here or there. Only of one possessed they say: «His relatives, or rather his mother and neighbours brought him to us by force. But the demon scoffed at us saying: "I have come back here by his will after the Nazarene had driven me out and I will not leave him again because he loves me more than he loves your Master and he looked for me" and with indomitable strength he suddenly tore the man away from those who were holding him and hurled him down a precipice. We ran to see whether he had been dashed to pieces. He had not! He was running like a young gazelle repeating curses and quips not really of this world... We felt sorry for his mother... But he!... Oh! can the demon do all that? »

«All that and much more » says Jesus sadly.

«Perhaps if You had been there...»

«No. I admonished him: "Go and do not relapse into your sin". But he did. He knew he wanted evil and he agreed. He is lost. There is a difference between a man who is possessed the first time through his ignorance and a man who wants to be possessed knowing that by doing so he sells himself again to the demon. But do not speak of him. He is a member cut off without hope. He is a volunteer of Evil. Let us rather praise the Lord for the victories He granted you. I know the name of the culprit and the names of those who have been saved. I could see Satan fall from heaven like a thunderbolt through your merits joined to My Name. Because I saw also your sacrifices, your prayers, the love with which you went towards unhappy people to do what I had told you to do. You have acted with love and God blessed you. Others will do what you do, but they will do it without love. And they will not get conversions... But do not rejoice because you have subdued spirits, but rejoice because your names are written in Heaven. Never remove them from there...»

«Master, when will those come who will not get conversions? Perhaps when You are no longer with us? » asks one of the disciples whose name I do not know.

«No, Agapo. Any time.»

«What? Also when You teach and love us? »

«Yes. I will always love you, also when you are far from Me. My love will always come to you and you will perceive it.»

«Oh! that is true. I perceived it one evening when I was vexed because I did not know how to reply to one who was asking me questions. I was on the point of running away shamefully. But I remembered Your words: "Be not afraid. You will be given at the right moment the words to be spoken" and I invoked You in my spirit. I said: "Jesus certainly loves me. I am calling His love to assist me" and Your love came to me. Like a fire, a light... a strength... The man before me was watching me sneering ironically and winking at his friends. He was sure to win the argument. I opened my mouth and it was like a river of words which

flowed out joyfully from my silly mouth. Master, did You really come, or was it an illusion? I do not know. I know that at the end the man - he was a young scribe - threw his arms round my neck saying: "You are blessed and blessed is He who has led you to such wisdom" and he seemed anxious to find You. Will he come?»

«Man's thoughts are as labile as words written on water, and his will is as restless as the wing of a swallow flying about for its last meal of the day. But pray for him... Yes. I did come to you. And Matthias and Timoneus, and John of Endor and Simon and Samuel and Jonah: they all had Me. Some were conscious of My presence, some were not. But I was with you. And I shall be with those who serve Me with love and truth for ever and ever.»

«Master, You have not yet told us whether among those who are present there will be someone without love...»

«It is not necessary to know that. It would be lack of love on My part to instigate indignation towards a companion who is not capable of loving.»

«But are there any? You can tell us that...»

«Yes, there are. Love is the simplest, sweetest and rarest thing there is, and even when it is sown, it does not always take root.»

«But if we do not love You, who can? » There is almost anger among the apostles and disciples who are upset by suspicion and sorrow.

Jesus closes His eyes. He conceals them that they may give no hint. But He makes a resigned, kind, sad gesture with His hands, which He stretches out with open palms, His gesture of resigned confession and admission and He says: «That is how it should be. But it is not so. Many do not know themselves yet. But I know them. And I pity them.»

«Oh! Master! Is it I perhaps? » asks Peter going close to Jesus, squeezing poor Marjiam between himself and the Master and throwing his short muscular arms towards the shoulders of Jesus Whom he grasps and shakes, looking mad with the terror of being one who does not love Jesus.

Jesus opens His bright but sad eyes and looking at Peter's inquisitive and frightened face, He says to him: «No, Simon of Jonah. Not you. You know how to love and you will love more and more. You are My Stone, Simon of Jonah. A good stone. I will lay on it the things dearest to Me and I am sure that you will support them without any disturbance.»

«And I? », «I? », «I? ». The question is being repeated like an echo from mouth to mouth.

«Peace! Peace! Be calm and endeavour, all of you, to possess love.»

«But which of us knows how to love most? »

Jesus looks round at everyone: a smiling caress... He then lowers His eyes and looks at Marjiam still squeezed between Himself and Peter and pushing Peter aside a little, He turns the boy round with his face towards the little crowd and says: «Here is he who knows how to love most among you. The boy. But you, whose cheeks are covered with beards and whose hair is grey, must not tremble with fear. Whoever is born again in Me becomes "a child". Oh! go in peace! Praise God Who called you, because you really see with your eyes the wonders of the Lord. Blessed are those who will also see what you see. Because I assure you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but they did not see it, and many patriarchs would have liked to know what you know, but they did not know, and many just people would have liked to hear what you hear but they were not able to hear it. But from now on those who love Me, will know everything.»

«And after? When You have gone, as You say? »

«Afterwards you will speak on My behalf. And later... Oh! large groups, not by number but by grace, of those who will see, know and hear what you now see, know and hear! Oh! large beloved multitudes of My "little-big" ones! Eternal eyes, eternal minds, eternal ears! How can I explain to you, who are around Me, what this eternal living will be, rather than eternal, endless living of those who will love Me and whom I will love to the extent of abolishing time, and they will be "the citizens of Israel" even if they live when Israel will be simply the remembrance of a nation, and they will be the contemporaries of Jesus living in Israel. And they will be with Me and in Me, until they learn what time has cancelled and pride has confused. What name shall I give them? You apostles, you disciples, the believers will be called "Christians". And those? What name will they have? A name known only in Heaven. What reward will they receive from the earth? My kiss, My voice, the warmth of My body. All Myself. I, they. They, I.

Utter communion... Go. I will stay to delight My spirit in the contemplation of those who in future will know and love Me in an absolute manner. Peace be with you.»

280. At the Temple for the Tabernacles.
20th September 1945.

Jesus is going to the Temple. The male disciples precede Him in groups, the women disciples follow Him, also in groups, that is, His Mother, Mary of Clopas, Mary Salome, Susanna, Johanna of Chuza, Eliza of Bethzur, Annaleah of Jerusalem, Martha and Marcella. The Magdalene is not there. The twelve apostles and Marjiam are around Jesus.

Jerusalem is in the pomp of its solemn festivities. There are people in every street and from every country. Singing, talking, whispering of prayers, the cursing of ass-drivers, the weeping of children can be heard everywhere. And above all the confusion there is the clear sky visible between houses and a pleasant sunshine which brightens up the colours of garments and enlivens the dying shades of pergolas and trees, glimpses of which can be caught here and there, beyond the walls of closed gardens and terraces.

Jesus at times meets acquaintances and their greetings are more or less respectful according to the mood of the person He meets. Gamaliel in fact bows deeply but superciliously and stares at Stephen, who smiles at him from the group of disciples and whom Gamaliel calls aside, after bowing to Jesus, and says a few words to him. Stephen then goes back to his group. The salutation of Cleopas of Emmaus, the old head of the synagogue, is revering; he is on his way to the Temple with his fellow citizens. As harsh as a curse is the reply of the Pharisees of Capernaum to Jesus' greeting. Johannah's peasants, led by their steward, greet Jesus by throwing themselves on the ground and kissing His feet in the dust of the road.

The crowds are amazed and stop to watch the group of men who at a cross-roads prostrate themselves with a cry at the feet of a young man, who is neither, a Pharisee nor a famous scribe, who is neither a satrap nor a powerful courtier, and some ask who he is and a whisper spreads: «He is the Rabbi of Nazareth, the one who is said to be the Messiah.» Proselytes and Gentiles then crowd inquisitively, pressing the group against the wall, causing obstruction in the little square, until a group of ass-drivers scatters them shouting imprecations. But the crowd soon gathers again, separating women from men, in a harsh demanding manner which is also a manifestation of faith. Everybody wishes to touch Jesus' garments, say a word to Him, ask Him questions. Their efforts are quite futile, because in their haste, in their anxiety and restlessness to move forward, they push one another so that no one is successful and even questions, and answers become muddled in the babel.

The only one who disregards the scene is Marjiam's grandfather, who replied with a shout to his grandson's shout, and immediately after revering the Master has clasped the boy to his heart and remaining thus, sitting back on his heels, his knees on the ground, is holding him on his lap, admiring and caressing him with tears and joyful kisses, asking him questions and listening to him. The old man is already in Paradise, so happy as he is.

The Roman troops rush to the spot thinking there is a brawl and they push through the crowd. But when they see Jesus they smile and withdraw tranquilly and merely advise the people present to clear out of the important cross-roads. Jesus obeys at once, taking advantage of the space made by the Romans, who are walking a few steps ahead of Him, as if they were making way for Him, whereas in actual fact they are going back to their outpost; the Roman guard has in fact been reinforced, as if Pilate were aware of the ill-feeling of the crowds and were afraid of an insurrection when Jerusalem is full of Jews from all over. And it is beautiful to see Him go, preceded by the Roman squad, like a king, to whom they make way, while he goes to his possessions.

When passing by, He says to the boy and the old man: «Remain together and follow

Me » and to the steward: «Please leave your men with Me. They will be My guests until this evening.»

The steward replies respectfully: «Everything will be done as You wish » and he goes away after bowing deeply.

The Temple is now close at hand and the swarming of the crowds, just like ants near the ant-nest, is even denser, when one of Johanah's peasants shouts: «There is our master! » and falls on his knees to greet him, imitated by all the others.

Jesus remains standing in the middle of a group of people prostrated, because the peasants had gathered round Him. He turns round looking towards the place pointed out by the peasant, and meets the glance of a Pharisee pompously dressed, whom I have already seen, but I do not know where.

Johanah, the Pharisee, is with other people of his caste: a heap of precious clothes of fringes, buckles, sashes, phylacteries, all larger than common ones. Johanah looks at Jesus attentively: a glance of mere curiosity, but not disrespectful. Nay, his salutation is a stiff one: just a slight inclination of the head. But it is a greeting to which Jesus replies respectfully. Two or three more Pharisees greet Him, whilst others look scornfully or pretend to be looking elsewhere, only one hurls an insult and the people near Jesus start, and even Johanah turns round immediately, fulminating with his eyes the offender, a man younger than he is, with hard conspicuous features.

Once they have gone by and the peasants dare to speak, one of them says: «That is Doras, Master", the one who cursed You.»

«Never mind. I have you who bless Me » replies Jesus calmly.

Leaning against an archivolt there is Manaen with other people, and as soon as he sees Jesus, he raises his arms with a cry of joy: «This is surely a joyous day, as I found You! » and he moves towards Jesus, followed by those who are with him. He reveres Jesus under the shady archivolt, where voices resound like under a dome.

While Manaen is greeting Jesus, His cousins Simon and Joseph pass near the apostolic group with other Nazarenes... but they do not even say hullo... Jesus looks at them sadly but does not say anything. Judas and James speak to each other excitedly, Judas quivers with rage and runs away, resisting restraint by his brother. But Jesus calls him with such a commanding voice: «Judas, come here! » that Alphaeus' vexed son comes back... «Leave them alone. They are like seed which has not yet felt springtime. Leave them in the dark of the insensitive sod. I will penetrate it just the same, even if the sod should become jasper closed round the seed. I will do it in due time.»

But the weeping of Mary of Alphaeus, who is desolate, resounds louder than the answer of Judas of Alphaeus. The long weeping of a distressed person... But Jesus does not turn round to comfort her although her groaning is very clearly heard under the archivolt resounding with echoes.

He continues to speak to Manaen who says to Him: «These are disciples of John's and have come with me. Like me, they want to be Yours.

«Peace be with good disciples. Over there are Matthias, John and Simeon, who are now with Me for good. I welcome you as I welcomed them, because everything that comes from the holy Precursor is dear to Me.»

They have now reached the enclosure of the Temple. Jesus gives instructions to the Iscariot and Simon Zealot for the ritual purchases and offerings. He then calls John, the priest, and says to him: «Since you come from this place, make arrangements to invite some Levites whom you know to be worthy of becoming acquainted with the Truth. Because this year I can really celebrate a joyful feast. Never again will the day be so pleasant...»

«Why, my Lord? » asks John, the scribe.

«Because I have you around Me, all of you, either with your visible presence or with your souls.»

«But we shall always be! And many more with us » states the apostle John emphatically. And everybody echoes him.

Jesus smiles, but remains silent, while John, the priest, goes away, to the Temple, together with Stephen, to carry out the order. Jesus shouts after him: «Join us at the Porch of the Pagans.»

They enter and almost immediately they meet Nicodemus, who bows deeply, but does not approach Jesus. But he exchanges with Jesus a meaningful smile full of peace.

While the women stop where they are allowed, Jesus goes with the men to the place of Jews, to pray, and after accomplishing the rite, He comes back to join those who are waiting for Him at the Porch of the Pagans.

The very large and high porches are crowded with people listening to the lessons of the rabbis. Jesus directs His steps to the spot where the two apostles and the two disciples sent ahead are standing waiting for Him. He is soon surrounded by people, as many people, spread in the crowded marble court, join the apostles and disciples. Curiosity is such that some disciples of rabbis also approach the circle round Jesus, but I do not know whether they do so spontaneously or because their masters have sent them.

Jesus asks point blank: «Why are you pressing round Me? Tell Me. You have well known rabbis, who are well liked by everybody. I am the Unknown and Disliked One. So why do you come to Me? »

«Because we love You » reply some, some say: «Because Your words are different from the words of the others », some: «To see Your miracles » or: «Because we have heard people talk about You » or: «Because You alone have words of eternal life and deeds corresponding to Your words », and finally some say: «Because we want to join Your disciples.»

Jesus looks at the people while they speak, as if He wanted to pierce them with His eyes and read their most hidden thoughts and some of them, who cannot resist His glance, go away or hide behind a column or behind people taller than they are.

Jesus resumes: «But do you know what it means and what it is to follow Me? I am replying to those words only, because curiosity does not deserve a reply and because those who hunger for My words obviously love Me and wish to join Me. So, those who have spoken form two groups: curious people whom I disregard, and volunteers, whom I wish to acquaint with the severity of that vocation.

To follow Me as a disciple means renouncing all affections for one only love: Mine. The selfish love for oneself, the guilty love for riches, sensuality or power, the honest love for one's wife, the holy love for one's father and mother, the deep love for and of children and brothers, must all yield to My love, if one wishes to be Mine. I tell you solemnly that My disciples must be more free than birds flying in the sky, more free than winds blowing across the firmament without anyone or anything holding them back. They must be free, with no heavy chains, with no ties of material love, without even the thin cobwebs of the slightest barrier. The spirit is a delicate butterfly enclosed in the heavy cocoon of the flesh and even the iridescent impalpable web of a spider can slow down its flight or stop it all together: the spider of sensuality, of the lack of generosity in sacrifice. I want everything, unreservedly. The spirit needs such freedom and generosity in giving, to be sure that it is not entangled in the cobwebs of affections, habits, considerations, fears, stretched out like as many threads by the monstrous spider which is Satan, the robber of souls.

If one wants to come to Me and does not hate in a holy manner father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, and one's very life, one cannot be My disciple. I said: "hate in a holy manner". Within your hearts you are saying: "Hatred, as He taught us, is never holy. So He is contradicting Himself". No. I am not contradicting Myself. I say that you must hate the heaviness of love, the sensual passionateness of love for your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and for your very life, on the contrary I order you to love relatives and life with the light freedom of spirits. Love them in God and for God, never postponing God to them, endeavouring and taking care to lead them where the disciple has already arrived, that is to God, the Truth. You will thus love God and relatives in a holy manner, safeguarding each love, so that family ties will not be a burden but wings, not a fault, but justice. You must be prepared to hate even your lives in order to follow Me. He hates his life who without fear of losing it or making it sad from a human point of view, uses it to serve Me. But it is only an appearance of hatred. A feeling erroneously called "hatred" by man who cannot elevate himself, as he is entirely earthly, by little superior to brutes.

In actual fact such apparent hatred, which consists in denying sensual satisfaction to one's life in order to give a more and more intense life to the spirit, is love. It is love, of the highest degree and the most blessed. To deny oneself base satisfactions, to reject sensual affections, to risk unfair reproaches, criticism and punishment, being rejected, cursed and perhaps

persecuted, all that is a sequence of grief. But it is necessary to embrace such grief and take it upon yourselves, like a cross, a scaffold on which all past faults are expiated to be justified by God, from Whom you can obtain every true, mighty, holy grace for those whom we love. He who does not carry his cross and does not follow Me, he who cannot do that cannot be My disciple.

Therefore, you who say: "We have come because we want to join Your disciples" must ponder on that very carefully. It is not a shame, but it is wisdom to weigh and judge oneself and admit both to oneself and others: "I am not the stuff of which disciples are made". What? The heathens have as a basis of one of their doctrines the necessity of "knowing oneself", and could you Israelites not do that to gain Heaven?

Because, remember this, blessed are those who will come to Me. But rather than come to betray Me and Him Who sent Me, it is better not to come at all, and remain children of the Law, as you have been so far. Woe betide those who, after saying: "I will come", cause damage to the Christ by being the betrayers of the Christian idea, the scandalisers of little ones and of good people! Woe betide them! And yet there will always be some of them!

You ought therefore to imitate him who wants to build a tower. First he carefully works out the necessary expenses and counts his money to ensure that he has enough to complete the work, lest, after laying the foundation, he may have to stop building through lack of money. In which case he would lose what he had previously and would be left without tower and without talents and over and above he would be scoffed at by people saying: "He began to build but was not able to finish the job. He can now stuff his stomach with the ruins of his unfinished building".

Imitate the kings of the earth also, by letting the poor events of the world be useful for supernatural teaching. When they want to go to war with another king, they calmly and carefully examine everything, the pros and cons, they consider whether the benefit of the conquest is worth the lives of the subjects, they study whether it is possible to conquer the place, whether their forces, which are half those of their enemy, but more pugnacious, can win; and as they rightly think that it is unlikely that ten thousand can beat twenty thousand soldiers, before clashing with the enemy, they send ambassadors with rich gifts for the other king, and thus soothe him, as his suspicions had already been aroused by the military movements of the other, they disarm him with some proof of friendship, they dispel his doubts and fears and make a treaty of peace with him, which is always more advantageous than a war, both from the human and spiritual point of view.

That is what you must do before beginning a new life and fighting the world. Because to be My disciples implies going against the stormy and violent trend of the world, of flesh and of Satan. And if you feel that you do not have the courage to renounce everything for My sake, do not come to Me, because you cannot be My disciples.»

«All right. What You say is true » agrees a scribe who has mingled with the crowd. «But if we divest ourselves of everything, with what shall we serve You? The Law contains commandments which are like money which God has given man so that by making use of it he may buy eternal life. You say: "Renounce everything" and You mention father, mother, riches, honours. God has given us those things also, and through Moses He has told us to use them in a holy way in order to appear just in the eyes of God. If You take everything away from us, what will You give us? »

«True love, as I said, rabbi. I give you My doctrine which does not take one iota away from the old Law, but perfects it.»

«So we are all disciples alike, because we all have the same things.»

«We all have them according to the Mosaic Law. But not everybody has them according to the Law perfected by Me according to Love. Not everyone achieves in it the same amount of merits. Even among My disciples not everybody will have the same amount of merits and some not only will not have an amount, but will lose also the only coin they have: their souls.»

«What? Who was given more will be left with more. Your disciples, or rather Your apostles, are following You in Your mission and are aware of Your ways of behaving, and have had very much, Your real disciples have received much, those who are disciples only by name have received less, and those who like me listen to You only by accident receive nothing. It is obvious that Your apostles will

have very much in Heaven, Your real disciples much, Your disciples by name less, those like me nothing.»

«It is obvious from a human point of view, but even from a human point of view it is wrong. Because not everybody is capable of making the goods received yield a profit. Listen to this parable and forgive Me if My lesson is too long. But I am a swallow of passage, and I stop in the House of the Father only for a little while, as I came for the whole world, and also because this little world, which is the Temple of Jerusalem, will not allow Me to interrupt My flight and remain where the glory of the Lord calls Me.»

«Why do You say that? »

«Because it is the truth.»

The scribe looks round and lowers his head. He can see that it is the truth as it is written on the faces of many members of the Sanhedrin, of rabbis and Pharisees who have been enlarging the crowd around Jesus. Faces green with bile, or purple with wrath, looks equivalent to words of curse and spittle of poison, ill-feeling fomenting everywhere, desire to ill-treat the Christ, which remains a mere desire only because of fear of the many people surrounding the Master with affection and who are ready for anything in order to defend Him, and perhaps because of fear of punishment by Rome, benign towards the meek Galilean Master.

Jesus calmly resumes clarifying His thought by means of a parable: «A man, who was about to set out on a long journey, and thus be away for a long time, called all his servants and committed all his wealth to them. He gave some of them five silver talents, some two silver talents, some only one gold talent: each according to his position and capability. And then he left. Now the servant who had received five silver talents, negotiated them diligently and after some time they brought him five more. The servant who had received two silver talents, did the same and doubled the amount received. But the servant to whom the master had given most, one talent of pure gold, was seized with fear that he might not be successful, with the fear of thieves and of many fanciful conceptions and above all with laziness, and he dug a deep hole in the ground and hid his master's money in it.

Many months went by and the master came back. He immediately called his servants to give back the money committed to them. The one who had received five silver talents came and said: "Here, my Lord. You gave me five. As I thought it was wrong not to make what you had given me yield some profit, I did my best and I gained five more talents. I was not able to do more...". "Well, very well, my good faithful servant. You have been faithful, willing and honest in little. I will give you authority over much. Come and join in your master's happiness". Next came the man of two talents and said: "I have taken the liberty of making use of your money to your own profit. Here is the account of how I used your money. See? There were two talents, now there are four. Are you glad, my lord?". And the master gave the good servant the same reply given to the first one.

Last came the one who enjoyed the greatest confidence of the master and had received a gold talent from him. He took it out of the casket and said: "You gave me the greatest value because you know that I am wise and loyal, as I know that you are uncompromising and exacting and will not tolerate loss of your money, but if misfortune befalls you, you make it up with those who are close to you. In actual fact you reap where you have not sown and you harvest where you have not scattered seed and you do not remit a penny to your banker or to your steward for any reason whatever. Your money must be as much as you say. Now, as I was afraid of reducing the value of this treasure, I took it and hid it. I trusted nobody, not even myself. I have now dug it up and I give it back to you. Here is your talent".

"O unjust lazy servant! Really, you have not loved me, because you have not known me and you have not loved my welfare, because you left it inactive. You have betrayed the confidence I had in you and you belie, accuse and condemn yourself by yourself. You knew that I reap where I have not sown and I harvest where I have scattered no seed. Why, then, did you not ensure that I could reap and harvest? Is that how you come up to my confidence? Is that how you know me? Why did you not take the money to a banker, so that I might draw it on my return with its interest? I diligently instructed you how to do that and you, silly lazy servant, took no heed of what I told you. Your talent and everything else will be taken off you and given to the man of the ten talents".

"But he already has ten, while this man is deprived of it..." they objected. "And that is right. He who has and works with what he has, will be given more and even in excess. But he who has nothing, because he did not want anything, will be deprived also of what was given to him. With regard to the useless servant who betrayed my confidence and left inactive the gifts I had given him, throw him out of my property and let him go and weep and eat his heart out". That is the parable. As you see, rabbi, he who had most was left with less, because he did not deserve to keep the gift of God. And it is not necessarily true that one of those whom you call a disciple only by name, having thus little to negotiate, or even one of those who listen to me only by accident, as you say, and have only their souls as money, cannot be successful in getting the gold talent and the interest of it, which will be taken from one who had been given most. The surprises of the Lord are endless because the reactions of man are endless. You will see Gentiles reaching eternal life and Samaritans possessing Heaven, and you will see pure Israelites and followers of Mine losing Heaven and eternal Life.»

Jesus becomes silent as if He wished to put an end to the debate and He turns towards the enclosure of the Temple.

But a doctor of the Law, who had sat down listening gravely under the porch, gets up and standing in His way, asks Him: «Master, what must I do to gain eternal life? You have replied to others, please reply to me as well.»

«Why do you want to tempt Me? Why do you want to lie? Are you hoping that I may say something different from the Law because I add brighter and more perfect ideas to it? What is written in the Law? Tell Me! What is the first commandment of the Law? »

«"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your intelligence. You shall love your neighbour as yourself ".»

«Your reply is correct. Do that and you will have eternal life.»

«And who is my neighbour? The world is full of good and of wicked people, known and unknown, friendly and hostile to Israel. Which is my neighbour? »

«A man going from Jerusalem down to Jericho through the mountain gorges, ran into highwaymen, who after wounding him severely, despoiled him of all his belongings and his very clothes and left him more dead than alive on the edge of the road.

A priest, who had finished his turn at the Temple, travelled down the same road. Oh! He was still smelling of the incense of the Holy! And his soul should have been scented with supernatural kindness and love, after being in the House of God, almost in touch with the Most High. The priest was in a hurry to get back home. So he looked at the wounded man but did not stop. He passed by hurriedly leaving the poor man on the edge of the road.

A Levite passed by. Should he become contaminated who must serve in the Temple? Never! He gathered his tunic so that it might not get stained with blood, he cast a glance over the man moaning in his blood and quickened his pace towards Jerusalem, towards the Temple.

Third came a Samaritan, who was travelling from Samaria towards the ford. He noticed the blood, he stopped, saw the wounded man in the deepening twilight, he dismounted and approached the wounded man, whom he gave a sip of strong and generous wine, he then tore his mantle to make bandages, and gently dressed the man's wounds after bathing them with vinegar and applying oil to them. He mounted the man on his horse and carefully led the animal, supporting the man at the same time, comforting him with kind words, without worrying about all the trouble or being annoyed because the man was of Jewish nationality. When he arrived in town, he took him to an inn, watched over him during the night and at dawn, seeing that he was better, he entrusted him to the innkeeper, paying him in advance with some denarii and saying: "Look after him as you would look after me. On my way back I will make good any extra expense you have, with a good measure, if you do everything well". And he went away.

Tell Me now, doctor of the Law. Which of these three was a "neighbour" for the man who had run into highwaymen? The priest perhaps? Or the Levite perhaps? Or was it not the Samaritan who did not ask who the wounded man was, why he was wounded, whether he was doing the wrong thing by assisting him, wasting time and money and running the risk of being taken for his wounder? »

The doctor of the Law replies: «The last one, who took pity on him, was his

"neighbour".»

«Do the same yourself and you will love your neighbour and God in your neighbour and you will deserve eternal life.»

"Nobody dare speak and Jesus takes advantage of the situation to join the women waiting for Him near the enclosure and return to town with them. A couple of priests have now joined the disciples, or rather: a priest and a Levite, a venerable old man the former, a very young one the latter.

Jesus is now speaking to His Mother, having Marjiam in the middle, between Himself and Her. And He asks Her: «Did You hear Me, Mother? »

«Yes, Son, and My sadness has been added to Mary of Clopas'. She wept a little before entering the Temple...»

«I know, Mother. And I know why. But she must not weep, but pray.»

«Oh! She prays so much! In the past nights, in her tent, while her sons were sleeping, she prayed and wept. I could hear her through the thin partition of the branches. To see Joseph and Simon only a few steps away, so close, and yet so divided...! And she is not the only one to weep. Johanna, who seems so tranquil, has been weeping with Me...»

«Why, Mother? »

«Because Chuza... is behaving... very oddly. At times he seconds her in everything. At times he opposes her in everything. If they are alone where no one can see them, he is the usual exemplary husband. But if there are other people, of the Court naturally, with him, then he becomes dictatorial and disdainful of his meek wife. She does not understand why...»

«I can tell You. Chuza is Herod's servant. Understand Me, Mother. "Servant". I will not tell Johanna, not to hurt her. But that is what he is. When he is not afraid of being blamed or jeered at by his sovereign, he is good Chuza. But when he fears that, he is no longer so.»

«It is because Herod is very angry because of Manaen and...»

«It is because Herod is mad with tardy remorse for yielding to Herodias. But Johanna already has so much happiness in life. Under her coronet, she must wear her cilice.»

«Annaleah also weeps...»

«Why? »

«Because her fiancé is going astray... against You.»

«Tell her not to weep. It is a solution. A grace of God. Her sacrifice will bring Samuel back to Good. For the time being she will be left free from any pressure for marriage. I promised her to take her with Me. She will precede Me in death...»

«Son!...» Mary presses Jesus' hand, while Her face becomes deadly pale.

«Dear Mother! It is for the sake of men. You know. It is for the love of men. Let us drink our chalice with good will. Is that right? »

Mary stifles Her tears and replies: «Yes ». A tortured heartrending «yes ».

Marjiam looks up and says to Jesus: «Why do You say these dreadful things which grieve Mother? I will not let You die. I will defend You as I defended the lambs.»

Jesus caresses him and to raise the spirits of the two distressed ones, He asks the boy: «What will your little sheep be doing now? Do you not miss them? »

«Oh! I am with You! But I always think of them and I wonder: "Will Porphirea have led them to pasture? and will she watch that Foam does not go to the lake?". Foam is so lively, you know? Her mother calls her repeatedly... without avail! She does what she likes. And Snow, she is so greedy that she eats until she is sick. Do You know, Master? I know what it is to be a priest in Your Name. I understand better than the others. They (and he points at the apostles who are coming behind) they say so many big words, they make so many plans... for the future. I say: "I will be a shepherd for men, as I am for sheep. And that will be enough". My Mummy and Yours told me yesterday such a lovely passage of the prophets... and She said to me: "Our Jesus is just like that". And in my heart I said: "I will be like that, too". Then I said to our Mother: "For the time being I am a lamb, later I will be a shepherd. Jesus instead is at present the Shepherd and He is also the Lamb. But You are always a ewe-Lamb, our dear, white, beautiful ewe-Lamb, Whose words are sweeter than milk. That is why Jesus is such a lamb: because He was born of You, the Little Lamb of the Lord".»

Jesus stoops and kisses him fondly. He then asks him: «So you really want to be a priest? »

«Of course, my Lord! That is why I try to become good and learn so much. I always go to John of Endor. He treats me as a man and so kindly. I want to be the shepherd of the sheep both misled and not misled, and the doctor-shepherd of those which are wounded or suffer from fractures, as the Prophet says. Oh! How lovely! » and the boy takes a jump clapping his hands.

«What has this blackcap got that he is so happy? » asks Peter coming forward. «He sees his way. Very clearly. Until the end. And I consecrate his vision with My approval.»

They stop before a high building, which, if I am not mistaken, is near the Ophel district, but in a more refined spot.

«Are we stopping here? »

«This is the house which Lazarus offered Me for our joyful banquet. Mary is already here.»

«Why did she not come with us? For fear of being jeered at? »

«Oh! No! I told her.»

«Why, Lord? »

«Because the Temple is more sensitive than a pregnant wife. As long as I can, and not out of cowardice, I do not want to collide with it.»

«It will be of no use to You, Master. If I were You, I would not only collide with it, but I would hurl it down from Moriah with all those who are in it.»

«You are a sinner, Simon. One must pray for one's fellow creatures, not kill them.»

«I am a sinner. But You are not... and... You ought to do it.»

«There is who will do it. After the measure of sin has been filled.»

«Which measure? »

«A measure that will fill the whole temple, overflowing in Jerusalem. You cannot understand... Oh! Martha! Open your house to the Pilgrim! »

Martha makes herself known and opens the door. They all go into a long hall ending in a paved yard with a single tree in each of the four corners. There is a large hall above the ground floor and from its open windows it is possible to see the whole town with its hills and slopes. I thus realise that the house is in the south or south-east side of the town.

The table has been laid for many guests. Many tables are set in parallel rows. About one hundred people can comfortably have a meal. Mary Magdalene, who was busy in the store room, arrives and prostrates herself before Jesus. Then Lazarus comes in with a happy smile on his drawn face. The guests enter little by little, some seem rather embarrassed, some are more sure of themselves. But the kindness of the women soon makes them all feel at home.

John, the priest, introduces to Jesus the two he has brought from the Temple.

«Master, my good friend Jonathan and my young friend Zacharias. They are true Israelites without malice or ill-will.

«Peace be with you. I am happy to have you. The rite must be kept also in these pleasant customs. And it is lovely that the ancient Faith gives a friendly hand to the new Faith which has come from the same origin. Sit beside Me while we wait for dinner time.»

The patriarchal Jonathan speaks, while the young Levite looks around curiously, and seems amazed and somewhat shy. I think he wants to give himself easy manners, but in actual fact he is like a fish out of water. Fortunately Stephen comes to his aid and brings him, one after the other, the apostles and the main disciples.

The old priest says caressing his white beard: «When John came to me, his master, to show me that he had been cured, I wanted to meet You. But, Master, I hardly ever leave my enclosure. I am old... But I was hoping to see You before dying. And Jehovah has heard me. May He be praised! Today I heard You in the Temple. You excel the old wise Hillel. I do not want to doubt, nay, I cannot doubt that You are what my heart is expecting. But do You know what it is to have imbibed for almost eighty years the faith of Israel as it has become through centuries of... human handling? It has become our blood. And I am so old! To hear You is like hearing the water that gushes out of a cool spring. Oh! yes! A virgin water! But I... I am full of the tired water which comes from so far away... and has been made heavy by so many things. How can I get rid of that saturation and enjoy You? »

«By believing and loving Me. Nothing else is required for just Jonathan.»

«But I will die soon! Shall I have time to believe everything You say? I shall

not even be able to follow all Your words or learn them from other people. Then?»

«You will learn them in Heaven. Only a damned soul dies to Wisdom. But he who dies in the grace of God draws life and lives in Wisdom. Whom do you think I am? »

«You can but be the Expected One, Whom the son of my friend Zacharias foreran. Did You meet him? »

«He was a relative of Mine.»

«Oh! So You are a relative of the Baptist? »

«Yes, priest.»

«He is dead... and I cannot say: "Poor man!". Because he died faithful to justice, after accomplishing his mission and because... Oh! The dreadful times we live in! Is it not better to go back to Abraham? »

«Yes. But more dreadful times will come, priest.»

«Do You think so? Rome, eh? »

«Not only Rome. Guilty Israel will be the first cause.»

«It is true. God is striking us. We deserve it. But also Rome... Have You heard of the Galileans killed by Pilate while they were offering a sacrifice? Their blood mingled with the victim's. Close to the very altar! »

«Yes, I heard about it.»

All the Galileans begin to riot because of that act of tyranny. They shout: «It is true that he was a false Messiah. But why kill his followers after striking him? And why at that moment? Were they bigger sinners perhaps? »

Jesus brings about peace and then says: «You are asking whether they were bigger sinners than many other Galileans and whether that is why they were killed? No, they were not. I tell you solemnly that they paid and many more will pay if you do not turn to the Lord. If you do not do penance, you will all perish alike, both in Galilee and elsewhere. God is indignant with His people. I tell you. You must not think that those who have been struck are the worst. Each of you should examine and judge himself, and no one else. Also the eighteen people on whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, were not the most guilty in Jerusalem. I tell you. Do penance if you do not want to be crushed as they were, also in your souls. Come, priest of Israel. The meal is ready. It is your duty to offer and bless the food, because a priest is always to be honoured for the Idea which he represents and calls to our minds, and it is your duty because you are a patriarch among us, and we are all younger than you are.»

«No, Master! No! I cannot do that in Your presence! You are the Son of God!»

«You do offer incense before the altar! And do you perhaps not believe that God is there? »

«Yes, I do believe that! With all my strength! »

«Well, then? If you are not afraid of offering in the presence of the Most Holy Glory of the Most High, why should you be afraid in the presence of the Merciful One, Who took upon Himself human flesh to bring to you also the blessing of God before night comes to you? Oh! You people of Israel do not know that I covered with the veil of flesh My unendurable Divinity, so that man might approach God and not die thereof. Come, believe and be happy. I revere in you all the holy priests, from Aaron down to him who will be the last priest of Israel with Justice, you, perhaps, because priestly holiness really is languishing among us, like a forsaken plant.»

281. At the Temple They Are Aware of Ermasteus, of John of Endor and of Syntyche.
21st September 1945.

Jesus is on His way to Bethany with the apostles and disciples and is speaking to the disciples, whom He orders to part, so that the Judaeans will go through Judaea and the Galileans up Trans-Jordan announcing the Messiah. The instruction raises some objections. I get the impression that Trans-Jordan did not enjoy a very good reputation among Israelites. They talk of it as if it

were a pagan region. And that offends the disciples from that area, among whom the most influential is the head of the synagogue of the Clear Water and then a young man, whose name I do not know, and both vigorously defend their towns and fellow citizens.

Timoneus says: «Come, my Lord, to Aera, and You will see how they respect You there. You will not find as much faith in Judaea, as there is there. Nay, I do not want to go there. Let me stay with You and send a Judaeans and a Galilean to my town. They will see how they believed in You on my word only.»

And the young man says: «I believed without even seeing You. And I looked for You after my mother had forgiven me. But I am happy to go back there, although that means being mocked by wicked citizens as I was once, and being reproached by good people for my behaviour in the past. But it does not matter. I will preach You through my example.»

«You are right. You will do as you said. And then I will come. And you, Timoneus, are right, too. So Hermas will go with Abel of Bethlehem in Galilee to announce Me at Aera, while you, Timoneus, will stay with Me. But I do not want such disputes. You no longer are Judaeans or Galileans: you are disciples. That is enough. That name and your mission make you all equal with regard to birthplace, rank, everything. In one thing only you may differ: in holiness. That will be individual and in the measure which each of you will be able to attain. But I would like you all to have the same measure: the perfect one. See the apostles? They were divided like you by race and other things. Now, after a little over a year of instruction, they are simply the apostles. Do the same, and as among you, priests are together with old sinners and rich people with former beggars, and young men with old venerable people, cancel likewise divisions brought about by belonging to this or that region. By now you have one Fatherland only: Heaven. Because you have set off on the way to Heaven each of his own free will. Never give My enemies the impression that you are hostile to one another. Sin is your enemy, nothing else.»

They proceed in silence for some time. Then Stephen approaches the Master and says: «I have something to tell You. I was hoping that You would ask me, but You did not. Yesterday Gamaliel spoke to me...»

«I saw him.»

«Are You not asking me what he told me? »

«I am waiting for you to tell Me, because a good disciple has no secrets from his Master.»

«Gamaliel... Master, come a little ahead with me...»

«Well... let us go. But you could have spoken in the presence of everybody...»

They move away a few yards. Stephen blushing says:

«I must give You a piece of advice, Master. Forgive me...»

«If it is good, I will accept it. Tell Me.»

«In the Sanhedrin, they know everything sooner or later. It is an institution with a thousand eyes and one hundred ramifications. They penetrate everywhere, see everything and hear everything. It has more informers than there are bricks in the walls of the Temple. Many live thus...»

«Spying. You may say so. It is the truth and I know. So? What has been said, more or less true, at the Sanhedrin? »

«Everything... has been said. I do not know how they can find out certain things. Neither do I know whether they are true... But I will tell You literally what Gamaliel told me: "Tell the Master to have Ermasteus circumcised or to send him away for good. It is not necessary to say anything else".»

«In fact it is not necessary to say anything else. First of all because I am going to Bethany just for that and I will remain there until Ermasteus is fit to travel again. Secondly because no justification could demolish the prejudice and... standoffishness of Gamaliel, who is scandalised because I have with Me a man who is not circumcised in a member of his body. Oh! if he looked around and within himself! How many uncircumcised people in Israel! »

«But Gamaliel...»

«He is the perfect representative of old Israel. He is not wicked, but... Look at this pebble. I could split it, but I could not make it malleable. He is like that. He will have to be crushed in order to be recomposed. And I will do that!

»

«Do You want to oppose Gamaliel? Be careful! He is powerful! »

«Oppose? As if he were an enemy? No. Instead of fighting against him, I will

love him, satisfying one of his desires for his mummified brains and spreading on him a balm which will dissolve him to recompose him.»

«I will pray also that that may happen, because I am fond of him. Am I wrong? »
«No. You must love him by praying for him. And you will do that. I am sure you will. Nay, you will help Me to prepare the balm... However, you will tell Gamaliel, to calm him, that I had already provided for Ermasteus and that I am grateful to him for his advice. Here we are at Bethany. Let us stop so that I may bless you all, because this is where we part. » And after joining the large group of apostles mingled with disciples, He blesses and dismisses them all, with the exception of Ermasteus, John of Endor and Timoneus. Then with the disciples left Jesus walks at a good pace the short distance to Lazarus' gate, which is already wide open to receive Him, He enters the garden raising His hand to bless the hospitable house, in the large park of which are the owners of the house and the pious women, who are laughing at Marjiam running along the paths adorned with the last roses. And with the owners and the women, also Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus come out of a path, when they hear the women shout; they also are guests of Lazarus, to be in peace with the Master. And they all make haste towards the Master; Mary with Her kind smile, and Mary of Magdala with her cry of love: «Rabboni! », and Lazarus limping, the two grave members of the Sanhedrin, and last, the pious women of Jerusalem and of Galilee: wrinkle-furrowed faces and smooth faces of young women and, as gentle as the face of an angel, the virginal face of Annaleah, who blushes in greeting the Master.
«Is Syntyche not here? » asks Jesus after the first greeting.
«She is with Sarah, Marcella and Naomi laying the tables. But here they are coming.»

And they come, in fact, with old Esther of Johanna, two faces marked by age and by sorrow, between two serene faces and the grave yet bright peaceful face of the Greek girl, different by race and by something which distinguishes her. And I could not say that she is a real and true beauty. And yet her dark eyes softened by a nuance of very deep indigo, under a high and very noble forehead, are more impressive than her body, which is definitely more beautiful than her face. A slender but not meagre body, which is well proportioned and has a graceful gait and carriage. But it is her expression that strikes one. An intelligent, frank, deep look, which seems to inhale the whole world, selecting it, keeping what is useful, holy, good, and rejecting what is evil; a look which allows its very depths to be searched and from which her soul looks out to scan those approaching her. If it is true that it is possible to know an individual through his eyes, I say that Syntyche is a woman with unerring judgement and firm honest thoughts. She kneels also with the other women and waits to stand up until the Master tells her.

Jesus proceeds along the green garden as far as the porch before the house and then enters a hall where the servants are ready to serve refreshments and assist guests in the ablutions before meals. While all the women withdraw Jesus remains with the apostles in the hall, and John of Endor and Ermasteus go to the house of Simon Zealot to leave the bags they are carrying.

«Is the young fellow who has gone with John, the one-eyed man, the Philistine whom You have accepted? » asks Joseph.

«Yes, Joseph, he is. How do you know? »

«Master... Nicodemus and I have been wondering for some days how we know and how, unfortunately, the others of the Temple know about it. The fact is that we do know. Before the Tabernacles, in the meeting which is always held before such festivities, some Pharisees said that they knew for certain that among Your disciples, beside... - forgive me, Lazarus - known and unknown prostitutes and publicans - forgive me, Matthew of Alphaeus - and former galley-slaves, there were an uncircumcised Philistine and a heathen girl. With regard to the heathen girl, who is certainly Syntyche, one can understand how it became known, or at least guess so. The Roman made a great fuss about her and he became the laughing stock of his people and of the Jews, also because he searched for his runaway everywhere, complaining and threatening, and he even troubled Herod saying that she was hiding in Johanna's house and that the Tetrarch should order his steward to hand her back to her master. But it is strange, very strange that it should be known that among the many men who follow You, there is an uncircumcised Philistine, and a former galley-slave!... Do You not think so? »

«It is and it is not strange. I will provide for Syntyche and the former galley-

slave.»

«Yes, do. Above all You ought to send John away. Your group of apostles is not a place for him.»

«Joseph, have you perhaps become a Pharisee? » asks Jesus severely.

«No... but...»

«And should I humiliate a soul which has been regenerated, because of the silly scruple of the worst Pharisaism? No, I will not! I will provide for his tranquillity. His, not Mine, I will watch over his perfecting as I watch over innocent Marjiam's. Really there is no difference in their spiritual ignorance! One speaks for the first time words of wisdom, because God has forgiven him, because he is re-born in God, because God has embraced the sinner. The other speaks the same words, passing from a forlorn childhood to a boyhood, watched over by the love of man beside the love of God, and opens his soul to the sun like a corolla and the Sun enlightens him with Himself. His Sun: God. And one is about to speak his last words... Can your eyes not see that he is wearing himself out with penance and love? Oh! I would really like to have many Johns of Endor in Israel and among My servants. I would like you, too, Joseph and you, Nicodemus, to have hearts like his and above all I wish his informer had it, the vile snake that hides under the appearance of a friend and is acting as a spy before becoming an assassin. The snake that envies the bird its wings, and lays snares for it to tear them off and enthrall it. No! The bird is about to change into an angel. And even if it could tear them off, which it will never be able to do, once they were put on to its slimy body, they would change into wings of a devil. Every spy is already a devil.»

«But where can such a rogue be? Tell me so that I may go at once and tear his tongue out » exclaims Peter.

«You had better pull his poisonous teeth out » says Judas of Alphaeus.

«No! It's better to strangle him! So he will not be able to hurt in any way. Such people can always be harmful » remarks the Iscariot firmly.

Jesus stares at him and concludes: «... and can always lie. But no one must do anything against him. It is not worth while letting the bird perish, to deal with the snake. With regard to Ermasteus, I am staying here, in Lazarus' house, just for the circumcision of Ermasteus himself, who is embracing the holy religion of our people for My sake and to avoid the persecution of narrow-minded Jews. It is the passage from dark to Light. But it is not necessary to make Light come to a heart. But I have agreed to calm down the susceptibility of Israel and to show the true will of the Philistine to come to God. But I tell you, in the times of Christ, that is not necessary to belong to God. Will, love, and a righteous conscience are sufficient. And how can we circumcise the Greek woman? In which part of her spirit, if she was able to perceive God better than many people in Israel? It is true that among the people present many are in darkness as compared to those who are despised by you for being in darkness. In any case, both the informer and you, members of the Sanhedrin, can tell the people concerned that the scandal has been removed as from today.»

«With regard to whom? To all three? »

«No, Judas of Simon. With regard to Ermasteus. I will see to the other two. Have you anything else to ask Me? »

«No, Master.»

«Neither have I anything else to tell you. But I ask you to tell Me, if you know, what has happened to Syntyche's master.»

«Pilate shipped him back to Italy by the first boat available, to avoid having trouble with Herod and the Jews in general. Pilate is in a tight corner at present... and has enough worries » says Nicodemus.

«Is the news certain? »

«I can check on it, if You wish so, Master » says Lazarus.

«Yes. Do so. And then let Me know the true situation.»

«But in my house Syntyche is safe just the same.»

«I know. Israel also protects a slave who has run away from a foreign cruel master. But I want to know.»

«And I would like to know who is the spy, the informer, the pretty spy of the Pharisees... and I want to know, and this can be found out, who are the denouncing Pharisees. Let us have the names of the Pharisees and of their towns. I mean of the Pharisees who have done the lovely work of informing, following the betrayal of one of us, because we, old and new disciples, are the only ones

to know things; a fine piece of work indeed it was to inform the Sanhedrin of the deeds of the Master, which are thoroughly honest, and who says or thinks the contrary is a devil and...»

«And that is enough, Simon of Jonah. It is an order.»

«And I obey, even if the veins of my heart should burst because of the effort. In the meantime the beauty of the day has gone...»

«No. Why? Has anything changed among us? So? O My Simon! Come here beside Me and let us talk of what is good...»

«They have come to tell us that dinner is ready, Master » says Lazarus.

«Let us go, then...»

282. Syntyche Speaks in Lazarus' House.

22nd September 1945.

Jesus is sitting in the porched courtyard, which is inside the house in Bethany, the courtyard which I saw crowded with disciples on the morning of Christ's Resurrection. Sitting on a marble seat covered with cushions, leaning with His back against the wall of the house, surrounded by the owners of the house, by the apostles and the disciples John and Timoneus, together with Joseph and Nicodemus, and by the pious women, He is listening to Syntyche, who standing in front of Him, seems to be replying to a question of His. All the people present are more or less interested and are listening in various postures, some sitting on benches, some on the floor, some standing or leaning against the columns or the wall.

«... it was necessary. In order not to feel all the burden of my situation. It was necessary not to be convinced, to refuse to be convinced that I was all alone, a slave banished from my fatherland. It was necessary to think that my father, mother, brothers and the so fond and kind Ismene were not lost for ever. And that, even if the whole world persisted in separating us, just as Rome had divided and sold us like baggage animals, although we were free citizens, a place would gather us all together again in the next life.

I had to think that our life is not only matter to be chained. On the contrary it has a free power that no chain can bind, except the voluntary one to live in moral disorder and in material revel. You call that "sin". Those who were my light in my night as a slave, give it a different definition. But they also agree that a soul nailed to a body by wicked corporal passions will not reach what you call the Kingdom of God, and we call living together with the gods in Hades. It is therefore necessary to abstain from falling into materialism and strive to achieve freedom from the body, procuring for oneself a heritage of virtue in order to possess a happy immortality and be reunited to those whom one loves.

And I could but think that the souls of the dead are not prevented from helping the souls of the living, so that a daughter could feel her mother's soul close to her and see her face and hear her voice speaking to the daughter, who could reply: "Yes, mother. So that I may come to you. Yes, not to upset you. Yes, not to make you weep. Yes, in order not to darken Hades where you are in peace. For all that I will keep my soul free. It is the only thing which I possess and which nobody can take away from me. And I want to preserve it pure so that I may reason according to virtue". It was freedom and joy to think thus. And that is what I wanted to think. And act accordingly. Because it is only a half and sham philosophy to think one way and then act in a different one.

To think thus was to rebuild a fatherland also in exile. An intimate fatherland, with its altars, faith, teaching, affections in one's ego... A great mysterious fatherland, yet not even so, because of the mystery of the soul which is consciously aware of the next world, even if at present it knows it only as a sailor at sea can see the details of the sea-coast in a misty morning: vaguely, in a rough draft, with only a few spots clearly outlined and which are enough for the tired seaman tortured by storms to say: "There is the harbour, peace is over there". The fatherland of souls, the place of our origin... the place of Life.

Because life is generated by death... Oh! I could understand only half of that until I heard one of Your words. Later it was as if a sunbeam struck the diamond

of my thought. Everything became enlightened and I understood to what extent the Greek masters were right and how later they became confused, as they lacked one datum, only one, to solve the theorem of Life and Death. The datum was: The True God, the Lord and Creator of everything existing!

May I mention Him with my heathen lips? Of course I may. Because I come from Him, like everybody else. Because He gifted the minds of all men with intelligence, and the wiser ones with a superior intelligence, whereby they seem demigods with a superhuman power. Because He made them write the truths which are already religion, if not a divine religion like Yours, a moral one, capable of keeping souls "alive", not only for the period of time we remain here, on the earth, but for ever.

Later I understood the meaning of: "Life is generated by death". He who said that was like one not completely drunk, whose intelligence had already become dullish. He spoke a sublime word, but did not understand it fully. I, forgive me my pride, Lord, I understood more than he did and I have been happy since that moment.»

«What did you understand? »

«That our present life is but the embryonal beginning of life and that true Life begins when death gives birth to us... to Hades, as a heathen, to eternal Life, as a believer in You. Am I wrong? »

«You are right, woman » approves Jesus.

Nicodemus interrupts: «But how did you hear of the Master's words? »

«He who is hungry, seeks food, sir. I was looking for my food. I was a reader, and as I was learned with a good voice and pronunciation, I was in a position to read much in the libraries of my masters. But I was not yet satisfied. I could feel that there was something else beyond the walls decorated with human science, and as a prisoner looking for gold, I hammered with my knuckles, I forced doors open to get out, to find... When I came to Palestine with my last master I was afraid I was going to fall into darkness... I was going instead towards the Light. The words of the servant at Caesarea were like as many blows with a pick which demolished the walls making wider and wider breaches through which Your Word came in. And I picked up those words and the news. And like a child stringing beads, I lined them up and adorned myself with them, drawing strength to become more and more purified in order to receive the Truth. I felt that by purifying myself I would find it. Even on this earth. At the cost of my life I wanted to be pure to meet the Truth, Wisdom, Divinity. My Lord, I am speaking foolish words. They are looking at me as if they were thoroughly confounded. But You asked me...»

«Speak. Go on speaking. It is necessary.»

«I resisted external pressure with strength and moderation. I could have been free and, happy, according to the world, if I had wanted. But I would not barter knowledge for pleasure. Because it is of no avail to have other virtues without wisdom. He, the philosopher, said: "Justice, moderation and strength separated from knowledge are like painted scenery, virtues befitting slaves, without anything firm and real". I wanted to have real things. The master, an imbecile, used to speak of You in my presence. Then the walls seemed to become a veil. It was enough to want to tear the veil and join the Truth. I did it.»

«You did not know what you were going to find » says the Iscariot.

«I knew how to believe that the god rewards virtue. I did not want gold, or honours, or physical freedom, no, not even that. But I wanted the truth. I asked God for that or to die. I wanted to be spared the humiliation of becoming an "object", and even more, of agreeing to become one. Renouncing everything which is corporal in looking for You, o Lord, because a research through senses is never perfect - as You noticed when seeing You I ran away, deceived as I was by my eyes - I abandoned myself to God Who is above us and within us and informs souls of Himself. And I found You because my soul led me to You.»

«Yours is a heathen soul » remarks once again the Iscariot.

«But a soul always has something divine within itself, particularly when it has striven to be preserved from error... It therefore tends to things of its own nature.»

«Are you comparing yourself to God? »

«No.»

«Why do you say that, then? »

«What? Are you, a disciple of the Master, asking me? Me, a Greek woman and only

recently freed? Do you not listen to Him when He, speaks? Or is the ferment in your body such that it blunts your mind? Does He not always say that we are the children of God? So we are gods if we are the children of the Father, of His and our Father, of Whom He always speaks to us. You may reproach me for not being humble, but not for not believing or not paying attention.»

«So you think that you are worth more than I am? Do you think that you have learned everything from your Greek books? »

«No, neither one nor the other. But the books of wise men, wherever they come from, have given me the minimum necessary to support myself. I do not doubt that an Israelite is worth more than I am. But I am happy with the destiny which comes to me from God. What else could I wish for? In finding the Master I found everything. And I think that was my destiny, because I really see a Power watch over me and it has fixed a great destiny for me and I have done nothing but comply with it, as I feel it is a good one.»

«Good? You have been a slave, and of cruel masters... If the last one, for instance, had recaptured you, how could you have complied with your destiny, you very wise woman? »

«Your name is Judas, is it not? »

«Yes, and so? »

«And so... nothing. I want to remember your name besides your irony. Bear in mind that irony is not advisable even in virtuous people... How would I have complied with my destiny? Perhaps I would have killed myself. Because in certain cases it is better to die than to live, although the philosopher says that that is not right and it is impious to procure welfare by oneself because only the gods have the right to call us to stay with them. And this waiting for a sign of the gods to do it, has always kept me from doing it, even in the chains of my sad fate. But now, in being recaptured by my filthy master, I would have seen the supreme sign. And I would have preferred to die rather than live, I, too, have my dignity, man.»

«And if he recaptured you now? You would still be in the same situation...»

«Now I would not kill myself. Now I know that violence against the flesh does not injure the spirit that does not consent. I would now resist until I were bent by force and killed by violence. Because I would take that as a sign from God that through such violence He would call me to Himself. And I would now die tranquilly, knowing that I would be only losing what is perishable.»

«You have replied very well, woman » says Lazarus and Nicodemus gives his approval as well.

«Suicide is never allowed » says the Iscariot.

«Many are the things which are forbidden, but the prohibition is not complied with. But, Syntyche, you must consider that as God has always guided you, so He would have prevented you from doing violence to yourself. Go now. I will be grateful to you if you look for the boy and bring him here » says Jesus kindly. The woman bows to the ground and goes away. They all follow her with their eyes. Lazarus whispers: «She is always like that! I fail to understand how what in her has been "life" is instead "death" for us Israelites. If You still have the chance of examining her again, You will see that whilst Hellenism corrupted us, though we already possessed Wisdom, it saved her. Why? »

«Because the ways of the Lord are wonderful. And He opens them to whoever deserves it. And now, My friends, I will dismiss you because night is falling. I am happy that you all have heard the Greek woman speak. As you have ascertained that God reveals Himself to the best people, you must conclude that it is hideous and dangerous to exclude all those who are not Israelites from the people of God. Bear that in mind for the future... Do not grumble, Judas of Simon. And you, Joseph, do not have unjustified scruples. None of you are contaminated for approaching a Greek woman. Make absolutely sure that you do not approach or give hospitality to the devil. Goodbye, Joseph; goodbye, Nicodemus. Will I be able to meet you again, while I am here? Here is Marjiam... Come, boy, say goodbye to the heads of the Sanhedrin. What do you say to them?»

«Peace be with you... and I say also: pray for me at the hour of incense.»

«You have no need for that, child. But why just at that hour? »

«Because the first time I entered the Temple with Jesus, He spoke to me of the evening prayer... Oh! It is so beautiful!...»

«And will you pray for us? When? »

«I will pray... in the morning and in the evening. That God may preserve you

from sin during the day and the night.»

«And what will you say, my child? »

«I will say: "Most High Lord, let Joseph and Nicodemus be true friends of Jesus". And that will be enough, because he who is a true friend, does not grieve his friend. And he who does not grieve Jesus is sure to possess Heaven.»

«May God preserve you thus, child! » say the two members of the Sanhedrin caressing him. They then greet the Master, the Blessed Virgin and Lazarus individually and all the others in a body and go away.

283. The Mission of Four Apostles in Judaea.

23rd September 1945.

Jesus is on His way back from an apostolic trip in the neighbourhood of Bethany. It must have been a short trip, because they are not carrying any food bags. They are speaking to one another saying: «The idea of Solomon, the boatman, was a good one, Master, wasn't it? »

«Yes, it was.»

The Iscariot, of course, disagrees with the others: «I do not see much good in it. He gave us what is no longer of any use to him as a disciple. There is no reason why he should be praised...»

«A house is always useful » says the Zealot gravely.

«Yes, if it were like yours. But what is his house? An unhealthy shanty.»

«It is all Solomon has » retorts the Zealot.

«And as he grew old in it without aches and pains, we shall be able to stay there now and again. What do you expect? All the houses to be like Lazarus'? » adds Peter.

«I do not expect anything. I cannot see the necessity of that gift. Once you are there you can be in Jericho just as well. There are only a few stadia between the two places. And what are a few stadia for the like of us, who are compelled to wander about all the time, like persecuted people? »

Jesus intervenes before the others lose all patience as clear signs indicate is about to happen: «Solomon, in proportion to his riches, has given more than anybody else. Because he has given everything. He gave it out of love. He gave it to let us have a shelter in case we are caught in the rain, or in a flood, in that not very hospitable area and above all in case the Judaeen ill-will should become so strong as to advise us to stay on the other side of the river. And that is with regard to the gift. That a humble, coarse but so faithful and willing disciple has been able to be so generous, which is clear evidence of his firm will to be a disciple of Mine for good, fills Me with great joy. I can truly see that many disciples, with the few lessons which they have received from Me, have excelled you who have received so many. You cannot sacrifice, particularly you, Judas, even what costs nothing: your personal opinions. You maintain yours stubbornly, unyieldingly.»

«You said that the struggle against oneself is the hardest...»

«And thus you want to tell Me that I am wrong when I say that it costs nothing. Is that right? But you have understood perfectly well what I mean! According to men, and you really are a true and proper man, only what is marketable is valuable. One's ego cannot be sold for money. Except... when a man sells himself to someone hoping to make a profit. An illicit trade like the one stipulated by a soul with Satan, even worse. Because it involves not only the soul but also man's thoughts, or judgement or freedom, you may call it as you like. There are some wretched people like that... But for the time being, let us forget about them. I praised Solomon because I see how good his deed is. And that is enough.» There is silence, then Jesus resumes speaking: «In a few days' time Ermasteus will be able to walk without any trouble. And I will go back to Galilee. But you will not all come with Me. Some will remain in Judaea and will come up later with the Judaeen disciples, so that we shall all be reunited for the feast of the Dedication.»

«Such a long time? Oh dear! Whose turn will it be? » the apostles ask one another.

Jesus hears their whispering and replies: «It will be the turn of Judas of Simon, of Thomas, Bartholomew and Philip. But I did not say that you will have

to be in Judaea until the feast of the Dedication. On the contrary I want you to gather the disciples and inform them to be there for the feast of the Dedication. So you will now go and look for them, gather them together and tell them; in the meantime you will watch over them and assist them and later you will come up after Me, bringing with you those you have found, and leaving instructions for the others to come. We have now friends in the main places in Judaea and they will do us the favour of informing the disciples. And on your way up to Galilee through Trans-Jordan, remember that I will be going through Gerasa, Bozrah, Arbela, as far as Aera, and collect also those who did not dare to come to Me asking for a miracle or doctrine, and later have regretted not doing so. Bring them to Me. I will stay in Aera until you arrive.»

«In that case we had better go at once » says the Iscariot.

«No, you will leave the evening before My departure and will stay with Jonah at Gethsemane until the following day, and then you will set out for Judaea. You will thus be able to see your mother and help her just now that she is selling her farm produce.»

«She learned to do that by herself years ago.»

«Don't you remember that last year she could not do without you at vintage time? » asks Peter rather slyly.

Judas becomes as red as a poppy and looks ugly in his anger and shame. But Jesus provides against any possible reply by saying: «A son is always of help and comfort to his mother. She will not see you again until Passover and after Passover. So go and do as I tell you.»

Judas does not reply to Peter, but he gives vent to his anger against Jesus: «Master, do You know what I must tell You? That I am under the impression that You want to get rid of me, or at least keep me away from You, because You suspect me and You wrongly think that I am guilty of something, because You lack charity towards me, because...»

«Judas! That is enough! I could tell you many words. But I say only: "Obey!"» Jesus is majestic in saying so. Tall as He is, with shining eyes and severe countenance, He strikes everybody with fear...

And Judas trembles. He goes behind all the apostles, while Jesus, all alone, walks ahead of them. The speechless apostolic group is thus between them.

284. Jesus Leaves Bethany for Trans-Jordan.
24th September 1945.

«Lazarus, My dear friend, I ask you to come with Me » says Jesus appearing at the door of the hall where Lazarus is reading a roll, half reclining on a little bed.

«I will come at once, Master. Where are we going? » asks Lazarus getting up immediately.

«Into the country. I need to be all alone with you.»

Lazarus looks at Him with a worried expression and asks: «Have You sad news to give me secretly? Or... No, I do not even want to think of that...»

«No, I only wish to seek advice from you and not even the air must be aware of what we shall say. Order a wagon, because I do not want you to get tired. When we are out in the open country I will speak to you.»

«In that case I will drive it myself. So no servant will know what we say.»

«Yes, do that.»

«I am going at once, Master. I'll soon be ready » and he goes out.

Jesus also goes out after standing somewhat pensive in the middle of the magnificent hall. While engrossed in thought, He mechanically moves two or three objects and picks up a roll which had fallen on to the floor, and when putting it in its place in a cabinet, because of His inborn instinct for order, which is

so deeply rooted in Jesus, He remains with His arm raised, looking at the strange art of some objects lined up in the cabinet, which are different from the current art in Palestine. By the embossed work and design imitating the ornaments of the temples of ancient Greece and of funeral urns, they appear to be very old amphoras and cups. What He sees beyond the articles themselves, I do not know... He leaves the hall and goes into the inner yard, where the apostles are.

«Where are we going, Master? » they ask when they see Jesus tidy His mantle.

«Nowhere. I am going with Lazarus. You will stay here and wait for Me. I shall soon be back.»

The Twelve look at one another. They are not very happy...

Peter says: «Are You going alone? Be careful...»

«Do not be afraid. While waiting, do not be idle. Teach Ermasteus, that he may have a better knowledge of the Law and be good company to one another, without arguments or rudeness. Bear with and love one another.»

He sets out towards the garden and they all follow Him. A closed cart soon arrives with Lazarus in it.

«Are You going in that cart? »

«Yes, so that Lazarus may not tire his legs. Goodbye, Marjiam. Be good. Peace to you all.»

He climbs into the cart, which grinding the pebbles of the avenue leaves the garden and turns into the main road.

«Are You going to the Clear Water, Master? » Thomas shouts after Him.

«No, I am not. Once again I tell you to be good.»

The horse starts at a steady trot. The road going from Bethany to Jericho runs through the country, which is becoming bare. The more they descend towards the plain, the more the fading of the greenery in the fields becomes noticeable. Jesus is pensive. Lazarus is silent and intent only on driving the cart. When they are down in the plain, a fertile plain, which is ready to nourish the seed of future corn, and where all the vineyards seem to be asleep, like a woman who has recently given birth to her fruit and is resting after her pleasant labour, Jesus beckons Lazarus to stop. Lazarus stops at once and leads the horse into a side road, which takes to houses far away... and he explains: «We shall be safer here than on the main road. These trees will conceal us from the eyes of many people.» In fact a thicket of low trees acts as a screen against the curiosity of passers-by. Lazarus is standing before Jesus, waiting.

«Lazarus, I must send away John of Endor and Syntyche. You can see that both prudence and charity advise Me to do so. It would be a dangerous test and useless grief for both of them to be aware of the persecutions set in motion against them... and which, for at least one of them, could bring about most grievous surprises.»

«In my house...»

«No. Not even in your house. Perhaps they would not be troubled materially. But they would be humiliated morally. The world is cruel. It crushes its victims. I do not want those two beautiful and powerful souls to get lost like that. So, as one day I joined Ishmael to Sarah, I will now join My poor John to Syntyche. I want him to die in peace, I do not want him to be left alone, and he must go away feeling that he is being sent elsewhere, not because he was formerly a galley-man, but because he is the proselyte disciple who can be sent away to announce the Master. And Syntyche will help him... She is a beautiful soul and will be a great strength in the future Church and for the future Church. Can you advise Me where to send them? I do not want them to stay in Judaea or in Galilee and not even in the Decapolis, where I go with My apostles and disciples. Nor in the heathen world. So, where? Where, so that they may be safe and usefull? »

«Master... I... how can I give You advice! »

«No, tell Me. You love Me, you do not betray Me, you love those whom I love, you are not narrow-minded like the others.»

«I... well... I would advise You to send them where I have some friends. To Cyprus or to Syria. Make Your choice. I have trustworthy people in Cyprus. And even more in Syria!... I have also a little house, watched over by a manager, who is as faithful as a pet lamb. Our old Philip! He will do for my sake anything I tell him. And, if You do not mind, those who are persecuted by Israel and are dear to You, will be my guests as from now on, and will be safe in the house... Oh! It is not a palace! It is a house where Philip lives alone with a

nephew, who looks after the gardens at Antigonium. The beloved gardens of my mother. We have kept them as a remembrance of her. She had taken there the plants of her Judaeen gardens... plants of rare essences... Mother!... How much good she did to the poor with them... It was her secret domain... My mother... Master, I will soon be going to say to her: "Rejoice, my good mother. The Saviour is on the earth". She was expecting You...» Tears stream down Lazarus' drawn face. Jesus looks at him and smiles. Lazarus recovers his strength: «But let us speak of You. Do You think it is a good place? »

«I think it is. And I thank you once again, also on their behalf. You have relieved Me of a heavy burden...»

«When will they leave? I am asking so that I may prepare a letter for Philip. I will say that they are two friends of mine, from here, in need of peace. And that will suffice.»

«Yes, that is enough. But, I beg you, not even the air is to be aware of this. You can see that yourself. They are spying upon Me...»

«I know. I will not mention it even to my sisters. But how will You take them there? You have the apostles with You...»

«I will now go up as far as Aera without Judas of Simon, Thomas, Philip and Bartholomew. In the meantime I will teach Syntyche and John thoroughly, so that they may go with large provisions of Truth. I will then go down to lake Merom and later to Capernaum. And when I am there, I will send the four apostles away once again, on some other mission, and in the meantime I will send the two off to Antioch. That is what they are compelling Me to do...»

«To be afraid of Your own people. You are right... Master, it grieves me to see You worried...»

«But your kind friendship is of great comfort to Me... Lazarus, I thank you... I am leaving the day after tomorrow and I will be taking your sisters away. I need many women disciples to conceal Syntyche amongst them. Johanna of Chuza also is coming. From Merom she will go to Tiberias, where she will be spending the winter months. Her husband has decided so to have her close to him, because Herod is going back to Tiberias for some time.»

«It will be done as You wish. My sisters are Yours, as I am, as my houses, servants and belongings are. Everything is Yours, Master. Make use of it to do good. I will prepare Your letter for Philip. It is better if I give it to You personally.»

«Thank you, Lazarus.»

«That is all I can do... If I were well... Cure me, Master, and I will come.»

«No, My dear friend ... I need you as you are.»

«Even if I do not do anything? »

«Yes, even so. Oh! My Lazarus! » and Jesus embraces and kisses him. They get on the cart and go back.

Lazarus is now silent and engrossed in thought, and Jesus asks him why.

«I was thinking that I am going to lose Syntyche. I was attracted by her science and goodness...»

«Jesus will gain her...»

«That is very true. When shall I see You again, Master? »

«In spring.»

«Shall I not see You again until spring? Last year You were here with me for the feast of the Dedication.»

«This year I will satisfy the apostles. But next year I will be with you quite a lot. It is a promise.»

Bethany appears in the October sunshine. They are about to arrive when Lazarus stops the horse to say: «Master, You are right in sending away the man from Kerioth. I am afraid of him. He does not love You. I do not like him. I never liked him. He is sensual and greedy. And thus he may commit any sin. Master, it was he who denounced You.»

«Have you any proof? »

«No, I have not.»

«Well, in that case, do not judge. You are not very clever at judging. Remember that you considered your Mary as inexorably lost... Do not say that it was My merit. She sought Me first.»

«That is true, too. However, beware of Judas.»

Shortly afterwards they enter the garden, where the apostles are curiously awaiting them.

The absence of four apostles, and above all of Judas, makes the remaining group more intimate and happy. The group which leaves Bethany on a clear October morning on its way to Jericho, to cross to the other side of the Jordan, is just like a family, the heads of which are Jesus and Mary. The women are gathered round Mary, only Annaleah is absent from the group of the women disciples, which comprises the three Maries, Johanna, Susanna, Eliza, Marcella, Sarah and Syntyche. Peter, Andrew, James and Judas of Alphaeus, Matthew, John and James of Zebedee, Simon Zealot, John of Endor, Ermasteus and Timoneus, are grouped round Jesus, while Marjiam jumping about like a little kid, goes to and fro from one group to the other, which are only a short distance apart. Although laden with heavy bags, they proceed joyfully in the mild sunshine, through the country so solemn in its rest.

John of Endor proceeds with some difficulty under the weight hanging from his shoulders.

Peter notices it and says: «Give your useless load to me since you have decided to carry it round. Were you missing it? »

«The Master told me to bring it.»

«Did He? How lovely! Why? »

«I don't know. Yesterday evening He said to me: "Pack your books again and follow Me with them".»

«Lovely indeed!... But if He told you, it must be for a good reason. Perhaps it is for that woman. How accomplished she is! Are you as learned? »

«Almost as much as she is. She is very clever.»

«But you are not going to follow us with this load all the time, eh? »

«Oh! I don't think so. I don't know. But I can carry it myself.»

«No, my dear friend. I don't want you to be taken ill. You are looking very poorly, you know? »

«I know. I feel as if I were dying.»

«Don't be silly! At least wait until We arrive in Capernaum. It is so lovely now that we are by ourselves without that... Curse my tongue! I have failed once again in my promise to the Master!... Master? Master? »

«What do you want, Simon?»

«I have spoken ill of Judas, and I had promised You that I would not do it any more. Forgive me.»

«Yes, I do. But try not to do it again.»

«I still have 489 times to be forgiven by You...»

«What are you talking about, brother? » asks Andrew who is obviously utterly amazed.

And Peter, whose placid countenance is humorously bright, twisting his neck under the weight of John of Endor's bag, exclaims: «Don't you remember that He said that we have to forgive seventy times seven. So I am still to be forgiven 489 times and I must keep an accurate account of them...»

They all laugh; Jesus cannot help smiling either. But He replies: «You had better keep count of all the times you are capable of being good, you big boy.» Peter approaches Him and embracing with his right arm Jesus' waist he says: «My dear Master! How happy I am to be with You without... Come on, admit it! You are happy, too... And You know what I mean. We are all friendly here. Your Mother is here. There is also the boy. We are going towards Capernaum. The season is beautiful... Five good reasons to be happy. Oh! And it is beautiful to travel with You! Where are we staying tonight? »

«At Jericho.»

«Last year we met the Veiled woman there. I wonder what has happened to her... I am rather curious to know... And we found also the man of the vineyards...»

Peter's laughter is so loud that it is contagious. They all laugh remembering the scene of the meeting with Judas of Keriath.

«You are really incorrigible, Simon! » remarks Jesus reproachingly.

«I did not say anything, Master. But I had to laugh remembering his countenance when he found us there... in his vineyards...» Peter laughs so wholeheartedly that he is compelled to stop, while the others proceed laughing against their will.

Peter is joined by the women. Mary asks him kindly: «What is the matter with you, Simon? »

«Ah! I cannot tell You or I will be lacking in charity once more. But, Mother, tell me, since You are so wise. If I throw out innuendos against someone, or worse still, if I utter slander about someone, I obviously commit a sin. But if I laugh at something, at an event, which is known to everybody, something which makes people laugh, for instance, if we remember the surprise, the embarrassment and excuses of a liar when he was found out and we laugh again as we did in the past, is that still wrong? »

«It is an imperfection against charity. It is not a sin like backbiting, or slander or innuendo, but it is still lack of charity. It is like a thread pulled out of a piece of cloth. It does not tear or wear the cloth out, but it affects the firmness and beauty of the fabric and makes it subject to tears and holes. Do you not think so? »

Peter rubs his forehead and feeling rather humiliated he replies: «I do. I had never thought of that.»

«Think about it now and do not do it any more. Laughter may be more offensive to charity than slaps in the face. Has someone made a mistake? We have found someone guilty of lying or of other faults? So? Why remember it? Why remind other people? Let us cover with a veil the faults of our brother, saying: "If I were the culprit, would I like another person to remember my fault or remind other people of it?". There are people who blush in their inmost heart, Simon, and suffer so much because of it. Do not shake your head. I know what you want to say. But, believe Me, also guilty people may blush thus. You must always think: "Would I like that done to me?". You will then see that you will no longer sin against charity. And you will always have so much peace in your heart. Look how happily Marjiam is jumping and singing, because his heart is not worried. He does not have to think about itineraries, expenses or what to say. He knows that someone else takes care of all that on his behalf. Do the same yourself. Abandon everything to God. Also judgement on other people. As long as you can be like a child led by God, why take upon yourself the burden of deciding and judging? The day will come when you must be judge and arbitrator and then you will say: "Oh! How easier and less dangerous it was formerly" and you will say that you were foolish in burdening yourself before the time with so much responsibility. How difficult it is to judge other people! Did you hear what Syntyche said some days ago? "A research through senses is never perfect". She is quite right. We very often judge according to the reactions of our senses. That is, with the utmost imperfection. Give up judging...»

«Yes, Mary. I sincerely promise You. But I do not know all the beautiful things which Syntyche knows! »

«And are you worried about that, man? Do you not know that I want to get rid of all that, in order to have only what you know? »

«Do you? Why? »

«Because science may support you on the earth, but through wisdom you gain Heaven. Mine is science, yours is wisdom.»

«But by means of your science, you were able to come to Jesus! So it is a good thing.»

«It is mixed with so many errors, that I would like to divest myself of it and clothe myself with wisdom only. I do not want ornate vain dresses. Let the severe inconspicuous dress of Wisdom be mine, as it clothes like an everlasting garment not what is corruptible, but what is immortal. The flame of Science flickers and quivers, The flame of Wisdom shines unvaryingly and steadily and is like the Divinity from which it originates.»

Jesus has slackened His pace in order to hear. He turns round and says to the Greek woman: «You must not yearn to divest yourself of everything you know. But you must select from your knowledge what is a particle of eternal Intelligence conquered by minds of undeniable value.»

«Have, therefore, those minds repeated within themselves the myth of the fire stolen from the gods? »

«Yes, woman. But it was not stolen in this case. They were able to pick it when the Divinity grazed them with its fire, caressing them as specimens, spread among decayed mankind, of what man is, gifted with reason.»

«Master, You should tell me what I must keep and what I must leave. I would not be a good judge. And then You ought to fill with the light of Your Wisdom, the spaces left empty.»

«That is what I intend doing. I shall point out to you to what extent is wise

what you know and I will develop it from that point to the end of the true idea. So that you may know for certain. And that will be useful also to those who are destined to have many contacts with the Gentiles in future.»

«We shall not understand anything, my Lord » moans James of Zebedee.

«You will understand little, for the time being, but one day you will understand both the present lessons and their necessity. And you, Syntyche, will expound to Me those points which are most obscure to you. And I will clarify them when we stop to rest.»

«Yes, my Lord. It is the desire of my soul which merges in Your desire. I am the disciple of the Truth, You the Master. It is the dream of all my life: to possess the Truth.»

285. Arrival at Ramoth with the Merchant from the Other Side of the Euphrates.
25th September 1945.

After walking a long way across a fertile plain on the other side of the Jordan -and it is pleasant to walk in the serene mild season as it is now at the end of October - and after resting in a little village lying at the foot of the lower slopes of a rather bulky chain of mountains, some summits of which can really be called mountains, Jesus sets out once again, following a long caravan of many quadrupeds and well armed men, to whom He had previously spoken while they were watering their animals at the fountains in the square. They are mostly tall swarthy men, with typical Asian features. The head of the caravan is riding a very strong mule and is armed to the teeth and weapons are hanging from his saddle. And yet he had great respect for Jesus.

The apostles ask Jesus: «Who is he? »

«A rich merchant from the other side of the Euphrates. I asked him where he was going and he replied politely. He will be passing through the towns where I intend to go. Which is providential in these mountains, when we have the women with us.»

«Are You afraid of something? »

«I am not afraid of being robbed, as we possess nothing. But it would be enough to frighten the women. A handful of robbers will never attack so strong a caravan, which will be most useful to us because we shall also find out the best passes and shall be able to cross over the difficult ones. He asked Me: "Are You the Messiah?" and when he heard that I was, he said: "I was in the Courtyard of the Heathens some days ago and I heard You more than I could see You, because I am a small man. Well, I will protect You and You will protect me. I have a very valuable load".»

«Is he a proselyte? »

«I do not think so. But perhaps he is of our extraction.»

The caravan proceeds slowly, as if they did not want to exhaust the strength of the quadrupeds by going too far. It is therefore easy to follow them and sometimes it is necessary to stop as the drivers let the laden animals pass one by one holding them by their halters in the most difficult spots.

Although a true and proper mountainous area, it is fertile and well cultivated. Perhaps the high mountains to the north act as a protection against the cold northern winds or the harmful eastern ones and that helps cultivation. The caravan marches along a stream which flows into the Jordan and is rich in water which comes down from I wonder which top. The view is beautiful and becomes more and more beautiful as one climbs up, stretching westwards across the plain of the Jordan and reaching, beyond it, the graceful hills and mountains of northern Judaea, while to the east and north the view changes continuously, stretching far out and wide, or showing overlapping rounded hills and green or rocky mountain tops, which seem to obstruct the road like the sudden wall of a labyrinth.

The sun is about to set behind the mountains of Judaea, colouring sky and slopes with a deep red, when the rich merchant, who has stopped to let the caravan pass, says to Jesus: «We must reach the village before night. But many of Your

people look tired. This is a long hard leg. Let them mount the spare mules. They are quiet animals. In any case they will be resting all night and the weight of a woman is no burden to them.»

Jesus agrees and the man orders the caravan to stop to let the women mount the mules. Jesus makes John of Endor get on horseback as well. And those on foot, including Jesus, hold the reins to make the women feel safer. Marjiam wants to be... a man, and although he is exhausted, he refuses to go on horseback with anyone and he takes one of the reins of the Blessed Virgin's mule, Who is thus between Jesus and the boy, and he walks bravely.

The merchant has remained near Jesus and he says to Mary: «See that village, Donna? That is Ramoth. We will stop there. I am well known at the hotel because I come this way twice a year, and I go along the coast, also twice a year to purchase and sell. My life is a hard one. But I have twelve children and they are all young. I got married late. The last one was nine days old when I left him. And he will have cut his first teeth when I see him.»

«A lovely family...» comments Mary, and She adds: «May Heaven preserve it for you.»

«As a matter of fact I cannot complain of its help although I do not really deserve it.»

Jesus asks him: «Are you at least a proselyte? »

«I should be... My ancestors were true Israelites. Then... we became acclimatised there...»

«A soul becomes acclimatised in one atmosphere only: in Heaven's.»

«You are right. But You know... My great grandfather married a woman who was not an Israelite. His children became less faithful... The sons of his children once again married women who were not from Israel and their children were respectful only of their Jewish names; because we are of Jewish extraction. Now I, a grandson of grandsons... I am nothing. Being in touch with everybody I have taken after everyone, with the result that I belong to no one.»

«That is not a good reason and I can prove it to you. If going along this road, which you know to be a good one, you should meet five or six people who said to you: "No, don't go this way!", "Go back", "Stop", "Go eastwards", "Turn westwards", what would you do? »

«I would say: "I know that this is the right road and the shortest, and i am not going to leave it".»

«Likewise: if you are negotiating some business and you know the best way to do it, would you listen to those who either through boasts or interested cunning advised you to act differently? »

«No. I would follow the method which my experience tells me is the best.»

«Very well. Millennia of faith are behind you, a descendant of Israel. You are neither stupid nor uneducated. So why are you influenced by contacts with everybody in matters of faith, whereas you reject them when money or road safety is concerned? Do you not think it is dishonourable also from a human point of view? To place God after money and the road...»

«I do not postpone God. But I have lost sight of Him...»

«Because business, money, your life are your gods. But it is still God Who allows you to have such things... Then, why did you go to the Temple? »

«Out of curiosity. Coming out of a house where I had negotiated some goods, I saw a group of men pay their respects to You and I remembered the words I had heard at Ashkelon from a woman who made carpets. I asked who You were, as I suspected You might be the One of Whom the woman had spoken to me. And when I found out that it was You, I followed You. I had done my business for that day... Then I lost sight of You. I saw You once again at Jericho. But only for a moment. Now I have found You again... That's it...»

«So God has joined and interlaced our ways. I have no gifts to offer you to thank you for your kindness. But before leaving you I hope to be able to give you a present, unless you leave Me beforehand...»

«No, I will not. Alexander Misace does not take back what he offers! Here we are. The village begins after that turn. I will go ahead. We will meet at the hotel » and he spurs his mule leaving almost at a gallop on the edge of the road.

«He is an honest unhappy man, Son » says Mary.

«And You would like him to be happy according to Wisdom, would You not?»

And they smile kindly at each other in the first shadows of the evening.

...The pilgrims are all gathered in a large hall of the hotel, waiting to go to bed, in the long October evening. The merchant is in a corner, all by himself, intent on his accounts. Jesus, with His group, is in the opposite corner. There are no other guests. Braying, neighing and bleating can be heard coming from the stables, which makes one assume that there are other people in the hotel. Perhaps they are already in bed.

Marjiam has fallen asleep in Our Lady's arms, forgetting all of a sudden that he was «a man». Peter is dozing and is not the only one. Also the whispering elderly women are half asleep and are silent. Jesus, Mary, Lazarus' sisters, Syntyche, Simon Zealot, John and Judas are well awake.

Syntyche is searching John of Endor's bag looking for something. But she prefers to come close to the others and listen to Judas of Alphaeus who is speaking of the consequences of the exile in Babylon and concludes: «...and perhaps that man is still a consequence of that. Every exile is a ruin...». Syntyche nods unintentionally but does not say anything and Judas of Alphaeus concludes: «However, it is strange that one can so easily divest oneself of what has been a treasure for centuries to become entirely new, particularly in matters of religion, and a religion like ours...»

Jesus replies: «You must not be surprised if you see Samaria in the lap of Israel.»

There is silence... Syntyche's dark eyes are staring at Jesus' serene profile. She looks at Him intensely, but does not speak. Jesus perceives her glance and turns round to look at her.

«Have you not found anything to your liking? »

«No, my Lord. I have got to the point that I am no longer able to reconcile the past with the present, former ideas with present ones. And I feel as if it were a defection because my former ideas have helped me to have the present ones. Your apostle spoke the truth... But my ruin is a happy one.»

«What is your ruin? »

«All my faith in heathen Olympus, my Lord. But I am somewhat upset because on reading Your Scriptures - John gave me them and I read them because there is no possession without knowledge - I found out that also in your history... of the beginning, shall I say, there are events which do not differ much from ours. Now, I would like to know...»

«I have already told you: ask Me and I will answer your questions.»

«Is everything wrong in the religion of the gods? »

«Yes, woman. There is but one God, Who does not originate from anybody else and is not subject to human passions and needs: one Only, Eternal, Perfect God, the Creator of everything.»

«I believe that. But I want to be able to reply to the questions which other heathens may ask me not in a way which does not admit any discussion, but by discussing in order to be convinced. I, by myself and by virtue of beneficent paternal God, have given myself informal answers, but sufficient to give peace to my spirit. But I was willing to reach the Truth. Others may be less anxious than I am in that respect. But everybody ought to be keen in such research. I do not want to be inactive with souls. I would like to give what I have received. But I must know in order to be able to give. Grant me knowledge and I will serve You in the name of love. Today, on the way, while I was watching the mountains and certain views reminded me of the chains of Hellas and of the history of my Country, by association of ideas the myths of Prometheus and Deucalion crossed my mind... You have something similar in the fulmination of Lucifer, in the infusion of life into clay, in the Flood of Noah. Light concomitances, yet they are a remembrance... Now tell me: how could we be aware of them if there was no contact between you and us, if you certainly had them before we did, and although we had them, we do not know how we got them? We still ignore one another, in many things. So how could we, thousands of years ago, have legends which are remembrances of Your Truth? »

«Woman, you ought to be the last one to ask Me. Because you have read works which could answer your questions by themselves. Today, by association of ideas, from the remembrance of your native mountains you have gone on to the remembrance of native myths and comparisons. Is that right. Why? »

«Because my awakened thought remembered.»

«Very well. Also the souls of the very ancient people who gave a religion to your land remembered. Vaguely, as someone who is imperfect can do, someone

separated from the revealed religion. But they have always remembered. There are many religions in the world. Now, if we had here in a clear picture all their details, we would see that there is something like a golden thread, lost in much mud, a thread with many knots in which fragments of the real Truth are enclosed.»

«But do we not all come of the same stock? You say so. So why were the very ancient ones, who came of the original stock, why were they not able to bring the Truth with them? Was it not unjust to deprive them of it? »

«You have read Genesis, have you not? What have you found? A complex sin at the beginning, a sin embracing the three states of man: matter, thought, spirit. Then a fratricide. Then a double homicide to counterbalance the work of Enoch to keep light in hearts, then corruption, when the sons of God, out of lust, married the daughters of man. And notwithstanding the purification by the Deluge and the remaking of the race from good seed, not from stones as your myths state, likewise the first clay modelled by God to His image and in the shape of man was endowed with life through the work of God by the infusion of vital Fire, and not through the theft of vital fire by man, there was a fresh outburst of pride, an insult to God: "Let us touch the sky" and the divine curse: "Let them be scattered and let them no longer understand one another"... And the only stock became divided, like water clashing against a rock is divided into little streams and does not come together again, and the race was divided into races. Mankind driven away by its sin and by divine punishment was scattered and never came together again, carrying with itself the confusion created by pride. But souls remember. There is always something left within them. And the most virtuous and wise see a light indistinctly, a feeble light in the dark of myths: the light of Truth. It is the remembrance of the Light seen before life, which inspires them with some truth, in which are fragments of the revealed Truth . Is that clear to you? »

«Only partly. But I will think about it. Night is the friend of those who meditate and collect their thoughts.»

«Well, let us go and collect our thoughts. Let us go, My friends. Peace to you, women. Peace to you, My disciples. Peace to you, Alexander Misace.»

«Goodbye, my Lord. God be with You » replies the merchant bowing...

286. From Ramoth to Gerasa.

26th September 1945.

The peculiarity of this village lying on a raised rocky platform in the middle of a crown of mountain tops, some of which are higher, some lower than it, appears in all its typical beauty in the rather hard light of a somewhat windy morning. It looks like a huge granite tray with buildings, little houses, bridges, fountains lying on it, for the amusement of a gigantic child. The houses seem to be engraved in calcareous rock which is the basic matter in the area. They are square shaped and built with blocks laid one upon another, some are not plastered, the blocks of some are still in their rough natural state, they really look like the little houses decorating a Christmas crib built with cubes by a big clever boy.

And around the little village one can contemplate its fertile country, covered with trees, variously cultivated, so that from above it looks like a carpet of squares, trapezia, triangles, some of which are brown owing to the recently hoed earth, some emerald green because of the grass grown after autumn rain, some reddish because of the last leaves of vineyards and orchards, some grey-green because of poplars or willows, or enamel green because of oaks and carobs, or bronze-green owing to cypresses and conifers. Beautiful, really beautiful! And one can see roads which, like ribbons parting from a knot, run from the village to the remote plain, or towards the high mountains and dive under woods or divide with a grey line the green meadows or brown ploughed fields. And there is a pleasant stream of water, which is silvery beyond the village towards its spring, and blue fading to jade on the other side, where it flows down to the valley between gorges and slopes, and it appears and disappears playfully, and it grows stronger and stronger and bluer and bluer as its water increases, thus preventing the reeds and grass, which have grown in its bed during the droughty months, from tinging it green and it thus reflects the sky, after burying the stalks in its deep water.

The sky is unreal blue: a precious scale of deep enamel blue, without the least impure flaw in its wonderful texture.

And the caravan sets off again, with the women still on horseback, because, as the merchant says, the road is very difficult after the village and it is necessary to walk fast in order to get to Gerasa before night. They are all muffled up and they proceed swiftly, as they are well rested, along a road which climbs up through wonderful woods, skimming the highest slopes of a solitary mountain, which rises like a huge block resting on the shoulders of the other mountains under it. A real giant as one can see in the highest parts of our Apennines.

«Galaad » says the merchant, pointing at it; he has remained near Jesus Who is leading the Virgin's little mule holding its reins. And the merchant adds:

«After this the road is much better. Have You ever been here? »

«No, never. I wanted to come here in springtime. But I was rejected at Galgala.»

«You rejected? How dreadful! »

Jesus looks at him and is silent.

The merchant has taken Marjiam up on his saddle, as the boy with his short legs was finding it difficult to keep up with the quick pace of the horses. And Peter is well aware that it is a quick pace! He is plodding along with all his might, imitated by the others, but he is always outdistanced by the caravan. He is perspiring, but is happy because he can hear Marjiam laugh, he sees that Our Lady is resting and the Lord is happy. He puffs and blows while speaking to Matthew and his brother Andrew, who are left behind with him, and he makes them laugh saying that if in addition to his legs, he had wings, he would be happy that morning. He got rid of all loads, like the rest, tying the bags to the saddles of the women's mounts, but the road is really frightful, the stone being slippery with dew. The two Jameses with John and Thaddeus are more clever as they are keeping up with the pace of the women's mules. Simon Zealot is speaking to John of Endor. Timoneus and Ermasteus are also leading mules.

At last the worst of the road is over and an entirely different scenery is displayed to their amazed eyes. The Jordan valley has definitely disappeared. To the east one's eyes rove over an imposingly wide tableland, where only a ripple of hills attempt to rise in order to interrupt the evenness of the landscape. I would never have thought there could be any such thing in Palestine. It seems that after the rocky storm of mountains, the storm itself has calmed down and become petrified in a huge billow which has been left hanging between the bottom level and the sky, with only one remembrance of its original fury in the tiny lines of hills, the foam of the crests solidified here and there, whilst the water of the billow has spread out over a wonderful and magnificent plain surface. And one reaches this bright peaceful area through a last gorge, as wild as the abyss between two clashing billows, the last two waves of a sea-storm, in the depths of which there is a fresh foaming torrent flowing westwards and coming from the east, in a tormented enraged way between rocks and waterfalls in dire contrast with the remote peace of the huge tableland.

«The road will be good now. If You do not mind I will give the order to stop» says the merchant.

«I am being guided by you, man. You know that.»

They all dismount and spread out along the slopes in search of wood to cook the food, and of water for their tired feet and parched throats. The animals, once relieved of their loads, graze the thick grass or go down to the limpid torrent to water. The smell of resins and roast meat rises from the little fires lit to cook some lambs.

The apostles have lit a fire of their own on which they heat some salt fish after washing it in the cool water of the torrent. But the merchant sees them and he comes bringing a little skinned lamb, or a little kid, whichever it may be, and makes them accept it. And Peter gets ready to roast it after stuffing it with fresh mint.

The meal is soon prepared and is soon over. And under the perpendicular midday sunshine they resume marching along a better road, which follows the torrent north-eastwards in a wonderfully fertile and well cultivated area, rich in sheep and swine herds, which run away grunting before the caravan.

«That walled town is Gerasa, my Lord. A town with a great future. It is now developing, and I don't think I am wrong in saying that it will soon be competing with Joppa, Ashkelon, with Tyre and many more towns, in beauty, trade

and wealth. The Romans have realised its importance, on this road which from the Red Sea, that is, from Egypt goes to the Euxine Sea through Damascus. And they are helping the Gerasenes to build... They are sharp-sighted and have a good nose. For the time being it only has a very good trade, but later!... Oh! It will be beautiful and rich! A little Rome, with temples, piscinae, circuses, thermal baths. I only traded with them. But now I have bought much ground, to build emporia, which I will sell later at a high price, and perhaps I will build a real gentleman's house there, where I can stay in my old days, when Balthazar, Nabor, Felix and Sydmia will be able to look after and manage respectively the emporia at Sinope, Tyre, Joppa and Alexandria on the mouth of the Nile. In the meantime the other three boys will grow up and I will give them the emporia at Gerasa, Ashkelon and perhaps at Jerusalem. And the rich and beautiful girls will be sought-after and they will make very good matches and give me many grandchildren...» the merchant has golden and rosy day-dreams for the future.

Jesus asks him calmly: «And then? »

The merchant rouses himself, looks at Him perplexedly and then says: «And then? That is all. Then death will come... It is sad. But that is it.»

«And will you leave all business? Your emporia? Your affections? »

«My Lord! I would not like to. But as I was born I must also die. And I shall have to leave everything » and he heaves such a long sigh as to push the caravan forward with it...

«But who told you that once you are dead you leave everything? »

«Who? The facts of life! Once you are dead... that is all. You have no hands, no eyes, no ears...»

«You are not only hands, eyes and ears.»

«I am a man. I know. I have other things. But they all end with death. It is like the setting of the sun. Its setting destroys it...»

«But dawn creates it once more, or rather it presents it again. You are a man, you said so. You are not an animal like the one you are riding. An animal, once it is dead, is really finished. Not you. You have a soul. Do you not know? Do you not even know that any more? »

The merchant hears the sad reproach, a sad but kind reproach, and he lowers his head whispering: «I still know that...»

«So? Do you not know that the soul survives? »

«I know.»

«Well, then? Do you not know that it still has an activity in the next life? A holy activity if it is holy. A wicked one if it is wicked. And it has its sentiments. Oh! It has them indeed! Loving ones, if it is holy. Hateful ones, if it is damned. Hateful against whom? Against the causes of its damnation. In your case: your business, the emporia, your exclusively human affections. Loving affections for whom? For the same things. And what blessings can a soul bring upon its children and their activity when it is in the peace of the Lord! »

The man is pensive. He says: «It is late. I am old, now.» And he stops his mule.

Jesus smiles and replies: «I will not force you. I advise you » and He turns round to look at the apostles, who in the halt before entering the town are helping the women to dismount and are picking up their bags.

The caravan sets out again and soon enters the busy town through the gate watched over by towers.

The merchant goes back to Jesus: «Do You want to remain with me? »

«If you do not drive Me away, why should I not want to? »

«Because of what I said to You. I must make You, the Holy One, sick.»

«Oh! no! I have come for people like you, whom I love because you are the most needy. You do not know Me as yet. But I am the Love who passes by begging for love.»

«So You do not hate me? »

«I love you.»

Tears shine in the man's deep eyes. But he says smiling: «In that case we shall stay together. I am stopping at Gerasa on business for three days. I leave the mules here and take camels. I have a caravan stage in the major halting places and a servant looks after the animals I leave in each place. And what will You do?»

«I will evangelize on the Sabbath. I would have left you, if you had not stopped, because the Sabbath is sacred to the Lord.»

The man knits his brows, is pensive and with some difficulty he agrees: «...Of

course... It is true. It is sacred to the God of Israel. It is sacred... it is indeed...» He looks at Jesus: «If You allow me, I will consecrate it to You.»
«To God. Not to His Servant.»
«To God and to You, by listening to You. I will do my business today and tomorrow morning. And then I will listen to You. Are You coming to the hotel now? »

«I have no option. I have the women and I am not known here.»

«Here it is, it is mine. It is mine because my stables are here year after year. I have large rooms for the goods. If You wish...»

«May God reward you. Let us go.»

287. Preaching at Gerasa.

27th September 1945.

He thought He was unknown! When He sets foot outside Alexander's building the following morning, He finds people already waiting for Him. Jesus is with the apostles only. The women and disciples are still in the house, resting. The people greet Him gathering round Him and they say that they know Him because a man He had freed from demons has spoken to them about Him. The man is not there now because he has gone on with two disciples, who passed by some days ago.

Jesus listens kindly to what they say and at the same time He walks through the town in some areas of which the noise of building yards is dreadfully loud. Masons, diggers, stone-cutters, blacksmiths, carpenters are working building, levelling, filling gaps, chiselling stones for walls, working iron for various purposes, sawing, planing, making poles out of strong trunks. Jesus passes by watching, He crosses a bridge on a babbling torrent flowing in the middle of the town, with a row of houses on each side pretending to form a riverside. He goes up to the higher part of the town, which is built on a rising ground so that the south east side is higher than the northern one, but they are both higher than the town centre, which is divided by the little stream.

The view from the point where Jesus has stopped is beautiful. The whole town is displayed before the onlooker, and behind it, on the eastern, southern, western sides there is a horse-shoe shaped chain of low green hills, whereas to the north the eye roves over a wide open plain, with a ground elevation on the horizon, so tiny that it cannot even be called a hill, but it is beautifully golden in the morning sunshine, which tinges with a yellowish hue the leaves of the vines which cover the ground, as if it intended to mitigate the melancholy of the withering leaves with the splendour of a touch of gold.

Jesus is admiring the view and the people of Gerasa are looking at Him. He wins the regard of the people by saying to them:

«This town is really beautiful. Make it beautiful also in justice and holiness.

The hills, the stream, the green plain were given to you by God. Rome is now helping you to have homes and beautiful buildings. But it is up to you only to have your town called holy and just. A town is what its citizens make it.

Because a town is a part of society closed within its walls, but it is the citizens that make the town. A town in itself does not commit sin. The stream, the bridge, the houses, the towers cannot sin. They are matter, not souls. But those who are within the town walls, in houses, shops, those who cross the bridge or bathe in the stream they can all sin. If a town is factious and ruthless, people say: "It is a very bad town". But that is wrong. It is not the town, it is the citizens who are very bad. Those individuals by joining together become one complex thing, as well as one thing only, which is called "town".

Now listen. If in a town ten thousand inhabitants are good, and only one thousand are not good, can we say that that town is wicked? No, we cannot.

Likewise: if in a town of ten thousand inhabitants there are many parties and each struggles to favour his own, can we say that that town is still united? No, we cannot. And do you think that that town will thrive? No, it will not.

You people of Gerasa are now all united striving to make your town great. And you will succeed because you all want the same thing and you vie with one another in achieving your purpose. But if tomorrow opposed parties should arise among you and one said: "No, it is better to expand eastwards" and another party said: "Not at all. We will build in the north where the plain is", and a third one should say: "Neither here nor there. We all want to live close together in the centre, near the river", what would happen? It would happen that the work you have started would stop, those who have lent capitals would withdraw them,

those who intended to settle here would go to another town with more agreeable people, and what you have already done would go to rack and ruin, as it would be exposed to the inclemency of the weather, before being completed, as a result of the quarrels of citizens. Is that right or not? You say it is, and you are right. So the harmony of the citizens is required for the welfare of the town, and consequently of the citizens themselves, because the welfare of a society is the welfare of its members.

But there is not only the society of which you are thinking, the society of citizens, of fellow-countrymen, or the little dear family society. There is a vaster society, an infinite one: the society of spirits.

Each living man has a soul. The soul does not die with the body, but survives for ever. The idea of God, the Creator, who gave each man his soul, was that all the souls of men should be gathered in one place only, in Heaven, forming the Kingdom of Heaven, whose monarch is God and whose blissful subjects were to be all men, after a holy life and a placid limbo of expectancy. Satan came to divide and upset, destroy and grieve God and spirits. And he set sin in the hearts of men and with sin he brought death to the body at the end of its existence, hoping to give death to spirits as well. But the death of spirits is their damnation, which is still existence, but devoid of what is true life and eternal joy, that is, devoid of the beatific vision of God and of His eternal possession in eternal light. And Mankind became divided in its desires, like a town divided by opposed parties. And it was thus brought to ruin. I said elsewhere to those who were accusing Me of expelling demons with the assistance of BeeIzebut: "Every kingdom divided in itself will be brought to ruin". In fact if Satan expelled himself, he and his gloomy kingdom would ruin.

I have come, for the love that God has for mankind created by Him, to remind people that one Kingdom only is holy: the Kingdom of Heaven. And I have come to preach it, so that the better people may go towards it. Oh! I would like everybody, even the worst ones, to come to it, becoming converted, freeing themselves from the demon who keeps them enslaved, either openly, through corporal and spiritual possession, or secretly through a mere spiritual one. That is why I move about curing sick people, expelling demons from possessed people, converting sinners, forgiving in the name of the Lord, preaching the Kingdom, working miracles to convince you of My power and prove that God is with Me. Because no one can work a miracle unless God is his friend. So if I expel demons with the power of God, and I cure sick people, I cleanse lepers, convert sinners, announce and preach the Kingdom and I call people to it in the name of God, and God's compliance with Me is clear and indisputable, so that only disloyal enemies may assert the contrary, it is a sign that the Kingdom of God is among you and must be established because the hour of its foundation has come.

How is the Kingdom of God established in the world and in hearts? By going back to the Mosaic Law or by becoming acquainted with it if one is ignorant of it and, above all, by abiding by it absolutely, in every event and moment of our life. Which is that Law? Something so severe as to be impracticable? No. It is a set of ten holy easy precepts, which even a really morally good man feels he must respect, even if he lives in the most impervious forest of mysterious Africa. It says:

"I am the Lord Your God, you shall have no gods except Me.

You shall not utter the name of God in vain.

You shall keep the Sabbath according to the commandment of God and to the needs of the human body.

Honour your father and mother so that you may have a long life and be blessed both on the earth and in Heaven.

You shall not kill.

You shall not steal.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.

You shall not covet your neighbour's goods".

Which good natured soul, contemplating what is around him, even if he is a savage, will not say: "All this was not formed by itself. Therefore there must be One, more powerful than nature and than man himself, who made this"? And he worships the Powerful One Whose Most Holy Name he may or may not know, but he

feels He must exist. And he has such reverence before Him, that when he utters the name which he has given Him or has been taught to utter to name Him, he trembles with respect and he feels that he prays when uttering it reverently. In fact it is a prayer to utter the Name of God with the intention of worshipping Him or making Him known to those who do not know Him.

Likewise, out of moral prudence alone every man feels that he must grant some rest to his limbs, so that they may resist as long as his life lasts. By deeper reason, a man who knows the God of Israel, the Creator and Lord of the Universe, feels that he must consecrate his bodily rest to the Lord, so that he may not be like a beast of burden which rests, when tired, on litter crushing fodder with its strong teeth.

Blood also calls for love for those from whom we originate, as we can see in that colt that is now running braying towards its mother which is coming from the market. It was playing in the herd, it saw its mother, it remembers it was fed by her and licked with loving care, defended and warmed by its mother, and see? It rubs her neck with its tender nostrils and jumps joyfully rubbing its young crupper against the sides that carried it. It is a duty and a pleasure to love one's parents. And there is no animal which does not love the mother which gave birth to it. What? Will man be more vile than worms living in mud?

A morally good man does not kill. He has a strong dislike of violence. He feels that it is not lawful to take anybody's life, and that God only, Who gave it, has the right to take it. He abhors homicide.

Likewise, he who is morally sound does not take advantage of other people's property. He prefers to eat plain bread with a clear conscience near a silvery fountain, rather than have a rich roast which is the fruit of a theft. He prefers to sleep on the ground with his head on a stone and friendly stars above him, pouring peace and comfort on his honest conscience, rather than toss about in a stolen bed.

And if he is morally sound, he is not eager for more women, which are not his, and he will not cowardly disgrace the nuptial bed of his neighbour. And he will consider his friend's wife as a sister and will not cast lustful glances at her, as no one does at a sister.

A man with a righteous soul, even if only naturally righteous, with no other knowledge of God but what comes to him from his honest conscience, will never take the liberty of giving false witness, as he would consider that the same as homicide and theft, which it is. But his lips are as honest as his heart, and his glances are honest, so he does not desire his neighbour's wife. He does not crave for anything, as he knows that that is the first incentive to sin. And he is not envious. Because he is good. A good man is never envious. He is happy in his lot.

Do you think that this law is so exacting as to be impracticable? Do not wrong yourselves! I am sure that you will not do that. And if you do not, you will stablish the Kingdom of God within yourselves and in your town. And you will be happily joined one day to those whom you loved and who like you have gained the eternal Kingdom in the everlasting joy of Heaven.

But we have within us passions, which are like citizens closed within the circle of town walls. It is necessary for all the passions of men to want the same thing: that is, holiness, Otherwise some will tend to Heaven in vain, if others leave the doors unguarded and let the seducer enter or counteract the actions of part of the spiritual citizens through disputes or laziness, making the interior part of the town perish and abandoning it to nettles, poison, couchgrass, snakes, scorpions, mice and jackals, and owls, that is, to wicked passions and to Satan's angels. You must be unceasingly vigilant, like sentries placed at the walls, to prevent the Evil one from entering where we want to build the Kingdom of God.

I solemnly tell you that as long as the strong man watches in arms the hall of his house, he is sure of everything which is in it. But if one stronger than he is comes, or if he leaves the door unguarded, then the stronger man will defeat him and disarm him, and when he is deprived of the weapons on which he relied, he loses heart and surrenders and the stronger man makes him a prisoner and takes his spoils. But if man lives in God, through loyalty to the Law and justice practised holily, God is with him, I am with him, and no harm can befall him. Union with God is the weapon which no strong man can overcome. Union with Me is certainty of victory and of abundance of eternal virtues through which he

will be given an eternal seat in the Kingdom of God. But he who turns his back on Me or becomes My enemy, rejects thereby the weapons and certainty of My Word. He who rejects the Word, rejects God. He who rejects God invokes Satan. He who invokes Satan destroys what he had to conquer the Kingdom.

Therefore, he who is not with Me is against Me. And he who does not cultivate what I have sown, will reap what the Enemy has sown. He who does not harvest with Me, dissipates and will be poor and nude when he comes to the Supreme Judge, Who will send him to the master to whom he sold himself by preferring BeeIzebub to Christ.

Citizens of Gerasa: build the Kingdom of God within yourselves and in your town.»

The trilling voice of a woman is clearly heard like the song of a skylark above the whispering of the admiring crowd, and it sings a new beatitude, that is the glory of Mary: «Blessed be the womb that bore You and the breast that suckled You.»

Jesus turns towards the woman who extolled His Mother admiring Her Son. He smiles, because He is pleased with the praise for His Mother. But He then says: «More blessed are those who listen to the word of God and practise it. Do that, woman.»

He then blesses the crowds and goes towards the country, followed by the apostles who ask Him: «Why did You say that? »

«Because I tell you solemnly that in Heaven they do not use the same measure as is used on the earth. And My Mother will be blessed not so much because of Her immaculate soul as for listening to the word of God and practising it through obedience. It was a prodigy of the Creator "that Mary's soul was immaculate". And He is to be praised for that. But the "let what you have said be done to Me" is a prodigy of My Mother. Her merit therefore is great. So great that the Saviour of the world came only because of Her capability of listening to God, speaking through Gabriel's lips, and because of Her will to practise the word of God, without weighing the difficulties and the immediate and future sorrows connected with Her assent. You can thus see that She is My blessed Mother not only because She bore and suckled Me, but because She listened to the word of God and practised it through obedience. But let us go home now. My Mother knew that I was going to be out for a short while and She may be worried because of My delay. We are in a half-pagan country. But in actual fact it is better than others. But let us go. And let us go round the walls to avoid the crowds which would keep Me back. Come down quick behind this thicket...»

288. The Sabbath at Gerasa.

28th September 1945.

The hours of the day are long when one does not know what to do. And those who are with Jesus do not know what to do on that Sabbath, in a town where they have no acquaintances, in a house where they do not feel at home because of different languages and habits, without taking into account the Jewish prejudices which keep them apart from Alexander Misace's camel-drivers and servants. Many, therefore, have stayed in bed or are dozing in the sun that makes the large square yard of the house comfortably warm. It is a yard suited to receive caravans, as it is fitted with basins and rings fixed to the walls or columns of a rustic porch, which runs along the four sides, with many stables and lofts for hay and straw on three sides. The women are in their rooms. I do not see even one of them.

Marjiam amuses himself also in the closed yard, watching the work of the stablemen, who curry mules, change litters, examine hoofs, fasten loose horse-shoes, or, what is of greater interest to him because it is something entirely new, he is spellbound watching how the cameleers deal with the camels, preparing in advance the load for each animal, in proportion to each of them, balancing it, and how they make a camel kneel down and rise in order to load and unload it, rewarding each one with a handful of dry legumes, which I think are broad beans, and at the end they gave them carobs, which the men also chew with relish.

Marjiam is utterly amazed and he looks round to find someone with whom he may share his amazement. But he is disappointed because adults are not interested in

camels. They are either speaking to one another or dozing. He goes to Peter who is sleeping blissfully with his head resting on soft hay, and shakes his arm. Peter half opens his eyes and asks: «What is it? Who wants me? »

«I do, Come and see the camels.»

«Let me sleep. I have seen so many of them... Ugly animals.»

The boy then goes to Matthew, who is checking his accounts, as he is the treasurer during this trip: «You know, I have been to see the camels. They eat like sheep, did you know? And they kneel down like men and they look like boats moving up and down. Have you seen them? »

Matthew, who has lost his count owing to the interruption, replies sharply: «Yes » and resumes counting his money.

Another disappointment... Marjiam looks round... There is Simon Zealot speaking to Judas Thaddeus... «How lovely camels are! And how good! They loaded and unloaded them and they lay down on the ground so that the cameleer should not have to work too hard. And they eat carobs. The men also were eating them. I would like... But I cannot make myself understood. Come with me...» and he takes Simon by the hand.

Simon, who is engrossed in peaceful conversation with Thaddeus, replies absent-mindedly: «Yes, dear... Go... and watch that you do not hurt yourself.»

Marjiam is astonished... Simon has not replied to the point. The boy is almost weeping. He goes away down-heartedly and leans against a column...

Jesus comes out of a room and sees that he is sulky and alone. He goes towards the boy and lays a hand on his head. «What are you doing all alone and so sad? »

«No one will listen to me...»

«What did you want from them? »

«Nothing I was speaking of the camels... They are lovely... I like them. It must be like being on a boat to be up there... And they eat carobs; the men also eat them...»

«And you want to go up there and eat carobs. Come, let us go to the camels » and Jesus takes him by the hand and goes to the end of the yard with the child, who has become cheerful once again.

He goes straight to a cameleer and greets him with a smile. The man bows to Him and continues examining his animal, adjusting its halter and reins.

«Man, do you understand Me? »

«Yes, Lord. I have known Your people for twenty years.»

«This boy has a big desire: to climb up on a camel... And a little one: to eat a carob » and Jesus smiles once again more lively.

«Your son? »

«No, I have no children. I am not married.»

«You, so handsome, so strong, You have not found a woman? »

«I have not looked for one.»

«You have never felt the desire of a woman? »

«No. Never.»

The man looks at Him and is spellbound. He then says: «I have nine children at Ischilo... I go: one son. I go: another son. Always.»

«Do you love your children? »

«They are of my blood! But my work is hard. I am here, my children are there. We are far apart... But I do it for their bread. Do you understand? »

«I do. So you can understand the boy who would like to mount a camel and eat carobs.»

«Yes. Come. Are you afraid? No? Good. Lovely boy! I have one, too, like you. Dark like you. Here. Take and hold it tight » and he puts into Marjiam's hand the strange handle which is in the front part of the saddle. «Hold it. I will come on now. And the camel will stand up. You are not afraid, eh? » And the man climbs up on the high saddle, he makes himself comfortable and spurs the camel, which stands up obediently with a heavy pitch.

Marjiam laughs happily. And he is all the more happy because the cameleer has put a delicious carob into his mouth. The camel ambles along the yard, then the driver puts it into a trot, finally, seeing that Marjiam is not afraid, he shouts something to one of his companions, who opens the very wide door at the rear of the yard and the cameleer disappears with his load in the green country. Jesus goes back towards the house and enters a large room where the women are. He smiles so happily that Mary asks Him: «What has happened, Son, that You are so happy? »

«I am as happy as Marjiam who is galloping on a camel. Come out so that we may see him coming back.»

They all go out into the yard and sit on the low wall near the basins. The apostles who are not sleeping approach them. Those who are at the windows in the rooms upstairs, look down, they see the group and go down to join them. Their shrill youthful voices, they are in fact the voices of John and of the two Jameses, awake also Peter and Andrew and arouse Matthew. They are now all together because John of Endor and the two disciples have also joined the group. «But where is Marjiam? I don't see him » asks Peter.

«He has gone for a run on a camel. None of you would listen to him... I saw that he was so sad and I took care of him.»

Peter, Simon and Matthew remember: «Of course! He was talking about camels... and carobs. But I was sleepy! »; «I had to check my accounts as I wanted to inform You of what I had received from the Gerasenes and what I had given to the poor »; «And I was speaking of faith with Your brother.»

«It does not matter. I saw to it. But, incidentally, I tell you that to take care of children's games is also love... But now let us talk of something else. The town is full of merriment. The only remembrance of our Sabbath is general mirth. So it is better to stay indoors. So much so because if they want, they can find us as they know where we are. There is Alexander inspecting his camels. I will now tell him that one is missing through My fault.» And Jesus hastens towards the merchant and speaks to him.

They come back together. The merchant says: «Very well. He will enjoy himself and a run out in the sun will do him good. You may rest assured that the man will treat him well. Calipius is a clever man. In exchange for the run, I ask You to tell me something. Last night I was thinking of Your words... those I heard at Ramoth, which You exchanged with the woman, and those You spoke yesterday. And I thought I was climbing up a high mountain, like those where I live, the tops of which reach up to the clouds. You were carrying me higher and higher. I was under the impression of being caught by an eagle, one of those eagles of our highest mountain, the first to emerge from the Deluge. I saw entirely new things, of which I had never thought before, all made of a light... And I understood them. Then I became confused. Tell me more.»

«What shall I tell you? »

«I don't know... Everything was so beautiful. What You said about meeting again in Heaven... I understood that we will love there in a different way, and yet it will be the same. For instance: we shall not be worried as we are now, it will be as if we were one family only: one for all and all for one. Am I wrong? »

«No. On the contrary! We shall one family also with the living. Souls are not separated by death. I am speaking of the just. They form one large family. Just imagine a large temple in which some worship and pray, and some work. The former pray also for those who are working, the latter work for those who are praying. The same applies to souls. We work on the earth. They help us with their prayers. But we must offer our sufferings for their peace. It is a chain which does not break. It is Love that ties those who were to those who are. And those who are must be good to be able to join those who were and want us to be with them.»

Syntyche makes an involuntary gesture, which she soon cheeks. But Jesus notices it and invites her to come out of her habitual self-restraint.

«I was thinking... I have been thinking about it for some days, and if I must tell the truth, I am worried, because I feel that if I believe in Your Paradise, I will lose my mother and sisters for ever...» a sob breaks the voice of Syntyche, who stops to stifle tears.

«What thought worries you so much? »

«I now believe in You. I can only think of my mother as a heathen. She was good... Oh! very good! And my sisters, too. Little Ismene was the best daughter there ever was on the earth. But they were heathens... Now, when I was like them, I thought of Hades and I used to say: "We will meet there again". Now Hades no longer exists. There is Your Paradise, the Kingdom of Heaven for those who have served the True God in justice. And what about those poor souls? It is no fault of theirs if they were born in Greece! None of the priests in Israel ever came to say: "Our God is the True God". So? Are their virtues and sufferings worth nothing? Will they be in eternal darkness and separated from me for ever? I tell You: it is a torture! I seem to have almost disowned them.

Forgive me, my Lord... I am weeping...» and she falls on her knees weeping disconsolately.

Alexander Misace says: «There You are! I also was wondering whether, if I become a just man, I will ever find my father, mother, my brothers and friends...»

Jesus lays His fingers on Syntyche's brown-haired head and says: «One is at fault when one knows the Truth, but persists in Error. Not when one is convinced of being in the Truth, and no voice has ever come to say: "The Truth is what I am bringing you. Forsake your chimeras for this True God and you will gain Heaven". God is just. Can you believe that He will not reward virtue which was perfected all by itself in the corruption of the heathen world? Do not worry, My daughter.»

«What about the original sin? And their nefarious cult? And...»

More objections would come from the Israelites to grieve Syntyche's already desolate soul, if Jesus with a gesture did not impose silence.

He says: «The original sin is common to everybody, whether one is from Israel or not. It is not a peculiarity of heathens. The pagan cult will be sinful after the Law of Christ has been spread throughout the world. Virtue will always be virtue in the eyes of God. And in virtue of My union with the Father I say, and I say this in His name, translating His Most Holy Thought into words, that the ways of God's merciful power are manifold, and they are so intent on giving joy to virtuous people that they will remove barriers between souls, and peace will be given to those who deserve peace. Not only, but I say that in future those who follow the religion of their ancestors with justice and holiness, convinced of being in the Truth, will not be disliked and punished by God. Wickedness, bad will, deliberate refusal of the known Truth, above all refutation of the revealed Truth and opposition to it, vicious living will really separate for ever the souls of the just from those of sinners. Take heart, Syntyche. Such dejection is an assault of hell due to Satan's wrath against you, as you are a prey he has lost for ever. There is no Hades. There is My Paradise. But it is not the cause of grief, but of joy. Nothing of the Truth is to be the cause of dejection or doubt, on the contrary it must give you strength for a greater faith and cheerful certainty. Always inform Me of your anxieties. I want the light in you to be as certain and steady as the light of the sun.»

Syntyche, still kneeling, takes His hand and kisses it...

The cry of the cameleer makes the group understand that the camel is about to come back, at a slow pace, without making any noise on the thick grass outside the rear door, which a servant opens at once. And Marjiam comes back, he is happy and his face is flushed after the run. He is a tiny little man hoisted onto the high back of the camel, and he laughs waving his arms, while the camel kneels down and he slides down from the odd saddle, caressing the swarthy cameleer. He then runs towards Jesus shouting: «How lovely! Did the Wise men come from the East on those animals to worship You? I will go on them to preach You all over the world! The world seems larger when seen from up there and it says: "Come, you who know the Gospel!". Oh! Do You know?... That man also is in need of it... And you, too, merchant, and all your servants... How many people are waiting and die without receiving it... More people than the sand in the river... They are all without You, Jesus! Oh! Make haste and announce it to everybody! » and he clings to Jesus' sides looking up at Him.

And Jesus bends kissing him and promising: «You will see the Kingdom of God evangelized as far as the most remote borders of Rome. Are you happy? »

«I am. And then I will come and say to You: "This, that, and that other Country... they all know You". I will then know the names of those remote Countries. And what will You say to me? »

«I will say: "Come, little Marjiam. Have a crown for every country in which you have preached Me and then come here beside Me, as on that day at Gerasa, and rest after all your work, because you have been a faithful servant and it is right that you should be happy in My Kingdom".»

289. From Gerasa to the Fountain of the Cameleer.

29th September 1945.

The caravan leaves Alexander's large courtyard, in perfect order as if it were

on a military parade. Jesus is at the rear with all His group. The camels are proceeding, their heavy loads swaying rhythmically and their heads, on their arched necks, seem to be asking at each step: «Why? Why? » in their silent but familiar gait, like the movement of doves, which at each step seem to be saying: «Yes, Yes » to everything they see. The caravan has to cross the town and it does so in the clear morning air. Everyone is all wrapped up because it is cool. The harness-bells of the camels, the cries of the camel-drivers, the screech of a camel regretting the idle stable inform the Gerasenes of Jesus' departure. The news spreads as fast as lightning and some Gerasenes rush to greet Him offering fruit and other foodstuffs. There is also a man with a sick little boy. «Bless him, that he may recover. Have mercy on us! » Jesus raises His hand and blesses the child saying: «Go and do not worry. Have faith.»

And the man says «yes » so trustfully, that a woman asks: «Would You cure my husband whose eyes are ulcered? »

«I will, if you can believe.»

«Well, I will go and bring him here. Wait for me, Lord » and she runs away as fast as a swallow.

Wait! Easier said than done! The camels are moving on. Alexander, at the head of the caravan, does not know what is wanted at its rear. The only thing to be done is to send word to the man.

«Run, Marjiam. Go and tell the merchant to stop before going out of the walls» says Jesus. And Marjiam dashes away to fulfil his mission.

The caravan stops and the merchant comes towards Jesus. «What is the matter? »

«Stay here and you will see.»

The woman of Gerasa is soon back with her husband whose eyes are diseased. It is much worse than ulcers! His eyes are two holes full of suppuration. They look dimmed, reddened, half-blind in the centre of the holes, among repulsive dripping tears. As soon as the man lifts the dark bandage dimming the light, tears flow more copiously as the light increases the pain of the diseased eyes. The man moans: «Have mercy! I suffer so much! »

«You have also sinned very much. Are you not complaining of that? Are you only grieved at the possibility of losing the poor sight of the world? Do you know nothing about God? Are you not afraid of eternal darkness? Why did you sin? »

The man is weeping and he bends without speaking. His wife is also weeping and she moans: «I have forgiven...»

«And I will forgive him as well, if he swears to Me that he will not relapse into his sin.»

«Yes, I do! Forgive me. I now know the consequences of sin. Forgive me. Forgive me as my wife did. You are the Good One.»

«I forgive you. Go to that stream, wash your face in the water and you will be cured.»

«Cold water will make him worse, Lord » moans the woman.

But the man is not concerned with anything else and he begins to grope until the apostle John pitifully takes him by the hand and leads him by himself at first, until the wife supports him by the other hand. The man goes down as far as the edge of the ice cold water babbling among stones, he bends. He takes some water cupping his hands and washes his face. He does not show any sign of pain. On the contrary, he appears to be relieved.

He then climbs up the bank, with his face still wet, and goes back to Jesus, Who asks him: «Well? Are you cured? »

«No, Lord. Not yet. But You said so and I will be cured.»

«Well, remain in your hope. Goodbye.»

The woman collapses weeping... She is disappointed. Jesus beckons to the merchant that they can go on. And the merchant, who is also disappointed, passes the word on. The camels march off again with their motion resembling a boat which raises and lowers its prow with its cut-water on the waves; they go out of the walls and take to the wide dusty caravan-route south-westwards.

The last couple of the apostolic group, that is, John of Endor and Simon Zealot, have just left the walls a few yards behind, when a shrill cry is heard in the silent air. It seems to spread all over the world, and is repeated in a higher and higher pitch, singing hosannas happily: «I can see! My blessed Jesus! I can see! I believed. I see! Jesus! Jesus! My blessed Jesus! » and the man, whose face is completely cured, with two beautiful eyes: two carbuncles full of light

and life, rushes to Jesus' feet and falls almost under the camel of the merchant, who manages to move his mount away from the prostrated man just in time.

The man kisses Jesus' garment repeating: «I believed! I believed and I can see! My blessed Jesus! »

«Stand up and be happy. And, above all, be good. Tell your wife to believe unreservedly. Goodbye.» And Jesus frees Himself from the grasp of the miraculously cured man and resumes His way.

The merchant strokes his beard pensively... At last he asks: «And if he had not persisted in believing, after his disappointment in washing? »

«He would have remained as he was.»

«Why do You exact so much faith to work a miracle? »

«Because faith witnesses the presence of hope and love of God.»

«And why did You want repentance first? »

«Because repentance makes God friendly.»

«Since I have no disease, what should I do to testify that I have faith? »

«You should come to the Truth.»

«And could I come without God's friendship? »

«You could not come without God's goodness. God allows those who look for Him to find Him, even if they are not yet repentant; because man generally repents when he knows God, either consciously or even with a faint consciousness of what his soul wants. Before he is like a blockhead led only by instinct. Have you ever felt the need to believe? »

«Many a time. Well, I was not satisfied with what I had. I felt there was something else. Something stronger than money, than my children, my hope... But I did not bother to try to find out what I was unknowingly seeking.»

«Your soul was seeking God. God's kindness has let you find God. Repentance for your remote idle past will give you the friendship of God.»

«So... in order to have the miracle of seeing the Truth with my soul, I should repent of my past? »

«Certainly. You ought to repent and decide to change your life completely...»

The man begins to stroke his beard once again and he stares so intently that he seems to be studying and counting the hairs on his camel's neck. He unintentionally strikes with his heel the camel which takes the stroke as a spur to quicken its step and it obeys taking the merchant towards the head of the caravan.

Jesus does not keep him back. On the contrary He stops thus allowing the women and apostles to overtake Him, until Simon Zealot and John of Endor reach Him. Jesus joins them.

«Of what are you speaking? » He asks.

«We were speaking of the depression that those must feel who do not believe in anything or have lost the faith they had. Syntyche was really dejected yesterday, although she has come to a perfect faith » replies the Zealot.

«I was saying to Simon that if it is grievous to pass from Good to Evil, it is also disconcerting to pass from Evil to Good. In the former case one is tortured by one's reproaching conscience. In the latter case one is... tormented... Like one who is taken to a completely unknown foreign country... Or it is the dismay of a man, who being a poor unlearned wretch, should find himself at a king's Court, among learned people and gentlemen. It is a pain... I know... Such a long suffering... One cannot believe that it is true, that it can last... that one can deserve it particularly when one's soul is stained... as mine was...»

«And now, John? » asks Jesus.

And John of Endor's worn out sad face brightens with a smile which makes it look less emaciated. He says: «Now, it is no longer so. Only gratitude to the Lord remains, nay, it increases. This the Lord wanted. There is still the memory of the past to keep me humble. But there is certainty. I feel acclimatized, I am no longer a foreigner in this kind world of forgiveness and love which is Yours. And I am serene, happy and in peace.»

«Do you consider your experience a good one? »

«Yes, I do. If I were not sorry for having sinned, because I grieved God through my sin, I would say that I feel that my past was a good thing. It can help me considerably to support willing but mislaid souls, in the first stages of their new belief.»

«Simon, go and tell the boy not to jump about so much. He will be exhausted this

evening.»

Simon looks at Jesus, but he understands the truth behind the order. He smiles intelligently and goes away leaving the two all alone.

«Now that we are alone, John, listen to this desire of Mine. For a number of reasons, none of My followers have the breadth of judgement and thought which you have. And your culture is wider than the average learning of Israelites. So I ask you to help Me...»

«Am I to help You? How? »

«On behalf of Syntyche. You are such a clever teacher! Marjiam learns quickly and well with you. So much so that I am thinking of leaving you together for some months, because I want Marjiam to have a wider knowledge than that of the little world of Israel. And it gives you pleasure to take care of him. And I rejoice seeing you together, you teaching, him learning; you growing young again, him maturing in learning. But you should take care of Syntyche as well, as if she were a lost sister. You said it yourself: one feels lost... Help her to become acclimatised in My atmosphere. Will you do Me this favour? »

«It is a grace for me to do it, my Lord! I did not approach her because I considered myself superfluous. But if You wish so... She reads my rolls. There are some which are sacred, some are only cultural: rolls from Rome and Athens. I see that she goes through them and meditates... But I never intervened in order to assist her. If You want...»

«Yes, I do. I want you to be friends. Like Marjiam and you, she will be staying in Nazareth for some time. It will be lovely: My Mother and you the teachers of two souls opening to God. My Mother: the angelical Teacher of the Science of God; you: the experienced master of human knowledge, which you can now explain with supernatural references. It will be lovely and useful.»

«Yes, my blessed Lord! Too beautiful for poor John!...» and the man smiles at the thought of the oncoming peaceful days with Mary, in Jesus' house...

And the road winds along a beautiful country, which is now completely flat after skirting a few little hills just out of Gerasa, in the mild sunshine which is becoming warmer and warmer. It is a well kept road on which it is comfortable to travel and to take to it again after the midday rest.

It is almost evening when I hear Syntyche laugh wholeheartedly for the first time; Marjiam in fact has said something to her which makes all the women laugh. I see the Greek woman bend to caress the boy and kiss him lightly on his forehead. The boy then resumes jumping about as if he did not feel at all tired. But all the others are tired and are glad for the decision to spend the night at the Fountain of the Cameleer. The merchant says: «I always stop here overnight. The leg from Gerasa to Bozrah, is too long both for men and animals.»

«The merchant is humane » remark the apostles, comparing him to Doras...

The «Fountain of the Cameleer » is only a handful of houses around several wells. It is a kind of oasis, not in the arid desert, because there is no aridity here, but an oasis in the vast uninhabited fields and orchards which follow one another for miles and which, as the October evening draws on, give the same sad sensation as the sea at twilight. Thus, the sight of houses, the noise of voices, of crying children, the smell of smoking chimneys and the first lights to be lit are as pleasant as one's arrival at home.

While the cameleers stop to water the camels for the first time, the apostles and the women follow Jesus and the merchant who enter... the rather prehistoric inn which will shelter them during the night...

...They are all gathered near a very large fireplace which takes up the whole of the narrow wall of a large smoky room where they have taken their meal, and where the men will sleep and servants are already preparing straw beds on mats. The fire is on because it is a cold damp evening.

«Let us hope that it will not start raining » says Peter with a sigh.

The merchant reassures him: «The bad weather will not begin until this lunation is over. It is always like this in the evening here. But it will be sunshine tomorrow.»

«It's for the women, you know? Not for me. I am a fisherman and I live in water. And I can assure you that I prefer water to mountains and dust.»

Jesus is speaking to the women and His two cousins. John of Endor and the Zealot are also listening to Him. Instead Timoneus and Ermasteus are reading one of John's rolls and the two Israelites are explaining to Ermasteus the Bible passages which are more obscure to him.

Marjiam is listening spellbound, but he looks sleepy. Mary of Alphaeus notices it and says: «That child is tired. Come, dear, let us go to bed. Come, Eliza, come Salome. Old people and children are better in bed. And you had all better go as well. You are tired.»

But besides the elder ones, with the exception of Marcella and Johanna of Chuza, no one moves.

After they have gone, after being blessed, Matthew whispers: «Who would have told these women, only a short while ago, that they were to sleep on straw beds, so far from their homes! »

«I have never slept so well » states Mary of Magdala resolutely. And Martha confirms her statement.

But Peter admits that his companion is right: «Matthew is right. And I wonder why the Master has brought you here, something I fail to understand.»

«Because we are His disciples! »

«Well, if He went where... lions are, would you go? »

«Of course, Simon Peter! What an effort to go for a little walk! And with Him!»

«Well: in actual fact it is a long walk. And for women who are not used to it...»

But the women protest and Peter shrugs his shoulders and becomes silent.

James of Alphaeus, on looking up, sees such a bright smile on Jesus' face, that he asks Him: «Will You tell us, privately, the real purpose of this journey, with the women... and with so little fruit, as compared to its fatigue? »

«Could you expect to see now the fruit of the seed buried in the fields which we have crossed? »

«I could not. I will see it in springtime.»

«I also say to you: "You will see it in due time".»

The apostles do not reply.

The silvery voice of Mary is heard: «Son, we were talking today of what You said at Ramoth. And each of us had different impressions and reflections. Would You tell us Your thought? I said that it was better to call You at once. But You were speaking to John of Endor.»

«In actual fact I raised the question. Because I am a poor heathen and I do not have the splendid light of your faith. You must sympathise with me.»

«I would like to have your soul, my dear sister! » says the Magdalene impulsively. And exuberant as she is, she embraces Syntyche clasping her with one arm. Her wonderful beauty seems to give light by itself to the miserable dwelling and to decorate it with the wealth of her sumptuous house. The Greek woman, who is entirely different and yet has such a singular personality while embraced by the Magdalene, adds a meditative note to the cry of love which seems to be always bursting forth from passionate Mary, meanwhile the Blessed Virgin, sitting with Her gentle face raised towards Her Son, Her hands clasped as if She were praying, Her most pure profile outstanding against the black wall, is the perpetual Adorer.

Susanna is dozing in the shadow of a comer, while Martha, who is active notwithstanding her weariness and the pressure of the others, takes advantage of the light of the fireplace to fasten some buckles on Marjiam's garment.

Jesus says to Syntyche: «But it was not a grievous thought. I heard you laugh.»

«Yes, because of the boy, who solved the question easily, saying: "I do not want to come back unless Jesus does. But if you want to know everything, go to the next world, then come back and tell us whether you remember".»

They all laugh again and say that Syntyche was asking Mary for a clarification on the explanation, which she had not understood properly, of the remembrance which souls have and which explains a certain possibility for heathens to have vague recollections of the Truth.

«I was saying: "Does that perhaps confirm the theory of reincarnation in which many heathens believe?" and Your Mother was telling me that what You say is something entirely different. Will You explain also this to me, my Lord? »

«Listen. You must not believe that the fact that souls have spontaneous recollections of Truth proves that we live several lives. By now you have already learned enough to be aware of how man was created, how he sinned and was punished. You have also been told that God incorporated a single soul in each man. That soul is created from time to time and is never again used for subsequent incarnations. This certainty would seem to cancel My statement concerning the recollections of souls. It should cancel it with regard to any

other being with the exception of man, who is gifted with a soul made by God. Animals cannot remember anything, as they are born once only. But man can remember, although he is born once only. He remembers with his better part: his soul. Where do souls come from? The soul of each man? From God. Who is God? The most intelligent, powerful, perfect Spirit. This wonderful thing which is a soul, a thing created by God to give man His image and likeness as an unquestionable sign of His Most Holy Paternity, shows signs of the qualities characteristic of Him Who creates it. It is therefore intelligent, spiritual, free, immortal, like the Father Who created it. It is perfect when it originates from the divine thought and in the instant of its creation it is identical, for a thousandth of an instant, with the soul of the first man: a perfection which understands the Truth through free gift. A thousandth of an instant. Then, once it is formed, it is stained by original sin. To make it clearer for you I will say that it is as if God were pregnant with the soul which He creates and the creature, in being born, were wounded by an indelible mark. Do you understand Me? »

«Yes, I do. While it is thought it is perfect. The creating thought lasts a thousandth of an instant. The thought then becomes actual fact and the fact is subject to the law brought about by Sin.»

«Your reply is correct. A soul becomes thus incarnate in a human body, bringing with it the memory of the Creator, that is of the Truth, as a secret gem in the mystery of its spiritual being. A baby is born. It may become good, very good or wicked. It may become anything because it is endowed with free will. The angelical ministry throws light on its "memories" and the tempter darkness. If man craves after light and thus for a greater and greater virtue, making his soul the master of his being, the faculty of remembering increases in the soul, as if virtue made the wall interposed between soul and God thinner and thinner. That is why virtuous people in every country perceive the Truth, not in a perfect way, as they are dulled by contrasting doctrines or by lethal ignorance, but in a sufficient manner to give pages of moral perfection to the peoples to whom they belong. Have you understood? Are you convinced? »

«Yes. In conclusion, the religion of virtue practised heroically predisposes the soul to the true Religion and to the knowledge of God.»

«Exactly. And now go and rest and may you be blessed. And You, too, Mother, and you sisters and disciples. May you rest in the peace of God.»

290. Going to Bozrah.
30th September 1945.

The merchant was right. October could not have granted the pilgrims a lovelier day. After the sun had dispelled the haze which veiled the country, as if nature had laid a veil over the sleeping plants at night, the country appears in its solemn stretch of cultivated fields warmed by the sun. The fog seems to have gathered together on remote mountain tops decorating them with a transparent foam, thus softening them even more against the serene sky.

«What are those? Mountains we have to climb? » asks Peter anxiously.

«No. They are the Hauran mountains. We shall be on the plain, on this side of the mountains. Before evening we shall be at Bozrah in Hauran. A beautiful good town. Much trade » says the merchant encouraging Peter and praising the town, considering, as usual, commercial prosperity as the basis of the beauty of a place.

Jesus is all alone, in the rear, as He is wont to do at times when He so wishes. Marjiam turns round several times looking at Him. When he can resist no longer, he leaves Peter and James of Zebedee, he sits on the edge of the road, on a stone which must be a Roman military landmark, and waits. When Jesus is at his level, the boy stands up and without speaking he goes beside Jesus, remaining a little behind Him so as not to annoy Him, and, he watches Him...

And he continues watching until Jesus comes out of His meditation and turns round on hearing the light footstep behind Him and He smiles stretching His hand out to the boy and saying: «Oh! Marjiam! What are you doing here all alone? »
«I was looking at You. I have been looking at You for days. Everybody has eyes but not everybody sees the same things. I have noticed that now and again You

want to remain all alone... On the first days I thought You were hurt by something. Then I noticed that You do it always at the same time and that Mother, Who always comforts You when You are sad, does not say anything to You when Your countenance is like that. On the contrary, if She happens to be speaking, She becomes quiet and concentrates on meditation. I notice things, You know? Because I always look at You and Her, in order to do what You do. I asked the apostles what You do, because You certainly do something. They said to me: "He prays". And I asked them: "What does He say?". No one replied, because they do not know. They have been with You for years, and they do not know. Today I followed You every time I noticed that countenance and I watched You while You were praying. But Your countenance is not always the same. This morning, at dawn, You looked like a bright angel. You looked at things with such bright eyes that I think they dispelled darkness more than the sun did. And You looked at things and people like that. And then You looked at the sky and Your face was the same as when You offer the bread at table. Later, when we were crossing that little village, You remained alone, in the rear, and You seemed to me a father, as You were so anxious to say kind words to the poor people of the village, while passing by. You said to one: "Endure your suffering with patience, because I will soon relieve you and others like you". He was the slave of that bad man who set his dogs on us. Then, while the food was being prepared, You looked at us with eyes full of kind love. You looked like a mother... But Your countenance was now sorrowful... What do You think, Jesus, when You are always like that?... But also in the evening, at times, if I am not asleep, I see that You are very serious. Will You tell me how You pray, why You pray? »

«Of course, I will tell you. So that you can pray with Me. The day is given to us by God. The whole day: the bright one and the dark one: day and night. It is a gift to live and have light. Our way of living is a means of sanctification. Is that right? So we must sanctify the moments of the whole day, to persevere in holiness and have the Most High and His bounty present in our hearts, and at the same time, keep the Demon away. Watch the little birds. They sing at sunrise. They bless the light. We must bless the light as well, because it is a gift of God, and we must bless God Who grants it to us and Who is the Light. We must crave for God as from daybreak to put a seal, a note of light on the whole oncoming day, that it may be entirely bright and holy. And we must join the whole creation in praising the Creator. Then, as the hours go by, and going by they make us aware of how much sorrow and ignorance there is in the world, we must pray again that sorrow may be relieved and ignorance may vanish and God may be known, loved and prayed to by all men, who, if they knew God, would be comforted in their sufferings. And at the sixth hour we must pray out of love for our family, to enjoy the gift of being united to those who love us. That is also a gift of God. And we must pray that our eating, instead of being useful, may not become an occasion of sin. And at sunset we pray remembering that death is the inevitable end waiting for all of us. And we must pray that our end, be it today or later, may take place with our souls in grace. And when the lights are lit, we must pray to thank for the day which is over and to ask for protection and forgiveness, so that we may go to sleep without any fear of a sudden judgement or assaults of the demon. And, finally, we must pray at night - but this applies only to adults - to make amends for the sins of the night, to keep Satan away from weak people, and that culprits may ponder, repent and make good resolutions which will become facts at sunrise. That is how and why a just person prays during the whole day.»

«But You have not told me why You are so absorbed, so grave and imposing at the ninth hour...

«Because... I say: "Through the Sacrifice of this hour, let Your Kingdom come to the world and may all those who believe in Your Word be redeemed". Say the same yourself...

«What sacrifice is it? You said that incense is offered in the morning and evening, and the victims at the same hour, every day, on the altar of the Temple. And that the victims for vows and expiation are offered at any hour. There is no indication of a special rite for the ninth hour.»

Jesus stops and takes the boy with both hands, and lifts him holding him in front of Himself, and as if He were saying a psalm, with His face raised, He says: «"And between the sixth and ninth hour, He Who has come as Saviour and Redeemer, He of Whom the prophets speak, will consume His Sacrifice after eating

the bitter bread of betrayal and after giving the sweet Bread of Life, after crushing Himself like grapes in a vat and quenching with His whole being the thirst of men and plants, and making for Himself a Royal purple with His own blood, and putting on a crown and seizing the sceptre, and taking His throne on the high place, so that Zion and Israel and the world might see it. Lifted up in the purple garment of His numberless wounds, in the dark to give Light, in death to give Life, He will die at the ninth hour and the world will be redeemed".»

Marjiam is frightened and pale and looks at Him with dismayed eyes and trembling lips on the point of bursting into tears. With faltering voice he says: «But You are the Saviour! So will You be dying at that hour? » Tears begin to stream down his cheeks and his little mouth sips them, while he awaits a denial.

But Jesus says: «I will, My little disciple. For you, too.» And as the child bursts into convulsive sobs, He presses him to His heart and says: «Are you sorry that I die? »

«Oh! My only joy! I do not want that! I... Let me die in Your place...»

«You are to preach Me all over the world. That is settled. But listen. I will die happily because I know that you love Me. Then I will rise from the dead. Do you remember Jonah? He was more handsome when he came out of the belly of the whale well rested and strong. So will I, and I will come to you at once and I will say to you: "Little Marjiam, your tears quenched My thirst. Your love kept Me company in the Sepulchre. I have now come to say to you: 'Be My priest' " and I will kiss you with the scent of Paradise still on Me.»

«But where will I be? Will I not be with Peter or Mother? »

«I will save you from the evil waves of those days. I will save the most weak and innocent ones. Except one... Marjiam, little apostle, will you help me to pray for that hour? »

«Oh! Yes, I will, Lord! And the others? »

«That is a secret between you and Me. A great secret. Because God loves to be revealed to the little ones... Do not weep any more. Smile at the thought that afterwards I will suffer no more and I will only remember all the love of men, and yours first. Come. Look how far the others are. Let us run and join them » and He puts him down and holding him by the hand they start running until they reach the group.

«Master, what have You done? »

«I was explaining the hours of the day to Marjiam.»

«And has the boy wept? He must have been naughty, and You are excusing him out of kindness » says Peter.

«No, Simon. He watched Me praying. You have not done that. He asked Me why. I told him. The boy was moved by My words. Now leave him alone. Go to My Mother, Marjiam. And you all, listen to Me. The lesson will do no harm to you either.» And Jesus explains once again the usefulness of prayer at the main hours of the day, leaving out the explanation of the ninth hour and concluding: «Union to God is to have Him present every moment to praise and invoke Him. Do so and you will make progress in the life of the spirit.»

Bozrah is now close at hand. Stretched out on the plain it looks a large beautiful town with walls and towers. The evening which is drawing on, tones down the shades of houses and country into a greyish languid lilac, in which all contours become vague, while grunting pigs and bleating sheep in the enclosures outside the walls, break the silence of the country. The silence comes to an end as soon as the caravan goes through the gate entering a labyrinth of narrow streets which disappoint those who from the outside thought the town was beautiful. Voices, smells and... stench stagnate in the twisted lanes and accompany the pilgrims as far as a square, the market square, where the inn is. They thus arrive at Bozrah.

291. At Bozrah.

1st October 1945.

Bozrah looks very dull in the morning mist, both because of the season and

because the town is closed in its narrow streets. It looks dull and dirty. The apostles, who have come back from their shopping at the market, are talking about it. Hotel practice in those days and in such places is so utterly antiquated, that one has to see to one's victuals. Innkeepers obviously do not want to lose any money. So they only cook what customers bring them, and let us hope that they do not steal any of that. Or at most they buy food for customers or sell them what they have in stock, working as butchers, if necessary, preparing poor lambs to be roasted.

Peter does not like buying from the innkeeper and is now squabbling with him. The man, with a rather roguish face, goes to the point of insulting the apostle, calling him «Galilean », while Peter answers back, pointing to a little pig, which the host has just slaughtered for some guests: «I am a Galilean, and you are a pig, you pagan. I would not stay in your stinking inn for one hour, if it depended on me. You thief and... (and he adds here a very clear epithet... which I leave in my pen).» I realise that between the people of Bozrah and the Galileans there is one of the many regional or religious incompatibilities, of which Israel, or rather Palestine was full.

The host shouts louder: «If you were not with the Nazarene, and I were not better than your filthy Pharisees who hate Him without any good reason, I would wash your face with the blood of the pig, so you would have to get out of here and rush to purify yourself. But I respect Him, Whose power is known. And I tell you, that notwithstanding all your fuss, you are sinners. We are better than you are. We do not lay snares neither do we betray. You, faugh! You are a lot of unfair traitors and rascals and you do not even respect the few holy people among you.»

«Who are you calling traitors? Us? Ah! In God's truth I...» Peter is furious and is about to break upon the man, when his brother and James hold him back, and Simon Zealot intervenes with Matthew.

But Peter's wrath is abated not so much by their intervention as by the voice of Jesus Who appears at one of the doors and says: «You now, Simon, will be quiet. And you, too, man.»

«Lord, this man was the first to insinuate and threaten.»

«Nazarene, I was offended first.»

I, he. He and I. The two culprits cast blame on each other.

Jesus comes forward seriously and calmly. «You are both wrong. And you, Simon, more than he is. Because you know the doctrine of love, of forgiveness, of meekness, of patience and brotherhood. In order not to be ill-treated as a Galilean, you must make yourself respected as a saint. And you, man, bless the Lord if you feel that you are better than others and endeavour to be worthy of becoming better and better. And above all, do not foul your soul with false charges. My disciples neither betray nor lay snares.»

«Are You sure, Nazarene? Well, then, why did those four come and ask me whether You had come, with whom You were and so many more questions? »

«What? Who are they? Where are they? » The apostles gather round him, forgetting that they are drawing close to a person still wet with the blood of a pig, which struck them with horror shortly before and kept them away.

«Go and mind your own business. You may stay, Misace.»

The apostles go into the room from which Jesus came out, and only Jesus and the innkeeper are left in the yard, one facing the other. The merchant is a few steps from Jesus and is watching the scene spellbound.

«Tell Me the truth, man. And forgive if blood made one of My disciples furious. Who are those four and what did they say? »

«I do not know exactly who they are. They are certainly scribes and Pharisees from the other side. I do not know who brought them here. I have never seen them. But they are well informed of You. They know from where You have come, where You are going, with whom You are. But they wanted confirmation from me. No. I may be a rascal. But I know my business. I know nobody and I see nothing. I know nothing. With regard to others, of course. As far as I am concerned, I know everything. But why should I tell others, particularly those hypocrites, what I know? Am I a rascal? Yes. If necessary I side also with robbers. In any case, You know... But I could not steal or try to steal Your freedom, honour and life. And those - I am no longer Phara of Ptolemy if what I say is not true and those are lying in wait for You, to do You harm. And who sent them? Perhaps someone from Perea or the Decapolis? Or someone from Trachonitis or Gaulanitis

or Hauran? No. We either do not know You, or if we have heard of You, we respect You as a just man, if we do not believe in You as a saint. So, who sent them? Someone on Your side and perhaps one of Your friends, because they know too many things...»

«It is easy to be informed of my caravan...» says Misace.

«No, merchant. Not of you, but of the others who are with Jesus. I do not know and I do not want to know. I do not see and I do not want to see. But I say to You: if You are guilty, make amends, if You know that You have been betrayed, take the necessary action.»

«I am neither guilty, man, nor betrayed. The only trouble is that Israel does not understand Me. But how do you know about Me? »

«Through a boy. A mischievous boy who had a bad reputation at Bozrah and Arbela. Here, because he came here to commit his sins, there because he dishonoured his family. Then he became converted and more honest than a just man. And he passed by with Your disciples, a disciple himself, and is waiting for You at Arbela, to honour You with his father and mother. And he tells everybody that You changed his heart through his mother's prayers. If this region ever becomes a holy one, Philip of James will have the merit of having sanctified it. And if there is anyone who believes in You in Bozrah, it is due to him.»

«Where are the scribes now, who came here? »

«I don't know. They went away because I told them that I had no rooms for them. I had them, but I did not want to give hospitality to snakes and thus have them close to the dove. They are certainly in this area. Be careful.»

«Thank you, man, What is your name? »

«Phara. I did my duty. Remember me.»

«Yes. And you must remember God. And forgive My Simon. The great love he has for Me at times blinds him.»

«No harm. I offended him as well... But it hurts to be insulted. You do not insult...»

Jesus sighs... He then says: «Will you help the Nazarene? »

«If I can...»

«I would be glad to speak from this yard...»

«And I will let You speak. When? »

«Between the sixth and ninth hour.»

«Go wherever You want and do not worry. Bozrah will know that You are going to speak. I will see to it.»

«May God reward you for it » and Jesus smiles at him, a smile which is already a reward. He then goes to the room where He was before.

Alexander Misace says: «Master, will You smile at me as well, like that?... I am also going to tell the citizens to come and listen to the Bounty Which is speaking. I know many. Goodbye.»

«May God reward you, too » and Jesus smiles at him.

He enters the room. The women are around Mary, Whose face is sorrowful and She gets up at once and goes towards Her Son. She does not speak. Her whole attitude is uncertainty. Jesus smiles at Her and He replies to Her saying to everybody:

«Be free by the sixth hour. I will speak here to many people. In the meantime go, everybody, with the exception of Simon Peter, John and Ermasteus. Go and announce Me and give plentiful alms.»

The apostles go away.

Peter slowly approaches Jesus Who is near the women and asks: «Why did You not send me as well? »

«When one is too impulsive, one stays at home. Simon, Simon! When will you learn to be charitable to your neighbour? For the time being it is a burning flame, but only for Me, it is a straight and stiff blade, but only for Me. Be mild, Simon of Jonah.»

«You are right, Master. Your Mother has already reproached me, as She knows how to, but without hurting. But it penetrated right into me. But... reproach me as well, but do not look at me so sadly.»

«Be good... Syntyche, I would like to speak to you privately. Come up to the terrace. Will you come, as well, Mother...»

And on the rustic terrace, which covers one wing of the building, in the sunshine which warms the air, walking slowly between Mary and the Greek woman, Jesus says: «Tornorrow we will part for a little while. When near Arbela, you women with John of Endor, will go towards the Sea of Galilee and will continue

together as far as Nazareth. But as I do not want to send you by yourselves with an almost disabled man, I will get My brothers and Simon Peter to accompany you. I can foresee that there will be some reluctance to separate. But obedience is the virtue of the just. When you go through the country over which Chuza watches in Herod's name, Johanna can find some more people to escort you on the rest of the way. You will then send back Alphaeus' sons and Simon Peter. But the reason why I asked you to come up here is as follows. I want to tell you, Syntyche, that I have decided for you to stay for some time in My Mother's house. She already knows. John of Endor and Marjiam will be staying with you. Stay there willingly, perfecting yourself more and more in Wisdom. I want you to take great care of poor John. I am not saying this to My Mother because She does not need any advice. You can understand John and sympathise with him, and he can do you much good because he is an experienced master. I will come later. Oh! Quite soon! And we will often meet. I hope to find you wiser and wiser in the Truth. I bless you particularly, Syntyche. This is My farewell from you, for this time. You will find love and hatred in Nazareth as anywhere else. But in My house you will find peace. Always.»

«Nazareth will ignore me and I will ignore Nazareth. I will live nourishing myself with the Truth and the world will be nothing to me, Lord.»

«Very well. You may go, Syntyche. And do not mention it to anybody, for the time being. Mother, You know... I trust these dearest pearls of Mine to You. While we are in peace, among ourselves, Mother, let Your Jesus refresh Himself in Your caresses...»

«How much hatred, Son! »

«How much love! »

«How much bitterness, My dear Jesus! »

«How much sweetness! »

«How much incomprehension, My Son! »

«How much comprehension, Mother! »

«Oh! My darling, My Dear Son! »

«Mother! Joy of God and Mine! Mother! »

They kiss each other and remain together, on the stone bench against the low terrace wall: Jesus embracing His Mother, a loving protector, Mary reclining Her head on Her Son's shoulder, Her hands in His: happy... The world is so distant... buried in the waves of love and faithfulness...

292. The Sermon and Miracles at Bozrah.

2nd October 1945.

...And the world is so close with its waves of hatred, betrayal, sorrow, need, curiosity. And the waves come, like those of the sea in a harbour, to die here, in the yard of the inn at Bozrah, which the respectful host, whose heart is better than his face makes one suppose, has cleaned of excrement and dirt. There is a large crowd of people, both local and strangers, but of the same region. And there are people whose conversation gives me to understand that they come from very far, from the lake area or beyond the lake. I catch the names of villages, and parts of sorrowful stories in the conversation of the people awaiting Jesus. Gadara, Hippo, Gerghesa, Gamala, Aphek, Nain, Endor, Jezreel, Magdala and Korazim, are mentioned by many people together with the stories of the reasons why they have come from so far.

«When I heard that He had come through Trans-Jordan, I was discouraged. But some disciples came when I was about to go back to Jezreel and they said to us, who were waiting at Capernaum: "He is certainly beyond Gerasa by now. Waste no time, go to Bozrah or Arbela" and I came with these people...»

«I instead, saw some Pharisees pass through Gadara. They were asking where was Jesus of Nazareth, Whom they knew to be in the area. My wife is ill. I joined them. Then yesterday at Arbela I heard that He was coming to Bozrah first, so I came here.»

«I have come from Gadara for this boy. He was gored by a furious cow. He has been left in that state...» and he shows his son who is utterly shrivelled and unable to move his arms.

«I could not bring mine. I come from Megiddo. What do you think? Will He cure him from here also? » moans a woman whose face is red with weeping.

«No, the sick person must be present.»

«No It is enough to have faith.»

«No. Unless He imposes His hands, one is not cured. His disciples also do that.»

«You have come a long way for nothing, woman.»

The woman begins to weep saying: «Poor me! I left him when he was almost dying, hoping... He will not cure him, and I will not comfort him in his death...»

Another woman consoles her: «Don't believe that, woman. I have come to thank Him because He worked a great miracle for me, without leaving the mountain on which He was speaking.»

«What was the matter with your son? »

«It was not my son. It was my husband who had become mad...» and the two women continue speaking in low voices.

«It is true. Also a mother at Arbela had her son redeemed without the Master seeing him » says a man from Arbela and he goes on speaking to some people near him...

«Make way, for pity's sake! Make way! » shout some bearers of a litter which is completely covered.

The crowds open out and the litter goes by with its sorrowful load, and stops at the end of the yard, almost behind a rick of straw. Is it a man or a woman lying on the litter? Who knows!

Two Pharisees come in: they are vainglorious and well preserved and more proud than ever. They assault the poor host as if they were mad, shouting: «You cursed liar! Why did you tell us that He was not here? Are you His accomplice? How dare you despise us, the holy ones in Israel, to favour... Whom, after all? How do you know who He is? What is He to you? »

«What is He? What you are not. But I did not lie. He came a few hours after you had left. He did not hide Himself, neither do I hide Him. But as I am the boss here, I tell you at once: "Get out of my house!". You do not insult the Nazarene here. Do you understand? And if you do not understand my words, I can speak to you in a more factual way, you jackals! »

The robust innkeeper seems so decided to come to blows that the two Pharisees change tone and become like creeping pups menaced by lash. «But we are looking for Him to revere Him! What are you thinking of? The thought that we might not see Him through your fault made us furious. We know Who He is. The holy and blessed Messiah, to Whom we are not worthy to raise our eyes. We are dust, He is the glory of Israel. Take us to Him. Our souls are yearning to hear His words.»

The host imitates their voices and gestures in a wonderful way: «Oh! Of course! And how could I ever suspect it was not so, since I am so well aware of the fame of Pharisees' justice?! Of course! You have come to worship Him! You are yearning for that! I will go and tell Him! I am going... No, by Satan! You shall not follow me! Neither will you, or I will strike you so much, you poisonous mummies, that I will make one knock into the other. Stay here. You stay here, where I am putting you. And you here. And I am sorry I cannot knock you into the ground up to your necks and use you as pegs to tie the pigs to be slaughtered» and he passes from words to deeds by seizing the leaner Pharisee by his armpits, lifting him up and dropping him so violently on the ground, that if it were not very hard the poor fellow would have sunk into it up to his ankles. But the ground is hard and the Pharisee remains standing like a puppet, after being tossed about so much. Then the host gets hold of the other man, and although he is rather fat, the innkeeper raises and drops him with the same fury, and as the Pharisee reacts wriggling, he knocks him down and makes him sit: a bundle of flesh and cloth... He then goes away uttering a nasty word which is lost among the moans of the two and the laughter of many more.

He goes through a corridor into a small yard, he climbs a little staircase, reaches a porched gallery and enters a large room in which Jesus and His group are about to finish their meal with the merchant.

«Two of the four Pharisees have come. You had better see what You must do. For the time being I have seen to them. They wanted to come with me. But I did not want them. They are now down in the yard with many sick people and many others.»

«I will come at once. Thank you, Phara, You may go.»

They all get up. Jesus orders His disciples and the women to stay where they are, with the exception of His Mother, Mary Clopas, Susanna and Salome. But seeing the sad countenance of those who have been excluded, He says: «Go up to the terrace. You will hear Me just the same.»

He goes out with the apostles and the four women. He goes back the same way as

the host came and enters the large yard. The crowds crane their necks to see, and those who are sly climb up on to straw stacks, on carts standing on one side, or on the edge of reservoirs...

The two Pharisees go and meet Him ceremoniously. Jesus greets them with His usual salutation as if they were His most faithful friends. But He does not stop to reply to their unctuous questions: «Are you so few? And without disciples? So they have left You? »

Jesus continuing to walk replies gravely: «No one left Me. You have come from Arbela where you met those who precede Me, and in Judaea you met Judas of Simon, Thomas, Nathanael and Philip.»

The stout Pharisee no longer dare follow Him and he stops all of a sudden blushing. The other, who is more barefaced, insists: «That is true. But as we knew that You were with faithful disciples and with some women, we were surprised at seeing You with so few people. We wanted to see Your new conquests and congratulate You » and he gives a false smile.

«My new conquests? There they are! » and Jesus makes a wide semicircular gesture, pointing at the crowds, which are mainly from the region beyond the Jordan, that is from this region where Bozrah is. And without giving the Pharisee time to retort, He begins to speak.

«Those who previously did not inquire about Me, have been looking for Me. And those who previously did not look for Me have found Me. And I said: "Here I am" to a nation which did not invoke My Name. Glory be to the Lord Who speaks the truth through the lips of the prophets! Looking at this crowd which has gathered round Me I really rejoice in the Lord because I see that the promises, which the Eternal Father made to Me when He sent Me to the world, have been fulfilled. Those promises which I Myself, with the Father and the Paraclete, put in the thoughts, on the lips and in the hearts of the prophets, the promises of which I was aware before becoming Flesh and which encouraged Me to be made flesh. And they encourage Me. Yes, they encourage Me against hatred, malice, mistrust and falsehood. Those who previously did not inquire about Me, have been looking for Me. And those who did not look for Me, have found Me. How come, if I was instead rejected by those to whom I had stretched out My hands saying: "Here I am"? And yet they knew Me, whereas these people here did not know Me. So?

Here is the key to the mystery. It is not a fault to ignore, but it is a fault to deny. And too many of those who know Me and to whom I stretched My hands, have denied Me as if I were illegitimate or a thief, a corrupting demon, because their pride has extinguished their faith and they have gone astray along bad, twisted sinful ways, leaving the way which My voice points out to them. Sin is in the heart, on the table, in the beds, in the hearts, in the minds of this people which rejects Me and which, seeing its own filth reflected everywhere, sees it on Me also, and its bitterness piles it up more and more, and it says to Me: "Go away, because You are unclean".

So what will He say, Who is coming with His robe dyed red, handsome in His garment, and is walking in the power of His strength? Will He accomplish already what Isaiah says, and will He not be quiet, but will He pour on their laps what they deserve? No, He will not. First He has to tread the winepress alone, abandoned by everybody, to make the wine of Redemption. The wine that exhilarates the just and makes them blessed, the wine that exhilarates the guilty of the great sin, to crush their sacrilegious power into crumbs. Yes, My wine, which is maturing hour by hour in the sun of Eternal Love, will be the ruin and salvation of many, as it is stated in a prophecy not yet written, but deposited in the unsplit rock from which the Vine giving the Wine of eternal Life sprang up.

Do you understand? No, you doctors of Israel do not understand. But it does not matter whether you understand. The darkness of which Isaiah speaks is descending upon you: "They have eyes and do not see. They have ears and do not hear". You shield the Light with your hatred, so that one can say that the Light was repelled by darkness and the world refused to know it.

But exult, you who were in the dark and believed in the Light which was announced to you, and you desired it, sought it and found it. Exult, o faithful people who have come to Salvation crossing mountains, valleys and lakes without considering the burden of the long journey. The same applies to the other spiritual journey which will take you, o people of Bozrah, from the darkness of ignorance to the light of Wisdom.

Exult, o people of Hauran! Exult in the joy of knowledge. Truly it refers also to you and to your neighbouring peoples, when the Prophet sings that your camels and dromedaries will crowd the streets of Naphtali and Zebulun to worship the true God, and to be His servants in the holy mild law, which does not impose anything in order to give divine paternity and eternal happiness but compliance with the ten commandments of the Lord: to love the true God with one's whole being, to love one's neighbour as oneself, to keep the Sabbath without desecrating it, to honour one's parents, not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to bear false witness, not to covet the wife or property of other people. Oh! you are blessed. If coming from farther away you will go beyond those who belonged to the house of the Lord and went out of it, urged by the ten commandments of Satan: dislike of God, love of oneself, corruption of cult, harshness towards parents, murderous desire, attempt to steal other people's holiness, fornication with Satan, false witness, envy of the nature and mission of the Word, and the horrible sin which ferments and matures in the depth of hearts, of too many hearts.

Exult, you who are thirsty! Exult, you who are hungry! Exult, you who are afflicted! Were you rejected? Were you proscribed? Were you despised? Were you strangers? Come! Exult! It is no longer so. I give you homes, wealth, paternity and fatherland. I give you Heaven. Follow Me, because I am the Saviour! Follow Me, because I am the Redeemer! Follow Me, because I am the Life! Follow Me, because I am He to Whom the Father refuses no grace! Exult in My love! Exult! And that you may realise that I love you, you who have sought Me in your sorrows, you who have believed in Me even before knowing Me, that this may be a day of true exultation, I pray thus: "Father, Holy Father! On all the wounds, diseases, sores of bodies, on the grief, tortures, remorse of hearts, on all the faithful who are springing up, on those who are vacillating, on those who are strengthening, let health, grace, peace descend! Peace in My Name! Grace in Your Name! Health through Our reciprocal love! Bless them, o Most Holy Father! Gather and form one fold with these lost children of Yours and Mine! Let them be where I will be, one with You, Holy Father, with You, with Me and with the Most Divine Spirit".»

Jesus, with His arms stretched out crosswise, His palms upwards towards the sky, His face raised, His voice blaring like a silver tuba, is overwhelming in His speech... He remains thus, silent, for some moments. Then His sapphire eyes stop looking at the sky to look at the large yard crowded with people who are sighing deeply moved or are quivering with hope; He joins His hands moving them forward and with a smile which transfigures Him, He utters a final cry: «Exult, you who believe and hope! People of sufferers, rise and love the Lord your God!»

The healing of the diseased is simultaneous and general. Trilling voices and roaring shouts praise the Saviour. A woman squeezes through the crowd, from the far end of the yard, dragging the sheet that had covered her and collapses at the feet of the Lord. This time the terrified crowds utter a different shout: «Mary, the leprous wife of Joachim! » and they run in all directions.

«Be not afraid! She is cured. Contact with her can do you no harm » says Jesus reassuring them. And He says to the prostrated female: «Stand up, woman. You have been rewarded for your great hope and you are forgiven for neglecting prudence towards your brothers. Go back home after the salutary ablutions.»

The woman, who is young and quite beautiful, stands up weeping. Jesus shows her to the crowds who have come back and admire the miracle shouting out of astonishment.

«Her husband, who adored her, had built a shelter for her at the end of his fields and went to its border every evening and gave her some food weeping...»

«She became infected through her pity, taking care of a beggar who did not say that he was a leper.»

«But how did Mary, the good woman, come here? »

«On that litter. How did we not notice Joachim's two servants? »

«They ran the risk of being stoned for that.»

«Their mistress! They love her, she is so kind that they love her more than themselves...»

Jesus makes a gesture and they all become silent: «You can see that love and goodness bring miracles and joy. So, be good. Go, woman. No one will do you any harm. Peace be with you and with your household.»

The woman, followed by the servants who have burnt the litter in the middle of

the yard, goes out and many people follow her.
Jesus dismisses the crowd after listening to some people and He retires to the house followed by those who were with Him.
«What words, Master! »
«How transfigured You were! »
«What a voice! »
«And what miracles! »
«Did you see the Pharisees flee? »
«They went away like two creeping lizards immediately after the first words.»
«The people of Bozrah and of all the villages here have a wonderful recollection of You...»
«Mother, what do You say? »
«I bless You, Son, on their behalf and Mine.»
«Well, Your blessing will follow Me until we meet again.»
«Why do You say that, Lord? Are the women leaving us? »
«Yes, Simon, Tomorrow at daybreak Alexander is leaving for Aera. We will go with him as far as the road to Arbela and we will then leave him. And with regret, believe Me, Alexander, because you have been a kind guide for the Pilgrim. I will always remember you, Alexander.»
The old man is moved. He is standing with his arms folded on his chest, in the deep eastern salutation, bending a little in front of Jesus. But when he hears His words, he says: «Above all, remember me when You are in Your Kingdom.»
«Do you wish that, Misace? »
«Yes, my Lord.»
«I also wish something of you.»
«Which, Lord? If I can I will give it to You, even if it were the most precious thing I possess.»
It is the most precious. I want your soul. Come to Me. I told you, at the beginning of our journey, that I hoped to give you a gift at the end of it. My gift is Faith. Do you believe in Me, Misace? »
«I do believe, Lord.»
«Then sanctify your soul so that faith may not be for you not only an inert but also a harmful gift.»
«My soul is old. But I will endeavour to make it new. Lord, I am an old sinner. Absolve me and bless me, because as from this moment I am beginning a new life. I will take Your blessing with me as the best escort in my journey towards Your Kingdom... Shall we ever meet again, Lord? »
«Not on this earth. But you will hear of Me and you will believe even more because I will not leave you without evangelization. Goodbye, Misace. We shall not have much time tomorrow to say goodbye to each other. Let us do so now, before taking our food together for the last time.» He embraces and kisses him. The apostles and disciples also do so. The women greet him all together. But Misace kneels down almost in front of Mary saying: «May Your light of a pure morning star shine in my mind until my death.»
«Until Life, Alexander. Love My Son and you will love Me, and I will love you.»
Simon Peter asks: «But shall we be going from Arbela to Aera? I am afraid we may be caught in bad weather. There is so much fog... We have had it for three days at dawn and sunset...»
«That is because we have been coming down here. Do you not think that we have come down a good deal? It is so. Tomorrow you will be climbing towards the mountains of the Decapolis and there will be no more fog there » explains Misace.
«Come down? When? It was a flat road...»
«Yes, but in continuous descent. Oh! so slowly that one does not notice it. But in many miles...»
«How long shall we be staying at Arbela? »
«You, James and Judas, not even one hour » replies Jesus resolutely.
«James and Judas... I... not even one hour? And where am I going if I am not staying with you all? »
«You are going away. As far as the land in the guardianship of Chuza. You will take My Mother and the women there, with the others. They will then proceed by themselves with Johanna's servants and you will come back and join Me at Aera.»
«Oh! Lord! You are angry with me and You are punishing me... How much You grieve me, Lord! »

«Simon, he feels that he is punished who knows that he is guilty. Being guilty must grieve you, not the punishment in itself. But I do not think that it is a punishment to accompany My Mother and the women disciples on their way back home.»

«But would it not be better if You came with us? Never mind Aera and these places and come with us.»

«I promised to go and I will go.»

«Then I will come, too.»

«You will obey without complaining, as My brothers do.»

«And if You meet some Pharisees? »

«You are certainly not the most suitable to convert them. It is just because I will meet some that I want you, James and Judas to go away with the women and with John of Endor and Marjiam before Arbela.»

«Ah!... I see! All right.»

Jesus turns round to the women and blesses them one by one, giving each of them suitable advice.

The Magdalene on bending to kiss the feet of her Saviour asks: «Shall I see You again before I go back to Bethany? »

«Most certainly, Mary. In the month of Ethanim I will be on the lake.»

293. Farewell to the Women Disciples.

3rd October 1945.

The reverential respect of Misace is shown the following morning, when he makes the pilgrims go the first miles on the camels after adjusting their loads, turning them into comfortable cradles for the inexperienced riders. And it is quite funny to see dark or fair-haired heads emerging from bundles and cases, with long hair reaching down to the men's ears, or tresses showing through the women's veils. As the camels are moving very fast, the wind now and again blows back the veils and the bright golden hair of Mary Magdalene or the milder fair hair of the Blessed Virgin shines in the sunshine, while the dark or brown-haired heads of Johanna, Syntyche, Martha, Marcella, Susanna and Sarah show indigo or dark bronze reflections, and the grey-haired heads of Eliza, Salome and Mary Clopas seem to be sprayed with silver dust in the clear warm sun. The men are proceeding bravely on the new means of transport and Marjiam is laughing happily.

They realise that the merchant's statement is true, when, turning round, they see Bozrah down in the valley, with its towers and high houses in the labyrinth of the narrow streets. Low hills appear to the north-west. The road to Aera runs at their feet; the caravan stops to let the pilgrims dismount and part. The camels kneel down with remarkable pitching which makes more than one woman scream. I now see that wisely the women had been fastened to the saddles with belts. The women are somewhat stunned with so much rolling, but they are well rested.

Misace dismounts as well; he had taken Marjiam up on his saddle, and while the cameleers resettle the loads in the usual way, he approaches Jesus to bid Him goodbye once again.

«Thank you, Misace. You have saved us a lot of fatigue and time.»

«Yes. We have covered twenty miles in a short time. The camels have long legs, even if they do not amble smoothly. I do hope that the women have not suffered too much because of that.»

All the women reassure him that they are well rested and have not suffered.

«You are now six miles from Arbela. May Heaven accompany you and make your journey smooth. Goodbye, my Lord. Allow me to kiss Your holy feet. I am happy to have met You, Lord. Remember me.» Misace kisses Jesus' feet, he mounts again and his cry makes the camels rise... And the caravan leaves at a gallop on the flat road, in a cloud of dust.

«A good man! I am all bruised, but in compensation, my feet have had a rest. But how much knocking! A north wind storm on the lake is nothing in comparison! Are you laughing? But I did not have the cushions the women had. Long live my boat! It is still the cleanest and safest thing. And now let us pick up our bags and move on.»

They compete with one another in loading themselves. The winners are those who will be staying with Jesus, that is, Matthew, the Zealot, James and John, Ermasteus and Timoneus, who take everything to spare the three who will be going with the women, or rather the four, because there is also John of Endor, whose help must be very relative, owing to the poorly state he is in.

They walk fast for a few miles. When they reach the top of a low hill which acted as a screen to the west, a fertile plain appears, surrounded by a ring of hills, which are higher than the one they met previously, and in the middle of the plain there is a long isolated hill. There is a town in the plain: Arbela. They descend and are soon in the plain.

They proceed for a little while, then Jesus stops saying: «This is where we part. Let us take our food together and then we shall part. This is the cross-road to Gadara. You will take that road. It is the shortest one and before evening you will be in the territory watched over by Chuza.»

There is not much enthusiasm... But they obey.

While taking their food Marjiam says: «Well, it is also the moment to give You this pouch. The merchant gave it to me when I was in the saddle with him. He said to me: "You will give it to Jesus before parting from Him and you will tell Him to love me as He loves you". Here it is. It was heavy here, in my tunic. It seems to be full of stones.»

«Let us see! Money is heavy! » They are all curious.

Jesus undoes the thin twisted leather strips which fasten the pouch made with gazelle leather, I think, because it looks like chamois leather, and empties its contents on His lap. Some coins roll out. But they are the least. Many small bags of very fine byssus roll out as well: little bundles tied with a thread. Beautiful hues shine through the very light linen tissue and the sun seems to light a tiny fire in each little bundle, as if they were embers under a thin veil of ash.

«What is it? Undo them, Master.»

They are all bending over Jesus Who calmly unties the knot of a little bundle shining with golden reflections: topazes of various sizes, still unrefined, sparkle freely in the sun. Another little bundle: rubies, drops of coagulated blood. Another one: a precious delightful display of green emerald chips. Another one: bits of sky in pure sapphires. Another one: languid amethysts. Another: violet indigo of beryls. Another: wonderful black onyxes... And so on for twelve little bundles. In the last one, the heaviest, a golden sparkling of chrysolites, there is a small parchment: «For Your Rational (1) of true Pontiff and King ».

Jesus' lap is a little meadow strewn with bright stripped petals... The apostles plunge their hands into that light which has become many-coloured matter. They are bewildered...

Peter whispers: «If Judas of Kerioth were here!...»

«Be quiet! It is better that he is not » says Thaddeus resolutely.

Jesus asks for a piece of cloth to make one parcel only of the stones and He is pensive while the others continue commenting.

The apostles say: «That man was rich indeed! » and Peter makes everybody laugh exclaiming: «We have been trotting on a throne of gems. I did not think I was sitting an such splendour. I wish it had been softer! What will You do with it now? »

«I will sell it for the poor.» He looks up at the women smiling.

«And where will You find a jeweller here, who can buy those things? »

«Where? Here. Johanna, Martha, Mary, will you buy My treasure? »

The three women, without even consulting with one another, say: «Yes » impulsively. But Martha adds: «We have little money here.»

«You will let Me have it at Magdala at the new moon.»

«How much do You want, Lord? »

«For Myself, nothing. For My poor, very much.»

«Give me it. You will have very much » says the Magdalene, and she takes the purse and conceals it in her breast.

(1) The Rational was the precious pectoral of judgement worn by the High Priest when he went into the presence of Yahweh (See Exodus 28, 15-30).

Jesus keeps only the money. He stands up. He kisses His Mother, His aunt His cousins and then he kisses Peter, John of Endor and Marjiam. He blesses the women and dismisses them. And they go away, looking back now and again, until they disappear round a bend.

Jesus goes with the rest towards Arbela. It is only a small group now, only eight people in all. They walk fast without speaking towards the town which is becoming closer and closer.

294. At Arbela.

4th October 1945.

The very first person they approach when inquiring about Philip of Jacob makes them realise how much work the young disciple has done. The person they asked is a little old wrinkled woman, who is carrying with difficulty a jug full of water. Gazing with her little deep-set eyes at the handsome face of John who asked her the question, after greeting her «Peace be with you » so gently as to enrapture her, she says: «Are you the Messiah? »

«No. But I am His disciple. He is coming, He is over there.»

The old woman puts her jug on the ground and hobbles in the direction pointed out to her and kneels down in front of Jesus.

John, who has remained with Simon near the pitcher which has turned over spilling half of its contents, says to his companion smiling: «We had better pick up this jug and join the old woman.» He does so while his companion adds: «We can use it to drink. We are all thirsty.»

When they reach the old woman - who not knowing what to say exactly continues to repeat: «Lovely, holy Son of the most holy Mother » still on her knees and drinking in with her eyes the figure of Jesus, Who smiles at her repeating in His turn: «Stand up, mother » - when they reach her, John says to her: «We have taken your jug. But it turned over and there is little water left in it. If you give it to us, we will drink this water and then we will fill the jug for you.» «Yes, my sons, of course. And I am sorry that I have but water for you. I wish I had milk in my breast as when I fed my Judas, in order to give you the sweetest thing there is on the earth: the milk of a mother. I would like to have wine, choice wine, to strengthen you. But Marianne of Elisha is old and poor...» «Your water is wine and milk to Me, mother, because it is given with love » replies Jesus and He is the first to drink out of the jug handed to Him by John. Then the others drink.

The old woman, who has at last stood up, looks at them as if she were looking at Paradise and when, after they have all drunk, she sees that they are about to throw away the water left in the jug, to fill it at the fountain gurgling at the end of the street, she rushes forward, defending her jug and saying: «No, don't. This water is more holy than lustral water, as He drank out of it. I will keep it carefully so that I may be cleansed with it when I die.» And she seizes her jug saying: «I will take it home. I have some more and I will fill them. But come first, o Holy One, that I may show You Philip's house » and she trots along swiftly, all bent, with a smile on her wrinkled face and her little eyes shining with joy. She trots along holding the hem of Jesus' mantle in her hand, as if she were afraid He might run away from her, and she defends her jug from the insistent apostles, who do not want her to carry that weight. She trots along blissfully, looking at the street and the houses in Arbela, the former deserted, the latter already closed as it is getting dark, and she looks like a conquerer, happy in her victory.

Finally, they pass from the side street into a more central one, where there are people hastening home - and the people watch her spellbound, pointing at her and questioning her - and, after waiting to have a circle of people around her, she shouts: «I have here Philip's Messiah. Run and tell everybody and first of all Jacob's household. So that they may be ready to honour the Saint.» She shouts at the top of her voice. She can make herself obeyed. It is the moment of authority of a poor, lonely, unknown little old woman of the people. And she sees the whole town deeply moved by her command.

Jesus, so much taller than she is, smiles at her when she looks at Him now and again and He lays His hand on her venerable head, in a filial caress which overwhelms her with happiness.

Jacob's house is in a central street. It is open and lit up and through the door one can see a long hall in which there are people holding lights, and they rush out joyfully as soon as Jesus appears in the street: the young disciple Philip, his father and mother, relatives, servants and friends.

Jesus stops and replies gravely to Jacob's deep bow, He then bends over Philip's mother who has knelt down to revere Him, and He makes her stand up blessing her and saying: «Be always happy because of your faith.» He then greets the disciple who has come with the other man who was with him, and whom Jesus greets as well. Old Marianne, however, does not leave the hem of the mantle or her place beside Jesus until they are about to enter the entrance hall. She then whispers: «Bless me that I may be happy! You will now stay here... I am going to my poor house and... and this beautiful thing is all over! » How much regret there is in her ageing voice!

Jacob, to whom his wife has spoken in a low voice, says: «No, Marianne of Elisha. Stay in my house as if you were a disciple. Stay as long as the Master will be with us and be thus happy.»

«May God bless you, man. You know what charity is.»

«Master... she brought You to my house. You have brought me grace and love. I am only giving back, and in a poor way, what I have received from You and from her so abundantly. Come in, and let my house welcome You.»

The crowds outside in the street see them go in and shout: «And what about us? We want to hear His word.»

Jesus turns round: «It is night and you are tired. Prepare your souls through a holy rest and tomorrow you will hear the Voice of God. For the time being, peace and blessings be with you.» And the front door closes on the happiness of this house.

James of Zebedee watches the Lord during the purification after the journey:

«Perhaps it was better to speak at once and depart at dawn. There are some Pharisees in town. Philip told me. They will vex You.»

«Those who might have been vexed by them are far away. The trouble they may cause Me is of no importance. There is love that will cancel it...»

The following morning... Jesus goes out among the joyful relatives of Philip and the apostles. The old woman follows them. He meets the people of Arbela who are patiently waiting for Him. He goes to the main square where He begins to speak.

«We read in the eighth chapter of the second book of Ezra, what I will now repeat to you: "When the seventh month came..." (Jesus says to me: "Do not write anything else. I will repeat the words of the book in full").

When does a people return to its country? When it goes back to the land of its ancestors. I have come to take you back to the land of your Father, to the Kingdom of the Father. And I can do that because I was sent for that. So I have come to take You to the Kingdom of God and it is therefore fair to compare you to those who repatriated with Zorobabel to Jerusalem, the city of the Lord, and it is fair to do with you what Ezra the scribe did with the people gathered once again within the sacred walls. Because it is incomparable foolishness to rebuild a town dedicating it to the Lord, without restoring souls, which are like as many little towns of God.

How can these little spiritual towns, dilapidated by so many events, be restored? Which materials should be used to make them solid, beautiful, lasting? The materials are in the precepts of the Lord: the ten commandments, of which you are aware, because Philip, a son of your town and My disciple, has reminded you of them. The two most holy of the holy precepts are: "Love God with your whole being. Love your neighbour as yourself". They sum up the Law. And I preach them because through them you are certain to conquer the Kingdom of God. In love you find the strength of persevering in holiness or becoming holy, the strength of forgiveness, the strength of heroism in virtue. Everything can be found in love. Fear does not save: the fear of the judgement of God, the fear of human sanctions, the fear of diseases. Fear is never constructive. It shakes, shatters, throws into disorder, it crushes. Fear leads to despair, it leads only to crafty concealment of evil-doing, it makes one fear when fear is useless, because evil is already within us.

Who thinks of behaving wisely, for the sake of his body, when one is healthy? No

one. But as soon as the first shiver of fever runs through our veins or a stain makes us think of unclean diseases, then fear becomes an added torture to the disease and it becomes a disintegrating strength in a body already broken down by illness. Love instead is constructive. It builds, solidifies, unites and preserves. Love brings hope in God. Love removes from evil-doing. Love makes man deal wisely with his own person, which is not the centre of the universe, as egotists believe and make it, the false lovers of themselves, because they love one part only: the less noble one, to the detriment of the immortal and holy part; but which it is our duty to preserve healthy, as long as God so wishes, in order to be useful to ourselves, to our relatives, to our town and to the whole country.

Diseases inevitably come. It is not true that every disease is the consequence of vice or punishment. There are holy diseases sent by the Lord to His just people, so that in the world, which considers itself the end and the means of pleasure, there may be holy people who are like war-hostages for the safety of others, and they pay personally expiating through their suffering, the portion of guilt which the world daily accumulates and which would end by crashing on Mankind, burying it under its malediction.

Do you remember old Moses praying while Joshua was fighting in the name of the Lord? You must consider that those who suffer holily, give the greatest battle to the fiercest warrior there is in the world, concealed under the appearances of men and peoples, to Satan, the Torturer, the Origin of all evils, and they fight on behalf of all men. But how much difference there is between such holy diseases sent by God, and those caused by vice through a sinful love of senses! The former are a proof of God's merciful will; the latter are a proof of diabolical corruption. It is therefore necessary to love, in order to be holy, because love creates, preserves and sanctifies.

Like Nehemiah and Ezra, I also, announcing this truth, say to you: "This day is sacred to the Lord our God. Do not be mournful, do not weep". Because all mourning ends, when one lives the day of the Lord. The harshness of death comes to an end, because the loss of a son, of a husband, a father, mother or brother becomes a temporary and limited separation. Temporary because it ends with our death. Limited because it is confined to the body and sense. Our soul does not lose anything when a relative of ours dies. Its freedom is limited in one party only, in us, as survivors with our souls still enclosed in the flesh, while the other party, the one who has passed to second life, enjoys the liberty and power to watch over us and obtain for us much more than when it loved us from the prison of its body.

Like Nehemiah and Ezra I say to you: "Go, eat the fat meat, drink the sweet wine and send a portion to the man who has none, for this day is sacred to the Lord, and therefore nobody must suffer during it. Do not be sad, because the joy of the Lord Who is among you, is the stronghold of those who receive the grace of the Most High Lord within their walls and in their hearts".

You can no longer erect Tabernacles. Their time is over. But erect spiritual ones in your hearts. Climb the mountain, that is, rise towards Perfection. Gather branches of olive, myrtle, palm, oak, hyssop and of every beautiful tree. Branches of the virtues of peace, purity, heroism, mortification, strength, hope, justice, of all virtues. Adorn your souls celebrating the feast of the Lord. His Tabernacles are awaiting you. His. And they are beautiful, holy, eternal, open to all those who live in the Lord. And together with Me, decide today to do penance for the past and to begin a new life.

Do not be afraid of the Lord. He calls you because He loves you. Be not afraid. You are His children like everybody in Israel. Also for you He created the Universe and Heaven, He sent Abraham and Moses, He opened the sea, He created the guiding cloud, He descended from Heaven to give the Law, and He opened the clouds that they might rain manna, and He made the rocks fruitful that they might give water. And now for you also He is sending the living Bread of Heaven to satisfy your hunger and the true Vine and the Fountain of eternal Life to quench your thirst. And through My lips He says to you: "Enter and possess the Land over which I have raised My hand to give it to you". My spiritual Land: the Kingdom of Heaven.»

The crowds exchange enthusiastic words... Then it is the turn of sick people. There are so many. Jesus has them lined up in two rows, and while this is being done, He asks Philip of Arbela: «Why did you not cure them? »

«That they might have what I had: to be cured by You.»
 Jesus passes blessing the sick people one by one and the usual prodigy is repeated: the blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, cripples stand straight, fever and weakness cease.
 The healing is over. At the end, after the last sick person, there are the two Pharisees who went to Bozrah together with two more. «Peace to You, Master. Are You not saying anything to us? »
 «I spoke to everybody.»
 «But we do not need those words. We are the saints of Israel.»
 «To you, who are masters, I say: comment upon the subsequent chapter, the ninth of the second book of Ezra, remembering how many times so far God has had mercy on you, and repeat the end of the chapter, as if it were a prayer, beating your chests.»
 «Quite right, Master, quite right. And do Your disciples do it? »
 «They do. It is the first thing I exact of them.»
 «All of them? Also the murderers who are in Your group? »
 «Does blood smell bad to you? »
 «It is a voice crying to Heaven.»
 «Then do not imitate those who shed it.»
 «We are not assassins! »
 Jesus gazes at them piercing them with His eyes. They dare not add one word for some time. But they follow the group which goes back to the house of Philip, who feels bound to invite them to enter and join in the banquet.
 «With great pleasure! We will stay longer with the Master » they say bowing very low.
 But once in the house they behave like bloodhounds... They watch, they peek, they ask the servants astute questions, and they approach even the old woman, who seems to be attracted by Jesus as iron is by a magnet. But she replies promptly: «Yesterday I saw these only. You must be dreaming. I brought them here, and there was only one John: that fair-haired boy who is as good as an angel.»
 They fulminate against the old woman and turn elsewhere. But a servant, without replying to them directly, bends over Jesus, who is sitting speaking to the landlord, and asks Him: «Where is John of Endor? This gentleman is looking for him.»
 The Pharisee casts a withering glance at the servant and stigmatises him as a «fool ». But Jesus is now aware of their intentions and it is necessary to remedy in the best possible manner. The Pharisee says: «It was to congratulate You, Master, on this wonder of Your doctrine and honour You through the convert.»
 «John is far away for good and he will be farther and farther away.»
 «Has he relapsed into sin? »
 «No. He is ascending towards Heaven. Imitate him, and you will find him in the next life.»
 The four do not know what to say and they wisely change the subject. The servants announce that the meal is ready and they all go into the dining-room.

295. Going to Aera.
 6th October 1945.

Arbela also is now far away. In the group there are also Philip of Arbela and the other disciple, whose name I hear is Mark.
 The road is muddy because of the heavy rain. The sky is overcast. A little river, but quite worthy of this name, crosses the road to Aera. Swollen with the rain which has stormed in this area it is certainly not sky-blue; it is reddish yellow as if the water had been flowing through ferrous ground.
 «The weather is now bad. You did the right thing in sending the women away. It is no longer the season for them to be on the roads » states James sententiously.
 And Simon the Zealot, who is always calm in his devotion to the Master, proclaims: «Everything He does, the Master does well. He is not dull like us. He sees and arranges everything for the best, and more to our behalf than to His

own.»

John, who is happy to be beside Him, looks up at Him with a smiling face and exclaims: «You are the dearest and best Master the earth ever had, has or will have, besides being the most holy.»

«Those Pharisees... What a disappointment! Also the bad weather has helped to convince them that John of Endor was not there. But why are they so hostile to him? » asks Ermasteus, who is very fond of John of Endor.

Jesus replies: «Their hatred is not against him or because of him. He is an implement which they manoeuvre against Me.»

Philip of Arbela says: «Well the rain has more than convinced them that it was useless to wait for and suspect John of Endor. Long live the rain! It served also to keep You in my house for five days.»

«I wonder how worried those at Aera are! It is surprising that my brother has not come to meet us » says Andrew.

«Meet us? He will be following us » remarks Matthew.

«No. He was taking the road along the lake. Because he was going from Gadara to the lake and by boat to Bethsaida to see his wife and tell her that the boy is at Nazareth and that he will be soon going back. From Bethsaida through Merom he will take the road to Damascus for a little while, and then the road to Aera. He is certainly at Aera.»

There is silence. Then John says smiling: «But that little old woman, Lord! »

«I thought that You were going to grant her the joy of dying on Your chest, as You did with Saul of Kerioth » remarks Simon Zealot.

«I have loved her even more. Because I will wait to call her to Me, when the Christ is about to open the gates of Heaven. The little mother will not have to wait long for Me. She now lives with her remembrance, and with the assistance of your father, Philip, her life will not be so sad. I bless you and your relatives once again.»

John's joy is darkened by a cloud thicker than the ones in the sky. Jesus notices it and asks: «Are you not glad that the old woman will soon be coming to Paradise? »

«Yes... but I am not as it means that You will be going... Why die, Lord? »

«Those who are born of woman, die.»

«Will You have her only? »

«Oh! no! How joyfully will those proceed, whom I save as God, and whom I loved as man...»

They cross two more little rivers, one close to the other. It is beginning to rain on the flat region which stretches in front of the pilgrims after they have climbed the hills at the junction with the road, which follows a valley and runs northwards. A mighty mountain chain appears to the north, or rather to the north-west, but more north than west, with many clouds piling on the mountain tops, forming almost unreal new tops on the real ones, covered with woods on the sides and with snow on the peaks. But the chain is very far away.

«There is water down here, and snow up there. That is the chain of the Hermon.

It has covered its summit with a large white blanket. If there is sunshine at Aera, you will see how beautiful it looks when the sun tinges the high peak with pink » says Timoneus, who is urged by the love for his fatherland to praise the beauty of the country.

«But it is raining now. Is Aera still far? » asks Matthew.

«Yes, very. We shall not be there until this evening.»

«In that case, may God save us from aches and pains » concludes Matthew, who is not very keen on walking in such weather.

They are all wrapped up in their mantles, under which they hold their travelling sacks to protect them from dampness, so that they may change their clothes on arrival, as the ones they are wearing are dripping wet and the bottom parts are heavy with mud.

Jesus is ahead of them, engrossed in thought. The others are nibbling at their pieces of bread and John says jokingly: «There is no need to look for fountains to quench our thirst. It is enough to hold sore heads back and open our mouths and the angels will give us water.»

Ermasteus, who being young is like Philip of Arbela and John so lucky as to take everything humorously, says: «Simon of Jonah was complaining of the camels. But I would rather be on one of those towers shaken by an earthquake than in this mud. What do you think? »

And John: «I say that I am comfortable everywhere, providing Jesus is there...»
The three young men go on talking incessantly. The four older ones quicken their steps and reach Jesus. The remaining couple, that is, Timoneus and Mark follow the rest speaking...

«Master, Judas of Simon will be at Aera...» says Andrew.

«Of course. And Thomas, Nathanael and Philip will be with him.»

«Master... I will regret these peaceful days » says James with a sigh.

«You must not say that, James.»

«I know... But I cannot help it...» and he draws another deep sigh.

«There will be also Simon Peter with My brothers. Does that not make you happy? »

«It does, very much! Master, why is Judas of Simon so different from us? »

«Why do rain and sunshine, warm and cold, light and darkness alternate? »

«Because it is not possible to have the same situation all the time. Life would come to an end on the earth.»

«Quite right, James.»

«Yes, but that has got nothing to do with Judas.»

«Tell Me. Why are all the stars not like the sun, that is, huge, warm, beautiful, mighty? »

«Because... because the earth would go on fire with so much heat.»

«Why are the trees not all like those walnut-trees? By trees I mean all vegetables.»

«Because animals would not be able to eat of them.»

«Well, why are they not all like grass? »

«Because... we would have no wood to light fires, to build houses, to make tools, carts, boats, furniture.»

«Why are the birds not all eagles, and the animals are not all elephants or camels? »

«We would be in a mess if it were so! »

«So, do you think that such varieties are a good thing? »

«Undoubtedly.»

«So you think... Why, according to you, did God make them? »

«To give us all possible help.»

«So, for a good purpose. Are you sure? »

«As I am sure that I am now alive.»

«Well, if you consider that it is right that there should be different kinds of animals, vegetables and stars, why do you expect all men to be alike? Each man has his mission and his temperament. Do you think that the infinite variety of species is a sign of the power or powerlessness of the Creator? »

«Of His power. One species enhances another.»

«Very well. Judas also serves the same purpose, as you do with your companions, and your companions with you. You have thirty-two teeth in your mouth and if you examine them carefully, you will see that one is quite different from another. Not only in their three basic groups, but each individually in its group. And consider their task when you eat. You will see that also those which seem of little use and to be doing little work, are instead the ones which fulfil the first task of breaking the bread and conveying it to others which crunch it and then pass it to others which turn it into soft pulp. Is it not so? You think that Judas does nothing or does wrong. I remind you that he evangelized southern Judaea very well, and, as you said yourself, he is very tactful with Pharisees.»
«That is true.»

Matthew remarks: «He is also very clever in collecting money for the poor. He can ask for it better than I can... Probably because money disgusts me now.»

Simon Zealot bends his head and he blushes so much that his face turns crimson.

Andrew notices it and asks him: «Are you not feeling well? »

«No... Fatigue... I don't know.»

Jesus gazes at him and he blushes more and more. But Jesus does not say anything.

Timoneus comes forward running: «Master, over there you can see the village before Aera. We can stop there or get some donkeys.»

«The rain is now ceasing. It is better to go on.»

«As You wish, Master. But, if You allow, I will go ahead.»

«You may go.»

Timoneus runs away with Mark. And Jesus remarks smiling: «He wants us to have a

triumphal entrance.»

They are all together in a group once again. Jesus lets them get excited talking about the difference of regions and He then withdraws to the rear of the group taking the Zealot with Him. As soon as they are alone He asks: «Why did you blush, Simon? »

The apostle turns crimson again but does not reply. Jesus repeats His question. Simon blushes more and more but remains silent. Jesus asks him once again.

«My Lord, You already know! Why do You want me to tell You? » shouts the Zealot sorrowfully, as if he were tortured.

«Are you certain? »

«He did not deny it. But he said: "I do so because I am provident. I have common sense. The Master never thinks of the future". Which we can say is true. But... it is always... it is always... Master, tell me the right word.»

«It is always a proof that Judas is only a "man". He cannot elevate himself to be a spirit. But, you are all more or less alike. You are afraid of silly things. You worry about useless providence. You cannot believe that Providence is powerful and always present. Well: let us keep that to ourselves. All right? »

«Yes, Master.»

There is silence. Then Jesus says: «We shall soon be going back to the lake... A little concentration after so much travelling will be lovely. You and I will be going to Nazareth for some time, towards the feast of the Dedication. You are alone... The others will be with their families. You will stay with Me.»

«My Lord, Judas, Thomas and Matthew are also alone.»

«Do not worry about that. Everyone will celebrate the festivity in his own family. Matthew has a sister. You are alone. Unless you want to go to Lazarus...»

«No, Lord » exclaims Simon. «No. I love Lazarus. But to be with You is to be in Paradise. Thank You, Lord » and he kisses Jesus' hand.

They have just left the little village behind when, in another heavy shower Timoneus and Mark appear on the flooded road shouting: «Stop! Simon Peter is coming with some donkeys. I met him on the way. He has been coming for three days to this place with the donkeys, always in the rain.»

They stop under a thicket of oak-trees which shelter them somewhat from the downpour. And then Peter appears riding a donkey and leading a line of donkeys; he looks like a friar under the blanket which covers his head and shoulders.

«May God bless You, Master! I said that He would be drenched like one who had fallen into the lake! Come on, quick, all of you, mount the donkeys, because Aera has been on fire for three days, as the people have kept the fireplaces lit to dry You! Quick... Look what a state He is in! But you... could you not keep Him back? Ah! if I am not there! But I say: just look at that! His hair is hanging as if he were drowned. You must be frozen. In all this rain! How thoughtless! And what about you all? You reckless ones! And you first of all, my stupid brother, and all the rest of you. How pretty you all look! You are like sacks soaked in a pond. Come on, quick. I will never trust Him to you again. I am almost dying with horror...»

«And with talking, Simon » says Jesus calmly while His donkey trots along beside Peter's at the head of the caravan of donkeys. Jesus repeats: «And with talking. And with talking uselessly. You have not told Me whether the others have arrived. Whether the women left. Whether your wife is well. You have told Me nothing.»

«I will tell You everything. But why did You leave in all this rain? »

«And why did you come? »

«Because I was anxious to see You, my Master.»

«Because I was anxious to join you, My Simon.»

«Oh! My dear Master! How much I love You! Wife, boy, house? They are nothing, nothing is beautiful without You. Do You believe that I love You so much? »

«I do. I know who you are, Simon.»

«Who? »

«A big boy full of little faults, under which so many lovely qualities are buried. But one is not buried. And that is your honesty in everything. Well, who was there at Aera? »

«Your brothers Judas and James, Judas of Kerioth with the others. Judas seems to have done a lot of good. Everybody praises him...»

«Did he ask you any questions? »

«Oh! So many! I did not reply to any of them, I said that I did not know anything. In fact, what do I know, except that I took the women as far as Gadara? You know... I did not tell him anything about John of Endor. He thinks that John is with You. You ought to tell the others.»

«No. Like you, they do not know where John is. There is no point in saying anything else. But all these donkeys!... For three days!... What an expense! And the poor? »

«The poor... Judas has loads of money and he sees to them. The donkeys cost me nothing. The people of Aera would have given me a thousand for You, without any charge. I had to raise my voice against them to avoid coming here with an army of donkeys. Timoneus is right. Everybody believes in You here. They are better than we are...» and he sighs.

«Simon, Simon! In Trans-Jordan they honoured us; a galley-slave, some heathen women, prostitutes, women gave you a lesson in perfection. Remember that, Simon of Jonah. Always.»

«I will try, Lord. Here are the first people from Aera. Look how many! There is the mother of Timoneus. There are Your brothers among the crowds. There are the disciples whom You sent ahead of those who came with Judas of Kerioth. And there is the richest man in Aera with his servants. He wanted You to stay in his house. But Timoneus' mother asserted her rights and You will be staying with her. Look, look! They are irritated because the rain is putting out their torches. There are many sick people, You know. They remained in town, near the gates, to see You at once. A man who owns a timber store sheltered them under the sheds. The poor people have been there for three days, since we arrived and we were surprised that You were not here.»

The shouts of the crowds prevent Peter from going on speaking, so he becomes quiet riding beside Jesus like an equerry. The crowds, whom they have now reached, part and Jesus passes through them on his little donkey, blessing them unceasingly.

They enter the town.

«To the sick people at once » says Jesus, Who pays no attention to the protestations of those who would like to take Him into their houses to give Him food and warmth, lest He might suffer too much. «They suffer more than I do » He replies.

They turn right and there is the rustic enclosure of the timber store. The door is wide open and complaining lamentations can be heard through it: «Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us! »

It is an imploring chorus as unchanging as a litany: voices of children, of women, of men, of old people. They are as sad as the bleating of suffering lambs, as melancholy as the voices of dying mothers, as dejected as the voices of those who have but one hope left, as trembling as the voices of those who can but weep...

Jesus enters the enclosure. He stands up as much as He can in the stirrups and with His right hand up He says with His powerful voice: «To all those who believe in Me, health and blessing.»

He sits in the saddle once again and is about to go back to the road, but the crowds press Him and the cured people throng round Him. And in the light of the torches, which burn in the shelter of the sheds and illuminate the twilight, the crowds can be seen acclaiming the Lord in a frenzy of joy. And the Lord disappears in a flowery collection of cured children, whom mothers have put on His arms, on His lap and even on the neck of the little donkey, holding them so that they might not fall. Jesus' arms are full of them, as if they were flowers, and He smiles happily, kissing them as He cannot bless them, since His arms are engaged in supporting them. The children are then taken away, and it is the turn of the old people who have also been cured and are now weeping out of joy; they kiss His mantle and are followed by the men and women...

It is dark when He can enter Timoneus' house and rest near the fire wearing dry clothes.

Jesus is speaking in the main square at Aera:

«...And I am not going to tell you, as I did elsewhere, the first and essential things you must know and do to be saved. You know them very well, through the work of Timoneus, a wise head of the synagogue of the old Law, who is now most wise, because he renews it in the light of the new Law. But I want to warn you against a danger which you cannot see in your present state of mind. The danger of being diverted by pressure and insinuations aiming at detaching you from the faith you have now in Me. I will leave Timoneus with you for some time. And with other disciples he will explain to you the words of the Book in the new light of my Truth which he has embraced. But before leaving you, and after scanning your hearts and seeing that they are willing, humble and sincere in their love, I want to comment with you upon a point of the fourth book of Kings.

When Hezekiah, king of Judah, was attacked by Sennacherib, the three great men of the hostile king came to him to terrorise him, pointing out to him the alliances which had been broken off and the armies which were already surrounding him. Eliakim, Shebna and Joah replied to the words of the powerful messengers saying: "Speak to us in such a way that the people may not understand you" so that the terrorised people might not ask for peace. But that was what the messengers of Sennacherib wanted, and at the top of their voices they said in perfect Hebrew: "Do not let Hezekiah delude you... Do with us what is useful to you and surrender and everyone of you will eat the fruit of his own vine and of his own fig-tree and drink the water of his own cistern until we come and deport you to a country like your own, a land of corn and good wine, a land abounding in bread and vineyards, a land of olive-trees, of oil and of honey, and you will live and will not die..." And it is written: "The people did not reply, because the king had ordered them not to reply".

Now, out of pity for your souls besieged by forces which are even fiercer than those of Sennacherib, who was able to harm bodies but could not damage souls, whereas war is declared to your souls by a hostile army led by the fiercest and most cruel despot there is in creation, I prayed his messengers, who, in order to damage Me through you, endeavour to terrorise both Me and you threatening dreadful punishments, I prayed saying: "Speak to Me only. But leave in peace the souls which are now being born to the Light. Vex Me, torture Me, accuse Me, kill Me, but do not rage against these children of the Light. They are still weak. One day they will be strong. But now they are weak. Do not be merciless towards them. Do not be merciless against the freedom of souls to choose their own way. Do not be pitiless towards the right of God of calling to Himself those who seek Him in their simple love".

But can one who hates yield to the prayer of him whom one hates? Can one seized by hatred know what love is? No. So with fiercer harshness and cruelty they will come and say to you: "Do not let the Christ delude you. Come with us and you will have all good things". And they will say to you: "Woe betide you if you follow Him. You will be persecuted". And they will urge you with insincere kindness: "Save your souls. He is Satan". They will say so many things against Me, to persuade you to abandon the Light.

I say to you: "Reply to the tempters with your silence". When the Strength of the Lord descends into the hearts of those who believe in Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Saviour, then you will be able to speak, because you will not speak, but the very Spirit of God will speak through your lips, and your souls will be firm in Grace, strong and invincible in Faith.

Be persevering. That is all I ask of you. Remember that God cannot agree to the witchcraft of His enemy. Let your sick people, those who have been comforted and whose souls have received peace, speak among you, only through their presence, of Him Who came among you to say to you: "Persevere in My love and in My doctrine and you will receive the Kingdom of Heaven". My works speak even more than My words, and although it is perfect blessedness to be able to believe without the need of any proof, I let you see the wonders of God, so that you may be fortified in your faith. When your intelligence is tempted by the enemies of the Light, reply to them with the words of your souls: "I believe because I have seen God in His works". Reply to the enemies by means of an active silence. And with those two replies, proceed towards the Light. May peace be always with you.»

And He dismisses them and then leaves the square.

«Why did You speak so little to them, Lord? Timoneus might be disappointed » says Nathanael.
«He will not, because he is just and he understands that to warn one of a danger is to love one with greater love. That danger is really present.»
«Always the Pharisees, eh? » asks Matthew.
«Those and others.»
«Are You downhearted, Lord? » asks John worriedly.
«No. Not more than usual...»
«And yet You were happier during the past days...»
«It may be sadness due to the absence of the disciples. But why did You send them away? Do You perhaps wish to go on travelling? » asks the Iscariot.
«No. This is the last place. We will go home from here. But it was not possible for the women to proceed in this weather. They have done a great deal. They must do no more.»
«And what about John? »
«John is ill, and is in a hospitable house, as you were.»
Jesus then takes leave of Timoneus and other disciples who will be remaining in that area and to whom He has certainly given instructions for the future, because He does not give any further advice.
They are at the door of Timoneus' house, because Jesus wanted to bless the landlady once more. The crowds look at Him respectfully and follow Him when He sets out again towards the outskirts, the vegetable gardens and the open country. The more persevering people follow Him for a little while, in a group which becomes thinner and thinner, until only nine people are left, then five, three, finally one... And the last one, too, turns round and goes back to Aera, while Jesus walks westwards, with only the twelve apostles, because Ermasteus remained with Timoneus.

Jesus says:

«And the journey, the second long apostolic journey is over. We now go back to the well-known countryside of Galilee.
Poor Mary, you are more exhausted than John of Endor. I authorise you to omit the descriptions of the places. We have given so much to curious searchers. And they will always be "curious searchers". Nothing else. That is enough now. Your strength is diminishing. Keep it for the word. I notice the uselessness of so much labour of yours, with the same spirit with which I noticed the uselessness of so much of My toil. That is why I say to you: "Spare yourself for the word". You are the "mouthpiece". Oh! One must really repeat for you the saying: "We played the pipes for you and you would not sing, we sang dirges and you would not be mourners". You repeated My words only, and difficult doctors turned up their noses. You added your descriptions to My words, and they find faults with them. And they will find more to object. And you are worn out. I will tell you when you are to describe the journey. I, and no one else.
I have struck you for almost one year. But before the year is over, do you wish to rest once again on My Heart? Come then, little martyr...»

297. The Little Orphans Mary and Matthias.
8th October 1945.

I see the lake of Merom again, in a dull wet day... Mud and clouds. Silence and fog. The horizon disappears in the fog. The Hermon chains are buried under blankets of low clouds. But from the place where I am - a high tableland near the little lake, which is grey and yellowish because of the mud of a thousand swollen little streams and because of the November overcast sky - one has a good view of this little sheet of water fed by the High Jordan, which flows out of it to feed the larger lake of Gennesaret.
It is getting dark and the evening is becoming more and more gloomy and wet while Jesus walks along the road which crosses the Jordan after lake Merom, and He then takes a lane towards a house...
(Jesus says: «You will put here the vision of the little orphans Matthias and

Mary, which you saw on August 20th, 1944.»)

20th August 1944.

Another sweet vision of Jesus and two children. I say so because I see that Jesus, while passing along a path between fields which must have been sown recently, because the soil is still soft and dark as it looks just after being sown, stops to caress two children: a little boy not more than four years old and a little girl about eight or nine. They must be very poor children because they are wearing poor faded garments, which are also torn and their faces are sad and thin.

Jesus does not ask any questions. He only gazes at them while He caresses them. He then hastens towards a house at the end of the path. It is a country house, well built, with an outside staircase leading from the ground up to a terrace on which there is a vine pergola, now bare of grapes and leaves. Only an odd yellow leaf hangs swinging in the damp wind of a bad autumn day. Some doves are cooing on the parapet of the house waiting for the rain which the overcast sky is promising.

Jesus, followed by His apostles, pushes the little rustic gate of the low rubble wall surrounding the house, and enters the yard, which we would rather call a threshing-floor, where there is a well and a stone-oven in a corner. I suppose that is what the little closet is, the walls of which are black with smoke, which is coming out even now and is blown towards the ground by the wind. Hearing the sound of footsteps a woman looks out of the closet and when she sees Jesus she greets Him joyfully and runs to inform the people in the house.

An elderly stout man comes to the door of the house and hastens towards Jesus.

«It is a great honour, Master, to see You! » he exclaims greeting Him.

Jesus greets him: «Peace be with you » and adds: «It is getting dark and it is about to rain. I beg you to give shelter and a piece of bread to Me and My disciples.»

«Come in, Master. My house is Yours. The maid-servant is about to take the bread out of the oven. I am happy to offer it to You with the cheese of my sheep and the fruit of my fields. Come in, because the wind is cold and damp...» and he kindly holds the door open and bows when Jesus passes. But he suddenly changes tone addressing somebody he sees and he says wrathfully: «Are you still here? Go away. There is nothing for you. Go away. Have you understood? There is no room here for vagabonds...» And he mumbles: «...and perhaps thieves like you.»

A thin weeping voice replies: «Have mercy, sir. At least a piece of bread for my little brother. We are hungry...»

Jesus, Who had gone into the large kitchen, which is cosy because of the big fire which serves also as a light, comes to the threshold. His countenance has already changed. With a severe and sad expression He asks, not the host, but in general, He seems to be asking the silent yard, the bare fig-tree, the dark well: «Who is it that is hungry? »

«I, sir. I and my brother. Just a piece of bread and we shall go away.»

Jesus is by now outside, where it is getting darker and darker because of the twilight and the impending rain. «Come here » He says.

«I am afraid, sir! »

«Come, I tell you. Do not be afraid of Me.»

The poor girl appears from behind the corner of the house. Her little brother is holding on to her shabby little tunic. They look timidly at Jesus and with fear in their eyes at the landlord, who casts a nasty look at them and says: «They are vagabonds, Master. And thieves. Only a little while ago I found her scraping near the oil-mill. She certainly wanted to go and steal something. I wonder where they come from. They do not belong to this area.»

Jesus pays little or no attention to him. He gazes at the little girl's emaciated face and untidy plaits, two pigtailed beside her ears, tied at the ends with strips of a rag. But Jesus' countenance is not severe while He looks at the poor wretch. He is sad, but He smiles to encourage her. «Is it true that you wanted to steal? Tell Me the truth.»

«No, sir. I asked for a little bread, because I am hungry. They did not give me any. I saw an oily crust over there, on the ground, near the oil-mill and I went there to pick it up. I am hungry, sir. I was given only one piece of bread yesterday and I kept it for Matthias... Why did they not put us into the grave

with our mother? » The little girl weeps desolately and her little brother imitates her.

«Do not weep.» Jesus comforts her caressing her and drawing her close to Himself. «Tell Me: where are you from? »

«From the plain of Esdraelon.»

«And have you come so far? »

«Yes, sir.»

«Has your mother been dead long? Have you no father? »

«My father died killed by sunstroke at harvest time and my mother died last month... and the baby she was giving birth to died with her...» She weeps more and more.

«Have you no relative? »

«We come from so far! We were not poor... Then my father had to work as a servant. But he is now dead and mother with him.»

«Who was his master? »

«Ishmael, the Pharisee.»

«Ishmael, the Pharisee! (it is not possible to describe how Jesus repeats that name). Did you come away of your own will, or did he send you away? »

«He sent me away, sir. He said: "The street is the place for starving dogs".»

«And you, Jacob, why did you not give some bread to these children? Some bread, a little milk and a handful of hay on which they might rest their tired bodies?...»

«But... Master... I have just enough bread for myself... and there is only little milk in the house... They are like stray animals. If you treat them kindly, they will not go away any more...»

«And you have no room and food for these two unhappy children? Can you truthfully say that? The rich crops, the plenty wine, the much oil and fruit which made your estate famous this year, why did they come to you? Do you remember? The previous year hail destroyed your crops and you were worried about your future life... I came and I asked for some bread. You had heard Me speak one day and you remained faithful to Me... and in your affliction you opened your heart and your house to Me and you gave Me bread and shelter. And what did I say to you going out the following morning? "Jacob, you have understood the Truth. Be always merciful and you will receive mercy. Because of the bread you gave the Son of man, these fields will give you rich crops and your olive-trees will be laden with olives like the grains of sand on the sea shore and the branches of your apple-trees will bend towards the ground". You received all that and this year you are the richest man in the district. And you refuse two children a piece of bread!...»

«But You were the Rabbi...»

«And because I was, I could have turned stones into bread. They cannot. I now say to you: you shall see a new miracle and you shall regret it very sorely... But beating your chest then say: "I deserved it".»

Jesus turns to the children: «Do not weep. Go to that tree and pick the fruit.»

«But it is bare, sir » objects the little girl.

«Go.»

The girl goes and comes back with her dress lifted up and full of beautiful red apples.

«Eat of them and come with Me » and to the apostles: «Let us go and take these two little ones to Johanna of Chuza. She remembers the benefits she received and out of love she is merciful to those who were merciful to her. Let us go.»

The dumbfounded and mortified man endeavours to be forgiven: «It is night, Master. It may rain while You are on the way. Come back into my house. There is the maid-servant going to take the bread out of the oven... I will give You some also for them.»

«It is not necessary. You would give it for fear of the punishment I promised you, not out of love.»

«So is this not the miracle? » (and he points at the apples picked on the bare tree and which the two starving children are eating greedily).

«No.» Jesus is most severe.

«Oh! Lord, have mercy on me! I understand. You want to punish me in the crops! Have mercy, Lord! »

«Not all those who call Me "Lord" will have Me, because love and respect are not testified by words, but by deeds. You will receive the mercy which you had.»

«I love You, my Lord.»

«That is not true. He loves Me who loves his neighbour. That is what I taught. You love but yourself. When you love Me as I taught, the Lord will come back. I am now going. My abode is to do good, to comfort the afflicted, to wipe the tears of orphans. As a mother hen stretches its wings over the helpless chicks, so I spread My power over those who suffer and are tormented. Come, children. You will soon have a home and bread. Goodbye, Jacob.»

And not satisfied with going away, he orders the apostles to take up the tired girl: Andrew takes her up in his arms and envelops her in his mantle, while Jesus takes the little boy and they thus proceed along the path which is now dark, with their pitiful loads which no longer weep.

Peter says: «Master! These children were very lucky that You arrived. But for Jacob!... What will You do, Master? »

«Justice. He will not starve, because his granaries are well stocked for a long time. But he will suffer shortage, because the seed he sows will yield no corn and his olive and apple-trees will be covered with leaves only. These innocent children have received bread and shelter from the Father, not from Me. Because My Father is the Father of orphans also. And He gives nests and food to the birds of forests. These children and all poor wretches with them, the poor wretches who are His "innocent and loving children" can say that God put food in their little hands and leads them with fatherly love to a hospitable home.»
The vision ends thus and I am left with a great peace.

Jesus says:

«This is just for you, o soul which weeps looking at the crosses of the past and at the clouds of the future. The Father will always have bread to put in your hand and a nest to shelter His weeping dove.

The lesson that I am the "Just Lord" applies to everybody. And I am not deceived or adulated by false homage. He who closes his heart to his brother, closes it to God and God to him.

Men, it is the first commandment: Love and love. He who does not love lies in professing to be a Christian. It is useless to frequent the Sacraments and rites, it is useless to pray if one lacks charity. They become formulae and even sacrileges. How can you come to the eternal Bread and satisfy your hunger with it, when you have denied a starving person a piece of bread? Is your bread more precious than Mine? Is it more holy? O hypocrites! I put no limit in giving Myself to your misery, and you, who are misery itself, have no pity on the miseries which, in the eyes of God, are not so hideous as yours. Because those are misfortunes, yours are sins. Too often you say to Me: "Lord, Lord", to have Me propitious to your interests. But you do not say so for your neighbour's sake. You do nothing for your neighbour in the name of the Lord. Look: what have your false religion and true lack of charity given you, both with regard to your community and to its individuals? To be abandoned by God. And the Lord will come back when you learn to love as I taught.

But I say to you, little flock of good people who suffer: "You are never orphans. You are never waifs. There would have to be no God, before His children could lack Providence. Stretch out your hands: the Father will give you everything, as a 'father', that is, with love which does not humiliate. Wipe your tears. I will take you and lead you because I have pity on your languor".

Man is the best loved in creation. Can you doubt that the Father may be more merciful to birds than to faithful men, since He is indulgent towards sinners and gives them time and the opportunity to come to Him? Oh! if the world understood what God is!

Go in peace, Mary. You are as dear to Me as the two little orphans you saw, and you are even dearer. Go in peace. I am with you.»

21st August 1944.

Mary says:

«Mary, Mother is speaking. My Jesus has spoken of the infancy of the spirit, a necessary requisite to conquer the Kingdom. Yesterday He showed you a page of

His life as a Master. You saw some children. Some poor children. Is there nothing else to be said? Yes, there is, and I am saying it to you, as I want to make you dearer and dearer to Jesus. It is a nuance in the picture which spoke to your spirit, on behalf of the spirits of many people. But it is nuances that make a picture beautiful and reveal the skill of the painter and the erudition of the observer.

I want to point out the humility of My Jesus to you.

That poor girl, in her ignorant simplicity, does not treat the hard-hearted sinner differently from My Son. She is not aware of the Rabbi or the Messiah. She has never heard Him or seen Him, because she lived, almost like a little savage in the fields and in a house where the Master was despised, in fact the Pharisee did despise My Jesus.

Her father and mother, worn out by the hateful work which their cruel master exacted, had no time and possibility of raising their heads from the clods they broke up. While they were mowing hay or cutting crops or picking fruit and grapes, or crushing olives at the mill, they may have heard people singing hosannas and may have raised their tired heads for a moment. But fear and fatigue lowered those heads at once under their yoke. And they died thinking that the world was nothing but hatred and sorrow. Whereas the world was love and wealth since the most holy feet of My Jesus trod upon it. The poor servants of a cruel master died without seeing even once the look and smile of My Jesus, without hearing His word, which gave comfort to souls, so that the poor felt as if they were rich, the hungry as if they were full, the sick as if they were healthy, the sorrowful as if they were comforted.

Jesus does not say: "I am the Lord and I say to you: do that". He remains anonymous. And the little girl, who was so ignorant that she did not understand even when she saw the miracle of the apple-tree bare of leaves, a branch of which became laden with apples to satisfy their hunger, continues to call Him: "sir", as she called Ishmael, her master, and the cruel Jacob. She feels attracted to the good Lord, because kindness always attracts. But nothing more. She follows Him confidently. And the poor girl lost in the world and in the ignorance encouraged by the world, by the "great world of mighty pleasure-loving people", who are keen in keeping inferiors in darkness in order to torture them more easily and exploit them more greedily, the poor girl loves Him at once instinctively.

She will learn later who was that "sir", who was as poor, as homeless and motherless as she was, who had no food, because He had left everything out of His love for men, also for her, a poor little frail girl; and she will understand that the Lord had given her miraculous fruit, to remove from her lips and from her heart the bitterness of human wickedness, which makes poor people hate mighty ones, and He had done so by means of a fruit of the Father, and not by means of a crust of bread, which was offered too late and in any case would have savoured of hardship and tears. Those apples really called to mind the apple of the Earthly Paradise. They appeared on the branch for Good and for Evil, they were the sign of redemption from all miseries, first of all from the ignorance of God, with regard to the two little orphans, and the sign of punishment for the man, who, although he already was aware of the Word, had behaved as if he were not. And she will learn from the good woman who made her welcome in Jesus' name, who was Jesus. He was her manifold Saviour: from starvation, from the inclemency of the weather, from the dangers of the world and from original sin.

But Jesus always had for her the light of that day, and He always appeared to her in that light: the good Lord, as good as in fairy-tales, the Lord Who had caresses and gifts, the Lord Who had made her forget that she had no father, mother, home and clothes, because He had been as kind to her as a father, as sweet as a mother, He had given a home to their tired bodies and clothes to their naked limbs, with His own chest and mantle and with the assistance of other good people who were with Him. A kind fatherly light which did not fade in a stream of tears, not even when she learned that He had died tortured on a cross, not even when, a little faithful believer of the early Church, she saw how the face of her "Lord" had been disfigured by blows and thorns and she considered how He was now, in Heaven, at the right hand of the Father. A light that smiled at her in her last hour on the earth, leading her fearlessly towards her Saviour, a light that smiled once again at her, in such an ineffably sweet

manner, in the splendour of Paradise.

Jesus looks also at you thus. Always think of Him as your remote namesake did and be happy to be loved by Him. Be as simple, humble, and faithful as the poor little Mary you have known. See how far she arrived, notwithstanding that she was a poor little ignorant girl of Israel: at the Heart of God. Love revealed Himself to her as He did to you and she became learned in the true Wisdom. Have faith. Be at peace. There is no misery which My Son cannot turn into riches and there is no solitude which He cannot replenish as there is no fault which He cannot cancel. The past no longer exists, once love has cancelled it. Not even a dreadful past. Are you going to be afraid when Disma, the robber, was not? Love and be afraid of nothing.
Mother leaves you with Her blessing.»

298. Mary and Matthias Are Entrusted to Johanna of Chuza.
11th October 1945.

The lake of Tiberias is a grey sheet of water. It looks like tarnished mercury, so heavy it is in the dead calm which allows just the resemblance of tired waves, which are not successful in making foam, and stop and calm down after making a slight movement, mingling with the dull water under a dull sky. Peter and Andrew, James and John around their respective boats on the little beach of Bethsaida, are preparing to sail. There is a smell of grass and wet earth, and a light mist on the green stretch towards Korazim. November gloominess lies heavy on everything.

Jesus comes out of Peter's house, holding by the hands Matthias and Mary whom Porphirea has tidied up with motherly care replacing Mary's little dress with one of Marjiam's. But Matthias is too small to have the same treatment and he is still shivering in his little faded cotton tunic, so much so that Porphirea, who is always so full of pity, goes back into the house and brings out a blanket in which she envelops the child as if it were a mantle. Jesus thanks her while she kneels down in taking leave and then withdraws after kissing the two orphans once more.

«Just to have children she would have taken these two as well » remarks Peter, who has been watching the scene and who in turn bends to give the two children a piece of bread spread with honey, which he had aside under a seat of the boat. Andrew laughs at him and says: «You wouldn't, would you? You even stole your wife's honey, to make these two happy.»

«Stole? It's my honey! »

«Yes, but my sister-in-law is jealous of it, because it is for Marjiam. And since you are aware of that, last night you stole into the kitchen, barefooted like a thief, and took enough of it to prepare that bread. I saw you, brother, and I laughed because you were looking about like a child who is afraid of his mother's slaps.»

«You horrible spy » replies Peter, laughing and embracing his brother, who kisses him saying: «My dear big brother.»

Jesus watches them and smiles frankly standing between the two children who eat up their bread.

The other eight apostles arrive from Bethsaida. Perhaps they were the guests of Philip and Bartholomew.

«Quick! » shouts Peter and he embraces the two children together to take them to the boat without getting their bare feet wet. «You are not afraid, are you?» he asks them while he paddles in the water with his short strong legs, bare to about a span above his knees.

«No, sir » says the girl, but she clings convulsively to Peter's neck closing her eyes when he puts her into the boat, which sways under Jesus' weight, Who also gets into it. The little boy, who is braver, or perhaps more astonished, does not say one word. Jesus sits down drawing the little ones to Himself, and covers them with His large mantle, which looks like a wing stretched out to protect two chicks.

They are all on board, six men in each boat. Peter removes the landing board, he pushes the boat farther out and jumps into it, imitated by James in the other boat. Peter's action has caused the boat to sway heavily and the girl moans:

«Mummy! » hiding her face in Jesus' lap and grasping His knees. But they are now moving smoothly, although it is laborious for Peter, Andrew and the servant who have to row with the help of Philip who is the fourth oarsman. The sail hangs loose in the heavy damp calm and is of no use. They must row.

«We are having a good row! » shouts Peter to those in the other boat, in which the Iscariot is the fourth oarsman and Peter praises his perfect rowing.

«Come on, Simon! » replies James. «Row with all your might or we shall beat you. Judas is as strong as a galley-slave. Well done, Judas! »

«Yes. We will make you head of the crew » confirms Peter who is rowing as hard as two. And he laughs saying: «But you will not succeed in beating Simon of Jonah's record. When I was twenty years old I was already first oarsman in competitions among villages » and he joyfully gives the stroke to his crew: «Heave ho!... Heave ho! » Their voices spread in the silence of the lake deserted in the early morning.

The children pluck up courage again. Their emaciated faces look up from under the mantle, one on each side of Jesus, Who embraces them, and they smile faintly. They take an interest in the work of the rowers and exchange comments.

«I seem to be going in a cart without wheels » says the boy.

«No. In a cart on the clouds. Look! We seem to be walking in the sky. Look, we are climbing on a cloud! » says Mary when she sees the prow of the boat plunge into a spot which mirrors a huge woolly cloud. And she laughs faintly.

But the sun dissipates the mist and although it is a wan autumn sun, the clouds become golden and the lake mirrors them shining. «Oh! How beautiful! We are now going to a fire. How lovely! » exclaims the boy clapping his hands.

But the little girl becomes silent and bursts into tears. They all ask her why she is weeping. She explains sobbing: «Mother used to say a poem, a psalm, I don't know, to keep us quiet, that we might be able to pray even with so much grief... and the poem mentioned a Paradise which will be like a lake of Light, of a gentle fire where there will be nothing but God and joy and where all those who are good will go... after the Saviour has come... This golden lake reminded me of it... My mummy! »

Matthias also is weeping and everyone pities them.

But Jesus' sweet voice rises above the murmur of the various voices and the moans of the little orphans: «Do not weep. Your mother brought you to Me, and she is here now with us, while I am taking you to a mother who has no children. She will be happy to have two good children in place of her own baby, who is now where your mummy is. Because she wept, too, you know? Her baby died as your mother did...»

«Oh! so we are now going to her and her baby will go to our mother! » says Mary.

«That is right. And you will all be happy.»

«What is this woman like? What is she? A peasant? Has she a good master? » The little ones are anxious to know.

«She is not a peasant, but she has a garden full of roses and she is as good as an angel. She has a good husband. He will love you as well.»

«Do You think so, Master? » asks Matthew who is somewhat incredulous.

«I am certain. And you will be convinced. Some time ago Chuza wanted Marjiam to make a knight of him.»

«Most certainly not! » shouts Peter.

«Marjiam will be a knight of Christ. That is all, Simon. Be quiet.»

The lake turns grey again. The wind rises and ripples the lake. The sail is filled and the boat sails swiftly along vibrating. But the children are dreaming of their new mother and are not afraid.

Magdala passes by with its white houses among the green vegetation. And the countryside between Magdala and Tiberias passes by. The first houses of Tiberias appear.

«Where, Master? »

«To Chuza's little harbour.»

Peter veers and gives instructions to the servant. The sail drops when the boat goes near the little harbour, and then enters it, stopping near the little pier, followed by the other boat. They are one beside the other like two tired ducks. They all land and John runs ahead to inform the gardeners.

The little ones press timorously against Jesus and Mary, pulling His tunic, asks with a big sigh: «But is she really good? »

John comes back: «Master, a servant is opening the gate. Johanna is already up.»

«Very well. Wait here. I will go ahead.»

And Jesus goes away alone. The others watch Him go commenting on His action more or less favourably. There is considerable doubt and criticism. But from the place where they are they can only see Chuza hastening towards Jesus; he bows almost to the ground at the gate and then enters the garden on Jesus' left. Then nothing else can be seen.

But I can see. I can see Jesus proceeding slowly beside Chuza who shows how happy he is to have the Master as his guest: «My Johanna will be delighted. And I am, too. She is feeling better and better. She told me about the journey. What a triumph, my Lord! »

«Did you mind? »

«Johanna is happy. And I am happy to see her thus. I might have lost her months ago, my Lord. »

«Yes, you might have... And I gave her back to you. Be grateful to God for that.»

Chuza looks at Him perplexedly... he then whispers: «A reproach, Lord? »

«No, an advice. Be good, Chuza.»

«Master, I am Herod's servant...»

«I know. But your soul is the servant of no one but God, if you wish so.»

«That is true, Lord. I will amend my way of living. Sometimes I am seized by the fear of public opinion...»

«Would you have minded last year when you wanted to save Johanna? »

«Oh! No. At the cost of losing all respect I would have applied to anyone who could save her.»

«Do likewise for your soul. It is even more precious than Johanna. Here she is coming.»

They quicken their steps towards Johanna who is running along the avenue to meet them.

«My Master! I did not hope to see You so soon. Which kindness of Yours has brought You to Your disciple? »

«A favour, Johanna.»

«A favour? Which? Tell us and if we can, we will help You » they both reply together.

«Yesterday evening on a desert road I found two poor children, a little girl and a little boy... they were barefooted, ragged, starving, all alone... and I saw them being driven away, as if they were wolves, by a hard-hearted man. They were dying of starvation... Last year I gave so much wealth to that man. And he denied two orphans a piece of bread. Because they are orphans. Orphans wandering on the roads of a cruel world. That man will receive his punishment. Do you want to receive My blessing? I am stretching My hand out to you, a Beggar of love, for those orphans who have no home, no clothes, no food, no love. Will you help Me?»

«But, Master, why ask? Tell me what You want, how much You want; tell us everything!...» says Chuza impulsively.

Johanna does not speak, but with her hands pressed on her heart, tears on her long eyelashes, a smile of desire on her red lips, she waits and her silence is more eloquent than words.

Jesus looks at her and smiles: «I would like those to have a mother, a father, a home; and the mother's name to be Johanna...»

He has no time to finish because Johanna's cry is like that of one freed from prison, while she prostrates herself to kiss the feet of her Lord.

«And what do you say, Chuza? Will you receive in My name My beloved ones, who are much dearer to My heart than jewels? »

«Master, where are they? Take me to them and upon my honour I swear to You that from the moment I lay my hand on their innocent heads, I will love them in Your name as if I were their real father.»

«Come, then. I knew that I was not coming for nothing. Come. They are coarse and frightened, but good. You can trust Me because I can read the hearts of men and the future. They will give peace and strength to your union, not so much now as in the future. You will find yourselves again in their love. Their innocent embraces will be the best lime for your home of a married couple. And Heaven will always be benign, and merciful towards you because of your charity. They are outside the gate. We came from Bethsaida...»

Johanna does not listen any more. She runs away, seized by a great desire to

caress them. And she does so, falling on her knees to clasp the two little orphans to her heart, kissing their emaciated cheeks, while they are amazed looking at the beautiful lady with garments adorned with jewels. And they look at Chuza, who caresses them and takes Matthias in his arms. And they look at the beautiful garden and at the servants who gather round them... And they admire the house which opens its halls full of riches to Jesus and His apostles. And they look at Esther who covers them with kisses. The world of dreams is open to the little waifs...
Jesus watches and smiles...

299. At Nain, in the House of Daniel Raised from the Dead.
12th October 1945.

It is a feast day for the people of Nain. Jesus is their guest for the first time since the miracle of young Daniel, who was raised from the dead. Jesus is going through the town, blessing, preceded and followed by a large number of people. The people of Nain have been joined by incomers from other villages, who have come from Capernaum, where they had gone looking for Jesus, and from where they were sent to Cana and then to Nain. I am under the impression that now that Jesus has many disciples, He has set up a kind of information network, so that pilgrims looking for Him can find Him, although He moves around continuously, even for a few miles a day, as the season and the short days allow. And among those who have come looking for Him, there are some Pharisees and scribes, apparently respectful...

Jesus is a guest in the house of the young man raised from the dead. The notables of the place have also gathered there. And Daniel's mother, when she sees the scribes and Pharisees - seven of them, like the deadly sins - humbly invites them, apologising for not being able to offer them a worthier abode. «There is the Master, woman, and that attaches great importance even to a cave. But your house is much more than a cave and we enter it saying: "Peace to you and to your house".»

The woman in fact, although she is certainly not rich, has done her utmost to honour Jesus. All the wealthy families in Nain have certainly entered the lists, joining their efforts to adorn the house and the table. And the various women who have collaborated are casting glances, from all possible spots, at the group passing through the hall towards two rooms, facing each other, in which the landlady has laid the tables. Perhaps that is all they have asked for, as compensation for the loan of kitchenware, tablecloths and seats, and for their work in the kitchen: to see the Master close at hand and breathe the same air as He does. And now they appear here and there, flushed, covered with flour or ashes, or with dripping hands, according to their tasks in the kitchen, they watch Him closely, they take their little share of divine sight, of divine voice, drinking in with their eyes and ears His kind blessing and figure and look delighted when they go back to the kitchen stove, cupboards and sink, more flushed than ever.

The happiest is the one who offers with the landlady the basins for the ablutions to the guests of consequence. She is a young dark-haired and dark-eyed girl, but her complexion is suffused with pink. And she blushes even more when the landlady informs Jesus that she is the fiancée of her son and that they will soon be getting married. «We waited for You so that the whole house might be sanctified by You. Please bless her as well, that she may be a good wife in this house.»

Jesus looks at her, and as the little bride bows, He imposes His hands on her head saying: «May the virtues of Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel flourish again in you and may you give birth to true children of God, for His glory and the happiness of this house.»

Jesus and the notables have now completed the purification rite and they enter the dining-room, with the young landlord, while the apostles and less influential persons of Nain go into the opposite room. And the banquet begins. From their conversation I gather that before my vision began, Jesus had preached and cured in Nain. But the Pharisees and scribes pay little attention to that; they, instead, harass with questions the people of Nain for details of the

disease of which Daniel died, of how many hours had elapsed between his death and resurrection, and they ask whether they had completed his embalming etc. etc. Jesus pays no attention to such investigations and converses with the revived man who is very well and is eating with a wonderful appetite. But a Pharisee calls Jesus to ask Him whether He was aware of Daniel's disease. «I was coming from Endor by mere chance, as I wanted to please Judas of Kerioth as I had pleased John of Zebedee. I did not even know I would be passing through Nain when I set out on our Passover pilgrimage » replies Jesus. «Ah! Had you not gone to Endor deliberately? » asks an amazed scribe. «No. I had not the least intention of going there, at that time.» «Why did You go then? » «I told you: because Judas of Simon wanted to go there.» «And why that fancy? » «To see the cave of the sorceress.» «Perhaps You had spoken about it...» «Never! There was no reason why I should.» «I mean... perhaps with that episode You explained other witchcraft, to initiate Your apostles in...» «In what? To initiate anyone in holiness, there is no need of pilgrimages. A cell or a desert barren land, a mountain top or a solitary house serve the same purpose: providing there is austerity and holiness in the teacher, and the will to become holy in the disciple. That is what I teach and nothing else.» «But the miracles which Your apostles now work what are they if not wonders and...» «The will of God. That is all. And the more holy they become, the more miracles they will work, through prayer, sacrifices and obedience to God. By no other means.» «Are You sure of that? » asks a scribe holding his chin in his hand and looking Jesus up and down. His tone is rather ironical and pitiful. «I gave them those weapons and that doctrine. If among them, and they are many, there should be anyone who becomes corrupted through base practices, out of pride or for other reasons, he will not have received such advice from Me. I can pray to see the culprit redeemed. I can undertake hard penance in expiation, imploring God to help him particularly with the light of His wisdom so that he may see his error. I can throw Myself at his feet to entreat him with all My love of Brother, Master and Friend to abandon his sin. And I would not consider that a humiliation, because the price of a soul is such that it is worth suffering any humiliation to save that soul. But I can do no more. And if after all he perseveres in his fault, the eyes and heart of the betrayed and misunderstood Master and Friend will shed tears and blood.» How much kindness and sadness there is in Jesus' voice and expression! The scribes and Pharisees look at one another. They exchange meaningful glances, but say no more on the subject. They instead ask young Daniel questions. Does he remember what death is? What did he feel when he came back to life? And what did he see in the gap between death and life? «I know that I was suffering from a mortal disease and I suffered agony. Oh! what a dreadful thing! Don't make me remember it!... And yet the day will come when I will have to suffer it once again! Oh! Master...» He looks at Him and is so terrified that he goes pale at the idea of having to die once again. Jesus kindly comforts him saying: «Death is in itself expiation. By dying twice you will be completely cleansed of faults and you will rejoice at once in Heaven. Let this thought make you live a holy life, so that you may have only involuntary and venial faults.» But the Pharisees return to the attack: «But what did you feel when you came back to life? » «Nothing. I was alive and healthy as if I had awaked from a long sound sleep.» «But did you remember that you had died? » «I remembered that I was very ill, in agony, and that is all.» «And what do you remember of the other world? » «Nothing. There is nothing. A black hole, an empty space in my life... Nothing.» «So, according to you, there is no Limbo, no Purgatory, no Hell? » «Who says there isn't? Of course there are. But I do not remember them.» «But are you sure that you were dead? »

The people of Nain lose their temper: «Was he dead? What more do you want? When we put him into the coffin, he was about to smell. In any case, with all those balms and bandages even a giant would die! »

«But do you not remember that you were dead? »

«I have told that I don't » the young man is losing his patience and he adds: «But what are you getting at with all these questions? That the whole village was pretending that I was dead, including my mother and my fiancée, who was dying with grief in her bed, including myself, all bandaged up and embalmed, while it was not true? What are you saying? That in Nain we were all children or idiots in a jesting mood? My mother's hair turned white in a few hours. My fiancée had to be treated because sorrow and joy had almost driven her mad. And you doubt it? And why should we have done all that? »

«Why? That's true! Why should we have done it » exclaim those of Nain.

Jesus does not speak. He toys with the tablecloth as if He were absent. The Pharisees do not know what to say... But Jesus begins to speak all of a sudden, when the conversation on the subject seemed to have come to an end, and He says: «I will tell you why. They (and He points at the Pharisees and scribes) want to prove that your resurrection from the dead was a cleverly contrived game to increase My reputation with the crowds. I, the inventor, you the accomplices to deceive God and our neighbour. No. I leave fraud to worthless people. I do not need witchcraft, or tricks or accomplices to be what I am. Why do you want to deny God the power of giving a soul back to a body? If He creates a soul and gives it when the body is being formed, will He not be able to give it back to the body, when the soul, being restored to the body through the prayer of His Messiah, is an incentive for many people to come to the Truth? Can you deny God the power of miracle? Why do you want to deny it? »

«Are You God? »

«I am Who I am. My miracles and My doctrine testify Who I am.»

«But why does he not remember while the spirits evoked can tell what the next world is? »

«Because this soul speaks the truth, sanctified as it is by the penance of a first death, instead what is spoken by the lips of necromancers is not the truth.»

«But Samuel...»

«Samuel came by the order of God, not of the sorceress, to bring to the traitor of the Law the verdict of the Lord, Who is not to be derided in His commandments.»

«Then why do Your disciples do it? » The arrogant voice of a Pharisee, who stung to the quick raises his voice, draws the attention of the apostles, who are in the opposite room, separated by a corridor a little more than a yard wide, but not isolated by doors or heavy curtains. When they hear themselves being referred to, they stand up and come noiselessly into the corridor to listen.

«In what do they do it? Speak frankly, and if your accusation is true, I will warn them not to do anything against the Law.»

«I know in what they do it, and many others know as well. But since You raise people from the dead and You say that You are more than a prophet, find out for Yourself. We shall certainly not tell You. In any case, You have eyes to see also many other things which Your apostles have done, when they are not to be done, or they did not do, when they are to be done. And You do not mind.»

«Tell Me some of them.»

«Why do Your disciples infringe the traditions of our ancestors? We saw them today. Also today! Not more than an hour ago! They went into the dining-room to eat without purifying their hands beforehand! » If the Pharisees had said: «and they slaughtered citizens beforehand » they would not have spoken in such a horrified manner.

«You have watched them, of course. There are so many things to be seen. Good and beautiful things which make us bless the Lord for creating or permitting such things and for giving us our lives so that we may see them. And yet you do not watch them. And many others do as you do. But you waste your time and your peace running after things which are not good.

You look like jackals, or better still, like hyenas running in the trail of a stench, neglecting the waves of perfumes brought by the wind from gardens full of aromatic herbs. Hyenas do not love lilies and roses, jasmines and camphor, cinnamon and cloves. They are unpleasant smells to them. But the stench of a

decomposing corpse in the bottom of a ravine, or on a cart road, or buried under bramble where a murderer threw it, or washed ashore by stormy waves, swollen, violaceous, burst, horrible, oh! that is a delightful smell for hyenas! And as the evening wind condenses and carries all the smells which the sun has distilled from the things it has warmed, they sniff at it to smell that vague inviting scent, and once they discover it and find where it comes from, they run away, with their snouts in the air, showing their uncovered teeth in their quivering jaws, like a hysterical laugh, to go where there is putrefaction. And be it the corpse of a man or a quadruped, or a snake killed by a peasant, or a beech-marten killed by a housewife, or be it a poor mouse, oh! they relish it! And they sink their fangs into the revolting stench, they feast and lick their lips...

But it is a matter of no interest, if some men improve in holiness day by day! But if one only does wrong, or more omit not a divine commandment, but a human practice - you may call it tradition, precept, as you wish, but it is always a human thing - then it is noticed. And one runs after even a suspicion... to rejoice, if the suspicion is true.

You who have come here not out of love, or faith or honesty, but for a wicked purpose, tell Me: why do you infringe the commandment of God, for the sake of your tradition? Are you going to tell Me that a tradition is more than a Commandment? And yet God said: "Honour your father and your mother, anyone who curses father or mother must die"! You instead say: "Anyone who says to his father and mother: what you should have from me is corban (1) is no longer obliged to give it to his father and mother". So with your tradition you have cancelled the commandment of God.

Hypocrites! Isaiah rightly said of you when he prophesied: "This people honours Me only with lip-service while its heart is far from Me, therefore they honour Me in vain as they teach human doctrine and commandments".

And while you neglect the precepts of God, you keep the traditions of men, the ablutions of amphorae and chalices, of dishes and hands and other such things. While you justify the ingratitude and avarice of a son, by offering him the excuse of a sacrifice so that he may not give a piece of bread to those who gave birth to him and need his help and whom it is his duty to honour, because they are his parents, you are scandalised because one does not wash one's hands. You alter and infringe the word of God in order to obey words invented by you and imposed by you as precepts. You therefore proclaim yourselves more just than God. You arrogate to yourselves the rights of legislators, whereas God alone is the Legislator of His people. You...» and He would continue, but the hostile group goes out, in the hail of accusations, bumping into the apostles and those who were in the house, guests or women helping the landlady, and who had gathered in the corridor, attracted by Jesus' thundering voice.

Jesus, Who had stood up, sits down again, beckoning to all those present to enter where He is, and He says to them: «Listen to Me and understand the truth. There is nothing outside man which going into his mouth can make him unclean. It is what comes out of the mouth that makes him unclean. Let those who have ears hear and use their reason to understand and their will to act. And now let us go. People of Nain, persevere in good and may My peace be always with you.»

He stands up, He greets the landlord and landlady in particular and He sets out along the corridor. But He sees the friendly women, who are enraptured looking at Him and He goes towards them saying: «Peace to you as well. May Heaven reward you for assisting Me with such love that I did not regret My Mother's table. I perceived your motherly love in every crumb of bread, in every sauce and bit of roast, in the sweet honey and in the cool scented wine. Love Me

(1) Corban: offering to God, especially one made in fulfilment of a vow.

always thus, o good women of Nain. But do not work so hard for Me the next time. A piece of bread and a handful of olives, dressed with your motherly smiles and your honest good looks, are quite enough for Me. Be happy in your homes because the gratitude of the Persecuted One is upon you and He is leaving comforted by your love.»

The women, weeping in their happiness, are all on their knees, and in passing by He lightly touches their white or dark-haired heads, one by one, blessing them. He then goes out and sets out again...

The early shades of evening hide the pallor of Jesus, Who is embittered by too many things...

300. In the Sheepfold at Endor.
13th October 1945.

Jesus goes back to Endor only. He stops at the first house of the village, which is a sheepfold rather than a house. But just because it is such, with low closed stables full of hay, it can shelter the thirteen pilgrims. The landlord, a coarse but good man, hastens to bring a lamp and a small pail of frothy milk, with some small loaves of very dark bread. He then withdraws blessed by Jesus Who remains with only the Twelve.

Jesus offers and hands out the bread, and as they lack bowls or cups, each of them dips his bread into the little pail and drinks out of it, when thirsty. Jesus drinks only a little milk. He is grave and silent... So much so, that after the meal, when they have satisfied their appetite, which is always very good, they at last become aware of His quietness.

Andrew is the first to ask: «What is the matter with You, Master? You look sad or tired to me...»

«I do not deny that I am.»

«Why? Because of those Pharisees? You should be accustomed to them by now... I have almost got accustomed myself! And You know how I used to react to them earlier. They always sing the same song!... Snakes can but hiss, in fact, and none of them will ever be able to imitate the singing of a nightingale. One ends up by not paying attention to them » says Peter, both earnestly and to cheer up Jesus.

«And that is how one loses one's control and falls into their coils. I ask you to never get accustomed to the voice of Evil as if it were harmless.»

«Oh! Well! If that is the only reason why You are sad, You are wrong. You can see how the world loves You » says Matthew.

«But is that the only reason why You are so sad? Tell me, my good Master. Or have they told You lies, or made slanderous insinuations or insinuated suspicion, or I do not know what, about us who love You? » asks the Iscariot solicitously and kindly, embracing with one arm Jesus, Who is sitting beside him on the hay.

Jesus turns towards Judas. His eyes flash like phosphorus in the flickering light of the lamp laid on the ground in the middle of the circle of the apostles sitting on the hay. Jesus stares at Judas of Kerioth and asks him: «And do you know Me to be so silly as to accept as true anybody's insinuations, to the point of being upset by them? It is real facts, Judas of Simon, which upset Me » and His eyes do not stop for one moment piercing, like a probe, the brown eyes of Judas.

«Which real facts are upsetting You, then? » insists the Iscariot in a tone of confidence.

«The ones I see in the depths of hearts and on dethroned foreheads.» Jesus lays stress upon the word.

Everybody becomes excited: «Dethroned? Why? What do You mean? »

«A king is dethroned when he is unworthy of remaining on the throne, and the first thing they tear off him is the crown, which is on his forehead, the most noble part of man, the only animal with his forehead erect towards the sky, as he is animal with regard to matter, but supernatural as a being gifted with a soul. But it is not necessary to be king on an earthly throne to be dethroned... Every man is king because of his soul, and his throne is in Heaven. But when a man prostitutes his soul and becomes a brute and demon, he then dethrones himself. The world is full of dethroned foreheads which are no longer erect towards Heaven, but are stooped towards the Abyss, weighed down by the word which Satan has carved on them. Do you want to know it? It is the one I read on foreheads. There is written: "Sold!". And that you may have no doubt as to who the buyer is, I tell you that it is Satan, by himself or through his servants in the world.»

«I have understood! Those Pharisees, for instance, are the servants of a servant who is greater than they are and who is Satan's servant » says Peter earnestly.

Jesus does not reply.

«But... Do You know, Master, that those Pharisees, after hearing Your words, were scandalised when they went away? They said so, when they bumped into me while going out... You were very resolute » remarks Bartholomew.

And Jesus replies: «And very truthful. It is not My fault, but theirs, if certain things must be said. And it was charitable of Me to say them. Any plant which was not planted by My Heavenly Father is to be uprooted. And the useless moorland of parasitic, suffocating thorny herbs, which destroy the seed of the holy Truth, was not planted by Him. It is charitable to uproot traditions and precepts which suffocate the Decalogue, misinterpreting it, and making it inert and impossible to abide by. It is charitable to do so for the sake of honest souls. As far as those insolent obstinate persons are concerned, who are deaf to every advice and action of Love, leave them alone and let them be followed by those whose souls and inclinations are like theirs. They are blind men leading blind men. If one blind man leads another, both can but fall into a pit. Let them feed on their own uncleanness, which they call "cleanliness". It cannot contaminate them any further, because it lies on the matrix from which it originates.»

«What You are saying now is connected with what You said in Daniel's house, is it not? That it is not what goes into the mouth of man that makes him unclean, but what comes out of it » asks Simon the Zealot gravely.

«Yes » replies Jesus briefly.

After a moment's silence, as Jesus' gravity freezes even the most exuberant characters, Peter asks: «Master, I, and I am not the only one, have not understood the parable very well. Please explain it to us. How is it that what goes in does not make unclean, and what comes out does? If I take a clean amphora and I pour dirty water into it, I will dirty it. So what goes into the amphora makes it unclean. But if from an amphora full of clean water I pour some of it on to the ground, I will not make the amphora unclean, because clean water comes out of it. So? »

And Jesus says: «We are not amphorae, Simon. We are not amphorae, My friends. And not everything is clean in man! Do even you not understand? Consider the case with which the Pharisees charged you. They stated that you were unclean because you were taking food to your mouths with dusty, sweaty hands, that is, with unclean hands. But where did that food go? From your mouths into your stomachs, from your stomachs into your intestines and from your intestines into the sewer. Can it thus make your whole body unclean, and what is contained in your body, if it only goes through the passage destined to fulfil the task of nourishing the flesh, and the flesh only, and then ending in a sewer, as it is right it should? That is not what makes man unclean. What makes man unclean is what is entirely and exclusively his own, procreated and brought forth by his ego. That is, what he has in his heart, and from his heart rises to his lips and to his head, corrupting his thoughts and words and making him wholly unclean. From the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, blasphemy. From the heart come avarice, lust, pride, envy, wrath, immoderate desires and sinful idleness. From the heart come incentives to all actions. And if the heart is wicked, they will be as wicked as the heart. All actions: from idolatry to insincere grumbling... All these wicked things, which from inside come outside, make man unclean, not eating without washing one's hands. The science of God is not a base thing, mud upon which any foot can tread. It is something sublime, which lives among stars, from which it descends with rays of light to perfect the just. Do not, at least you, tear it from Heaven to disgrace it in mud... Go and rest now. I am going out to pray.»

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Maria Valtorta

THE POEM OF THE MAN-GOD

VOLUME FOUR

THE THIRD YEAR OF THE PUBLIC LIFE
(Conclusion)

414. The Beggar on the Road to Jericho.
17th May 1944.

I see Jesus on a very dusty and sunny main road. There is not the smallest patch of shade, there is not a blade of grass. There is dust on the road, there is dust on the waste country bordering on it. There are certainly none of the

pleasant hills of Galilee nor of the woody mountains of Judaea, so rich in waters and pastures. The land here is not a desert by its nature, but only because man has made it so by leaving it uncultivated. It is a flat country and I cannot see one hill, not even in the distance. As I am not familiar with Palestine, I cannot say which region it is. It is certainly one which I have never seen in previous visions. On one side of the road there are heaps of crushed stones, perhaps to repair the road, which is in a very bad state. At present one sinks into the dust: when it rains it must become a torrent of mud. I can see no houses, neither near the road nor far away.

Jesus, as usual, is walking a few metres ahead of the apostles, who, hot and tired, follow Him in a group. To protect themselves from the sun, they have pulled their mantles over their heads and they look like a confraternity dressed in many-coloured robes. Jesus, instead, is bare-headed. The sun does not seem to annoy Him. He is wearing a white linen short-sleeved tunic. It is very wide and loose. He is not even wearing His usual cord belt. His clothes are most suitable for this torrid place. His mantle also must be of sky-blue linen because it is very light and falls loosely over His body, which is thus less enveloped than usual. His shoulders are covered, but His arms are free. I do not know how He has fastened it to keep it thus.

A man is sitting, nay, he is half-lying on one of the heaps of crushed stones. He must be a poor beggar. His garment (so to speak) is a dirty tattered short tunic, which perhaps once was white, but now is the colour of mud. He is wearing two shabby worn-out sandals: two soles with holes, held together with pieces of string. In his hands he has a stick made from the branch of a tree. He has a dirty bandage on his forehead and another dirty rag, stained with blood, on his left leg, between his knee and hip. The poor fellow is emaciated, a heap of bones, dejected, dirty, hairy, uncombed.

Before he invokes Jesus, Jesus goes to him. He approaches the poor wretch and asks him: «Who are you? »

«A poor man begging for bread.»

«Along this road? »

«I am going to Jericho.»

«The road is a long one and the country is depopulated.»

«I know, but the Gentiles who pass here are more likely to give me a piece of bread and a coin, than the Jews from whom I have come.»

«Have you come from Judaea? »

«Yes, from Jerusalem. But I had to go a long way round to see some good people in the country, as they always give me something. Townsfolk don't give anything. There is no mercy there.»

«You are right. There is no mercy.»

«But You have mercy. Are You Judaeen? »

«No. I come from Nazareth.»

«Once the Nazarenes had a poor reputation. But now we must say that they are better than the people in Judaea. Even in Jerusalem, only the followers of that Nazarene, Who they say is a Prophet, are good. Do You know Him? »

«And do you know Him? »

«No. I went there because, see, my leg is numb and contracted, and I drag myself along with difficulty. I am not fit to work and I am dying of starvation and blows. I was hoping to meet Him, because I was told that He cures whoever He touches. It is true that I do not belong to the chosen people... but they say that He is good to everybody. I was told that He was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks. But I walk slowly... and I was beaten and I was left suffering on the road... When I arrived in Jerusalem, He had left, because they told me that the Jews had ill-treated Him as well.»

«And did they maltreat you? »

«They always do. Only the Roman soldiers give me a piece of bread.»

«And what do the people in Jerusalem say of that Nazarene? »

«That He is the Son of God, a great Prophet, a Saint, a Just man.»

«And what do you think He is? »

«I... I am an idolater. But I think He is the Son of God.»

«How can you believe that, if you do not even know Him? »

«I know His works. Only God can be as good and speak words as He does.»

«Who told you of those words? »

«Other poor people, people who were cured, children who bring me some bread...»

Children are good and they know nothing of believers and idolaters.»

«But where do you come from? »

«...»

«Tell Me. I am like children. Be not afraid. But be sincere.»

«I am... a Samaritan. Don't beat me...»

«I never beat anybody. I never despise anyone. I feel sorry for everybody.»

«Then... Then You are the Rabbi of Galilee! »

The beggar prostrates himself, from the heap of stones he falls on the dust like a dead body, in front of Jesus.

«Stand up. It is I. Be not afraid. Stand up and look at Me.»

The beggar looks up, still on his knees: he is all contracted because of his deformity.

«Give this man some bread and something to drink » says Jesus to the apostles who have just arrived.

It is John who gives bread and water.

«Make him sit down, so that he may eat comfortably. Eat, brother.»

The poor man weeps. He does not eat. He looks at Jesus with the eyes of a stray dog, which is caressed and fed, for the first time, by a compassionate person.

«Eat up! » orders Jesus smiling.

The poor fellow eats between one sob and another and tears moisten his bread.

But there is also a smile among his tears. He slowly regains confidence.

«Who wounded you here? » asks Jesus touching with His fingers the dirty bandage on the man's forehead.

«A rich Pharisee deliberately ran me over with his cart... I was standing at a cross-roads begging for bread. He drove his horses against me so quickly, that I was not able to move aside. I was on the point of death because of it. I still have a hole in my head, from which putrid matter comes out. »

«And who struck you there? »

«I had approached the house of a Sadducee, where there was a banquet, asking for some of the remains, after the dogs had chosen the best ones. He saw me and set the dogs on me. One of them tore my thigh to pieces.»

«And what about this large scar that maims your hand? »

«A scribe gave me a blow with a club three years ago. He found out that I was a Samaritan and he struck me breaking my fingers. That is why I cannot work. With my right hand maimed, my leg numbed, how can I earn my living? »

«But why are you leaving Samaria? »

«It's bad to be in need, Master. We are very unhappy and there is not enough bread for everybody. If You helped me...»

«What do you want Me to do for you? »

«To cure me so that I may work.»

« Do you think I can? »

«Yes, I do believe it, because You are the Son of God.»

«Do you believe that? »

«I do.»

«You, a Samaritan, believe that? Why? »

«I do not know why. I know that I believe in You and in Him Who sent You. Now that You have come, there is no difference in worshipping. It is enough to worship You in order to worship Your Father, the eternal Lord. Where You are, there is the Father.»

«Have you heard, My friends? (Jesus addresses His disciples). This man is speaking through the Spirit Who enlightens the truth for him. And I solemnly tell you that he is superior to scribes and Pharisees, to cruel Sadducees, to all those idolaters who falsely call themselves the children of the Law. The Law prescribes to love our neighbour, after God. And they give blows to the neighbour asking for bread, they drive horses and dogs on suppliants, on the neighbour who lowers himself below the dogs of a rich man, they set the very dogs on him, to make him even more unhappy than his diseases do. Disdainful, cruel, hypocrites, they do not want God to be known and loved. If they did want that, they would make Him known through their deeds, as this man said. It is deeds, not practices, which make people see the living God in the hearts of men and lead men to God. And you, Judas, since you reproach Me for being imprudent, tell Me, shall I not reprimand them? To be silent, to feign that I approve of them, would mean approving of their behaviour. No. For the glory of God, Whose Son I am, I cannot allow humble, unhappy, good people to believe that I approve

of their sins. I have come to make the Gentiles sons of God. But I cannot do that if they see that the children of the Law - they call themselves so, but they are illegitimate children - practise a paganism more guilty than theirs, because these Jews have been acquainted with the Law of God, and now, just like unclean animals, they spit the regurgitations of their satisfied passions on it. Am I to believe, Judas, that you are like them? You, who reproach Me for the truth I speak? Or must I think that you are worried about your own life? He who follows Me must not be concerned with human worries. I told you, Judas, you are still in time to choose between My way and the way of the Judaeans, whom you approve of. But consider that My way goes to God; the other to God's Enemy. Consider that and make up your mind. But be sincere. And you, My friend, rise and walk. Remove those bandages. Go back home. You are cured because of your faith.»

The beggar looks at Him dumbfounded. He dare not stretch out his hand... but he tries. It is uninjured, exactly as his left one. He drops his stick, and pushing his hands on the heap of stones, he rises. He can stand. The paralysis contracting his leg is cured. He moves his leg, bends it... takes one step, two, three. He walks... He looks at Jesus with a cry and tears of joy. He rips off the bandage from his forehead. He touches the back of his head, where the infected hole was. There is nothing. It is all cured. He tears the blood-stained rag off his leg: the skin is intact.

«Master, Master and my God! » he shouts, lifting his arms, and then falling on his knees to kiss Jesus' feet.

«Go home now, and always believe in the Lord.»

«And where shall I go, Master and God, but after You, Who are good and holy? Do not reject me, Master...»

«Go to Samaria. And speak of Jesus of Nazareth. The hour of Redemption is close at hand. Be My disciple with your brothers. Go in peace.»

Jesus blesses him and they then part. The cured man walks fast northwards, turning round now and again to look.

Jesus, with His apostles, leaves the road and they proceed eastwards through uncultivated fields, taking a little path which cuts across the main road and which widens out only much farther on. It is perhaps the road to Jericho. I do not know.

415. The Conversion of Zacchaeus.

17th July 1944.

I see a large square, which looks like a market and is shaded by palms and other lower leafy trees. The palm-trees grow here and there, without any order and their top leaves rustle in the warm upper breeze, which raises a reddish dust, as if it came from a desert or from uncultivated places of reddish earth. The other trees, instead, form shady porches along the sides of the square, and vendors and buyers have taken shelter under them, in a restless shouting din. In a corner of the square, exactly where the main road leads into it, there is a primitive excise office. There are scales and measures, and a bench at which is sat a little man who oversees, watches and deals in cash and to whom everybody speaks, as if he were very well known. I know that he is Zacchaeus, the exciseman, as many people address him, some to ask about the events of the town, and they are mainly strangers, some to pay their taxes. Many are surprised at seeing him worried. He seems in fact absent-minded and engrossed in thought. He replies in monosyllables and at times with gestures, which amazes many, who know that Zacchaeus is usually talkative. Some ask him whether he is not feeling well or if any of his relatives is ill. But he says no.

Only twice he shows keen interest. The first time when he questions two people who have come from Jerusalem and are speaking of the Nazarene, of His miracles and teaching. Zacchaeus then asks many questions: «Is He really as good as they say? And do His words correspond to facts? Does He really make use of the mercy which He preaches? On behalf of everybody, also of publicans? Is it true that He does not reject anybody? » And he listens, thinks and sighs. The second time when someone points out to him a bearded man, who is, passing by with a little

donkey laden with household goods. «See, Zacchaeus? That is Zacharias, the leper. He lived in a sepulchre for ten years. Now that he is cured, he has bought the furnishings for his house, which was emptied according to the Law, when he and his relatives were declared lepers.»

«Call him.»

Zacharias comes.

«Were you a leper? »

«I was and so were my wife and my two children. My wife was the first to be infected and we did not notice it at once. The children became infected sleeping with their mother, and I, when I approached my wife. We were all lepers! When it was found out, they sent us away from the village... They could have left us in our house, as it was the last one... at the end of the street. We would not have caused any trouble... I had already grown a very high hedge, so that we might not even be seen. It was already a sepulchre... but it was our home... They sent us away. Away! Away! No town wanted us. And quite rightly! Not even our own town had wanted us. We stayed near Jerusalem, in an empty sepulchre. Many poor wretches are there. But the children died, in the cold of the cave. The disease, cold and starvation soon killed them... They were two boys... they were beautiful before the disease. They were strong and beautiful, dark brown like two blackberries in August, curly and lively. They had become two skeletons covered with sores... They had no hair left, their eyes were sealed with scabs, their feet and hands were falling off in white scales. I watched the bodies of my children waste away!... They no longer looked like human beings the morning they died... one after the other within a few hours... I buried them under a little earth and many stones, like the carrion of animals, while their mother screamed... A few months later their mother died...and I was left alone... I was waiting to die and no one would dig a hole to bury me...

I was almost blind when one day the Nazarene passed by. From my sepulchre I shouted: "Jesus! Son of David, have mercy on me!" A beggar, who was not afraid to bring me his bread, had told me that he had been cured of his blindness, by shouting that invocation. And he said: "He did not only give me the sight of my eyes, but also of my soul. I saw that He is the Son of God and I see everyone through Him. That is why, brother, I do not shun you, but I bring you bread and faith. Go to the Christ. So that one more soul may bless Him". I could not go. My feet, ulcerated to the bone, would not let me walk... in any case... I would have been stoned, if they saw me. I waited carefully for Him to pass. He often passed by coming to Jerusalem. One day I saw, as far as I could see, a cloud of dust on the road and many people and I heard shouts. I dragged myself to the brow of the hill, where the sepulchral caves were, and when I thought I could see a bare fair-haired head shine among other covered ones, I shouted aloud, at the top of my voice. I shouted three times, until my voice reached Him. He turned round. He stopped. Then He came towards me: all alone. He came right under the spot where I was and He looked at me. He was handsome, kind, with a voice, a smile!... He asked: "What do you want Me to do for you?".

"I want to be cleansed".

"Do you believe that I can? Why?" He asked me.

"Because You are the Son of God".

"Do you believe that?".

"I believe it" I replied. "I see the Most High flash in His glory above Your head. Son of God, have mercy on me!".

He then stretched out a hand and His face was ablaze. His eyes seemed two blue suns, and he said: "I want it. Be cleansed" and He blessed me with a smile!... Ah! What a smile! I perceived a strength enter me. Like a sword of fire which ran searching for my heart, it ran through my veins. My heart, which was so diseased, became as it was when I was twenty years old, and the ice-cold blood became warm and fast-flowing in my veins. No more pains, no more weakness, and a joy, what a joy!... He was looking at me; with His smile He made me blissful. He then said: "Go, show yourself to the priests. Your faith has saved you".

I then realised that I had been cured and I looked at my hands and legs. There were no more sores. There was fresh rosy flesh where previously the bone was uncovered. I ran to a little stream and I looked at myself. My face also was clean. I was clean! Clean after being loathsome for ten years!... Oh! Why did He not pass by before? When my wife and children were alive? He would have cured us. Now, see? I am buying things for my house... But I am all alone!...»

«Have you not seen Him any more? »

«No, but I know that He is in this area and that is why I have come. I would like to bless Him once again and be blessed by Him to have strength in my solitude.»

Zacchaeus lowers his head and is silent. The group breaks up.

Some time passes. It gets warmer. The market place empties. The exciseman with his head resting on one hand is pensive, sitting at his desk.

«Here is the Nazarene! » shout some children, pointing at the main road.

Women, men, sick people, beggars rush towards Him. The square is empty. Only some donkeys and camels, tied to the palm-trees, remain where they were, and Zacchaeus remains at his desk.

He then stands up and climbs on his desk. But he cannot see anything because many people have pulled off branches and are waving them joyfully and Jesus is bending over sick people. Zacchaeus then takes off his garment and having on only his short tunic he climbs one of the trees. He goes up the large smooth trunk with difficulty as his short arms and legs make climbing difficult. But he succeeds and sits astride two branches as on a perch. His legs hang from that kind of railing and from his waist upwards he leans out as if he were at a window and he watches.

The crowds arrive in the square. Jesus looks up and smiles at the solitary spectator perched on the branches. «Zacchaeus, come down at once. I am staying at your house today » He orders.

And Zacchaeus, after a moment of astonishment, his face purple with excitement, lets himself slide down on the ground like a sack. He is so excited that he is hardly able to put on his clothes. He closes his books and cash-desk with gestures which he would like to be very fast, but instead are very slow. But Jesus is patient: He caresses some children while waiting.

Zacchaeus is ready at last. He approaches the Master and leads Him to a beautiful house with a large garden around it, in the centre of the town. A beautiful town. Not much inferior to Jerusalem with regard to its buildings, if not to its size.

Jesus goes in and while waiting for the meal to be made ready, he takes care of sick and healthy people. With such patience... as He only is capable.

Zacchaeus comes and goes, busying himself. He is beside himself with joy. He would like to speak to Jesus. But Jesus is always surrounded by a crowd of people.

At last Jesus dismisses everybody saying: «Come back at sunset. Go to your homes now. Peace be with you.»

The garden empties and the meal is served in a beautiful cool hall facing the garden. Zacchaeus has done things in great style. I do not see any other relatives, so I think that Zacchaeus is single and lives only with many servants.

At the end of the meal, when the disciples scatter in the shade of bushes to rest, Zacchaeus remains with Jesus in the cool hall. In actual fact Jesus remains alone for a little while, because Zacchaeus withdraws to let Him rest. But he comes back and looks through a slit in the curtains. He sees that Jesus is not sleeping, but is pensive. He then approaches Him. He is carrying a heavy coffer, which he lays on the table near Jesus and says: «Master... they have spoken to me about You. For some time. One day on a mountain side You said so many truthful things, that our doctors cannot excel them. They remained in my heart... and since then I have been thinking of You... Then I was told that You are good and that You do not reject sinners. I am a sinner, Master. They told me that You cure sick people. My heart is diseased, because I defrauded, I practised usury, I have been a depraved fellow, a thief, hard on the poor. But now, I have been cured, because You spoke to me. You approached me and the demon of sensuality and riches fled. And as from today, I belong to You, if You do not reject me, and to prove to You that I am reborn in You, I divest myself of the ill-acquired riches and I give You half of my wealth for the poor and I will use the other half to give back, multiplied by four, what I got by fraud. I know whom I cheated. Then, after handing back to each of them what belongs to them, I will follow You, Master, if You allow me...»

«I do want that. Come. I have come to save and call people to the Light. Today Light and Salvation have come to the house of your heart. Those who over there, beyond the gate, are grumbling because I have redeemed you sitting at your

banquet, are forgetting that you are a son of Abraham as they are, and that I have come to save who was lost and to give Life to those whose spirits were dead. Come, Zacchaeus. You have understood My word better than many people who follow Me only to be able to accuse Me. Therefore you will be with Me as from now on.»

The vision ends here.

18th July 1944.

Jesus says:

«There is yeast and yeast. There is the yeast of Good and the yeast of Evil. The yeast of Evil, a Satanic poison, ferments more easily than the yeast of Good, because it finds matter more suitable for fermentation in the heart of man, in the thought of man, in the flesh of man, seduced all three by a selfish will, contrary therefore to the universal Will, which is the Will of God.

The will of God is universal because it is never confined to a personal thought, but it takes into consideration the welfare of the whole universe. Nothing can increase the perfection of God in any way, as He has always possessed everything in a perfect manner. Thus there can be no thought in Him of personal gain inciting any of His actions. When we say: "This is done to the greater glory of God, in the interest of God", we do not mean that divine glory is in Itself susceptible to improvement, but that everything which in Creation bears the mark of good and any person doing good, and thus deserving to possess it, is adorned with the sign of divine Glory and thus gives glory to Glory itself, Which has created all things gloriously. It is, in short, the testimony which people and things bear to God, giving evidence, with their deeds, of the perfect Origin from Which they come.

Thus, when God orders or advises you to do an action or inspires you with one, He does not aim at any selfish interest, but at your welfare, with altruistic charitable mind. That is, therefore, the reason why the Will of God is never selfish, on the contrary it is a Will which aims entirely at altruism and universality. It is the only and true Strength in the universe which considers universal welfare.

On the contrary, the yeast of Good, spiritual embryo coming from God, grows through difficulties and hardships, as it has against itself the reactions propitious to the other one: the flesh, the heart, the thought of man, pervaded with selfishness, the antithesis of Good, which by its origin can be but Love. Most men lack the will of Good and consequently Good becomes sterile and dies, or lives so poorly that it does not leaven: it remains as it was. There is no grave fault. But there is not even the effort to do the greatest good. The spirit thus lies inert: not dead, but unfruitful.

Bear in mind that not to do evil serves only to avoid Hell. To enjoy at once beautiful Paradise one must do good. It is essential. As much good as one can do, struggling against oneself and other people. Because I said that I had come not to bring peace but war, also between father and children, brothers and sisters, when such war was to defend the Will of God and His Law against the abuse of human wills aiming at what is contrary to what God wants.

In Zacchaeus the tiny quantity of yeast of good had leavened a huge mass. Only an original small particle had fallen into his heart: they had related My Sermon on the Mount to him. And they had done it so badly, mutilating it of many parts, as happens with reported speeches.

Zacchaeus was a publican and a sinner, but not through bad will. He was like one who sees things badly because the veil of cataract covers his eye-lenses. But he knows that once the veil is removed, he can see properly once again. And that sick person wants the veil to be removed. Zacchaeus was like that. He was neither convinced nor happy. He was not convinced of Pharisaic practices, which had already replaced the true Law. And he was not happy with his way of living. He was instinctively seeking Light. The true Light. He saw a flash of it in that fragment of My speech and he hid it in his heart like a treasure. Because he loved it - bear this in mind, Mary - because he loved it, the flash became more and more lively, vast and vehement, and caused him to see Good and Evil clearly and to choose rightly, generously cutting off all the tentacles which previously, from things to his heart and from his heart to things, had enveloped him in a net of malicious slavery.

"Because he loved it". That is the secret of success or failure. One succeeds

when one loves. One has little success when one loves niggardly. One has no success at all when one does not love. In anything. All the more in the things of God, where, as God is invisible to corporal senses, I dare say, one must love perfectly, as far as a creature can reach perfection, in order to succeed in an enterprise. In holiness, in this case.

Zacchaeus, disgusted with the world and the flesh, as he was disgusted with the meanness of Pharisaic practices, so captious and severe for other people, so indulgent for them, loved the little treasure of a word of Mine, which reached him by chance, speaking from a human point of view. He loved it as the most beautiful thing that his forty-year-old life had ever possessed, and from that moment he concentrated his heart and thought on that point.

It is not only in evil that man's heart is where his treasure is. But also in good. Did saints perhaps during their lifetime not have their hearts where their treasure was: in God? Yes, they did. And that is why, looking only at God, they passed on the Earth, without contaminating their souls with the mud of the Earth.

That morning, even if I had not appeared there, I would have conquered a proselyte. Because the speech of the leper had completed Zacchaeus' metamorphosis. At the bench of the excise-house there was no longer a cheating vicious publican, but a man repenting his past and decided to change life. If I had not gone to Jericho, he would have closed his office, he would have taken his money and come looking for Me, because he could no longer live without the water of Truth, without the bread of Love, without the kiss of Forgiveness. The usual harsh critics who always watched Me to reproach Me, did not see that and they could understand it even less. And that is why they were amazed at My having a meal with a sinner. Oh! I wish you never judged, leaving that task to God, you poor blind people, who cannot even judge yourselves! I never went with sinners to approve of their sin. I went to remove them from sin, because they often had only the exterior aspect of sin: their contrite souls had already changed into new souls, living to expiate. So was I with a sinner? No, I was with a redeemed soul, in need only of a guide to stand up in its weakness of a soul risen from death.

How much Zacchaeus' episode can teach you! The power of upright intention that excites desire. Upright desire that urges one to seek deeper and deeper knowledge of Good and to long for God continuously until one reaches Him, true repentance that gives the courage of abnegation. Zacchaeus had the upright intention of listening to words of true Doctrine. When he heard some, his upright desire urged him to greater desire and thus to uninterrupted research for that Doctrine; the research for God, hidden in the true Doctrine, detached him from the mean gods of richness and sensuality and made him a hero of renunciation.

"If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and follow Me" I said to the rich young man, but he did not do that. But Zacchaeus, although more hardened in avarice and sensuality, was able to do it. Because, through the few Words related to him, like the blind beggar and the leper cured by Me, he saw God. Can a soul that has seen God, find any more attraction in the little things of the Earth? Is that ever possible, My little bride? »

19th July 1944.

Jesus says:

«In My several bedtitudes I enunciated the requisites necessary to achieve them and the rewards that will be given to the blessed ones. But while the categories mentioned are different, the reward is the same, if you consider the situation carefully: to enjoy the same things that God enjoys.

Different categories. I have already explained that God with His thought creates souls of different tendency, so that the Earth may enjoy a just balance in all its inferior and superior necessities. If the rebellion of man upsets that balance, as he always wants. to go against the divine Will, Which guides him lovingly along the just way, it is not God's fault. Men, perpetually dissatisfied with their situation, invade or upset other people's estates, either by means of true and proper abuse of power, or by attempts at such abuse. What are world wars, family feuds, professional warfare, but such active abuse? What are social revolutions, what are the doctrines that clothe themselves with the name "social", but in actual fact are nothing but arrogance and the very

opposite of charity, because they neither want nor practise the justice they preach, on the contrary they overflow with outbreaks of violence, which do not relieve oppressed people, but increase their numbers to the advantage of a few arrogant fellows?

But where I, God, reign, such alterations do not take place. Nothing upsets order in My Kingdom and in the spirits which are really Mine. Thus the several aspects of the multiform holiness of God are lived and rewarded, because God is just, pure, peaceful, merciful, free from the greed of fleeting riches, joyful in the happiness of His love. Some souls tend to one form, some to another. They tend in an eminent manner, because all virtues are present in saints. But one predominates, and on account of it, that saint is particularly celebrated among men. But I bless and reward him on account of all of them, because the reward is "to enjoy God" both for the peaceful and the merciful, for those who love justice and for those who are persecuted by injustice, for the pure and the distressed, for the meek and for the pure in spirit.

The pure in spirit! How badly is this definition always understood, even by those who perceive its right meaning! According to human superficiality and to foolish human irony, and according to ignorance, which considers itself wise, pure in spirit means "stupid".

The better class of people think that the spirit is intelligence, thought; those who are more material consider it artfulness and malice. No. The spirit is by far superior to intelligence. It is the king of everything in you. All physical and moral qualities are subjects and servants of that king. That is the situation where a creature devoted to God in a filial manner knows how to keep things in the right place. Where instead a creature is not devoted in a filial manner, idolatries take place, and the maidservants become queens and depose the spirit king. Anarchy which causes disaster like all anarchies.

Poverty in spirit consists in having the sovereign freedom from everything that is the delight of man, and for which man goes to the extent of committing material crime or the unpunished moral crime that too often escapes human law, but does not make fewer victims, on the contrary it makes more and with consequences which are not limited to taking the life of the victim, but often deprive both the victims and their relatives of their good reputation and livelihood.

The man poor in spirit is no longer enslaved by riches. Even if he does not go so far as to repudiate them materially, depriving himself of them and of every comfort by joining a monastic order, he knows how to use them sparingly for himself, which is a double sacrifice, in order to be prodigal of gifts to the poor of the world. He has understood My sentence: "Make friends by means of unjust riches". Of his money, which might be the enemy of his spirit, leading it to lust, greed and anticharity, he makes a servant that levels the way to Heaven for him - the rich: poor in spirit - a way completely spread with his mortifications and his charitable deeds for the miseries of his fellow-creatures. How many injustices the man poor in spirit mends and cures! His own injustices of the time when, like Zacchaeus, he was but a greedy hard-hearted man. Injustices of his neighbours, whether alive or dead. Social injustices. You erect monuments to people who were great only because they were overbearing. Why do you not erect monuments to the secret benefactors of destitute mankind, to the poor and working classes, to those who use their wealth not to make their own lives a perpetual feast, but to make life brighter, better and more elevated for those who are poor, for those who suffer, for those whose functional faculties are impaired, for those left in ignorance by overbearing people, because ignorance serves their hateful aims better? How many there are, also among those who are not rich, nay, who are little less than poor, and yet they can sacrifice the "two farthings" they possess, in order to relieve a misery, which, being without the Light which they have - and their behaviour makes one understand that they do have it - is greater than their own!

Those are poor in spirit who, losing their possessions, whether large or small, know how to keep their peace and hope, without cursing or hating anyone, either God or men.

The wide category of the "poor in spirit", which I mentioned as the first one - because I could say that without such freedom of the spirit from all the delights of life, it is not Possible to have the other virtues which give beatitude - is divided and subdivided into many forms.

Humility of thought which does not swell with pride and does not proclaim itself super-thought, but makes use of the gift of God acknowledging its Origin, for Good. Only for that.

Generosity in affections, whereby one can deprive oneself also of them, in order to follow God, also of life, the most real wealth and the most loved instinctively by the animal creature. All My martyrs were generous in that way, because their spirits had become poor, in order to become "rich" in the only eternal riches: God.

Justice in loving our personal things. It is our duty to love them, because they are testimony of Providence in our favour. I have already spoken about that in previous dictations. But we must not love them more than we love God or His Will; you must not love them to the extent of cursing God, if man snatches them from you.

And finally, I would repeat it, freedom from the slavery of money.

Those are the different forms of that spiritual poverty that I said will possess Heaven out of justice. Put under your feet all the fleeting riches of human life to possess the eternal riches. Consider the Earth and its deceitful fruit, which is sweet outside and bitter inside, as the last thing, and live working to conquer Heaven. Oh! there is no fruit there with a false flavour. There is the ineffable fruit of the enjoyment of God.

Zacchaeus had understood that. That sentence was the arrow that opened his heart to Light and Charity. It opened it to Me as I approached him to say to him:

"Come". And when I came up to him to call him, he was already "poor in spirit". He was therefore capable of possessing Heaven. »

416. At Solomon's Village.

'Jesus says:

«You will put here the vision of Jesus and the beggar on the road to Jericho, which you had on 17th May 1944, and immediately after it, the vision of the conversion of Zacchaeus, of 17th July 1944.»

13th April 1946.

Jesus arrives there at dead of night. The position of the moon makes me think that it is about two o'clock a.m. A beautiful moon, just beginning to wane is beaming in the middle of the clear sky spreading peace on the earth. Peace and abundant dew, the heavy dew of warm countries, beneficial to plants after the parching heat of the sun during the day.

The pilgrims must have followed the gravel bed of the river, which is dry near the banks, as the river is more restricted in its bed because of the summer drought. And from the cane-brake they climb up to the wood limiting the banks and supporting them with the network of the roots of the trees growing near the water.

«Let us stop here and await morning » says Jesus.

«Master... I am aching all over...» says Matthew.

«And I am afraid I have a temperature. A river is not a healthy place in summer... as You know » adds Philip.

«But it would have been worse if from the river we had gone up to the Judaeen mountains. That is also well known » says the Zealot, who feels sorry for Jesus, to Whom they all tell their fears and complaints, but Whose mood no one understands.

«Never mind, Simon. They are right. But we shall have a rest shortly... Please, only another short distance... And a short rest here. You can see how the moon is going down westwards. Why wake the old man and Joseph, who is perhaps still ill, when it will soon be daybreak?...»

«The trouble is that everything is wet with dew here. One does not know where to sit...» grumbles the Iscariot.

«Are you afraid of spoiling your garment? Never mind, after these forced marches among dust and dew, there is no strutting about in it! In any case... kind Helkai would prefer it as it is. Your Greek frets... ha! ha! those at the hem and round the sleeves are hanging in ribbons on the thorny bushes of the Judaeen desert, and the one round your neck has been ruined by your perspiration... You

are now a perfect Judaeon...» says Thomas, who is always merry.
«I am perfect a wretch, dirty as I am, and disgusted with it » retorts Judas angrily.
«It is enough for you to have a clean heart, Judas » says Jesus calmly. «That is important...».
«Important! Important! We are exhausted with fatigue, with starvation... We are ruining our health, and that only is important » replies rudely Judas.
«I am not compelling you to stay... It is you who want to stay.»
«After all this time!... I had better do so. I am...»
«You may as well say the word that makes your lips rankle: "You are compromised in the eyes of the Sanhedrin". But you can always make amends... and regain their confidence...»
«I do not want to make amends... because I love You and I want to stay with You.»
«In actual fact you say so in such a manner that rather than love it sounds like hatred...» grumbles between his teeth Judas of Alphaeus.
«Well... every man has his own way of expressing his love.»
«Of course! There is also who loves his wife but kills her with blows... I would not like that kind of love » says James of Zebedee endeavouring to put an end to the incident with a jest. But no one laughs. But no one, thanks be to God, replies.
Jesus advises: «Let us go and sit down on the threshold of the house. The eaves are wide and will protect us from the dew, and there is a footing at the base of the little house...»
They obey without speaking and when they arrive at the house they sit in a row along the wall.
But Thomas' simple remark: «I am hungry. These night marches make one hungry » revives the argument.
«Marches don't come into it! The fact is that for days we have been living on nothing! » replies the Iscariot.
«Actually at Nike's and at Zacchaeus' we had good meals, and Nike gave us so much food that we had to give it to the poor, otherwise it would have gone bad. We have never been short of bread. The caravan guide also gave us bread and butter...» remarks Andrew.
Judas, who cannot contradict, is silent.
A cock crows in the distance greeting the first sign of daylight.
«Oh! good! It will soon be down! » says Peter stretching himself, as he had almost fallen asleep.
They wait for daybreak in silence.
A bleating in a sheep-fold... Then a harness-bell in the distance on the main road, poles apart from them... The nearby cooing of Ananias' doves. The hoarse voice of a man in the cane-brake... It is a fisherman coming back with his night catch and he is cursing because it is scanty. He sees Jesus and stops. He hesitates, then says: «If I give it to You, will You promise me plenty in future? »
«For profit or for your needs? »
«For my needs. I have seven children, my wife and her mother.»
«You are right. Be charitable and I promise you that you will not lack what is necessary.»
«Here, then. In there, there is also the injured man who is not recovering despite treatment...»
«May God reward you and give you peace » says Jesus.
The man says goodbye and goes away, leaving his fish strung through the mouth with a willow twig.
Silence falls on them again, just broken by the rustling of the canes, by the trills of some birds... Then a creaking is heard nearby. The rustic little gate, which Ananias made, creaks when opened and the little old man appears on the road scanning the sky. A sheep follows him bleating...
«Peace to you, Ananias! »
«Master! But... how long have You been there? Why did You not call, so that I could open the door for You?! »
«Not long. I did not want to disturb anyone... How is Joseph? »
«You know?... He is not well. Pus runs out of his ear and he suffers from headaches. I think he will die. That is, I thought. You are here now and I think

that he will recover. I was going out to get some herbs to make a poultice...»
«Are Joseph's companions here? »
«Two of them. The others have gone ahead. Solomon and Elias are here.»
«Did the Pharisees annoy you? »
«Immediately after You left. Not afterwards. They wanted to know where You had gone. I said: "To my daughter-in-law, at Masada". Did I do the wrong thing? »
«No, you did not.»
«And... have You really been there? » The little old man is anxious.
«Yes, I was there. She is well.»
«But... did she not listen to You?...»
«No, she did not. We must pray very much for her.»
«And for the little ones... That she may bring them up for the Lord...» says the old man and two large tears stream down his face to say what he does not speak. He concludes: «Did You see them? »
«I can say that I saw one... I got a glimpse of the others. They are all well.»
«I offer my renunciation and forgiveness to God... But... it is so grievous having to say: "I will never see them again"...»
«You will soon see your son and you will be in peace with him in Heaven.»
«Thank You, Lord. Come in...»
«Yes. Let us go at once to the injured man, Where is he? »
«In the best bed.»
They go into the well-kept kitchen garden, and from it into the kitchen and from the kitchen into the little room. Jesus bends over the sick man who moans in his sleep. He bends... and breathes into the ear enveloped in lints already impregnated with pus. He stands up and withdraws noiselessly.
«Are You not waking him? » asks the old man in a low voice.
«No. Let him sleep. He is no longer suffering. He will rest. Let us go to the others.»
Jesus sets the door ajar without making any noise and goes into the large room where are the little beds purchased the last time. The two disciples, being tired, are still sleeping.
«They keep vigil until morning. I keep watch over him from morning till evening. So they are tired. They are so good.»
The two must be sleeping with their ears cocked, because they awake at once:
«Master! Our Master! You came just in time! Joseph is...»
«Cured. I have already seen to him, He is sleeping and does not know. There is nothing wrong with him now. All he has to do is to purge himself of the pus and he will be as healthy as previously.»
«Oh! In that case purge us as well, because we have sinned.»
«How? »
«In order to assist Joseph we did not go to the Temple...»
«Charity makes every place a temple. And in the Temple of charity there is God. If we all loved one another, the whole Earth would be a Temple. Do not worry. The day will come when Pentecost means "Love". A manifestation of love. You have celebrated, anticipating times, the future Pentecost, because you have loved your brother.»
From the other room Joseph's voice is heard calling: «Ananias! Elias! Solomon! But I am cured! » and the man, thin and still pale, but no longer suffering, appears covered only with his short tunic. He sees Jesus and says: «Ah! It was You, my Master! » and he runs to kiss His feet.
«May God grant you peace, Joseph, and forgive Me if you suffered because of Me.»
«I glory in having shed my blood for You, as my father did. I bless You for making me worthy of that! » Joseph's simple plain face shines with joy uttering these words and looks noble, with the handsomeness which originates from an interior light.
Jesus caresses him and says to Solomon: «Your house serves to do much good.»
«Oh! because it is Yours, now. Previously it served only for the sound sleep of the ferryman. But I am glad that it has been useful to You and to this just man. We shall now have some good days here with You.»
«No, My friend. You will leave at once. We are no longer granted any rest. This period of time will be a real test and only those with a strong will will remain faithful. We shall now break the bread together and then you will leave at once, going along the river, preceding Me by half a day.»
«Yes, Master. Joseph also? »

«Yes. Unless he is afraid of new injury...»

«Oh! Master! Would to God that I had to precede You in death shedding my blood for You! »

They go out into the dewy kitchen garden shining in the early sun. And Ananias does the honours of the house by picking some early figs from the branches better exposed, and he apologises for being unable to offer a young pigeon because the two broods were used for the sick man. But there is the fish and they get busy preparing the food.

Jesus is walking between Elias and Joseph who tell Him of the recent adventure and of the strength of Solomon, who carried the injured man on his back for miles and miles, which they covered a little at a time, by night...

«But you, Joseph, have forgiven those who injured you, have you not? »

«I never had a grudge against those unhappy people. I offered forgiveness and my sufferings for their redemption.»

«That is what one must do, My good disciple! And what about Ogla? »

«Ogla has gone with Timoneus. I do not know whether he will go on with him or whether he will stop at Mount Hermon. He always said that he wanted to go to Lebanon.»

«Well. May God inspire him to do what is best.»

Many birds now chirp in chorus among the branches, while bleatings, the voices of children and women, braying donkeys, squeaking pulleys of wells, tell that the village is awake.

In the kitchen garden the bread is broken, the fish handed round and they have their meal. Immediately afterwards, the three disciples, blessed by Jesus, leave the house and walk fast along the road, as far as the river, and vanish into the cool shady canebrakes... They can no longer be seen...

«And now let us rest until evening and then we will follow them » orders Jesus. And some lie down on the little beds, some on the piles of nets, which Ananias made, saying that thus he is not idle and he earns his daily bread, and they all seek a refreshing sleep.

In the meantime Ananias, after picking up the garments wet with perspiration, goes out noiselessly, closes the door and the gate and goes down to the river to wash them, so that they may be fresh and dry by evening...

Jesus says:

«And here you will put the vision: "Jesus in a little village of the Decapolis" of 2nd October 1944, and then the other one: "The Demoniac of the Decapolis" of 29th September 1944.»

417. In a Little Village of the Decapolis. Parable of the Sculptor.
2nd October 1944.

This is what I see. A little river in a village consisting of few modest houses. It must be the one from which Jesus came when, in a boat, He crossed the Jordan in flood, because I see the boatman and his relatives come to meet Jesus, Who had sent the Iscariot and Thomas ahead, to prepare the way for Him.

The boatman, when he sees Jesus coming from afar, quickens his step and when he is before Him, he bows most reverently saying: «You are welcomed, Master, by our sick people. They are waiting for You. I told them much about You. The entire village greets You through my lips saying: "Blessed be the Messiah of the Most High God!"»

«Peace to you and to this village. I am here for you. You will not be disappointed in your hopes. Those who believe will find Heaven merciful. Let us go.» And Jesus proceeds towards the centre of the village, walking beside the boatman.

Men, women and children appear at the doors and then follow the little procession, as it advances. At every step the people grow in numbers as many more join those already there. Some greet, some bless, some invoke.

«Master » shouts a mother «my son is ill. Come, Blessed One! »

And Jesus deviates towards a poor house, He lays one hand on the shoulder of the mother in tears and asks: «Where is your son? »

«Here, Master, come.»

The mother, Jesus, the boatman, Peter, John, Thaddeus and some local people go

in. The others crowd at the door and look in craning their necks to see. In a corner of the poor dark kitchen there is a little bed near the glimmering fireplace. On the bed there is the little corpse of a child about seven years old. I say a little corpse because he is so emaciated, yellowish, motionless. One is aware only of the heavy panting of the little chest, affected, I would say, by tuberculosis.

«Look, Master. I have spent all my resources to save at least this one. I am a widow, the other two sons died at the same age as this one is at present. I took him as far as Caesarea on the Sea to have him visited by a Roman doctor. But all he could say to me was: "Resign yourself. Caries is corroding him". Look...» And the mother uncovers the poor little thing, pushing the blankets back. Where there are no bandages, there are little bones protruding from a parched yellowish skin. But only a tiny part of the body is uncovered. The rest is covered with bandages and linens and when the mother removes them, they show the characteristic dripping holes of osseous caries. A pitiful sight. The sick boy is so prostrate that he makes no gesture. He does not even seem to be involved. He just opens his hollow dull eyes, he casts an indifferent, I would say annoyed, glance at the people and then closes them again.

Jesus caresses him. He lays His long hand on the little abandoned head, and the child opens his eyes again, looking with more interest at the unknown man, who is touching him with so much tenderness and is smiling with so much sympathy. «Do you want to be cured? » Jesus says to him in a low voice, bending over his wan face. He had previously covered the little body saying to the mother, who wanted to put some more bandages: «It is not necessary, woman. Leave him thus.» The little patient nods without speaking.

«Why? »

«For my mother » he says in a very faint voice. His mother weeps more grievously.

«Will you always be good if you are cured? A good son? A good citizen? A good believer? » He asks the questions separating them clearly, to give the child time to answer each one. «Will you always remember what you are now promising? » The feeble, yet so deep in desire, «yes », is uttered repeatedly, like a succession of sighs from his soul.

«Give me your hand, My little one.» The little patient wants to give his healthy one, the left one. But Jesus says: «Give Me the other one. I will not hurt you.»

«Lord » says the mother «it's one big sore. Let me bandage it. For You...»

«It does not matter, woman. I am disgusted only at the impurities of hearts.

Give Me your hand and say with Me: "I want to be always good as a son, as a man, as a believer in the true God".»

The boy repeats stressing his voice. Oh! His whole soul is in his voice, and his hope as well... and certainly also his mother's.

A solemn silence has fallen in the room and in the street. Jesus, Who is holding the boy's right hand with His left one, lifts His right one, with the gesture as when He announces a truth, or when He imposes His will on diseases and elements, and standing solemnly upright, He says in a powerful voice: «And I want you to be cured. Rise, child, and praise the Lord » and He releases the little hand which is now completely healed, thin, but without the least excoriation, and He says to the mother: «Uncover your child.»

The woman, who looks as if she were between a death sentence and one of mercy, removes the blankets hesitantly... and she utters a cry and throws herself on the very lean but wholesome body, kissing and embracing it... mad with joy. So much so that she does not see Jesus going away from the bed towards the door. But the boy sees and says: «Bless me, Lord, and allow me to bless You. Mother... are you not thanking? »

«Oh! forgive me...» The woman, with the child in her arms, throws herself at Jesus' feet.

«I understand, woman. Go in peace and be happy. Goodbye, boy, Be good. Goodbye, everybody.» And He goes out.

Many women lift up their children so that Jesus' blessing may preserve them from evil in future. Little ones creep through adults to be caressed. And Jesus blesses, caresses, listens, He stops to cure also three people with diseased eyes and a man trembling as if he were affected by St. Vitus' dance. He is now in the centre of the village.

«There is a relative of mine here, deaf-and-dumb from birth. He is quick-witted,

but he cannot do anything. Cure him, Jesus » says the boatman.

«Take Me to him.»

They enter a small kitchen garden at the end of which there is a young man, about thirty years old, who is drawing water from a well and pouring it on vegetables. As he is deaf and with his back turned, he does not notice what is happening and he calmly goes on with his work, notwithstanding that the shouts of the crowd are so loud as to frighten the doves on the roofs.

The boatman goes towards him, takes him by the arm and leads him to Jesus.

Jesus stands in front of the unhappy fellow, very close to him, body against body, so that with His tongue He touches the tongue of the dumb man, who is standing with his mouth open, and with His middle-fingers in the ears of the deaf-mute, He prays for a moment with His eyes raised to the sky. He then says: «Be opened! » and removing His fingers He steps aside.

«Who are You Who have loosened my tongue and ears? » shouts the man cured miraculously.

Jesus makes a gesture and tries to proceed going out from the rear of the house. But both the cured man and the boatman hold Him back, one saying: «He is Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah » and the other exclaiming: «Oh! stay, that I may worship You! »

«Worship the Most High God and be always faithful to Him. Go. Do not waste time in useless words, and do not turn the miracle into a human pastime. Make use of your tongue to do good, and listen to the voices of the Creator Spirit Who loves and blesses you, with your heart, rather than with ears.»

Of course, it is quite useless to tell a man, who is so happy, not to talk of his happiness! The cured man makes up for so many years of mutism and deafness, by speaking to all the people present.

The boatman insists on Jesus entering his house to rest and take some refreshments. He feels that he is the maker of all the respect surrounding Jesus and is proud of it. He wants his right to be acknowledged.

«But I am the notable elder of the village » says an old imposing man.

«But if I had not been there with my boats, you would not have seen Jesus » replies the boatman.

And Peter, who is always frank and impulsive, says: «Actually... if I had not told you a little thing, you... the boats...»

Jesus interferes providentially, making everybody happy. «Let us go near the river. While waiting for our food there - and let it be frugal and sparing, because food is to serve the body and not be the aim of the body - I will evangelize. Anyone wishing to hear Me or ask Me questions, may come with Me.» I can say that the entire village follows Him.

Jesus gets into a boat beached on the gravel bed and from that improvised pulpit He speaks to His listeners, who are sat in front of Him, in a semicircle, on the bank and among the trees.

He takes as a starting point the question asked by a man: «Master, our Law seems to point out as struck by God those who were born wretched, in fact He forbids them to serve at the altar. How can they be guilty? Would it not be fair to consider guilty their parents who give birth to wretched sons? Mothers in particular? And how are we to behave with those born unfortunate? »

«Listen. A great perfect sculptor one day carved a statue and he made such a perfect job, that he was pleased and he said: "I want the Earth to be full of such marvels". But by himself he could not cope with such a task. He therefore called other people to help him and said to them: "On this model make for me one thousand, ten thousand statues equally perfect. I will then give them the final touch, instilling expression into their features". But his assistants were not capable of so much, because besides being much inferior to their master in skill, they had become somewhat intoxicated eating of a fruit, the juice of which brings about delirium and dullness. The sculptor then gave them some moulds and said: "Mould the material in them; it will be a perfect work and I will complete it, enlivening it with a final touch". And the assistants set down to work.

But the sculptor had a great enemy. A personal enemy and the enemy of his assistants, and he tried with every means to make the sculptor cut a poor figure and rouse disagreement between him and his assistants. Thus he attacked their work with his cunning, altering the material to be poured into the moulds, or reducing the fire, or praising the assistants exaggeratedly. It thus happened

that the ruler of the world, in an effort to prevent as far as possible the work from going out in imperfect copies, imposed heavy sanctions on those models issued in an imperfect state. And one of the sanctions was that such models could not be displayed in the House of God, where everything must be, or ought to be perfect. I say: ought to be, because it is not so. Even if appearances are good, facts are not so. Those present in the House of God seem faultless, but the eye of God discovers the gravest faults in them. The faults which are in their hearts.

Oh! the heart! It is with the heart that one serves God; indeed: it is with the heart. It is not necessary, neither is it enough to have clear eyes and perfect hearing, harmonic voice, beautiful limbs, to sing the praises pleasing to God. It is not essential or sufficient to have beautiful clean and scented garments. The spirit is to be pure and perfect, harmonic and well shaped in sight, hearing, voice, in spiritual forms, and these are to be adorned with purity; that is the beautiful clean dress scented with charity: that is the oil saturated with essence that God likes.

And what kind of charity would be the attitude of a man, who being happy and seeing an unhappy fellow, should despise him and hate him? On the contrary, double and treble charity is to be given to those who, although not guilty, were born poor wretches. Wretchedness is a pain that gives merit to those who bear it and to those who, united with the victims, suffer seeing them bear it out of love of relationship, and perhaps they strike their chests thinking: "I am the cause of such pain through my vices". And it must never become the cause of spiritual fault in those who see it. It becomes a fault if it becomes anti-charity. So I say to you: "Never be without charity towards your neighbour. Was he born a poor wretch? Love him because he endures a great pain. Did he become unhappy through his own fault? Love him because his fault has already become a punishment. Is he the parent of a wretch born such or who became such? Love him because there is no deeper sorrow than the grief of a parent struck in his child. Is it a mother who has given birth to a monster? Love her because she is literally crushed by such grief, which she considers the most inhuman. It is inhuman".

But even deeper is the grief of a woman who is the mother of a son, who is a monster in his soul, as she realises that she has given birth to a demon dangerous for the Earth, for the Fatherland, for the Family, for friends. Oh! the poor mother of a cruel, vile son, of a murderer, of a traitor, of a thief, of a corrupt man, dare not even raise her forehead! Well. I say to you: Love those mothers also, the most unhappy ones. Those who in history will be known as the mothers of murderers, of traitors.

Everywhere the Earth has heard the weeping of mothers whose hearts were broken because of the cruel death of their sons. From Eve onwards how many mothers have felt their bowels being lacerated more painfully than in labour, nay, they felt their bowels and their hearts being tom off by a cruel hand, in the presence of their sons murdered, tortured, martyred by men, and they howled their pangs, throwing themselves with the frenzy of convulsive sorrowful love on the corpses which could not hear them any longer, neither could they be warmed by their warmth, nor could they say with a look, a gesture, since they could not do so with their lips: "Mother I can hear you".

And yet I tell you that the Earth has not yet heard the cry and has not collected the tears of the most holy Mother and of the most unhappy one among all those who will be remembered for ever by man: the Mother of the Killed Redeemer and the mother of the man who will be His traitor. Those two mothers, martyrs in different ways, will be heard mourning miles apart, and the innocent and holy Mother, the most innocent, the Innocent Mother of the Innocent, will be the one Who will say to Her far away sister, the martyr of a son more cruel than anything on the Earth: "Sister, I love you".

Love to be worthy of that Woman Who will love everybody and on behalf of everybody. It is love that will save the Earth.»

And Jesus comes down from His rustic pulpit and bends to caress a little boy rolling on the grass of the gravel bed half-naked in his little shirt. After so many sublime words from a Master, it is pleasant to see Him thus, taking interest in a child, like a common man, and then breaking the bread, offering it round and handing it to those close to Him, sitting and eating like every man, while He certainly already hears in His heart the cry of His Mother and sees

Judas beside Him.

Such control over His feelings impresses me, who am so impulsive, more than many other things. It is a continual lesson to me. Those present, instead, seem to be really fascinated. They are pensive and silent while eating and they look with veneration at the kind Master of love.

418. The Démoniac of the Decapolis.

29th September 1944.

Jesus and His apostles are still moving about the country. The mowing season is now over and the fields display scorched stubble. Jesus is walking along a shady path and is speaking to some men who have joined the group of the apostles.

«Yes » says one. «Nothing can cure him. He is more than mad. And he terrorises everybody, women in particular, because he chases them with obscene jibes. It would be a tragedy if he caught them! »

«One never knows where he is » says another man. «On the mountains, in the woods, in the fields... he appears all of a sudden like a snake... Women are terrified of him. One of them, a young girl, who was coming back from the river, died in a few days of a high temperature because she had been grasped by the madman.»

«The other day my brother-in-law went to the place where he prepared a sepulchre for himself and his relatives, because his father-in-law had died, and he wanted to make all the preparations for the burial. But he had to run away because the démoniac, nude and howling as usual, was inside and threatened to strike him with stones... He chased him almost as far as the village, then went back to the sepulchre and the dead man had to be buried in my sepulchre.»

«And what about the time when he remembered that Tobias and Daniel had taken him by force, had tied him and taken him back home? He waited for them hiding among the canes and the mud of the river and when they got into the boat to go fishing or to ferry, I am not sure which, with the strength of a demon he lifted the boat and turned it upside down. They saved themselves by a miracle, but what was in the boat was lost and the very keel of the boat was damaged and the oars were broken.»

«But have you not shown him to the priests? »

«Yes, he was taken to Jerusalem tied like a bale... What a journey!... I was there and I can tell You that I do not need to go to hell to learn what happens and is said there. But it was of no avail...»

«Just as bad as before? »

«Worse! »

«And yet... the Priest!...»

«But what can You expect!... It would be necessary...»

«What? Go on...»

There is silence.

«Speak up. Be not afraid, I will not accuse you.»

«Well... I was saying... but I do not want to commit a sin... I was saying... that... well... the priest might be successful if...»

«If he were a holy man, you mean, but you dare not say so. I say to you: do not judge. But what you say is true. It is regretfully true!...»

Jesus becomes silent and sighs. A short embarrassed silence.

Then one dares to take up the thread of the speech again: «If we should meet him, will You cure him? Will You clear this countryside? »

«Do you hope that I may be able to do so? Why? »

«Because You are holy.»

«God is holy.»

«And You who are His Son. »

«How do you know? »

«Eh! people talk, in any case, we live here, near the river, and we know what You did three months ago. Who can stop a river in spate, but the Son of God? »

«And what about Moses? And Joshua? »

«They worked in the name of God and for His glory, And they were able to do so because they were holy. You are greater than they were.»

«Will You do it, Master? »

«I will, if we meet him.»

They proceed. The increasing heat makes them leave the road and seek shelter in a thicket along the river, which is not ruffled as when it was in flood. Although still rich in water, the water is calm and blue, shining in the sun. The path widens and white houses appear at the end of it. They must be approaching a village. At the borders of it there are some small very white buildings, with only one opening in one wall. Some are open. Most of them are hermetically closed. There is no one about. They are spread over bare uncultivated ground, which seems to be abandoned. There are only weeds and boulders.

«Go away! Away! Go back or I will kill You! »

«The demoniac has seen us! I am going away.»

«I, too.»

«And I will follow you.»

«Be not afraid. Remain here and watch.»

Jesus is so sure of Himself that the... brave ones obey, but they go behind Jesus. The disciples also remain behind Him. Jesus proceeds alone and solemnly, as if He saw and heard nothing.

«Go away! » The voice is a rending cry. It sounds like a growl and a howl. It seems impossible that it can be uttered by a human being. «Go away! Back! I will kill You! Why are You persecuting me? I do not want to see You! » The possessed man bounds, he is nude, swarthy, with long ruffled hair and beard. His dark bristly locks strewn with dry leaves and dust fall over his grim bloodshot eyes, which roll in their sockets, and reach down to his mouth. And his mouth, open in howls and bursts of laughter of a madman - they sound like a nightmare - is foaming and bleeding, because he is striking it with a sharp stone and he says: «Why can I not kill You? Who is binding my strength? Is it You? You? »

Jesus looks at him and proceeds.

The madman rolls on the ground, bites himself, foams even more, strikes himself with his stone, springs to his feet, points his forefinger towards Jesus, Whom he stares at fixedly and wildly and says: «Listen! Listen! He Who is coming is...»

«Be silent, demon of the man! I order you.»

«No! No! I will not be silent. What is there between You and us? Why do You not leave us in peace? Are You not satisfied with confining us to the kingdom of hell? Is it not enough for You that You have come to snatch man from us? Why do You force us back down there? Allow us to dwell in our preys! Since You are great and powerful, pass and conquer, if You can. But let us rejoice and be harmful. We exist for that. Oh! cur... No! I cannot say that! Don't make me say that to You! I cannot curse You! I hate You! I persecute You! I am waiting for You to torture You! I hate You and Him from Whom You proceed and I hate Him Who is Your Spirit. I hate Love, because I am Hatred! I want to curse You! I want to kill You! But I cannot! I cannot! Not yet! But I will wait for You, o Christ, I will wait for You. I will see You dead! O what a joyful hour! No! Not joyful! You dead? No. Not dead. And I defeated! Defeated! Always defeated!... Ah!...» Paroxysm is at its utmost.

Jesus continues towards the demoniac keeping him under the radiation of His magnetic eyes. Jesus is now all by Himself. The apostles and the other people have remained behind. The people are behind the apostles, who are at least thirty metres from Jesus.

Some inhabitants of the village, which appears to be thickly peopled and I think is also wealthy, have come out, attracted by the shouts, and are watching the scene, ready to run away just like the other group. So the scene is as follows: in the centre the possessed man and Jesus, now a few metres apart from each other; behind Jesus, to the left, the apostles and the people of the country; on the right hand side, behind the demoniac, the citizens.

Jesus, after ordering the demon to be silent, has not spoken any more. He only stares at the demoniac. But now He stops and raises His arms, He stretches them towards the possessed man and is about to speak, The man's cries are now dreadful. He writhes, he jumps to the right, to the left, upwards. He looks as if he wanted either to run away or hurl himself upon Jesus, but he cannot. He is riveted there and apart from his writhing, he can make no other movement.

When Jesus stretches out His arms, His hands extended as if He were taking an oath, the madman howls louder and after cursing, laughing and swearing, he

begins to weep and implore. «No, not in hell! Don't send me there! My life is dreadful even here, imprisoned in man, because I want to travel through the world and tear Your creatures to pieces. But not there! No! No! Leave me outside!...»

«Come out of him. It's an order.»

«No! »

«Come out.»

«No! »

«Come out.»

«No! »

«In the name of the true God, come out! »

«Oh! Why do You defeat me? But I am not coming out, no. You are the Christ, the Son of God, but I am...»

«Who are you? »

«I am Beelzebub, the Master of the world and I will not surrender. I defy You, o Christ! »

The demoniac becomes motionless all of a sudden, stiff, almost dignified, and stares fixedly at Jesus with phosphorescent eyes, hardly moving his lips to utter unintelligible words and making light gestures with his hands near his shoulders and his elbows bent.

Jesus also has stopped. With His arms folded over His chest He gazes at him. Jesus also moves His lips lightly, but I cannot hear any word.

The people present are waiting, but they do not agree with one another:

«He cannot do it! »

«Yes, the Christ will now succeed.»

«No. The other one is winning.»

«He is strong.»

«Yes, he is.»

«No, he isn't.»

Jesus opens His arms. His face flashes command, His voice sounds like thunder.

«Come out. For the last time. Come out, o Satan! It is I Who command!»

«Aaaaah! » (it is a very long cry of never-ending torture. Not even a man slowly pierced by a sword would yell thus). And the cry ends in words: «I am coming out. Yes, You have defeated me. But I will avenge myself. You are driving me away, but there is a demon beside You and I will go into him and possess him, investing him with my full power. And no order of Yours will be able to take him away from me. In every age, in every place I, the author of Evil, procreate sons for myself. And as God procreated Himself by Himself, I procreate myself by myself . I conceive myself in the heart of man and he gives birth to Me, he gives birth to a new Satan, who is he himself and I rejoice having so many children! You and men will always find those creatures of mine, who are as many Satans. I am going, o Christ, to take possession of my new kingdom, as You wish, and I leave You this poor wretch whom I maltreated. In his place, as I am leaving him to You, the alms of Satan to You, God, I will take one thousand and ten thousand now, and You will find them when Your body in lurid tatters will be given as a plaything to dogs, and I will take ten thousand and one hundred thousand in future centuries to use them as an instrument for me and a torture for You. Do You think that You will win by raising Your Sign? My followers will knock it down and I will be the winner... Ah! It is not true that I will win! But I will torture You both in Yourself and in Your followers!...»

A loud crash, like thunder, is heard, but there is neither flash of light nor rumbling of thunder. Only a sharp lacerating crack, and as the demoniac falls like a dead body to the ground and remains there, a huge tree-trunk collapses near the apostles, as if it had been cut about one metre from the ground by a saw working as quickly as lightning. The apostolic group moves away just in time, while the local people run away.

But Jesus, Who has bent over the prostrated man and has taken him by the hand, turns round, still stooping and with the hand of the cured man in His own, He says: «Come. Be not afraid! » The people approach timorously. «He is cured. Bring a garment.» A man runs away to fetch one.

The man comes round slowly. He opens his eyes and meets Jesus'. He sits up. With his free hand he wipes off perspiration, blood and foam, he pushes his hair back and looks at himself, When he realises that he is nude in the presence of so many people, he feels ashamed. He crouches and asks: «What happened? Who are

You? Why am I here? Nude? »

«Nothing, My friend. They will now bring you some clothes and you will go back home.»

«Where have I come from? And where are You from? » He speaks with the faint tired voice of a sick person.

«I come from the Sea of Galilee.»

«And how come You know me? Why are You helping me? What is Your name? »

Some men arrive with a tunic which they put on the man cured miraculously. And an old woman arrives weeping and she presses the cured man to her heart.

«Son! »

«Mother! Why did you leave me for such a long time? »

The old woman weeps even more and kisses and caresses him. Perhaps she would speak more words, but Jesus dominates her with His eyes and inspires her with more pitiful ones: «You have been so ill, son! Praise God Who has cured you and the Messiah Who acted in the name of God.»

«Him? What's His name? »

«Jesus of Galilee. But His name is Goodness. Kiss His hands, son, and ask Him to forgive you for what you did or said... you certainly spoke in your...»

«Yes, he spoke when he was feverish » says Jesus to prevent unwise words. «But it was not he who spoke and I am not severe with him. Let him be good now. Let him be continent.» Jesus stresses the word. The man lowers his head, embarrassed.

But what Jesus spares him is not spared by the rich citizens who have by now approached them. Among them there are some ineffable Pharisees. «You have been lucky! It is a good job that you met Him, the master of the demons.»

«I... a demoniac? » The man is terrified.

The old woman bursts out: «You cursed ones! You have neither mercy nor respect! You greedy cruel vipers! And you as well, you useless minister of the synagogue. The Holy One master of the demons! »

«And who do you think has power over them but their king and father? »

«Oh! Impious people! Blasphemers! Be c....»

«Be silent, woman. Be happy with your son. Do not curse. They do not upset or worry Me. You may all go in peace. My blessing to good people. Let us go, My friends.»

«May I follow You? » It is the cured man who asks the question.

«No. Stay here. Be My witness and your mother's joy. Go.»

And among cheering shouts and whispered mockery Jesus crosses part of the little town and then goes back to the shade of the trees along the river.

The apostles crowd round Him.

Peter asks: «Master, why did the unclean spirit offer so much resistance? »

«Because it was a complete spirit.»

«What does that mean? »

«Listen to Me. Some people give themselves to Satan by opening a door to one capital vice. Some give themselves twice, some three times, some seven times. When one has opened his spirit to the seven vices, then a complete spirit enters him. Satan, the black prince, enters.»

«How could that man, still young, be possessed by Satan? »

«Oh! My friends! Do you know along which path Satan comes? Generally three are the beaten paths, and one is never missing. Three: sensuality, money, pride of the spirit. Sensuality is the one which is always present. Courier of the other concupiscences, it passes spreading its poison and everything flourishes with satanic flowering. That is why I say to you: "Be the masters of your flesh". Let that control be the beginning of everything else, as that slavery is the beginning of everything else. The man enslaved by lust, becomes thief, swindler, cruel, murderer, in order to serve his mistress. The very thirst for power is also related to the flesh. Do you not think so? It is so. Meditate on that and you will see whether I am mistaken. It was through the flesh that Satan entered man and through the flesh he goes back into man, and he is happy if he can do so. He, one and sevenfold, enters with the proliferation of his legions of minor demons.»

«You said that Mary of Magdala had seven demons. You said so and they were certainly demons of lust. And yet You freed her very easily.»

«Yes, Judas. That is true.»

«So? »

«So, according to you, My theory is wrong. No, My friend. That woman wanted, by that time, to be freed from her possession. She wanted. Will power is everything.»

«Why, Master, do we notice that many women are possessed by the demon, and we can say, by that demon? »

«See, Matthew. Woman is not equal to man in her formation and in her reaction to the original sin. Man has other aims for his desires which may be more or less good. Woman has one aim only: love. Man has a different formation. Woman has this one, sensitive, which is even more perfect, because its purpose is procreation. You know that every perfection brings about an increase in sensitiveness. A perfect ear can hear what escapes a less perfect ear and is glad of that. The same applies to the eyes, to the palate and to olfaction. Woman was to be the sweetness of God on the Earth, she was to be love, the incarnation of that fire which moves Him Who is, the manifestation, the testimony of that love. God had therefore gifted her with a supereminent sensitive spirit, so that, one day as a mother, she could and would know how to open the eyes of the hearts of her sons to the love for God and their fellow-creatures, as man would open the eyes of intelligence of his children to understanding and acting. Consider the command of God to Himself: "Let us make a helpmate for Adam". God-Goodness could but want to make a good helpmate for Adam. He who is good loves. Adam's helpmate, therefore, was to be able to love to succeed in making Adam's day happy in the blissful Garden. She was to be so capable of loving as to be the second, collaborator and substitute of God, in loving man, His creature, so that even when God did not reveal Himself to His child with His loving voice, man should not feel unhappy for lack of love. Satan was aware of such perfection. Satan knows so many things. It is he who speaks through the lips of pythonesses telling lies mixed with truth. And - bear this in mind all of you, both you who are present here and those who will come in future - he speaks such truth, which he hates because he is Falsehood, only to seduce you with the chimera that it is Light that speaks and not Darkness. Satan, cunning, tortuous and cruel, crept into such perfection, he bit there and left his poison. The perfection of woman in loving has thus become Satan's instrument to dominate man and woman and spread evil...»

«What about our mothers, then? »

«John, do you fear for them? Not every woman is an instrument for Satan. Perfect as they are in their feelings, they exceed in action: angels if they want to be of God, demons if they wish to be of Satan. Holy women, and your mother is one of them, want to be of God and they are angels.»

«Do You not think that the punishment of woman is unfair, Master? Man also sinned.»

«And what about the reward then? It is written that Good will come back to the world through Woman and Satan will be defeated.»

«Never judge the work of God. That is the first thing. But consider that as Evil came into the world through woman, it is fair that through the Woman Good should come into the world. A page written by Satan is to be cancelled. And the tears of a Woman will do that. And as Satan will shout his cries for ever, the voice of a Woman will sing to drown those cries.»

«When? »

«I solemnly tell you that Her voice has already descended from Heaven where Her hallelujah has been sung from eternity.»

«Will She be greater than Judith? »

«Greater than every woman.»

«What will She do? »

«She will turn Eve upside down with her treble sin. Absolute obedience. Absolute purity. Absolute humility. She will rise on that: a victorious queen...»

«But, Jesus, is Your Mother not the greatest, having given birth to You? »

«Great is he who does the will of God. And that is why Mary is great. Every other merit comes from God. But that one is entirely Hers and may She be blessed for it.»

And it all ends.

Jesus says:

«You have seen a man "possessed" by Satan. There are many replies in My words. Not so much for you as for other people. Will they be of any use? No. They will

be of no use to those who need them most. Rest with My peace.»

419. The Yeast of the Pharisees.
22nd April 1946.

After the Holy Week and the consequent penitence of not having any visions, the spiritual vision of the Gospel comes back to me this morning. And all my anxiety is forgotten in this joy that is foretold by an indescribable sensation of superhuman jubilation...

...And now I see Jesus, Who is still walking along the thickets on the banks of the river, and He stops and orders the apostles to have a rest during the hours which are too warm to travel. Because, while it is true that the thickly interlacing branches protect from the sun, they form a kind of canopy which obstructs the very light breezes, and thus the air in there is warm, still, heavy, and damp; dampness in fact rises from the ground near the river, and far from being a relief it is a sticky torture, which mixes with and increases the troublesome perspiration streaming down their bodies.

«Let us stop until evening. We will then go down to the whitish gravel bed still visible in starlight and we will proceed by night. Let us take some food and a rest now.»

«Ah! before taking any food I will refresh myself in the water. The water will be warm, too, like a decoction for a cough, but it will wash my sweat away. Who is coming with me? » asks Peter.

They all go with him: everyone, Jesus also, as, like everybody else, He is perspiring and His tunic is heavy with dust and sweat. Each of them takes a clean tunic from his sack and they all go down to the river. On the grass, to mark their stop, there are only thirteen sacks and the small water flasks, watched over by old trees and countless birds, which look curiously with their tiny jet eyes at the thirteen full multicoloured sacks spread over the grass. The voices of the bathers fade away and mingle with the murmuring water. Only now and again the sharp laughter of the younger ones resounds like a high note above the low monotonous tone of the river.

But silence is soon broken by the shuffling of feet. Some heads appear from behind a thicket; they cast sidelong glances and say with an expression of satisfaction: «They are here. They have stopped. Let us go and tell the others » and they disappear behind the bushes...

...In the meantime the apostles come back with the Master. They are refreshed, their hair is still wet, although they have dried it hurriedly, they are barefooted and are holding their dripping washed sandals by the straps, and they are wearing fresh clothes and the other ones are hanging in the cane-brake after being washed in the blue water of the Jordan. They are obviously in very good form after the long bath.

Unaware of the fact that they have been discovered, they sit down, after Jesus has offered and handed out the food. And after the meal, sleepy as they are, they would like to lie down and slumber, when a man arrives and after him another one, and then a third one...

«What do you want? » asks James of Zebedee, who sees them arrive and stop behind a large bush, undecided about moving forward or not. The others, including Jesus, turn round to see to whom James is speaking.

«Ah! it's the people of the village... They have followed us! » says Thomas without enthusiasm, as he was preparing to have a little nap.

In the meantime the visitors reply somewhat timorously, seeing the obvious reluctance of the apostles to receive them: «We wanted to speak to the Master... To tell Him that... Is that right, Samuel?...» and they stop not daring to say anything more.

But Jesus benignly encourages them: «Speak up. Have you more sick people?...» and He stands up directing His steps towards them.

«Master, You are even more tired than we are. Have a little rest and let them wait...» say some of the apostles.

«There are creatures here who want Me. So their hearts have no rest either. And the weariness of a heart is heavier than the tiredness of limbs. Let Me listen to them.»

«All right! Farewell to our rest!...» grumble the apostles, who are so affected by fatigue and heat as to reproach the Master in the presence of strangers, so much so, that they say to Him: «And when Your lack of prudence will have caused us all to be taken ill, You will realise too late that we were necessary to You.»

Jesus looks at them... compassionately. There is nothing else in His kind tired eyes... And He replies: «No, My friends. I do not expect you to imitate Me. Look, you stay here, and rest; I will speak and listen to these people and then I will come and rest with you.»

His reply is so kind that it achieves more than a reproach would obtain. The kind hearts and affections of the Twelve are awakened and overwhelm them: «No, Lord! Stay where You are and speak to them. We will go and turn our clothes round so that the other side may dry. We will thus overcome sleep, and then we will come back and rest all together.» And the more sleepy ones go towards the river... Matthew, John and Bartholomew remain.

In the meantime the three citizens have become more than ten and their number increases more and more...

«So? Come here and speak without any fear.»

«Master, after You left, the Pharisees have become even more violent... They attacked the man freed by You... and it will be a new miracle if he does not become mad... because... they said to him... that You freed him from a demon who hampered only his reason and that You gave him a stronger demon, so strong that he defeated the previous one and is stronger than the previous one, because this one damns and possesses his soul, and thus, while in next life he would not have had to bear the consequences of the first possession because his actions were not... what did they say, Abraham?...»

«They said... oh! a strange word... In short God would not have asked him to give an account of those actions because he had not done them with a free mind, whereas now, by adoring You through the imposition of the demon he has in his heart, placed there by You - oh! forgive us for telling You - by You, the prince of demons, by adoring You with a mind which is no longer mad, he is impious, cursed and will be damned. Consequently the poor wretch regrets his previous state and... he almost curses You... So he is more insane than previously... and his mother is in despair because her son has given up hope of being saved... and all their joy has become a torture. We have been looking for You so that You may give him peace, and an angel certainly guided us here... Lord, we believe that You are the Messiah. And we believe that the Messiah has in Himself the Spirit of God. He is therefore Truth and Wisdom. And we ask You to give us peace and an explanation...»

«You are in justice and in charity. May you be blessed. But where is the poor wretch? »

«He is following us with his mother, shedding desperate tears. See? The entire village, except them, the cruel Pharisees, is coming here, disregarding their threats. Because they have threatened to punish us for believing in You. But God will protect us.»

«God will protect you. Take Me to the man I cured.»

«No. We will bring him here. Just wait » and many of them depart towards the larger group of people who are coming making gestures, while two shrill cries overwhelm the confused noise of the talk of the crowd. The others, those who have remained, are already so many, and when they are joined by the group surrounding the cured demoniac and his mother, a really large crowd is pressing among the trees around Jesus, climbing even the trees to find a place to hear and see.

Jesus goes towards the cured demoniac, who begins to tear his hair as soon as he sees Him, and kneeling down he says: «Give the first demon back to me! Out of pity for me, for my soul! What have I done to You that You should injure me so much? »

And his mother, also on her knees, says: «He is raving mad with fear, Lord! Do not pay attention to his blasphemous words, but free him from the fear that those cruel people have infused into him, so that he may not lose the life of his soul. You have already freed him once!... Oh! for the sake of a mother, free

him once again! »

«Yes, woman. Be not afraid! Listen, child of God! » And Jesus lays His hands on the ruffled hair of the man delirious with supernatural fear: «Listen. And judge. Judge by yourself because your reason is free and you can judge according to justice. There is an unerring way to find out whether a prodigy comes from God or from a demon. And it is what a soul feels. If the extraordinary event comes from God, it infuses peace into the soul, peace and solemn joy. If it comes from the demon, it brings about perturbation and sorrow. And peace and joy come also from the words of God, whereas perturbation and sorrow come from those of a demon, be it a demon spirit or a demon man. And also the closeness of God grants peace and joy whereas the closeness of wicked spirits or men bring about perturbation and sorrow. Now consider, child of God. When, by yielding to the demon of lust, you began to receive your oppressor within you, did you enjoy happiness and peace? »

The man ponders and blushing replies: «No, Lord.»

«And when your everlasting Enemy captured you completely, did you enjoy peace and happiness? »

«No, Lord. Never. As long as I could understand, as long as a particle of my mind was free, I was distressed and grieved by the arrogance of the Enemy. Later... I do not know... My mind was no longer able to understand what I suffered... I was lower than a beast... But even in that state when I seemed to be less intelligent than an animal... oh! how much I could still suffer! I cannot say what... Hell is dreadful! It is nothing but horror... and it is not possible to say what it is...»

The man shivers remembering what he suffered when he was possessed. He trembles, blanches, perspires... His mother embraces him and kisses his cheek to distract his mind from that nightmare... People whisper their comments.

«And when you woke up with your hand in Mine, what did you feel? »

«Oh! Such a wonderful sensation... and such a joy and an even greater peace... I seemed to be coming out from a dark prison, where countless snakes had been my chains and the air was permeated with the stench of a putrid sewer, and I seemed to be entering a garden full of flowers, of sunshine, of songs... I became acquainted with Paradise... but even that cannot be described...» The man smiles as if he were enraptured by the remembrance of his recent short hour of happiness. He then sighs and concludes: «But it was soon all over...»

«Are you sure? Now that you are close to Me and far from those who upset you, tell Me, what do you feel? »

«Peace once again. Here with You, I cannot believe that I am damned, and their words sound like blasphemy to me... But I believed them... So did I not sin against You? »

«You did not sin; they did. Rise, child of God, and believe in the peace within you. Peace comes from God. You are with God. Do not sin and be not afraid » and He removes His hands from the head of the man making him stand up.

«Is it really so, Lord? » ask many.

«It is really so. The doubt raised by the deliberately harmful words was the final revenge of Satan, who had come out of him defeated, but anxious to recapture the lost prey.»

With much good common sense a man of the people says: «Then... the Pharisees... assisted Satan! » and many applaud the keen remark.

«Do not judge. There is Who judges.»

«But at least we are sincere in our judgment... And God sees that we judge evident sins. They pretend to be what they are not. They act deceitfully and with wicked purposes. And yet they are more successful than we are, although we are honest and sincere. They are our terror. They extend their power even on the freedom of faith. One must believe and practise to their liking and they threaten us because we love You. They strive to reduce Your miracles to witchcraft and to frighten You. They conspire, they oppress, they injure...» The people speak excitedly.

With a gesture Jesus imposes silence and says:

«Do not receive in your hearts anything originating from them, neither their suggestions nor their methods, not even the thought: "they are wicked and yet they are successful". Do you not remember the words of Wisdom: "Fleeting is the triumph of the wicked", and the words of Proverbs. "Son, do not follow the examples of sinners and do not listen to the words of the wicked because they

will become entangled in the chains of their sins and they will be deceived by their own great stupidity"? Do not put into yourselves what comes from them and which you, although imperfect, consider wrong. You would, in fact, put within yourselves the same yeast which corrupts them. The yeast of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. Let it never be in you, neither with regard to the forms of worship of God nor with regard to your behaviour with your brothers. Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees. Remember that there is nothing concealed which cannot be disclosed, there is nothing hidden which is not revealed in the end.

You can see that yourselves. They allowed Me to leave and then they sowed darnel where the Lord had scattered chosen seed. They thought they had acted artfully and successfully. And it would have been enough if you had not found Me, if I had crossed the river leaving no trace of Myself on the water, which resumes its normal aspect after the bows open it, and their wickedness, under the appearance of good, would have triumphed. But their trick was soon found out and their evil deed was annulled. And the same applies to all the actions of man. At least One is aware of them and provides: God. What is spoken in the dark, ends up by being disclosed by Light, and what is plotted in the secrecy of a room can be disclosed as if it had been planned in a square. Because every man may have an informer. And because every man is seen by God Who can intervene and unmask offenders.

So one must always live honestly in order to live peacefully. And those who live thus need not be afraid, neither in this life nor with regard to the next one. No, My friends, I tell you: who acts righteously need not be afraid. They must not fear those who kill, yes, those who can kill the body, but can do nothing else. I will tell you what you must be afraid of. Be afraid of those who after putting you to death, can send you to hell, that is, of vices, of evil companions, of false teachers, of all those who insinuate sin or doubt into your hearts, of those who try to corrupt your souls more than your bodies, to detach you from God and to drive you to despair of divine Mercy. I repeat to you that that is what you are to be afraid of, because in that case you will be dead for ever. But be not afraid for the rest, for your lives. Your Father does not lose sight even of one of these tiny birds which builds its nest in the leafy branches of trees. Not one of them is caught in the net without its Creator being aware of it. And yet their material value is tiny: five sparrows for two pennies. And their spiritual value is nil. And yet God takes care of them. Will He, therefore, not take care of you? Of your lives? Of your welfare? Every hair on your heads is known to the Father, and no wrong done to His children passes unnoticed by Him, because you are His children, that is, you are worth much more than the sparrows which nest on roofs or among leafy branches.

And you remain His children until, by your own free will, you renounce to be so. And one renounces such filiation when one denies God and the Word Whom God sent amongst men to lead men to God. Then, when a man will not acknowledge Me in the presence of men, because he is afraid of being damaged by such acknowledgement, God will not acknowledge him as His child, and the Son of God and of man will not acknowledge him in the presence of the angels in Heaven, and those who disown Me in the presence of men, will be disowned as children in the presence of God's angels. And those who have spoken ill of the Son of man or against Him will still be forgiven, because I will plead with the Father for their forgiveness, but those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Why that? Because not everybody can understand the extent of Love, its perfect infinity and see God in a body like the body of every man. The Gentiles, the heathens cannot believe that through faith, because their religion is not love. Also among us the fearful respect of Israel for Jehovah can prevent people from believing that God has become man and the humblest of men. It is a fault not to believe Me. But when it is based on excessive fear of God, it is still forgiven. But he cannot be forgiven, who does not yield to the truth shining through My deeds, and denies that the Spirit of Love has kept the promise to send the Saviour at the fixed time, the Saviour preceded and accompanied by the signs foretold.

Those who are persecuting Me, are acquainted, with the prophets. The prophecies are full of Me. They are acquainted with the prophecies and they know what I do. The truth is evident. But they deny it because they want to deny it. They systematically deny that I am not only the Son of man, but also the Son of God,

foretold by the prophets, He Who was born of a Virgin, not by the will of man, but of the Eternal Love, of the Eternal Spirit, Who announced Me so that men could recognise Me. In order to be able to say that the night of the Expectation of the Christ is still enduring, they persist in keeping their eyes closed, so that they may not see the Light which is in the world, and therefore they deny the Holy Spirit, Its Truth and Its Light. And they will be judged more severely than those who do not know. Neither will they be forgiven for saying that I am "satan", because the Spirit works divine, not satanic deeds for Me. And they will not be forgiven for driving people to despair, when Love had led them to peace. Because those are all offences against the Holy Spirit. Against this Paraclete Spirit Who is Love and grants love and asks for love and Who is awaiting My holocaust of love in order to spread out in wise love, illuminating the hearts of My believers. And when that has happened and they will still persecute you, accusing you before magistrates and princes of synagogues and in courts, do not worry about how to defend yourselves. The same Spirit will tell you what to say to serve the Truth and conquer Life for yourselves, just as the Word is giving you what is necessary to enter the Kingdom of eternal Life.

Go in peace. In My Peace. In that Peace with God and which God sheds to saturate His children with it. Go and be not afraid. I have not come to deceive you, but to teach you, not to lose you, but to redeem you. Blessed are those who will believe My words. And you, man, who have been saved twice, be firm and remember My peace, so that you may say to tempters: "Do not try to seduce me. My faith is that He is the Christ". Go, woman. Go with him and be in peace. Goodbye. Go back to your homes and leave the Son of man to His humble rest on the grass, before resuming His persecuted journey in search of other people to be saved, until the end. My peace be with you.»

He blesses them and goes back to the place where they had their meal. The apostles are with Him. After the people disperse, they lie down, resting their heads on their sacks and they soon go to sleep, in the sultry heat of the afternoon and in the heavy silence of those torrid hours.

420. Consider Yourselves Unprofitable Servants.

24th April 1946.

The gravel bed is white in the moonless but very clear night, as thousands of large, unusually large stars are shining in the Eastern sky. It is not an intense light like moonlight, but it is already a pleasant phosphorescence, which enables those whose eyes are accustomed to darkness, to see where they walk and what is around them. Here, on the right hand side of the wayfarers, who are going up northwards along the river, the mild starlight shows the vegetable border made by cane-brakes, willows and then by tall trees, and as the light is faint, they look like a compact continuous wall, without any interruption, impossible to penetrate, with a gap where a stream or torrent bed, completely dry, draws a white line that runs eastwards and disappears at the first curve of the tiny tributary now dried up. On the left hand side, instead, the travellers discern the glittering waters that flow down towards the Dead Sea grumbling, sighing, rustling, quiet and serene. And between the shining line of the blue indigo waters, in the night, and the dark opaque mass of grass, bushes and trees, the clear strip of the gravel bed, in places wider, in others narrower, is now and again interrupted by tiny ponds, remainders of previous floods, with

still a little water, which is slowly absorbed by the soil and in which there are still some tufts of green grass, which elsewhere is dried up in the gravel bed parched in the hours of sunshine.

The apostles are compelled by those tiny ponds or by tangles of dry bulrushes, as dangerous as blades for their feet half-naked in sandals, to part now and again and then join again in a group round the Master, Who is proceeding with vigorous strides, always solemn, silent most of the time, with His eyes raised to the stars rather than bent to the ground. But the apostles are not silent. They are talking to one another, summarising the events of the day, drawing conclusions or foreseeing future developments. A few rare words of Jesus, often spoken in reply to a direct question or to correct a wrong or uncharitable opinion, punctuate the chattering of the Twelve. And the march proceeds in the night, marking the night silence with new elements for those desert banks: human voices and shuffling of feet. Nightingales are silent among the branches, surprised at the discordant harsh sounds mixing with and disturbing the usual murmur of water and whispering of breezes, the customary accompaniments of their virtuosi solos.

But a direct question, not concerning what has happened but what is to happen, breaks not only the peace of the night, but also the more intimate peace of hearts, with the violence of a rebellion in addition to the sharp tone of voices upset by scorn and anger. Philip asks whether and in how many days they will be home. A latent need of rest, an unexpressed but understood desire for family love is in the simple question of the elderly apostle, who is a husband and father besides being an apostle, and has interests to look after...

Jesus perceives all that and turns round to look at Philip, He stops waiting for him, as Philip is a little behind with Matthew and Nathanael, and when he is near, He embraces him with one arm saying: «Soon, My friend. But I ask you to be kind enough to make another small sacrifice, providing you do not wish to part from Me before...»

«Me? Part from You? Never! »

«Then... I will keep you away for some time from Bethsaida. I want to go to Caesarea on the Sea via Samaria. On our way back we will go to Nazareth and those who have no family in Galilee will remain with Me. Then, after some time, I will join you at Capernaum... And I will evangelize you there to make you even more capable. But if you think that your presence at Bethsaida is necessary... you may go, Philip. We shall meet there...»

«No, Master. It is more necessary for me to stay with You! But You know... Home is sweet... and my daughters... I do not think that I will have them very much with me in future... and I would like to enjoy a little of their modest kindness. But if I have to choose between them and You, I choose You... and for many reasons...» ends Philip with a sigh.

«And you are doing the right thing, My friend. Because I will be taken away from you before your daughters...»

«Oh! Master!...» says grievously the apostle.

«It is so, Philip » concludes Jesus kissing the temple of the apostle.

Judas Iscariot, who has been grumbling between his teeth since Jesus mentioned Caesarea, raises his voice as if the kiss given to Philip has made him lose control of his actions. And he says: «How many useless things! I don't really understand why it is necessary to go to Caesarea! » and he says so with angry impetuosity; he seems to imply: «and You Who want to go there are a fool.»

«It is not for you to judge the necessity of what we do, but for the Master » Bartholomew replies to him.

«Really, why not? As if He saw natural necessities clearly! »

«I say! Are you mad or sane? Do you realise of Whom you are speaking? » asks Peter shaking him by the arm.

«I am not mad. I am the only one with sound brains. And I know what I am saying.»

«You are saying lovely things! » «Beg God not to take them into account! »,

«Modesty is not your strong point! », «One might think that you are afraid that by going to Caesarea you might be found out for what you are » say James of Zebedee, Simon Zealot, Thomas and Judas of Alphaeus respectively.

The Iscariot addresses the last one: «I have nothing to be afraid of and you have nothing to find out. But I am tired of seeing that we pass from one error to another, ruining ourselves. Conflicts with the members of the Sanhedrin,

arguments with Pharisees. The Romans are the last straw...»
«What? Less than two months ago you were overjoyed, you were full of confidence, you were, you were... you were everything because Claudia was your friend! » remarks Bartholomew ironically who, being the most... uncompromising, is the one who does not rebel against contacts with the Romans only out of obedience to the Master.

Judas is speechless for a moment because the logic of the ironical remark is obvious, and unless he is prepared to appear illogical, he cannot contradict what he said previously. But he soon collects himself and says: «It is not because of the Romans that I am saying that. I mean because of the Romans as enemies. They... after all they are only four Roman ladies, four, five, six at most, they promised to help us and they will. But it is because that will increase the hatred of His enemies, and He does not realise that and...»

«Their hatred is intense, Judas. And you know that as well as I do, even better than I do » says Jesus calmly stressing the word «better ».

«Me? Me? What do You mean? Who knows things better than You do? »

«Just now you said that you are aware of necessities and how to make use of them...» retorts Jesus.

«With regard to natural things, yes. I say that You know spiritual matters better than anybody.»

«That is true. But I was just saying to you that you know better than I do, unpleasant, disgraceful, natural things, if you wish to call them so, such as the hatred of My enemies, such as their purposes...»

«I know nothing! I do not know anything. I swear to it on my soul, on my mother, on Jehovah...»

«That is enough! It is written that you must not swear » orders Jesus with such severity that even His countenance seems to become petrified in the perfection of a statue.

«Well, I shall not swear. But I must be allowed to say, since I am not a slave, that it is not necessary, that it serves no purpose, on the contrary it is dangerous to go to Caesarea, to speak to the Romans...»

«And who told you that that will happen? » asks Jesus.

«Who? Everything! You need to make sure of something. You are on the track of a...» he stops realising that wrath is making him say too much. He then resumes: «And I tell You that You ought to think also of our interests. You have deprived us of everything: home, earnings, affections, peace. We are persecuted because of You and we shall be persecuted even later. Because You, You say so in every possible way, will go away one fine day. But we are staying. We shall be ruined, but we...»

«You will not be persecuted when I am no longer among you. I, who am the Truth, tell you so. And I tell you that I have taken what you spontaneously and insistently gave Me. So you cannot say that I have taken away from you, with abuse of power, even one of the hairs that fall off when you tidy them. Why are you accusing Me? » Jesus is now less severe, His sad countenance expresses the desire to bring Judas back to reason kindly and I think that his compassion, so full and so divine, acts as a check on the others, who would not be so sympathetic towards the culprit.

Judas also perceives that and with one of the brusque changes of his soul urged by two opposed forces, he throws himself on the ground striking his head and chest and shouting: «Because I am a demon. I am a demon. Save me, Master, as You save so many demoniacs. Save me! Save me! »

«Do not let your desire to be saved be inactive.»

«It exists. You can see that. I want to be saved.»

«By Me. You expect Me to do everything. But I am God and I respect your free will. I will give you the strength so that you may get to say: "I do want". But to want not to be a slave must come from you.»

«I do want! I do want! But do not go to Caesarea. Don't go! Listen to me as You listened to John, when You wanted to go to Achor. We have all the same rights. We all serve You in the same manner. You are obliged to satisfy us for what we do... Treat me as You treated John! I want it! What difference is there between him and me? »

«The soul is different! My brother would never have spoken as you did. My brother does not...»

«Be silent, James. I will speak. To everybody. And you stand up and behave as a

man, as I treat you, not like a slave moaning at the feet of his master. Be a man, since you are so anxious to be treated as John, who, truly, is more than a man because he is chaste and full of Charity. Let us go. It is late. I want to cross the river at dawn. The fishermen will be coming back then after hauling the lobster-pots and it is easy to find a ferry-boat. The moon in her last days raises her thin crescent higher and higher. We will be able to walk faster in her increased light.

Listen. I solemnly tell you that no one must boast of doing his duty and exact for that, which is an obligation, special favours.

Judas has reminded Me that you have given Me everything. And he told Me that it is My duty to satisfy you for what you do. But just listen. Among you there are some fishermen, some landowners, some own a workshop, and the Zealot had a servant. Now then. When the boat servants, or the men who helped you like servants in the olive grove, in the vineyard, or in the fields, or apprentices in the workshop, or even the faithful servant who looked after the house and meals, finished their work, did you begin to serve them? Is it not so in every house and in every task? Which man, with a servant ploughing or minding sheep, or a workman in a workshop, would say to him when he finishes his work: "Go and have your meal immediately"? No one. But whether he comes back from the fields or he lays down his working tools, every master says: "Get my supper laid, get yourself tidy and with clean clothes wait on me while I eat and drink. You will eat and drink afterwards". Neither can one say that that is insensibility.

Because a servant must serve his master, and the master is not obliged to him, because the servant has done what the master had ordered him to do in the morning. Because, while it is true that the master must be kind to his servant, so it is the duty of the servant not to be lazy or a squanderer, but he must cooperate for the welfare of the master who feeds and clothes him. Would you bear your boat assistants, your peasants, workmen, your house servant to say to you: "Serve me because I have worked"? I do not think so.

So with you, when you consider what you have done and you do for Me - and, in future, considering what you will do to continue My work and to continue to serve your Master - you must always say, because you will see that you have always done much less than was fair to do to be on a par with what you received from God: "We are unprofitable servants because we have done but our duty". If you reason thus, you will see that you will no longer feel pretensions and bad temper arise in you, and you will act according to justice.»

Jesus is silent. They are all pensive.

Peter nudges John, who is pondering staring with his blue eyes at the waters, which from indigo have become silver-blue in the moonlight, and says to him: «Ask Him when is it that one does more than one's duty. I would like to be able to do more than my duty, I...»

«I, too, Simon. I was just thinking of that » replies John with his beautiful smile and in a loud voice he asks: «Master, tell me: will the man who serves You never be able to do more than his duty to tell You that he thus loves You entirely?»

«Child, God has given you so much, that in all fairness, all your heroism would always be too little. But the Lord is so good that He does not measure what you give Him with His infinite measure. He measures it with the limited measure of human capability. And when He sees that you have given without parsimony, with a full measure, overflowing generously, He then says: "This servant of Mine has given Me more than it was his duty. I will therefore give him the superabundance of My rewards".»

«Oh! How happy I am! I will give You an overflowing measure to have that superabundance! » exclaims Peter.

«Yes, you will give Me it. You will all give Me it. All those who are lovers of the Truth, of the Light, will give Me it. And they will be supernaturally happy with Me.»

They are now on the other bank. On their right are mount Tabor and the little Hermon, on their left the mountains of Samaria, the Jordan is behind them, and in front of them, beyond the plain in which they are, the hills in front of which is Megiddo; (if my memory does not fail me, I heard this name in a remote vision, the one in which Jesus joins Judas of Kerioth and Thomas, after the separation brought about by the necessity of concealing the departure of Syntyche and John of Endor).

They must have rested all day in some hospitable house, because it is evening once again and it is evident that they have rested. It is still warm, but dew is already beginning to form, mitigating the heat. And violet shadows of twilight are falling after the last red flares of a blazing sunset.

«We can walk without difficulty here » remarks Matthew happily.

«Yes. If we proceed this fast, we shall be at Megiddo before cock-crow » the Zealot replies to him.

«And at dawn we shall be beyond the hills, in sight of the plain of Sharon » concludes John.

«And of your sea, eh? » says his brother teasing him.

«Yes. Of my sea...» replies John smiling.

«And with your spirit you will depart on one of your spiritual wanderings » says Peter pressing his arm with strong fatherly affection. And he concludes: «Teach me as well, how to draw certain... angelical thoughts from the sight of things.

I have looked at water so many times... I have loved it... but... but it has never been of any avail to me other than to earn my living by fishing in it. What do you see in it?...»

«I see water, Simon. Like you and everybody else. As I now see fields and orchards... But then, beside the eyes of my body, I have other eyes in here, and I no longer see grass and water but words of wisdom come out from those material things. It is not I who think. I would not be able. It is somebody else who thinks in me.»

«Are you perhaps a prophet? » asks the Iscariot somewhat ironically.

«Oh! no! I am not a prophet...»

«What then? Do you think that you possess God? »

«Even less so...»

«You must be raving then.»

«It might well be so, I am so small and weak. But if it is so, it is pleasant raving and leads me to God. My disease then becomes a gift and I bless the Lord for it.»

«Ha! Ha! Ha! » Judas guffaws maliciously.

Jesus, who has been listening, says: «He is not ill, he is not a prophet. But a pure soul possesses wisdom. It is wisdom that speaks in the heart of a just man.»

«In that case I will never get there, because I have not always been good...» says Peter, somewhat discouraged.

«What about me, then? » replies Matthew.

«My friends, only few people, too few could possess wisdom because they have always been pure. But repentance and good will make man, previously guilty and imperfect, just, and then the conscience is purified in the bath of humility, contrition and love, and thus purified, it can vie with those who are pure.»

«Thank You, Lord » says Matthew bending to kiss the hand of the Master.

There is silence. Then Judas exclaims: «I am tired! I don't know whether I will be able to walk all night.»

«No wonder! Today you wandered about like a blowfly, while we were sleeping! » James of Zebedee replies to him.

«I wanted to see if I met any of the disciples...»

«What did it matter to you? The Master did not tell you. So...»

«Well, I did it. And if the Master allows me, I will stop at Megiddo. I think a friend of ours is there, he goes there every year, at this time, after harvest-time. I would like to speak to him of my mother and...»

«Do as you wish. After your errand you will go to Nazareth. We will meet you there. You can thus inform My Mother and Mary of Alphaeus that we shall soon be home.»

«I also say to You, as Matthew did: "Thank You, Lord".»

Jesus does not reply, and He receives the kiss on His hand as He received

Matthew's. It is not possible to see His countenance because it is the moment in the evening when daylight has disappeared completely and there is no starlight as yet. It is so dark that they are proceeding along the road with difficulty and to avoid all possible trouble Peter and Thomas decide to light some twigs, which they have taken from hedges and which burn with a crackle. But the lack of light previously and the smoky moving light later do not enable one to see the expressions of faces.

In the meantime they are approaching the hills, the dark tops of which are visible because they are darker than the mown fields, where the stubble looks whitish against the black of the night, and they become more and more visible as they are approached and as the light of the first stars illuminates them...

«I would leave You here, as my friends lives a little outside Megiddo. I am so tired...»

«You may go. May the Lord watch over your steps.»

«Thank You, Master. Goodbye, friends.»

«Goodbye, goodbye » say the others without attaching much importance to their greetings.

Jesus repeats: «May the Lord watch over your actions.»

Judas goes away quickly.

«H'm! He doesn't look so tired » remarks Peter.

«True! He was dragging his feet here. But now he is running like a gazelle over there...» says Nathanael.

«Your farewell was a holy one, Brother. But unless the Lord overwhelms him with His will, the assistance of God will not help him to take good steps and do fair actions.»

«Judas, the fact that you are My brother does not exempt you from being reproached! I therefore reproach you for being harsh and pitiless towards your companion. He has his faults. But you also have yours. And the first is that you do not endeavour to help Me to perfect his soul. You exasperate him with your words. It is not with violence that you bend hearts. Do you think that you are entitled to censor every action of his? Do you consider yourself so perfect as to be able to do so? May I remind you that I, your Master, do not do so, because I love that imperfect soul. It moves Me to pity more than any other soul... just because it is imperfect. Do you think that he is happy with his state? And how will you be able to be a master of spirits in future, if with one of your companions you do not practise to make use of the infinite charity which redeems sinners? »

Judas of Alphaeus has bent his head as from the first words. But at the end he kneels on the ground saying: «Forgive me. I am a sinner. And reproach me when I am wrong, because reproof is love, and only a fool does not appreciate the grace of being corrected by a wise person.»

«You can see that I do it for your own good. And forgiveness is joined to My reproach because I can understand the reason for your severity and because the humility of the person corrected disarms him who corrects. Stand up, Judas, and sin no more » and He keeps him beside Himself with John.

The other apostles exchange comments with one another, whispering at first, then in louder voices out of their habit of speaking aloud. I can thus hear them make comparisons between the two Judases.

«If it had been Judas of Kerioth to get that reproach, I wonder how he would have reacted! Your brother is good » says Thomas to James.

«But... well... We cannot say that what he said was wrong. He said one thing which is true with regard to Judas of Kerioth. Do you believe the story of the friend who goes to Judaea? I don't » says Matthew frankly.

«It must be... vineyard matters as it happened at the Jericho market » says Peter referring to the scene which he cannot forget. They all laugh.

«It certainly takes the Master to pity him so much...» remarks Philip.

«So much? Always, you should say » replies James of Zebedee.

«If it were I, I would not be so patient » says Nathanael.

«Neither would I. Yesterday's scene was disgusting » confirms Matthew.

«The man cannot be completely sound of mind » says the Zealot conciliatorily.

«But he knows how to look after his business. He is even too clever. I would bet my boat, my nets, even my house, sure that I would not lose anything, that he has gone to see some Pharisee to beg for protection...» says Peter.

«That's right. Ishmael! There is Ishmael at Megiddo! How come we never thought

of that?! We must tell the Master! » exclaims Thomas striking his forehead vigorously with his hand.

«It is of no use. The Master would excuse him once again and would reproach us » says the Zealot.

«Well... let us try. James, go: He loves you and you are a relative of His...»

«We are all alike, as far as He is concerned. Here, He does not see us as relatives or friends, He sees only apostles and He is impartial. But I will go, just to please you » says James of Alphaeus. And he quickens his step to depart from his companions and join Jesus.

«You think that he has gone to see a Pharisee. This one or that one... it does not matter... But I think he did it in order not to come to Caesarea. He does not come there willingly...» says Andrew.

«He seems to have been disgusted with the Roman ladies for some time » remarks Thomas.

«And yet... while you were going to Engedi and I was going with him to Lazarus, he was so happy to speak to Claudia...» says the Zealot.

«Yes... but... I think that he did something wrong just then. And I think that Johanna knows and that is why she sent for Jesus and... and I have been making many suppositions since Judas flew into a passion at Bethzur...» grumbles Peter between his teeth.

«Do you mean that?...» asks Matthew curiously.

«Well... I don't know... Ideas... We shall see...»

«Oh! Don't let us think of evil things! The Master does not approve of that. And we have no proof that he did anything wrong » says Andrew imploringly.

«You are not going to tell me that he acts rightly in grieving the Master, in lacking in respect to Him, in causing ill feelings...»

«Be good, Simon! I can assure you that he is somewhat mad...» says the Zealot.

«Well. He may be. But he sins against the kindness of our Lord. If he spat in my face, if he boxed my ears, I would put up with that and offer it to God for his redemption. I have taken it into my head to make every sacrifice for that and I bite my tongue and I run my nails into the palms of my hands when he plays the fool, in order to control myself. But I cannot forgive him for being bad to our Master. The sin he commits against Him, it's the same as if he committed it against me, and I cannot forgive him. Then... if it were only now and again! But he is always at it! I cannot get over the anger boiling within me about one of his quarrels, and he makes a fresh scene! Once, twice, three times... There is a limit!» Peter is almost shouting his words and is gesticulating impetuously.

Jesus, Who is about ten metres ahead of them, turns round, a white shadow in the night, and He says:

«There is no limit to love and forgiveness. There is none. Neither in God nor in the true children of God. As long as there is life, there is no limit. The only obstacle to the descent of forgiveness and love is the impenitent resistance of the sinner. But if he repents, he is always to be forgiven, even if he sinned not once, twice or three times a day, but much more frequently. You also sin and you want to be forgiven by God and you go to Him saying: "I have sinned! Forgive me". And forgiveness is pleasant to you and it is pleasant to God to forgive. And you are not gods. Consequently the offence given to you by people like yourselves is less grave than that given to God, Who is not like anybody else. Do you not think so? And yet God forgives. Do likewise yourselves. Be careful! Watch that your intolerance does not become detrimental to you by causing God to be intolerant towards you. I have already told you, but I will repeat it once again. Be merciful in order to have mercy. No one is so sinless as to be inexorable towards a sinner. Look at your own burdens before considering those weighing on the hearts of other people. Remove yours from your souls and then turn to those of other people to show them not the severity that condemns, but the love that teaches and helps to be freed from evil. In order to be able to say - and not be silenced by a sinner - in order to be able to say: "You have sinned against God and against your neighbour" it is necessary not to have sinned or at least to have made amends for the sin. In order to be able to say to those who are dejected because they have sinned: "Have faith that God forgives those who repent" as servants of God Who forgives repentant souls - you must show so much mercy in forgiving. Then you will be able to say: "See, repentant sinner? I forgive your sins seven and seven times, because I am a servant of Him Who forgives countless times those who repent of their sins as

many times. Consider then how the Perfect One forgives, if I know how to forgive, simply because I serve Him. Have faith!". You must be able to say so, and say so with your deeds, not just with words. You must say so forgiving. So if your brother sins, admonish him kindly, and if he repents, forgive him. And if at the end of the day he has sinned seven times and says to you seven times: "I repent", forgive him seven times. Have you understood? Will you promise Me that you will do that? While he is away, do you promise Me to be indulgent to him and to help Me to cure him making the sacrifice of controlling yourselves when he does anything wrong? Do you not want to help Me to save him? He is your brother in spirit as he comes from one sole Father, by race as he comes from one sole people, by mission as he is an apostle like you. So you ought to love him three times. If in your family you had a brother who grieved your father and exposed himself to censure, would you not try to correct him so that your father suffered no longer and no one spoke ill of your family? So? Is your family not a greater and holier one as its Father is God and I am the First-born? Why, then, do you not want to console the Father and Me and help us to improve the poor brother who, believe Me, is not happy to be so?...»

Jesus is anxiously imploring on behalf of the apostle who is so full of faults... And He concludes: «I am the Great Beggar and I ask you for the most valuable alms: I ask you to give Me souls. I go about looking for them, but you must help Me... Satisfy the hunger of My Heart, which seeks love and finds it only in too few people. Because those who do not aim at perfection are like as many loaves of bread of which My spiritual hunger is deprived. Give souls to your Master Who is distressed at not being loved and understood...»

The apostles are moved... They would like to say so many things, but every word seems too mean... They press round the Master, each one wishing to caress Him, to make Him feel that they all love Him.

At last it is meek Andrew who says: «Yes, Lord. With patience, silence and sacrifice, the powerful means of conversion, we will give You souls. Also that one... if God helps us...»

«Yes, Lord. And You help us with Your prayer.»

«Yes, friends. And in the meantime let us pray together for your companion who has gone away. "Our Father Who art in Heaven ..."»

Jesus' perfect voice repeats the words of the Our Father pronouncing them distinctly and slowly. The others chorus in a subdued tone. And while praying they move away in the night.

422. Martyrdom for Love Is Absolution.

27th April 1946.

From the tops of the last risings of the ground, which cannot be called hills, as their height is so minimal, a large stretch of the Mediterranean coast appears; it is limited to the north by the Carmel promontory, while to the south it stretches freely as far as human eyes can see. A placid almost straight coast with behind it a fertile plain interrupted by slight undulations of the ground. Coast-towns are visible with their white houses situated between the green of the country and the blue of the sea, which is placid and serene, a bright blue reflecting the pure azure of the sky.

Caesarea is a little to the north of the place where the apostles are with Jesus and with some disciples, whom they probably met in the villages they passed through in the evening or at dawn. It is now later than daybreak and dawn, although it is very early in the morning. In those beautiful hours of summer mornings, when the sky, after rosy dawn becomes again blue, the air is fresh and clear and fresh is the country. No sail appears on the sea. They are the pure hours of the day, when fresh flowers begin to open and the dew, drying in the early sun, exhales the sweet smells of herbs, bestowing freshness and perfume on the light breath of the morning breeze, which moves the leaves on stems just lightly and barely ripples the smooth expanse of the sea.

The town appears stretched along the shore, as beautiful as every place where Roman refinement has settled. Thermal baths and marble buildings exhibit their whiteness like solid blocks of snow in the districts closer to the sea, overlooked by a tall white square tower near the harbour: perhaps a Castrum or a

look-out post. Then there are the more modest little suburban houses, in Jewish style, and everywhere there are green pergole, roofgardens built more or less splendidly on the flat roofs of houses, and tall trees growing everywhere. The apostles admire the view resting in the shade of a group of plane-trees almost on the top of the hill.

«The sight of this immensity lightens one's heart! » exclaims Philip.

«And you seem to be already feeling all the coolness of those beautiful blue waters » says Peter.

«True! After so much dust, stones, thorns... look what a marvel! How fresh and peaceful! The sea always brings peace...» remarks James of Alphaeus.

«H'm! Except when... it slaps your face and whirls you and the boat round like tops in the hands of boys...» replies Matthew who probably remembers being seasick.

«Master... I think... I think of all the words of our psalmists, of the book of Job, of the words of the wisdom books, where the power of God is celebrated. And, I do not know why, the thoughts coming from what I see make me feel that we shall be elevated to perfect beauty on a blue bright purity thus, if we are just until the end in the great gathering, in Your eternal Triumph, the one which You described to us and which will be the end of Evil... And I seem to be seeing this azure immensity peopled with bright risen bodies and You, shining more than a thousand suns, in the middle of the blessed souls... and no more sorrow, tears, insults, disparagement like yesterday evening's... and peace, peace, peace... But when will Evil stop being harmful? Will it perhaps blunt its arrows against Your Sacrifice? Will it be convinced that it has been beaten? » asks John, who at first was smiling and now is depressed.

«Never. It will always think that it is triumphant, notwithstanding all the contradictions of the just. And My Sacrifice will not blunt its arrows. But the hour will come, the final hour, when Evil will be defeated, and in a beauty even more infinite than that foreseen by your spirit, the chosen ones will be the only People, the eternal, holy true People of the true God.»

«And shall we all be there? » ask the apostles.

«Yes, all.»

«And what about us? » ask the already large group of the disciples.

«You will all be there, too.»

«All the ones present or all those who are Your disciples? We are many now, notwithstanding those who parted from us.»

«And you will be more and more. But not everyone will be faithful until the end. But many will be with Me in Paradise. Some will have their reward after expiation, some immediately after their death, but the reward will be such that, as you forget the Earth and its sorrows, so you will forget Purgatory with its penitential longing for love.»

«Master, You told us that we will suffer persecutions and martyrdom. They may capture and kill us before we have time to repent, or our weakness will prevent us from being resigned to violent death... So? » asks Nicolaus of Antioch. who is among the disciples.

«Do not believe that. Owing to your human weakness you could not suffer martyrdom with resignation. But supernatural assistance will be instilled by the Lord into the great spirits who must bear witness to the Lord...»

«Which? Insensibility, perhaps? »

«No, Nicolaus. Perfect love. They will achieve such complete love that torture, accusations, separations from relatives, from life, from everything, will no longer be depressing matters, on the contrary they will become the base to rise to Heaven, to receive it, to see it and therefore to stretch arms and hearts towards tortures, in order to go where their hearts already are: to Heaven.»

«One who dies thus will be much forgiven » says an old disciple whose name I do not know.

«Not much, but completely forgiven, Papias. Because love is absolution, and sacrifice is absolution, and heroic confession of faith is absolution. You can thus see that martyrs will have treble purification.»

«Oh! then... I have sinned much, Master, and I have followed these disciples to be forgiven, and yesterday You forgave me and because of that You were insulted by those who do not forgive and are guilty. I think that Your forgiveness is valid. But for my long years of sin give me the absolution of martyrdom.»

«You are asking for a great deal, man! »

«Not as much as I have to give to have the beatitude which John of Zebedee has described and You have confirmed. I implore You, Lord. Let me die for You, for Your doctrine...»

«You are asking for very much, man! The life of man is in the hands of My Father...»

«But every prayer of Yours is heard, as every judgement of Yours is heard. Ask the Eternal Father that forgiveness for me...»

The man is on his knees at the feet of Jesus, Who looks him in the eye and then says: «And do you not think that it is martyrdom to live when the world has lost all attraction and the heart yearns for Heaven, and to live to teach other people to love and to become acquainted with the disappointments of the Master and to persevere tirelessly to give souls to the Master? Always do the will of God, even if your own should appear to you to be more heroic, and you will be holy... But here are your companions coming with supplies. Let us set out to arrive in town before the torrid hours.»

And He sets out first down the light descent that soon arrives at the plain marked by the white ribbon of the road leading to Caesarea on the Sea.

423. At Caesarea on the Sea. Parable of the Father Who Gives Each of His Children the Same Amount of Money.

30th April 1946.

Caesarea has large markets where fine victuals pour in for the refined Roman tables, and near the market squares where, in a kaleidoscope of faces, colours and races, more common foodstuffs can be found, there are stores with richer delicacies, imported both from the various Roman colonies and from remote Italy, to make the separation from the Fatherland less painful. And stores selling wines and delicatessen imported from abroad are in deep porches, because the Romans do not like being burned by the sun or drenched by rain while purchasing refined foodstuffs for their banquets. While satisfying their gluttony like Epicureans, they do not neglect the other parts of their bodies... thus cool shady porches and arches protecting from the rain lead from the Roman district - which is almost entirely grouped around the building of the Proconsul, between the coast road and the square of barracks and tollhouse - to the Roman stores near the Jewish markets.

There are many people under these porches, the end part of which near the markets is comfortable if not beautiful, There are people of all races. There are slaves and freedmen and an occasional pleasure-loving gentleman surrounded by slaves, passing listlessly from one shop to another, after leaving his litter in the street, and doing his shopping which the slaves take to his house. And when two Roman gentlemen meet, one can hear the usual idle talk: the weather, the tedium of the town which does not offer the pleasures of remote Italy, regret for great performances, plans for banquets and licentious speech.

A Roman, preceded by about a dozen slaves laden with bags and parcels, meets two friends. Reciprocal greetings: «Hail, Ennius! »

«Hail, Florus Tullius Cornelius! Hail, Marcus Heraclaus Flavius! »

«When did you come back? »

«The day before yesterday, at dawn, exhausted.»

«You, exhausted? You are never in a sweat! » the young man named Florus says teasing playfully.

«Don't jeer at me, Florus Tullius Cornelius. I am drudging even now on behalf of my friends! »

«Your friends? We did not ask you to drudge » objects the elder friend, named Marcus Heraclaus Flavius.

«But my love thinks of you. You cruel people who sneer at me, see this procession of slaves laden with goods? Others have gone before them with other goods. And it's all to honour you.»

«So this is your work? A banquet? »

«Why? » shout the two friends loudly.

«Sh! Noble patricians making such a terrible din! You sound like the plebeans of this country where we are wearing ourselves out in...»

«Orgies and idleness. Because we do nothing else. I am still asking myself: why

are we here? What tasks have we got? »

«To be bored to death is one.»

«To teach the hired female mourners here how to live is another. »

«And... to sow Rome in the sacred pelvises of Jewish women is another one.»

«And to enjoy, here as anywhere else, our wealth and power, to which everything is allowed, is a further one.»

The three alternate as in a litany and laugh. But young Florus suddenly stops and becomes gloomy and he says: «But for some time a fog has been hanging over the merry Court of Pilate. The most beautiful women look like chaste vestals and their husbands comply with their whims. And that spoils the habitual feasts a great deal...»

«Of course! The caprice for that coarse Galilean... But it will soon be over...»

«You are wrong, Ennius. I know that Claudia also is conquered by Him and thus... good morals have strangely installed themselves in her palace. Roman republican austerity seems to be revived there...»

«Alas! What a mouldy smell! Since when? »

«Since sweet April, suitable for love affairs. You don't know... You were not here. But our ladies came back as sad as the mourners of cinerary urns and we poor men have to look elsewhere for many of our amusements. Which we are not even allowed in the presence of the modest ladies! »

«One reason more why I should help you. A great dinner this evening... and a greater orgy in my house. I was at Cyntium and I found delightful things which these stinkers consider impure: peacocks, partridges, and all kinds of moorhens, and little wild boars removed alive from their mother, which had been killed, and bred for our dinners. And wines... Ah! sweet, precious wines of the Roman hills, of my warm shores near Liternum and of your sunny coast near Aciri!... And sweet-smelling wines from Chios, of which Cintium is the pearl. And inebriating wines from Iberia, suitable to excite senses for the final enjoyment. Oh! It must be a great feast, to dispel the tedium of our exile and to convince ourselves that we are still virile!...»

«Will there be women as well? »

«Of course... And more beautiful than roses. Of every colour and... taste. I spent a treasure for all the goods, including the women... But I am generous to my friends!... I was just finishing my shopping here. What might have gone bad during the journey. After the banquet, let us have love!...»

«Did you have a good voyage? »

«Very good. Aphrodite Anadyomene was friendly to me. In any case I am dedicating tonight's rite to her...»

The three men laugh grossly anticipating the on-coming shameful pleasures...

But Florus asks: «But why this exceptional feast? What's the reason for it?...»

«Three reasons: my beloved nephew in the next few days will begin to wear his toga virilis. I must celebrate the event. Obedience to the foreboding that Caesarea was changing into a distressing abode and that it was necessary to discredit fate by means of a rite to Venus. The third reason... I will whisper it to you: I am invited to a wedding...»

«You? Liar! »

«I am invited to a wedding. It is a "wedding" every time one relishes the first sip from a sealed amphora. And I am doing that this evening. Twenty thousand sesterces, or if you prefer so, two hundred gold pieces I paid for her, because in actual fact that is what I had to give for her, including brokers and the like. But even if Venus had given birth to her at dawn in April, and had made her with foam and golden beams, I would not have found her more beautiful and pure! A bud, a closed but... Ah! And I am her master! »

«Profaner! » says Marcus Heracleus jokingly.

«Do not play the censor, for you are my equal... After Valerian left, we were bored to death here. But I am replacing him... We must take advantage of the experience of our forefathers. But I will not be so foolish to wait, as he did, for the girl, who is fairer than honey and whom I have called Galla Ciprina, to be spoiled by the sadness and the theories of emasculated philosophers who do not know how to enjoy the pleasures of life...»

«Bravo!!! But... Valerian's slave was a learned woman and...»

«... and became mad reading philosophers... Soul!... second life!...»

virtue!!!... a lot of nonsense!... To live is to enjoy oneself! And we live here. Yesterday I burned every mournful scroll and I ordered the slaves, under

pain of death, not to remember the miseries of philosophers and of Galileans. And the girl will know me only...»

«But where did you find her? »

«Well! Somebody was very shrewd and bought slaves after the Gallic wars and used them only as reproducers, treating them well, obliging them only to procreate, to give fresh flowers of beauty... And Galla is one of them. She is now pubescent and her master sold her... and I bought her... ah! ah! ah! »

«You lustful!...»

«If it had not been me, it would have been somebody else... So... She should not have been born a girl...»

«If He heard you... Oh! Here He is! »

«Who? »

«The Nazarene Who cast a spell on our ladies. He is behind you...»

Ennius turns round as if he had an asp behind him. He looks at Jesus Who is coming forward slowly among the people pressing round Him, the poor common people and some Roman slaves as well, and he contemptuously says: «That ragamuffin?! Women are depraved. But let us run away, lest He should cast a spell on us as well! » Then addressing his poor slaves, who have been standing all the time with their loads, like caryatids for whom there is no mercy, he orders: «Go home quickly, because you have been wasting your time so far, and those who are making preparations are waiting for spices and perfumes. Run! Quick! And remember that you will be scourged if everything is not ready by sunset.»

The slaves go away at a run and the Roman follows them slowly with his two friends...

Jesus advances. He is sad, because He heard the end of Ennius' conversation and from the height of His stature He looks with infinite compassion at the slaves running under their burdens. He turns round, looking for the faces of more Roman slaves... He sees some, trembling with fear of being caught by superintendents or being driven away by the Jews, mixed among the crowds surrounding Him. He stops and asks: «Is there anyone among you belonging to that household? »

«No, Lord. But we know them » reply the slaves present.

«Matthew, give them abundant offerings. They will share them with their companions, so that they may know that there is someone who loves them. And remember, and tell the others that sorrow comes to an end with life only for those who were good and honest in their chains, and with sorrow ends also the difference between rich and poor, between free people and slaves. Afterwards there is only one just God for everybody, Who, without taking into account wealth or chains, will reward the good and punish the wicked. Bear that in mind.»

«Yes, Lord. But we, who belong to the households of Claudia and Plautina, are quite happy, like those who belong to Livia and Valeria, and we bless You because You have improved our lot » says an old man to whom everyone listens as if he were their chief.

«To show Me your gratitude be always good and you will have the true God as your eternal Friend.»

And Jesus raises His hand as if to dismiss and bless them and He then leans against a column and begins to speak in the attentive silence of the crowd. The slaves do not go away, they remain listening to the words uttered by the divine lips.

«Listen. A father of many children gave each of them, when they became adults, two coins of great value and said to them: "I no longer intend to work for each of you. You are now old enough to earn your living. So I am giving each of you the same amount of money, so that you may invest it as you please and to your own profit. I will remain here waiting, ready to advise you and also to assist you, if through misfortune you should lose all or part of the money that I am now giving you. But remember that I will be inexorable towards those who squander it mischievously, and towards sluggards who waste it or leave it as it is through idleness or vices. I have taught each of you Good and Evil. You cannot therefore say that you are facing life without knowing what life is. I have set for everyone an example of wise, just activity and of honest life. So you cannot say that I have contaminated your spirits through my evil examples. I have done my duty. It is for you now to do yours, as you are neither stupid, nor unprepared, nor illiterate. Go" and he dismissed them and remained alone,

waiting, in his house.

His sons scattered through the world. They all had the same things: two valuable coins of which they could dispose freely, and a greater treasure of health, energy, knowledge and their father's examples. So they should have all been successful in the same way. But what happened? Some of the sons employed their money wisely and by means of untiring honest work and a simple honest life, in accordance with their father's teaching, they soon owned a large honest treasure; some at first made an honest fortune, but later they squandered it through idleness and orgies; some made money practising usury or dealing in contemptible business; and some did nothing because they were inactive, lazy, undecided and they finished their valuable coins before they could find any employment.

After some time the father of the family sent servants wherever he knew that his sons were and said to the servants: "You will tell my sons to meet in my house. I want them to give me an account of what they have done during this time and I wish to ascertain myself what is their situation". And the servants went everywhere, they met the children of their master, they gave the message and each of them went back with the master's son whom they had met.

The father received them with great solemnity, as a father, but also as a judge. And all the relatives of the family were present with friends, acquaintances, servants, fellow-villagers and people from neighbouring villages. A solemn meeting. The father was on his seat of head of the family, and around him, in a semicircle there were all the relatives, friends, acquaintances, servants, fellow-villagers and people from the neighbourhood. In front of him, in a line, his sons. Even without being questioned, their different countenances expressed the truth. Those who had been active, honest, of good morals and had made a holy fortune looked prosperous, peaceful and well-off, like people who are wealthy, enjoy good health and a clear conscience. They looked at their father with a kind, grateful, humble but at the same time triumphant smile; they were shining with joy having honoured their father and family and because they had been good children, good citizens and faithful believers. Those who had squandered their assets in laziness or vices were mortified, low-spirited, haggard-faced and shabby, with the signs of orgies or starvation clearly visible. Those who had made a fortune by contemptible means had an aggressive hard countenance, with the cruel upset look of beasts which are afraid of the tamer and are prepared to react...

The father began to question these last ones: "How come you who looked so serene when you left, now look like beasts ready to tear people to pieces? Where did you get that mien?"

"Life gave it to us. And your severity in sending us away from home. You put us in touch with the world".

"All right. And what did you do in the world?"

"What was possible for us to obey your orders to earn a living with the mere nothing you gave us".

"All right. Stand in that corner... And now it is your turn, you emaciated, sick looking and shabby people. What did you do to come to this state? You were healthy and well dressed when you left".

"Clothes wear out in ten years..." objected the sluggards.

"So there are no more looms in the world to make cloth for men's garments?"

"Yes... But one needs money to buy it..."

"You had it".

"In ten years... it is more than finished. Everything which has a beginning comes to an end".

"Yes, if you take from it and never put anything back into it. But why have you only taken from it? If you had worked, you could have added to it and taken from it and the money would not have come to an end, on the contrary you could have increased it. Have you been ill, perhaps?"

"No, father".

"Well, then?"

"We felt lost... We did not know what to do, what was right... We were afraid of doing the wrong thing. And not to do wrong, we did not do anything".

"And had you no father to whom you could apply for advice? Have I ever been an uncompromising frightening father?"

"Oh! no! But we were ashamed of having to say to you: 'We are not capable of

taking the initiative'. You have always been so active... We hid ourselves out of shame".

"All right. Stand in the middle of the room. It's your turn now! What are you going to tell me? From your outward looks you seem to have suffered not only hunger but also from illness. Were you perhaps taken ill because you had worked too hard? Be frank and I will not reproach you".

Some of the children who were questioned threw themselves on their knees striking their breasts and saying: "Forgive us, father! God has already punished us and we deserved it. But you, who are our father, forgive us!... We began well, but we did not persevere. As we had become wealthy so easily we said: 'Well, let us enjoy ourselves a little, as our friends suggest, then we will go back to work and make up for it'. And we really wanted to do so: go back to the two coins and make them yield again, as if it were a game. And twice (say two), three times (says one) we were successful. Then our good luck abandoned us... and we finished all our money".

"But why did you not return to reason after the first time?".

"Because the bread spiced with vice corrupts the palate, and one can no longer do without it...".

"There was your father...".

"True. And we longed for you with regret and homesickness. But we offended you... We implored Heaven to inspire you to send for us, so that we might receive your reproach and your forgiveness; that is what we wanted and are now asking for, more than riches which we do not want any more because they led us astray".

"All right. Stand in the middle of the room beside those who were questioned before you. And you who are sick and poor like those, but are silent and show no sign of grief, what are you going to say?".

"What the first ones said. That we hate you, because your unwise way of doing things has been the cause of our ruin. Since you knew us, you should not have exposed us to temptations. You hated us and we hate you. You set that trap for us to get rid of us. May you be cursed".

"Very well. Stay with the first ones in that corner. And now it is your turn, my prosperous, serene, wealthy sons. Tell me. How did you do so well?".

"By carrying out your teaching, your examples, advice, orders, everything. We resisted temptations, out of love for you, blessed father who gave us life and wisdom".

"Very well. Come to my right hand side and listen all of you to my judgement and to my defence. I gave each of you the same money, examples and wisdom. My sons have reacted in different manners. From a hard working, honest moderate father different children have come forth: some are like him, some are lazy, some an easy prey to temptations, and some so cruel that they hate their father, their brothers and neighbours, on whom, even if they do not say so, but I know, they have practised usury and committed crimes. And among the weak and lazy ones there are some who are penitent and some impenitent. This is my judgement. The perfect ones are already on my right hand side, equal to me in glory and in deeds; those who are repentant, like children to be educated, will come once again under my authority until they reach a degree of capability which will prove that they are adults again; the unrepentant and guilty ones will be driven out of my property and will be persecuted by the malediction of him who is no longer their father, because their hatred for me annuls our relationship of father and son. But I wish to remind you all that each son has been the author of his own fate, because I gave everybody the same things, which, however, have brought about four different situations in those who received them and I cannot be accused of desiring their evil lot".

The parable is over and I will now explain it to you who have listened to it. The Father in Heaven is symbolised by the father of the large family. The two coins given by the father to each of his children before sending them into the world are: time and free will, that God grants to every man to be used as he wishes, after being taught and perfected by the Law and the examples of just people. Everyone receives the same gifts. But every man makes use of them as he wishes. Some treasure up time, means, education, wealth, everything, for a good purpose and remain holy and sound, the owners of increased riches. Some begin well, then become tired and lose everything. Some do nothing as they expect other people to do it. Some accuse the Father of their mistakes; some repent and

are willing to make amends; some do not repent and they accuse and curse as if their ruin has been brought about by other people. And God grants rewards to the just at once; He grants mercy to those who repent and time to expiate, so that they may achieve a reward through repentance and expiation; and He gives malediction and punishment to those who trample on love through impenitence, the consequence of their sins. He gives every man what is due to him.

So do not waste the two coins: time and free will, but make the right use of them to be on the right hand side of the Father, and if you fail, repent and have faith in Merciful Love. Go. Peace be with you! »

He blesses them and looks at them moving away in the sun flooding the square and streets. But the slaves are still there...

«Are you still here, My poor friends? Will you not be punished? »

«No, Lord, if we say that we have been listening to You. Our mistresses venerate You. Where are You going now, Lord? They have been wishing to see You for such a long time...»

«To the rope-maker near the harbour. But I am leaving this evening, and your mistresses will be at the party...»

«We shall tell them just the same. Months ago they told us to inform them every time You come here.»

«All right. Go. And make good use of your time and thoughts, which are always free, even if a man is in chains.»

The slaves bend to the ground and go away towards the Roman quarters. Jesus and His apostles go towards the harbour, along a narrow street.

424. At Caesarea on the Sea. The Roman Ladies and the Slave Galla Ciprina.
1st May 1946.

Jesus is a guest of the rope-maker's humble family. Their house is low, with a saltish smell, close as it is to sea water. At the rear there are some smelly storehouses where goods are unloaded before they are collected by the various buyers. At the front there is a dusty road, furrowed by heavy wheels, very noisy because dockers, urchins, carters and seamen come and go incessantly. Beyond the street there is a little dockyard with dirty water soiled by the rubble thrown into it, and by its own stagnation. From the dockyard a canal flows into the actual port, capable of taking large ships. On the western side there is a large sandy square where ropes are made with squeaky twisting winches worked by hand. On the eastern side there is another little square, much smaller but more noisy and untidy, where men and women are patching up nets and sails. And beyond lie low hovels with a saltish smell, crowded with half-naked children.

One certainly cannot say that Jesus has chosen a magnificent abode. Flies, dust, bustle, the smell of stagnant water, the stink of hemp steeped before being used, reign there. And the King of kings, lying with His apostles on heaps of coarse hemp, tired as He is, falls asleep in that poor environment, partly a lumber-room, partly a storeroom, which is at the rear of the little house and from which, through a door as black as tar, one can enter the kitchen, which is also black, and through a worm-eaten door, corroded by dust and salt, so that it looks whitish-grey like pumice-stone, one comes out into the square where ropes are being made and from which comes the stench of steeped hemp.

The sun is blazing down on the square notwithstanding that there are four huge plane-trees, two at each end of the rectangular square, under which are the winches to twist the hemp. I do not know whether I am giving the implement the right name. The men, wearing tunics reduced to the bare essential for decency, running with sweat as if they were under a shower, keep turning their winches with continuous motion, as if they were galley-slaves... They speak only to say the words indispensable to their work. Thus, without the squeaking of the winch wheels, and the creaking of the hemp stretched in twisting, there is no other noise in the square, a strange contrast with the din in the other places around the house of the rope-maker.

Thus the exclamation of one of the workers is most surprising as it is uttered

unexpectedly: «What? Women? At this awful time of the day?! Look! They are coming here...»

«They may be in need of ropes to tie their husbands...» says a young rope-maker jokingly.

«They may need some hemp for some work.»

«H'm! It's unlikely that they need ours, which is so coarse, when they can get it combed!?»

«Ours is cheaper. See? They are poor...»

«But they are not Jewesses. See, their mantles are different...»

«Perhaps they are not Jewesses. There are all races in Caesarea now...»

«Perhaps they are looking for the Rabbi. They may be ill... See how they are all covered, even in this heat... »

«Provided they are not lepers... Poverty, yes, but leprosy, no; I do not want it, not even to be resigned to God » says the rope-maker whom everybody obeys.

«But did you not hear the Master?: "We must accept everything God sends us".»

«But leprosy is not sent by God. It is sent by sins, vices, contagion...»

The women are now behind them, not behind those who are speaking and are at the very end of the square, but behind those who are on the side near the house, thus the first to be met, and one of them bends to say something to one of the rope-makers, who turns round astonished and remains like a blockhead.

«Let us go and listen to them... Covered like that... With all the children I have, leprosy would be the last straw!...» says the owner who has stopped turning his winch and goes towards the women. His companions follow him...

«Simon, this woman wants something, but she speaks a foreign language. Since you have travelled, listen to her » says the man to whom the woman had spoken.

«What do you want? » asks the rope-maker rudely, trying to see her through the dark dyed byssus which covers her face.

And in the purest Greek the woman replies: «The King of Israel. The Master.»

«Ah! I see. But... are you lepers? »

«No.»

«Who can assure me? »

«He can. Ask Him.»

The man hesitates... He then says: «Well. I will make an act of faith and God will protect me... I am going to call Him. Stay where you are.»

The four women do not move, a greyish silent group, looked at with amazement and evident fear by the rope-makers, who have gathered together a few steps apart.

The man goes into the storeroom and touches Jesus Who is sleeping. «Master... Come out. They are looking for. You.»

Jesus wakes and gets up immediately asking: «Who? »

«Who knows!... Some Greek women... they are all covered... They say that they are not lepers and that You can assure me...»

«I will come at once » says Jesus tying His sandals which He had taken off, and buttoning the top part of His tunic near His neck, and putting on the belt which He had taken off to be more free in His sleep. And He goes out with the rope-maker.

The women make the gesture of starting towards them. «Stay where you are, I tell you! I do not want you to walk where my children are playing... I want Him to say first that you are healthy.» The women stop.

Jesus joins them. The tallest one, not the one who previously spoke Greek, says a word in a low voice. Jesus addresses the ropemaker: «Simon, you need not worry. The women are healthy and I have to listen to them in peace. May I go into the house?...»

«No. The old woman is there and she is more curious and chatty than a magpie. Go over there, to the end, under the shed of the vats. There is also a little room. You will be alone there and in peace.»

«Come...» says Jesus to the women. And He goes with them to the end of the square, under the unsavoury shed, into the little room as narrow as a cell, where there are broken tools, rags, refuse hemp, huge cobwebs, and where the smell of macerating-vats and mould is so strong as to catch their throats.

Jesus, Who is very grave and pale, smiles lightly saying: «It is not a place in accord with your tastes... But I have nothing else...»

«We do not see the place, because we see Him Who lives in it just now » replies Plautina removing her veil and mantle, imitated by the other ladies, who are Lydia, Valeria and Albula Domitilla, a freedwoman.

«From which I infer that after all you still believe that I am a just man.»
«More than a just man. And Claudia has sent us precisely because she believes that You are more than just and she does not take into consideration the words she heard. But she wishes to have Your confirmation to double her veneration for You.»
«Or to deprive Me of it, should I appear as they tried to picture Me. But you can assure her. I have no human ambitions. My ministry and My desire are only and entirely supernatural. I do want to gather all men into one only kingdom. But what part of men? Their flesh and blood? No. I leave that, a fleeting matter, to fleeting monarchies, to unsteady empires. I want to gather under My sceptre only the spirits of men, immortal spirits in an immortal kingdom. I reject all other accounts of My will, irrespectively of whoever gave them, if they differ from that one. And I beg you to believe and to tell her who sent you, that the Truth has but one word...»
«Your apostle was so sure of himself when he told us...»
«He is an overexcited youngster. He is to be listened to as such...»
«But he is detrimental to You! Reproach him... Send him away...»
«And what about My mercy? He acts through mistaken love. So must I not pity him? And what would change if I sent him away? He would do double harm to himself and to Me.»
«So he is like a cannon-ball tied to Your foot!...»
«He is a poor wretch to be redeemed...»
Plautina falls on her knees stretching out her arms and saying: «Ah! Master, greater than anybody else, how easy it is to believe that You are holy when one feels Your heart in Your words! How easy it is to love and follow You because of Your charity, which is even greater than Your intelligence! »
«Not greater. But more understandable for you... whose intellects are hampered by too many errors and you are not generous in clearing them to receive the Truth.»
«You are right. Your divination is as great as Your wisdom.»
«As wisdom is a form of holiness it gives enlightenment of judgement, both on past or present events, and on forewarning of future ones.»
«So your prophets...»
«Were holy. God therefore communicated with them in great fullness.»
«Were they holy because they belonged to Israel? »
«They were holy because they belonged to Israel and because they were just in their actions. Because not all Israel is or was holy, although they belonged to Israel. The fact that one belongs by chance to a people or to a religion cannot make one holy. Those two conditions can be of great assistance to be so, but they are not the essential factors of holiness.»
«Which is then the factor? »
«The will of man. The will that leads the actions of man to holiness if it is good, to wickedness if it is bad.»
«Then... it is not fair to say that just people cannot be found also among us.»
«Certainly not. Nay, some just people were certainly among your ancestors, and there are certainly some among those who are living now. Because it would be too dreadful if the whole heathen world were made of demons. Those among you who feel attraction to Good and Truth and repulsion to Vice, and shun evil deeds as disgracing man, believe Me, they are already on the path of justice.»
«Claudia then...»
«Yes. And you as well. Persevere.»
«But if we should die before being... converted to You?... Of what use would it be to have been virtuous?...»
«God is just in judging. But why hesitate to come to the true God? »
The three ladies lower their heads... Silence... Then the great confession, the one which explains so many cruelties and so much resistance of the Romans against Christianity... «Because, by doing so, we would appear to be betraying our Fatherland...»
«On the contrary you would serve your Fatherland, making it morally and spiritually greater, strengthened by the possession and protection of God, in addition to its armies and riches. Rome, the City of the world, the City of the universal Religion!... Just think of that...»
There is silence...
Then Livia, blushing like a peony, says: «Master, some time ago we were seeking

information on You also in the pages of our Virgil. Because, as far as we are concerned, prophecies in no way connected with any of the beliefs of Israel are of greater value to us than those of your prophets, as we feel that the latter are influenced by millenary beliefs... And we discussed the matter... comparing those who presaged You in all times, nations and religions. But no one presaged You so justly as our Virgil... How much we spoke on that day with Diomed also, the Greek freedman, an astrologer dear to Claudia! He maintained that that happened because the time was nearer and the stars spoke with their conjunctions... And in support of his thesis he put forward the fact of the three Wise men from the three Eastern countries, who had come to worship You, still a baby, causing the massacre, which struck Rome with horror... But we were not persuaded because... for over fifty years none of the wise people in the world spoke of You explaining the voices of the stars, although we are even closer to Your present revelation. Claudia exclaimed: "We would need the Master! He would speak the truth and we would know the place and the immortal destiny of our greatest poet!". Would You tell us... for Claudia... A gift to prove that she is not disliked by You because of her doubt about You...»

«I understood her reaction of a Roman and I have had no grudge against her. You may reassure her. And listen. Virgil was not great only as a poet, was he? »
«Oh! no! Also as a man. In the midst of a society already corrupt and vicious he shone with spiritual purity. No one knew him to be lewd, fond of orgies and debauchery. His writings are chaste, but even chaster was his heart. So much so that where he lived mostly, he was called the "little virgin" with mockery by vicious people, with respect by good people.»

«So, could God not be reflected in the limpid soul of a chaste man, even if that man was a heathen? Will perfect Virtue not have loved the virtuous man? And if he was granted love and the sight of Truth because of the pure beauty of his soul, could he not have had a flash of prophecy? As prophecy is nothing but the truth which is revealed to those who deserve to know the Truth as a reward and a spur to greater and greater virtue? »

«So... he did prophesy You? »

«His mind inflamed with purity and genius was elevated to the knowledge of a page concerning Me, and he can be called the just heathen poet, a pre-Christian prophetic spirit as a reward to his virtues.»

«Oh! Our Virgil!! And will he be rewarded? »

«I said: "God is just". But do not imitate the poet stopping at his limit. Go on, because the Truth did not reveal itself to you by intuition and partly, but completely and it spoke to you.»

«Thank You, Master... We are going away. Claudia told us to ask You if she can be useful to You in moral matters » says Plautina without replying to Jesus' remark.

«And she told you to ask Me, if I was not an usurper...»

«Oh! Master! How do You know? »

«I am more than Virgil and the prophets...»

«It is true! It is all true! Can we serve You?...»

«For Myself I need but faith and love. But there is a creature who is in great danger and whose soul will be killed this evening. Claudia could save her.»

«Here? Who? Soul killed? »

«One of your patricians is giving a dinner-party and...»

«Ah! Yes! Ennius Cassius. My husband also is invited...» says Livia.

«And mine... And we, too, really. But as Claudia is not going, we will not go either. We had decided to withdraw immediately after dinner, in the event we had gone... Because... our dinners end in orgies... which we can no longer bear... And with the contempt of neglected wives we let our husbands remain...» says Valeria severely.

«Not with contempt... With pity for their moral misery...» corrects Jesus.

«It is difficult, Master... We know what happens there...»

«I also know many things which happen in hearts... and yet I forgive...»

«You are holy...»

«You must become so. Urged by My desire and spurred by your will...»

«Master!...»

«Yes. Can you say that you are as happy now as you were before meeting Me, happy with the poor brute sensual happiness of heathens unaware that they are more than flesh, now that you know a little of Wisdom?...»

«No, Master. We admit it. We are discontented, annoyed, like one who is looking for a treasure and cannot find it.»

«And it is in front of you! What annoys you is the yearning after Light of your spirits, which suffer because of your delay... in giving them what they ask for...»

There is silence... Then Plautina, without replying to Jesus' remark, says: «And what could Claudia do? »

«She could save that creature. A girl purchased for pleasure by the Roman. A virgin who will not be such tomorrow.»

«If he bought her... she belongs to him.»

«She is not a piece of furniture. Within her body there is a soul...»

«Master... our laws...»

«Women: the Law of God!...»

«Claudia is not going to the feast...»

«I am not telling her to go. I am telling you to say to her: "The Master, to be sure that Claudia does not blame Him, asks her for help for the soul of that girl"...»

«We will tell her. But she will not be able to do anything... A slave purchased... is an object of which one may dispose...»

«Christianity will teach you that a slave has a soul like the soul of Caesar, in most cases even better, and that that soul belongs to God, and he who corrupts it is cursed.» Jesus is imposing while saying so.

The women perceive His authority and severity. They bow without discussing. They put on their mantles and veils again and say: «We will report. Hail, Master.»

«Goodbye.»

The women go out into the warm square. But Plautina turns round and says: «With regard to everybody we were Greek women. Is that clear? »

«I understand. Go without worrying.»

Jesus remains under the low porch and they go away along the same road they came.

The rope-makers go back to their work...

Jesus walks back to the storeroom slowly. He is pensive. He does not lie down again. Sitting on a pile of rolled up ropes He prays fervently... The eleven apostles are still fast asleep...

Some time goes by thus... About one hour. Then the rope-maker looks in and beckons Jesus to go to the door. «There is a slave who wants You.»

The slave, a Numidian, is outside in the square still exposed to the sun. He bows and without speaking he gives Jesus a waxed tablet.

Jesus reads it and says: «Tell her that I will wait until dawn. Have you understood? »

The man nods assent and to make Jesus understand why he does not speak, he opens his mouth to show that his tongue has been cut off .

«Poor wretch! » says Jesus caressing him.

Two tears stream down the dark cheeks of the slave who takes Jesus' white hand in his dark ones, which are so much like those of a big monkey, and he rubs it against his face, he kisses it, and then throws himself on the ground. He takes Jesus' foot and lays it on his head... A language of gestures to express his gratitude for that gesture of pitiful love...

And Jesus repeats: «Poor wretch! » but He does not cure him.

The slave stands up and wants the waxed tablet back... Claudia does not wish to leave any trace of her correspondence... Jesus smiles and hands the tablet to him. The Numidian departs and Jesus approaches the rope-maker.

«I must remain here until dawn... Will you allow Me?...»

«Everything You wish. I am sorry that I am poor...»

«I am pleased that you are honest.»

«Who were those women? »

«Foreigners needing advise.»

«Healthy? »

«As you and Me.»

«Good!... Here are Your apostles...»

In fact, rubbing their eyes, stretching themselves, still half sleeping, the Eleven come out of the storeroom and go toward the Master.

«Master... we will have to have supper if You wish to leave this evening...» says Peter.

«No. I am not leaving until dawn.»

«Why? »

«Because I have been asked to do so.»

«But why? Who asked You? It was better to walk by night. It's new moon now...»

«I hope to save a creature... And that is brighter than the moon and more refreshing for Me than the coolness of the night.»

Peter draws Him aside: «What has happened? Have You seen the Roman ladies? What mood are they in? Is it them who are becoming converted? Tell me...»

Jesus smiles: If you let Me reply I will tell you, o most inquisitive man. I saw the Romans. They are going towards the Truth only very slowly. But they are not going back. It is already a lot.»

«And... with regard to what Judas said... what is the situation? »

«That they are continuing to respect Me as a wise man.»

«But... for Judas? Is he not involved?...»

«They came to see Me, not him...»

«Why then was he afraid to meet them? Why did he not want You to come to Caesarea? »

«Simon, it is not the first time that Judas is strangely capricious...»

«That is true. And... are the Romans coming tonight? »

«They have already come.»

«Why are we waiting until dawn, then? »

«And why are you so inquisitive? »

«Master, be good... Tell me everything.»

«Yes, I will... to remove all doubt... You also heard the conversation of those three Romans...»

«Yes, I did. Filthy! Plague! Demons! But what have we got to do with that?... Ah! I see! The Roman ladies will go to the dinner and then they will come and ask to be forgiven for taking part in filthiness... I am surprised that You agree.»

«And I am surprised at your rash judgement! »

«Forgive me, Master! »

«Yes, you had better know that the Roman ladies are not going to the dinner-party and that I asked Claudia to intervene on behalf of that girl...»

«Oh! But Claudia can do nothing! The girl was bought by the Roman and he can do what he likes with her! »

«But Claudia can exert much influence upon the Roman. And Claudia sent word to Me to wait until dawn before leaving. Nothing else. Are you satisfied? »

«Yes, Master, I am. But You have not rested... Come now... You are so tired! I will watch to ensure that You are left in peace... Come...» and lovingly tyrannical he pulls and pushes Jesus, compelling Him to lie down once again... Hours go by. It is sunset, work comes to an end, and children shout louder in the streets and little squares and swallows screech in the sky. The first shades of evening descend upon the earth, and swallows go back to their nests, and children to bed. One by one all noises cease, so that one can hear only the light rippling of the water in the canal and the louder lapping of the waves on the shore. Houses, the houses of tired workmen are closed, lights go out and rest descends to make everyone blind and dumb... remote... The moon rises and adorns with her silver also the dirty sheet of water of the little dockyard, which now looks like a sheet of silver...

The apostles are sleeping once again on the hemp... Jesus, sitting on one of the winches, His hands in His lap, is praying, thinking, waiting... He does not lose sight of the street coming from town.

The moon rises, rises... She is perpendicularly above His head. The noise of the sea is louder, the smell of the canal is stronger, and the cone of the moon which plunges its beams into the sea becomes wider and wider, embracing all the expanse in front of Jesus, and fades away farther and farther: a path of light which seems to be coming towards Jesus from the end of the world, along the canal, finishing in the basin of the dockyard. And a little white boat is coming along that path. It is proceeding without leaving any trace on the liquid path, as the water becomes smooth again after it passes... It comes up the canal... It is now in the silent dockyard... It draws closer and stops. And three shadows land from it. A robust man, a woman and between them a slender figure. They direct their steps towards the house of the rope-maker.

Jesus stands up and goes to meet them. «Peace to you. Whom are you looking for?

»

«For You, Master » says Lydia unveiling her face and coming forward alone. And she goes on: «Claudia has fulfilled Your desire because it was a just and completely moral matter. That is the girl. Valeria will take her later as a nurse for little Fausta. In the meantime she asks You to keep her, or, better still, to entrust her to Your Mother or to the mother of Your relatives. She is completely pagan. Nay, more than pagan. The master who brought her up, put absolutely nothing into her. She knows nothing about Olympus or anything else. She has only a holy terror of men, because life was revealed to her in all its brutality only a few hours ago...»

«Oh! How sad! Too late? »

«No, not from a material point of view... But he was preparing her for his... let us say: sacrilege. And the girl is terrified... Claudia had to leave her with that satyr while dinner lasted, as she intended to take action when wine had impaired his capability of pondering. I need not remind You that if man is always lewd in his sensual love affairs, he is much more so when he is drunk... But only then he is a laughing-stock who can be urged by force and despoiled of his treasure. And Claudia took advantage of the situation. Ennius wants to go back to Italy, whence he was sent away as he had fallen out of favour... Claudia promised his return in exchange for the girl. Ennius swallowed the bait... But tomorrow, when he is sober, he will rebel, will look for her, he will cause an uproar. It is true that tomorrow Claudia will have the means to silence him.»

«Violence? No!...»

«Oh! violence used for a good purpose is useful! But it will not be used... Only Pilate, still stunned by the quantity of wine he drank this evening, will sign the order for Ennius to go and report to Rome... Ha! Ha!... And he will leave with the first military ship. But in the meanwhile... it is wise for the girl to be elsewhere, lest Pilate should repent and revoke the order... He is so uncertain! And it is better for the girl to forget, if she can, human filth. Oh! Master!... We went to the dinner for that purpose... But how were we able to go to such orgies up to a few months ago, without feeling sick? We ran away as soon as we achieved our purpose... Our husbands are there just now emulating brutes... How disgusting, Master!... And we have to receive them after they...»

«Be austere and patient. You will improve your husbands through your exemplary conduct.»

«Oh! it is not possible!... You do not know...» The woman weeps more out of scorn than sorrow. Jesus sighs. Lydia resumes: «Claudia asked me to tell You that she did this to prove to You that she reveres You as the Only Man Who deserves veneration. And she wants me to inform You that she thanks You for teaching her the value of a soul and of purity. She will never forget that. Do You want to see the girl? »

«Yes. And who is the man? »

«The dumb Numidian whom Claudia employs in the most secret matters. There is no danger of delation... He has no tongue...»

As in the afternoon Jesus repeats: «Poor wretch! » But even now He does not work a miracle.

Lydia goes and takes the girl by the hand and almost drags her before Jesus. She explains: «She knows few Latin words and even fewer Judaeen... A little wild animal... Just an object of pleasure.» And she says to the girl: «Don't be afraid. Say "thanks" to Him. It is He Who saved you... Kneel down. Kiss His feet. Cheer up! Do not tremble!... Forgive her, Master! She is terrorised by the last caresses of drunken Ennius...»

«Poor girl! » says Jesus laying His hand on the veiled head of the girl. «Be not afraid! I will take you to My Mother, for some time. To a Mother, do you understand? And you will have so many brothers around you... Be not afraid, My dear daughter! »

What is there in Jesus' voice and looks? Everything: peace, confidence, purity, holy love. The girl perceives that, she throws back her mantle with hood to look at Him better, and the slender figure of a girl hardly at the threshold of puberty, almost still a little child, somewhat immature in comeliness, innocent looking, appears in a dress too wide for her...

«She was half-naked... I put on her the first garments I found, and I put some also in her sack...» explains Lydia.

«A little girl! » says Jesus compassionately. And stretching out His hand

towards her, He asks: «Do you want to come with Me, without any fear? »
«Yes, sir.»
«No. I am not your owner. Call Me: Master.»
«Yes, Master » says the girl with more confidence and a timid smile replaces the expression of fear previously visible on her very pale face.
«Are you capable of walking a long distance? »
«Yes, Master.»
«Then you will rest at My Mother's, in My house, awaiting Fausta... a little girl of whom you will be very fond... Are you pleased? »
«Oh! Yes!...» and the girl confidently raises her clear grey-blue eyes, which are most beautiful between her golden eyebrows and she dares to ask: «No more that master? » and a flash of terror upsets her once again.
«Never again » Jesus promises once more laying His hand again on the girl's thick hair of the shade of blond honey.
«Goodbye, Master. In a few days' time we shall be on the lake as well. Perhaps we shall meet again. Pray for the poor Roman ladies.»
«Goodbye, Lydia. Tell Claudia that these are the conquests which I expect, and nothing else. Come, child. We are leaving at once...» And holding her by the hand He looks in at the door of the storeroom calling the apostles.
While the boat, without leaving any trace of its voyage sails back to the open sea, Jesus and the apostles, with the girl enveloped in a mantle in the middle of the group, go towards the country through narrow desert streets of the outskirts...

425. Aurea Galla.
2nd May 1946.

Summer dawns are so early that the time between the setting of the moon and daybreak is short. So that, although they have walked very quickly, at the darkest hour of the night they are still in the neighbourhood of the town of Caesarea, and a branch of thorn-bush which they have lit, does not give sufficient light. They are compelled to stop for some time, also because the girl, who is not accustomed to walking by night, often stumbles over stones half buried in the dust.
«It is better to stop for a little while. The girl cannot see and she is tired » says Jesus.
«No, I can go on... Let us go far, far away... He may come. We passed here to go to that house » says the girl with chattering teeth, mixing Hebrew and Latin in a new language to make herself understood.
«We will go behind those trees and nobody will see us. Do not be afraid » Jesus replies to her.
«Yes, be not afraid. That... Roman is dead drunk under the table by now...» says Bartholomew to reassure her.
«And you are with us. And we love you! We will not let anybody hurt you. I say! We are twelve strong men...» says Peter, who is little taller than she is, but as sturdy as she is lean, and as burnt by the sun as she is snow-white, a poor flower brought up in the shade so that she might be more exciting and valuable.
«You are a little sister. And brothers defend their sisters...» says John.
The girl, at the last flash of light of the improvised torch, looks at her consolors with her clear iron-grey eyes, lightly tinged with blue, two limpid eyes still shining with the tears shed in the moment of terror shortly before... She is suspicious. And yet she trusts them. And together with the others she crosses the dry rivulet beyond the road to enter an estate at the end of which there is a thick orchard.
They sit down in the dark, waiting. The men perhaps would like to sleep. But every noise makes the girl moan and the gallop of a horse causes her to cling convulsively to the neck of Bartholomew, who, perhaps because he is old, inspires confidence and trust. It is thus impossible to sleep.
«Don't be afraid! When one is with Jesus, nothing harmful happens any more» says Bartholomew.
«Why? » asks the girl trembling and still clinging to the apostle's «Because Jesus is God on the Earth, and God is stronger than men.»

«God? What is God? »
«Poor creature! How have they brought you up? Have they not taught you anything?»
»
«To keep my skin white, my hair shiny, to obey masters... to always say yes... But I could not say yes to the Roman... he was ugly and he frightened me... He frightened me all day long... He was always there... at the bath, when I was getting dressed... those eyes... and hands... oh!... And who does not say "yes" gets beaten...»
«You will not be beaten. Neither the Roman nor his hands are here any longer... There is peace...» Jesus replies to her.
And the others remark: «It is horrible! Treated like valuable animals, no better than animals! Worse!... Because an animal knows at least that they teach it to plough, to have a saddle on and a bit, because that is its task. But this girl was thrown there without knowing anything!...»
«If I had known I would have thrown myself into the sea. He had said: "I will make you happy"...»
«And he did make you happy. But in a way that he had never imagined. Happy for the Earth and for Heaven. Because to know Jesus is happiness » says the Zealot. There is silence: everybody is meditating on the horrors of the world. Then, in a low voice, the girl asks Bartholomew: «Will you tell me what is God? And why He is God? Because He is good and handsome? »
«God... How can one teach you, since you are completely devoid of religious ideas? »
«Religious? What is it? »
«Most High Wisdom! I am like one who is getting drowned in a deep sea! What shall I do in front of this abyss? »
«What seems so difficult to you, Bartholomew, is so simple. It is an abyss, but an empty one. And you can fill it up with the Truth. It is worse when the abyss is full of filth, poison, snakes... Speak with simplicity, as you would speak to a baby. And she will understand you better than an adult would.»
«Oh! Master! But could You not do it? »
«I could. But the girl will accept the words of one like her more easily than she would listen to My words of God. And in any case... You will have to face such abysses in future, and fill them with Me. After all, you must learn to do so.»
«That is true! I will try. Listen, girl... Do you remember your mother? »
«Yes, sir. Flowers have bloomed for seven years without her. But before that I was with her.»
«All right. And do you remember her? Do you love her? »
«Oh! » a sob joined to her exclamation says everything.
«Don't weep, poor creature... Listen... The love you feel for your mother...»
«... and my father... and my little brothers...» says the girl sobbing.
«Yes... for your family, the love for your family, your thoughts for it, your desire to go back to it...»
«Never again!!...»
«Who knows!... All that is something which can be called the religion of the family. So religions, religious ideas, are the love, the thought, the desire to go where He or they are, in whom we believe, whom we love and desire.»
«Ah! If I believe in that God there, I will have a religion... It is easy! »
«Well. What is easy? To have a religion or to believe in that God there? »
«Both. Because it is easy to believe in a good God like that one there. The Roman mentioned so many of them and swore... He used to say: "by goddess Venus!", "by god Cupid". But they could not be good gods because he did things which were not good, while mentioning them.»
«The girl is not stupid » remarks Peter in a low voice.
« But I still do not know what is God. I see Him a man like you... So God is a man. And how can one tell? In what is He stronger than everybody? He has neither swords nor servants...»
«Master, help me...»
«No, Nathanael! You are doing so well...»
«You are saying so out of kindness... However, let us see how we can proceed. Listen, girl... God is not a man. He is like a light, a look, a sound, so big that He fills the sky and the earth illuminating everything, He sees everything, directs everything and gives orders to everything...»

«Also to the Roman? Then He is not a good God. I am afraid! »
«God is good and gives good orders, and He had ordered men not to make war, not to make slaves, to leave little girls to their mothers and not to frighten them. But men do not always listen to the orders of God.»
«But you do...»
«Yes, I do.»
«But if He is stronger than anybody else, why does He not make men obey Him? And how can He speak if He is not a man? »
«God... oh! Master!...»
«Go on, Bartholomai. You are so wise a teacher, you can express the most sublime thoughts with so much simplicity, and you are afraid? Do you not know that the Holy Spirit is on the lips of those who teach Justice? »
«It seems so easy when we listen to You... and all Your words are in here... But to draw them out when we have to do what You do!... Oh! misery of us poor men! What worthless teachers we are! »
«To acknowledge your worthlessness is to predispose your spirits to the teaching of the Paraclete Spirit...»
«All right. Listen, girl. God is strong, very strong, stronger than Caesar, than all men put together with their armies and war-machines. But He is not a cruel master who makes people always say yes, under pain of the lash if one does not say so. God is a father. Did your father love you? »
«So much! He named me Aurea Galla because gold is precious and Gaul is our fatherland, and he used to say that I was dearer to him than the gold he had once possessed and than our fatherland...»
«Did your father beat you? »
«No. Never. Even if I was naughty he used to say to me: "My poor daughter!" and he wept...»
«There you are! That is what God does. He is a father and He weeps if we are bad, but He does not compel us to obey Him. But those who are bad will be punished one day with horrible tortures...»
«Oh! lovely! The master who took me away from my mother and took me to the island and the Roman in tortures! And will I see them? »
«You will be near God and you will see, if you believe in Him and you are good. But to be good you must not hate even the Roman.»
«No? How can I do that?!...»
«Praying for him or...»
«What is to pray? »
«It is to speak to God telling Him what we want...»
«But I want a dreadful death for my masters! » says the girl with wild vehemence.
«No, you must not. Jesus will not love you if you say so...»
«Why? »
«Because we must not hate those who injured us.»
«But I cannot love them...»
«Forget them for the time being... Try to forget them. Later, when you know more about God, you will pray for them... So we were saying that God is powerful but He leaves His children free.»
«Am I a child of God? Have I two fathers? How many sons has He? »
«All men are children of God, because He made them all. See the stars up there? He made them. And these plants? He made them. And the earth on which we are sitting, and that bird which is singing and the sea which is so big, everything and all men. And men are His children more than anything else, as they are His children because of that thing which is called soul and which is light, sound, look, not as big as His, which fill Heaven and Earth completely, but are beautiful and they never die as He never dies.»
«Where is the soul? Have I got one? »
«Yes and it is in your heart, and it is that thing that made you understand that the Roman was bad, and that certainly will not make you wish to be like him. Is that right? »
«Yes...» The girl ponders after her uncertain yes... She then says with confidence: «Yes! It was like a voice within me and a need to have help... and with another voice, but that one was mine, I called my mother... because I did not know that there was God, that there was Jesus... If I had known, I would have called Him with that voice which I had within me...»

«You have understood well, child, and you will grow in Light. I am telling you., Believe in the true God, listen to the voice of your soul, devoid of acquired wisdom, but devoid also of evil will, and you will have a Father in God, and in death, which is the passage from the Earth to Heaven for those who believe in the true God and are good, you will have a place in Heaven, near your Lord » says Jesus laying His hand on the head of the girl, who changes position and kneels down saying:

«Near You. It is nice to be with You. Do not part from me, Jesus. I now know who You are and I prostrate myself. At Caesarea I was afraid to do so... But You seemed a man to me. I now know that You are a God hidden in a man and You are a Father and Protector to me.»

«And Saviour, Aurea Galla.»

«And Saviour. You saved me.»

«And I will save you even more. You will have a new name...»

«Are You going to deprive me of the name which my father gave me? The master on the island called me Aurea Quintillia, because they divided us according to complexion and number and I was the fifth blonde... But why do You not leave me the name given to me by my father? »

«I am not taking it off you. But you will have in addition to your old name, a new one, the eternal one.»

«Which? »

«Christian. Because the Christ saved you. But it is dawning. Let us go... See, Nathanael, it is easy to speak of God to empty abyssess... You spoke very well. The girl will improve quickly in Truth... Aurea, go ahead with My brothers...» The girl obeys but timidly. She would prefer to remain with Bartholomew, who understands and promises: «I am coming at once, too. Go, be obedient...» And when he is with Jesus, Peter, Simon and Matthew, he remarks: «It's a pity that Valeria will have her. She is always a heathen...»

«I cannot impose her on Lazarus...»

«There is Nike, Master » suggests Matthew.

«And Eliza...» says Peter.

«And Johanna... She is a friend of Valeria and Valeria would cede the girl to her willingly. She would be in a good home » says the Zealot.

Jesus is pensive and silent...

«You will decide... I am going to join the girl, as she is always turning round. She trusts me because I am old... I would keep her... one daughter more... But she is not from Israel...» and he goes away, the good but too Israelite Nathanael.

Jesus looks at him depart and shakes His head.

«Why that gesture, Master? » asks the Zealot.

«Because... it grieves Me to see that wise people are also slaves to prejudice...»

«However... let us keep this to ourselves... Bartholomew is right... and in actual fact... You should provide... Remember Syntyche and John... Don't let the same thing happen... Send her to Syntyche...» says Peter who is afraid of trouble in case the heathen girl should stay with them.

«John will not live long... Syntyche is not yet mature enough to be the teacher of a girl like this one... It is not a suitable place...»

«And yet You must not keep her. Consider that Judas will soon be with us. And Judas, Master, allow me to tell You, is a lustful man and a... one who is inclined to speak to gain some profit... and he has too many friends among the Pharisees...» insists the Zealot.

«That's it! Simon is right! Just what I was thinking! » exclaims Peter. «Do as he says, Master!...»

Jesus ponders but is silent... He then says: «Let us pray! And the Father will help us...» and, at the rear of the others, they pray fervently.

Dawn is breaking... They pass by a village and resume walking in the country... The sun is becoming warmer and warmer. They stop to eat in the shade of a huge walnut-tree.

«Are you tired? » Jesus asks the girl who is eating with no relish. «Tell Me and we will stop.»

«No, no. Let us go...»

«We have asked her several times. But she always says no...» says James of Alphaeus.

«I can go on, I am fit! Let us go far away...»

They resume their journey. But Aurea remembers something. «I have a purse. The ladies said to me: "You will give it when you are near the mountains". The mountains are here and I am giving it.» And she rummages in the sack where Livia put some clothes for her... She takes out the purse and gives it to Jesus. «Their offerings... They did not want to be thanked. They are better than many among us... Take it, Matthew. And keep this money. It will be used as secret alms.»

«Shall I not tell Judas of Kerioth? »

«No.»

«He will see the girl...»

Jesus does not reply... They set out again, but they proceed with difficulty because of the intense heat, the dust and dazzling light. Then they begin to climb the first ramifications of Mount Carmel, I think. Although it is more shady and cooler here, Aurea walks slowly and often stumbles.

Bartholomew goes back to the Master. «Master, the girl is feverish and exhausted. What shall we do? »

They consult. Should they stop? Or proceed carrying her? They are undecided. At last they decide that they must at least reach the road to Sicaminon to ask assistance of some wayfarer on horseback or in a wagon. And they would like to carry the girl in their arms, but she is heroic in her will to go farther away and keeps repeating: «I can walk, I am fit! » and wants to proceed by herself. She is flushed, her eyes are feverish and she is really exhausted. But she does not give up... She walks slowly, agreeing to be supported by Bartholomew and Philip... But she proceeds... They are all really tired. But they realise that they must go on and they do so...

They are on the top of the hill. There is the opposite slope... The plain of Esdraelon is down there, and beyond it the hills among which is Nazareth...

«If we do not find anybody, we will stop at the peasants...» says Jesus...

They go on... Almost down on the plain they see a group of disciples. There is Isaac and John of Ephesus with his mother, and Abel of Bethlehem with his mother, and other disciples whose names I do not know. For the women there is a rustic cart drawn by a strong little mule. There are also two shepherds, Daniel and Benjamin, Joseph the boatman and others.

«It is Providence helping us! » exclaims Jesus and He tells everybody to stop while He goes to speak to the disciples and to the two women in particular. He takes them aside with Isaac and tells them part of Aurea's adventure: «We took her away from a lustful master... I would like to take her to Nazareth to cure her because she is suffering from fear and exhaustion. But I have no vehicle. Where were you going? »

«To Bethlehem in Galilee, to Myrtha's. It is impossible to stand the heat in the plain » replies Isaac.

«Go to Nazareth first, I ask you to do so out of charity. Take the girl to My Mother and tell Her that I will be with Her in two or three days' time. The girl has a temperature, so pay no attention to her raving. I will tell you later...»

«Yes, Master. As You wish. We will leave at once. Poor creature! Did he thrash her? » ask the three.

«He wanted to profane her.»

«Oh!... How old is she? »

«About thirteen...»

«The coward! The lewd rogue! But we will love her. We are true mothers, not because we have been promoted such by merit, is that right, Naomi? »

«Of course it is, Myrtha. Lord, are You keeping her as a disciple? »

«I do not know yet...»

«If You keep her, we are here. I am not going back to Ephesus. I have sent friends to sell everything. I am staying with Myrtha... Remember us for anything the girl needs. You saved our sons and we want to save her.»

«We will see later...»

«Master, the two women disciples are reliable because of their holiness...» says Isaac pleading.

«It does not depend on Me... Pray fervently and do not mention anything to anybody. Have you understood? To anybody.»

«We will hold our tongues.»

«Come with the cart.» And Jesus goes back followed by Isaac who is driving the

cart and by the two women.

The girl is lying on the grass seeking refreshment for her high temperature.

«Poor creature! But she will not die, will she? »

«What a beautiful girl! »

«My dear, do not be afraid. I am a mother, you know? Come... Hold her up, Myrtha... She is tottering... Help us, Isaac... Over here where she will not be jolted so much... Put her sack under her head... Let us put our mantles under her... Isaac, wet these linens and we will put them on her forehead... What a temperature, poor child...»

The two women are careful and motherly. Aurea is so overwhelmed by the high fever, that she is almost absent...

Everything is ready... The cart can start... Isaac before using his whip remembers: «Master, if You go to the bridge, You will find Judas of Kerioth. He is waiting for You like a beggar... It was he who told us that You were coming here. Peace to You, Master. We will get to Nazareth during the night! »

«Peace to You, Master » say the women disciples.

«Peace to you! »...

The cart trots away...

«Thanks be to the Lord!...» says Jesus.

«Yes. It is a good thing for the girl and because of Judas... It is better if he knows nothing...»

«Yes. It is better. So much better that I ask your hearts to make a sacrifice.

We will part before arriving at Nazareth, and you people of the lake will go to Capernaum with Judas, whereas I with My brothers, Thomas and Simon will go to Nazareth.»

«We will do that, Master. And what will You say to these disciples who are waiting for You? »

«That it was urgent for us to inform My Mother of My arrival... Let us go...»

and He joins the disciples who are so happy to be with their Master, that they do not ask any question.

426. Parable of the Vineyard and of Free Will.

4th May 1946.

«Peace to you, My friends. The Lord is good. He grants us to meet for a brotherly meal. Where were you going? » Jesus asks the ex-shepherds while making His way into a thicket to protect Himself from the sun.

«Some towards the sea, some towards the mountains. We came here together, growing in numbers all the time, as other groups joined us along the road » says Daniel, formerly a shepherd in Lebanon.

«Yes, and the two of us would like to go as far as Great Hermon to nourish our hearts where we pastured our flocks » says his companion Benjamin.

«It is a good idea. I will go to Nazareth for some time, later I will be at Capernaum and Bethsaida until the new moon of Elul. I am telling you so that you may find Me in case of need. Sit down and let us put together our victuals to share them according to justice.»

They do so spreading their... wealth on a piece of cloth: cakes, cheese, salt fish, olives, some eggs, the first apples... and they share out the food as cheerfully as they had laid it down, after Jesus has offered and blessed it.

How pleased they are with the un hoped-for feast of love! They forget tiredness and heat, lost as they are in the joy of listening to Jesus, Who inquires about what they have done, gives them advice, or tells them what He has done. And although the very warm hour of a sultry day would make one drowsy, they are so interested that no one yields to sleep. And when the meal is over and the few provisions left have been collected and divided into equal parts among them, they move into the thickest part of the nearest brushwood on the hill, and sitting around Jesus in the shade of the trees, they beg Him to tell them a beautiful parable, which they may use as a practical rule of life and teaching. Jesus, Who is sat facing the plain of Esdraelon, now bare of crops but luxuriant in vineyards and orchards, turns His eyes round looking at the panorama as if He were looking for a subject in what He sees. He smiles. He has found it. He begins with a general question: «The vineyards in this plain are beautiful, are

they not? »

«Yes, very beautiful. They are extraordinarily laden with grapes which are maturing. And they are very well kept. That is why they yield so much.»

«They must be plants of great value...» insinuates Jesus. And He concludes: «As the plain is divided into estates belonging to rich Pharisees, they have cultivated it with good plants regardless of expenses.»

«Oh! It would have been of no use to purchase the best plants, if they had not been taken care of continually. I am an expert in the matter because I grow vines in all my property. But if I do not toil hard, that is, if I had not toiled hard at it, as my brothers continue to do now, believe me, Master, I would not be able to offer You at vintage time grapes like those of last year » says a strong man, about forty years old, whom I think I have already seen, but whose name I do not remember.

«You are right, Cleopas. The whole secret to have good fruits is to take care of our property » say another man.

«Good fruits and good profits. Because if the land gave only what one spends on it, it would still be a bad investment of money. The land must yield the fruit of the capital it costs us, plus a profit enabling us to increase our wealth. Because we must consider that a father has to divide his property among his sons. And of one property, be it land or money, he has to make several parts, one for each son, to give each of them what to live on. I do not think that we are to be blamed if we increase our property for the benefit of our children » insists Cleopas.

«You are not, if you achieve it by honest work and in an honest manner. So you say that notwithstanding the good quality of the seedlings planted out, it is necessary to toil hard at them to have a profit? »

«Most certainly so! Before we have the first bunches... Because it takes time, you know! Because one must have patience and work as well while the young shoots have only leaves. And later, when they begin to yield fruit and are strong, one must watch that there are no useless vine-branches, harmful insects and that parasitic grass do not impoverish the soil. And you have to ensure that the vine-branches are not suffocated by the foliage of bushes and bindweed and you have to dig round the foot of the vine forming circles so that dew may penetrate and water may stagnate a little longer than elsewhere nourishing the plant, and you have to spread manure... Hard work! But it is necessary, even if it is unpleasant, because grapes, so sweet, so beautiful, that each bunch seems a collection of precious stones, grow exactly by sucking fetid black manure. It seems impossible but it is so! And one has to thin out the leaves so that the sun may shine on the bunches, and when vintage is over, one has to arrange the vines, tying and pruning them, covering the roots with straw and excrement, to protect them against frost, and also during winter one has to go and see whether the wind or some robber has pulled off the stakes and whether the weather has loosened the withes by which the branches are tied to the stakes... Oh! there is always something to be done until the vine is completely withered... And then there is still work to be done to remove it from the soil, which is to be cleaned out taking away all the roots so that it may be ready to receive a new plant. And do You know how one must work patiently with a light hand and eyes wide awake extricating the vine-shoots of the dead plants entangled with those of the vines still alive? If one acted foolishly and with a heavy hand, how much damage would be caused! One must be of the trade to know that!... The vines? They are like children! And before a child becomes a man, how hard one has to work to keep him sound in body and mind!... But I am speaking all the time and I am not letting You speak... You promised us a parable...»

«Actually you have already told it. It would be sufficient to apply your conclusion and say that souls are like vines...»

«No, Master! You must speak. I... I have talked nonsense and we cannot do the work of application by ourselves...»

«All right. Listen.

When we had an animal body in the womb of our mother, God created a soul in Heaven to make the future man in His likeness and He infused it into the body which was forming in the womb. And man, when it was time for him to be born, was born with a soul, which up to the age of reason was like land left uncultivated by its master. But when man reached the age of reason, he began to reason and to tell Good from Evil. He then realised that he had a vineyard to cultivate to his

liking. And he became aware that he had a vine-dresser in charge of his vineyard: his free will. In fact the freedom to guide himself, which God granted to man, His son, is like an efficient servant, granted by God to man, His son, to assist him to make his vineyard fertile, that is his soul.

If man did not have to work by himself to become rich, to build for himself an eternal future of supernatural prosperity, if he should have had to receive everything from God, what merit would he have in re-creating himself in holiness, after Lucifer had corrupted the initial holiness given gratuitously by God to the first parents? It is already a great gift that the creatures, who had fallen by inheritance of fault, are granted by God the possibility to deserve a reward and become holy, by being born again, through their own will, to the initial nature of perfect creatures, as the Creator had given to Adam and Eve, and to their children, if the first parents had remained free from the original Fault. Man, who had fallen, must become a chosen man through his free will. Now, what happens to souls? This. Man entrusts his soul to his will, to his free will, which begins to work the vineyard that had remained so far a piece of ground without vines, a good ground, but bare of durable plants. During the first years of its existence only frail grass and caducous flowers had grown on it: the instinctive goodness of a child who is good because he is an angel still unaware of Good and Evil.

You may ask: "How long does he remain such?". We generally say: for the first six years. But in actual fact there are precocious reasons so that we have children who are responsible for their actions before the age of six. There are children who are responsible for their actions also at three, four years of age, and they are responsible because they know what is Good and what is Evil, and they freely want the former or the latter. The moment a child can tell a good action from a bad one, that child is responsible. Not before. Thus a fool, even if one hundred years old, is irresponsible, but his guardians are responsible in his place and they must lovingly watch over him and his neighbour who may be damaged by the dull-witted or foolish fellow, so that he may not harm himself or other people. But God does not impute any fault to the idiot or fool, because unfortunately they are deprived of reason. But we are talking of intelligent beings, sound in mind and body.

So man entrusts his uncultivated vineyard to his vine-dresser: his free will, which begins to cultivate it. The soul, that is the vineyard, has a voice and makes the free will hear it. It is a supernatural voice nourished by supernatural voices which God never denies souls: the voice of the Guardian, those of the spirits sent by God, the voice of Wisdom, those of the supernatural remembrances which every soul recollects, although man does not have a precise perception of them. And the vineyard speaks to the free will, in a kind and imploring voice, begging it to adorn it with good plants, to be active and wise so that it may not become a wild, sterile, poisonous thicket of thorn-bushes, where serpents and scorpions nest, foxes have their earths and martens and other evil quadrupeds their holes.

Free will is not always a good cultivator. It does not always watch over the vineyard and defend it with an impassable hedge, that is with firm good will, aiming at protecting the soul from robbers, from parasites, from all harmful things, from strong winds which might cause the little flowers of good resolutions to fall off when they have hardly begun to be desired. Oh! what a high strong hedge is required around the heart to save it from evil! How one must watch to ensure that it is not forced, and that no one opens either large gaps through which dissipations may enter, or sly little openings, at its base, through which vipers creep in: the seven capital vices! How necessary it is to hoe, to burn weeds, to prune, to trench, to manure through mortification and take care of one's soul through love for God and for our neighbour. And it is necessary to watch with wideopen bright eyes and mind wide awake that the vine-shoots which appeared to be good, do not turn out to be bad, and if that should happen, they are to be extirpated mercilessly. One plant only, but perfect, is better than many useless or noxious ones.

We have hearts, we have therefore vineyards which are always cultivated, in which new vines are planted by an extravagant cultivator who piles up new plants: he wants to do this work and that one, he has ideas, which are not even wicked, then he neglects them and they become evil, they fall on the ground, they degenerate and die... How many virtues perish because they are mingled with

sensuality, they are not cultivated, because, in short, free will is not supported by love! How many thieves enter to rob, to tamper with things, to extirpate, because one's conscience falls asleep instead of being vigilant, because one's will loses its strength and becomes corrupted, because one's free will is seduced, and although free, it becomes a slave to Evil. But consider! God made it free and yet free will becomes a slave to passions, to sin, to concupiscence, to Evil in a word. Pride, wrath, avarice, lust, first mixed with, then triumphant over good plants!... A disaster! How much drought there is that parches plants, because people no longer pray, whereas prayer is union with God, and therefore a dew of beneficial juices for the soul! How much frost freezes roots through lack of love for God and our neighbour! How much poorness of soil, because people refuse the manuring of mortification and humility! What an inextricable tangle of good and bad vine-shoots, because one has not the courage to suffer cutting off what is noxious! That is the state of a soul whose guardian and cultivator is an extravagant free will inclined to Evil.

Whereas the soul whose free will lives in an orderly way - and therefore in submission to the Law given so that man may know what is order, how it is and how it is kept - and is heroically faithful to Good, because Good elevates man and makes him similar to God, whereas Evil makes him brutal and similar to a demon, is a vineyard bedewed with the pure, plentiful useful waters of faith, appropriately shaded by trees of hope, warmed by the sun of charity, controlled by will, matured by mortification, tied with obedience, pruned by strength, guided by justice, watched over by wisdom and conscience. And Grace increases assisted by so much help, Holiness increases and the vineyard becomes a wonderful garden, where God descends for His delight. Providing the vineyard always remains a perfect garden till the death of the creature, God has such work of a willing good free will brought by His angels into the great eternal Garden of Heaven.

You certainly want that lot for yourselves. So watch that the Demon, the World and the Flesh do not seduce your free will and ruin your souls. Watch that there is love in you, but not self-regard, which extinguishes love and puts the soul in the power of various sensualities and disorder. Be vigilant until the end and storms may wet you but not hurt you, and laden with fruit you will go to your Lord for the eternal reward.

I have finished. Now meditate and rest until sunset while I retire to pray.»
«No, Master. We must not delay in setting out to arrive at some house » says Peter.

«Why? There is time until sunset! » say many.

«I am not thinking of sunset or of the Sabbath. I am thinking that within an hour there will be a violent storm. See those tongue-shaped dark clouds which are rising slowly from the mountain ranges of Samaria? And those which are so white and are progressing rapidly from the west? A lower wind is blowing the former, an upper wind the latter. But when they are here above us, the upper wind will yield to sirocco and the dark clouds, laden with hailstones, will come down and clash with the white ones, laden with lightning, and then you will hear some music! Come on, quick! I am a fisherman and I can read in the sky.»

Jesus is the first to obey and they all set off quickly towards the farm-houses in the plain...

At the bridge they meet Judas who shouts: «Oh! My Master! How much I have suffered without You! Praised be the Lord Who has rewarded my perseverance in waiting for You here! How did things go at Caesarea? »

«Peace to you, Judas » briefly replies Jesus and He adds: «We will speak in the house. Come, a storm is impending.»

In fact gusts of wind begin to raise clouds of dust from the parched roads, the sky becomes overcast with clouds of all shapes and shades, and the air is yellow and lurid... And the first large, warm, sparse drops begin to fall and the first lightning furrows the sky, which is now almost dark...

They begin to run and goaded by the desire not to get drenched to the skin, they arrive at the first house when, amid the roar of a thunderbolt which falls nearby, a deluge of rain and hailstones falls upon the area causing a strong smell of damp earth and of ozone exhaling from the incessant lightning.

They go in and fortunately the house is provided with porches and is inhabited by peasants believing in the Messiah. And with veneration they invite the Master to make Himself at home with His companions «as if He were in His own house. But

raise Your hand and disperse the hail, out of pity for our work » they say crowding round Jesus.

Jesus raises His hand and blesses the four cardinal points, and rain only pours from the sky to water orchards, vineyards, meadows and to purify the heavy atmosphere.

«May You be blessed, Lord! » says the head of the family. «Come in, my Lord! » And while the rain is pelting down, Jesus enters a very large room, a storeroom, and tired as He is, He sits down surrounded by His apostles.

427. Going about the Plain of Esdraelon.
6th May 1946.

It must have continued to rain all the previous day and during the night, because the ground is very damp and the roads are becoming muddy. But to compensate for this the atmosphere is clear, free from dust at all levels. And the sky smiles up there, and looks as fresh and clear after the storm as if it were springtime, and the earth also smiles, dewy, fresh, clean, with a reminiscence of spring in the serene fresh dawn. And the last drops of rain, held by the entangled foliage or hanging from vine-tendrils shine like diamonds in the sun, while fruits washed by the heavy rain display the hues of their skins, the pastel shades of which are becoming day by day the perfect hues of full maturity. Olives and grapes, still hard and unripe, mingle with the green foliage, but each little olive has a tiny drop hanging from its base, and the compact bunches of grapes are like a network of tiny drops hanging from the stalks of the grapes.

«It is pleasant to walk today! » say Peter trampling joyfully on the ground which is not dusty, does not scorch and is not slimy either.

«You seem to breathe purity. But look at the hue of the sky! » Judas Thaddeus replies to him.

«And those apples? That bunch over there, all around that branch. I do not know how it can hold the weight and come out of the mass of fruits with a cluster of leaves? How many colours! The green of the hidden ones is shading into yellow, the others are turning to red, and the two which are more exposed are completely red where the sun shines. They look as if they were covered with sealing wax! » says the Zealot.

And they walk on happily contemplating the beauties of creation until Thaddeus, immediately imitated by Thomas and the others, intones a psalm celebrating the creative glory of God.

Jesus smiles upon hearing them sing so happily and He joins in the chorus with His beautiful voice. But He cannot finish because the Iscariot, while the others continue to sing, approaches Him and says: «Master, while they are busy and inattentive singing, tell me: how did the trip to Caesarea go and what did You do? You have not told me yet... And this is the first moment that we are alone and can speak about it. At first there were our companions and the disciples and the peasants who welcomed us, then our companions and the disciples, now that the disciples have gone ahead of us... I have never been able to ask You...»

«You are greatly interested... But at Caesarea I did not do what I will do in Johanan's estate. I spoke of the Law and of the Kingdom of Heaven.»

«To whom? »

«To the citizens. Near the markets.»

«Ah! Not to the Romans?! Did You not see them? »

«How is it possible to be at Caesarea, the residence of the Proconsul, and not see Romans? »

«I know. But I say... Well... You did not speak to them personally? »

«I repeat: you are greatly interested! »

«No, Master. Simple curiosity.»

«Well. I did speak to the Roman ladies.»

«To Claudia also? What did she say to You? »

«Nothing, because Claudia did not come. Nay, she made Me understand that she does not wish anyone to know that she is in touch with us.»

Jesus lays much stress on the sentence and diligently watches Judas who, although an impudent fellow, changes colour, blushes lightly and then blanches.

But he soon collects himself and says: «She does not want? She no longer esteems You? She is mad.»

«No, she is not mad, She has a well-balanced mind. She can tell and distinguish her duty as a Roman lady from her duty towards herself. And if she procures light and breath for herself, for her soul, by coming towards Light and Purity, as she is a creature who instinctively seeks the Truth and will not rest in the falsehood of paganism, at the same time she does not want to be detrimental to her Fatherland, not even in theory, as she might be by making people think that she sides with a possible competitor of Rome...»

«Oh! but... You are King of the spirit!...»

«But you apostles, although you know that, cannot convince yourselves that it is true. Can you deny that? »

Judas blushes again and then grows pale, he cannot lie and says: «No! But it is our excessive love that...»

«Even more so who does not know Me, that is Rome, can mistrust Me as a competitor. Claudia is acting righteously both towards God and her Fatherland, by honouring Me as king and master of the spirit, if not as God, and by being loyal to her Fatherland. And I admire loyal, just, non-obstinate spirits. And I would like My apostles to deserve the praise which I give the heathen woman.» Judas does not know what to say. He is about to part from the Master. But curiosity goads him again. Rather than curiosity it is the desire to find out how much the Master knows... and he asks: «Did they ask after me? »

«Neither after you nor any other apostle.»

«What did you speak about, then? »

«Of chaste life. Of their poet Virgil. You can see that the subject was of no interest to Peter, John or anybody else.»

«But what had that got to do with it? A useless conversation...»

«No. It helped Me to make them consider that a chaste man has a bright intellect and an honest heart. Very interesting for heathen ladies... and not only for them.»

«You are right... I will not keep You further, Master » and he almost runs away to join those who have finished singing and are waiting for the two left behind...

Jesus joins them more slowly and He says: «Let us take that path in the wood. We will shorten the road and will be sheltered from the sun which is already becoming strong. We will also be able to stop in the thick of the wood and eat in peace.»

And they do so going towards north-west, towards Johanan's estate, because I can hear them talk about the peasants of that Pharisee...

Jesus says: «And you will put here the vision of 16th June 1944: Jesus, the fallen nest and the Pharisee.»

428. The Fallen Nest and the Scribe Johanan ben Zaccai.

16th June 1944. Later, 10.30 a.m.

I see Jesus wearing a white tunic with His dark-blue mantle thrown over His shoulder, while He is walking along a woody path. It is woody because there are trees and shrubs on both sides. Narrow tracks cut through the green entanglement, but it is not a solitary place remote from any village, as they often meet other people. I would say that it is the road linking two villages close to each other, running through the fields of the villagers. The country is flat, and mountains can be seen in the distance. I do not know what place it is. Jesus, Who was speaking to His disciples, stops and listens, looking round, He then takes a little path in the thicket and goes towards a large group of small trees and shrubs. He bends and searches. And He finds. There is a nest in the grass. I do not know whether it was knocked down by a storm, as one would think from the damp soil and the branches still dripping, as is usual after a storm, or whether anybody tampered with it and left it there, not to be caught with the brood in his hands. I do not know. I can only see a small nest interwoven with hay and full of dry leaves, down of plants and wool, among which five little birds, only a few days old, are stirring and chirping: they are reddish, without

feathers, rather ugly looking because of their wide open beaks and bulging eyes. High above, on a tree, their parents are screeching desperately. Jesus picks up the little nest carefully. He holds it in the hollow of one hand and He looks for the spot where it was or where it can be placed safely. He finds a tangle of brambles so compact that it looks like a little basket, and so deep in the bush as to be safe. Without minding the thorns which scratch His arms, after handing the nest to Peter - and the apostle so elderly and stout looks funny with the little nest in his short rough hands - Jesus rolls up His long wide sleeves and works to make the entangled branches more concave and thus safer. It is done. He takes the nest and places it in the bush and secures it by pulling long cylindrical blades of grass which look like very thin reeds. The nest is now safe. Jesus stands aside and smiles. He then gets one of the apostles, who is carrying his sack across his shoulder, to give Him a piece of bread and He crumbles some on the ground, on a stone. Jesus is now happy. He turns round to go back to the main road while the birds fly down to the rescued nest screeching with joy.

A little group of men is standing on the roadside. Jesus finds them facing Him and looks at them. His smile fades away and His face becomes very severe, I would say sombre, while it was so compassionate when He was picking up the nest and so happy when He had arranged it safely.

Jesus stops. And He continues to look at His unexpected witnesses. He seems to be looking at their hearts with their secret thoughts. He cannot go any farther because the group have blocked the path. But He is silent.

But Peter does not keep quiet. «Let the Master pass » he says.

«Be quiet, Nazarene » replies one of the group. «How did your Master take the liberty of going into my wood and do manual labour on the Sabbath? »

Jesus looks straight at him with a strange expression. It is and it is not a smile. And if it is a smile it is not one of approval. Peter is about to reply.

But Jesus asks: «Who are you? »

«The landlord of this place. Johanan ben Zaccai.»

«A renowned scribe. For what do you reproach Me? »

«For profaning the Sabbath.»

«Johanan ben Zaccai, do you know Deuteronomy? »

«Are you asking me? Me, a true rabbi of Israel? »

«I know what you want to tell Me: that I, as I am not a scribe, but a poor Galilean, cannot be a "rabbi". But I ask you once again: "Do you know Deuteronomy?"»

«Certainly better than You do.»

«To the letter... certainly, if you wish to think so. But do you know it in its true meaning? »

«What is said is said. There is but one meaning.»

«True, there is but one meaning. And it is a meaning of love; or, if you do not want to call it love, of mercy; or if it annoys you to call it so, say: of humanity. And Deuteronomy says: "If you see your brother's sheep or his ox straying, even if they are not close at hand, you must not make off, but you will take them back to him, or you will keep them until he comes for them". It says: "If you see your brother's donkey or ox fall, do not pretend you have not seen, but help him to put it on its feet again". It says: "If in a tree or on the ground you find a nest with the mother bird sitting on the chicks or the eggs, you must not take the mother (because she is sacred to procreation) you may take the chicks only". I saw a nest on the ground and the mother weeping over it. I felt sorry for her because she was a mother. And I gave her chicks back to her. I did not think I was profaning the Sabbath by consoling a mother. We must not let the sheep of our brother go astray, but the Law does not say that it is a sin to put a donkey on its feet again on a Sabbath. It says only that we must have mercy on our brother and humanity for the donkey, a creature of God. I thought that God had created that mother that she might procreate, and that she had obeyed God's command, and that to prevent her from bringing up her offspring was to interfere with her obedience to a divine command. But you do not understand that. You and your friends consider the letter, not the spirit. You and your friends do not consider that you infringe the Sabbath twice, nay, three times, by degrading the divine Word to the pettiness of human mentality, by interfering with a command of God and by lacking in mercy towards your neighbour. In order to injure by means of a reproach, you do not consider that

it is wrong to speak unnecessarily. This, which is also work, but neither useful, nor necessary, nor good, does not seem a profanation of the Sabbath to you. Johanan ben Zaccai, listen to Me. As today you have no mercy on a blackcap and according to Pharisaic practice you would let her die of grief, and you would let her offspring perish miserably, left at the mercy of asps or wicked people, likewise tomorrow you will have no mercy on a mother and you will make her die a miserable death and you will have her offspring killed, saying that it is right to do so out of respect to your law. To yours, not to God's. To the law which you and those like you have made to oppress the weak so that you, the strong ones, may triumph. But see. The weak always find a saviour. Whereas the proud, those who are strong according to the law of the world, will be crushed under the weight of their own heavy law. Goodbye, Johanan ben Zaccai. Remember this hour and mind you do not profane yourself another Sabbath with the satisfaction of a crime committed.»

And Jesus casts a fulminating glance at the irascible old man, whose face is red with anger, and looking down on him, because the scribe is short and stout and Jesus seems a palm-tree compared with him, He passes by walking on the grass, because the scribe does not step aside.

Jesus says:

«I wanted to uplift your spirit with a true vision, even if it is not mentioned in the Gospels.

This is the lesson for you: that I have so much mercy on little birds without nests, even if the name instead of being blackcap, is Mary or John. And I take care to give them a nest again, when an event has deprived them of it.

And this is the lesson for everybody. That too many know the words of the Law, still too many although they are few, because everybody ought to know them, but they know the "words" only. They do not live them. That is the error.

Deuteronomy prescribed humane laws, because men in those days, because of their spiritual childhood, were brutal and half-savage. They had to be led by hand along the flowery paths of pity, respect, love for the brother who lost an animal, for the animal which fell, for the bird sitting on eggs, to teach them to rise to higher pity, respect, love. But when I came I perfected the Mosaic rules and I opened wider horizons. The letter was no longer "everything". The spirit became "everything". Beyond the little human act for a nest and its inhabitants, it is necessary to consider the secret meaning of My gesture: that I, the Son of the Creator, bowed before the work of the Creator. That brood also is His work.

Oh! happy those who can see God in everything and serve Him with spirit of reverent love! And woe to those, who like a snake, cannot raise their heads above their filth and as they cannot sing the praises of God, Who reveals Himself in the work of their brothers, they bite them because of the excess of poison choking them. There are too many who torture the better ones saying, to justify their perversity, that it is right to do so out of respect to the law. Their law. Not God's. But if God cannot stop their wicked deeds, He can avenge His "little ones".

And let this be given to those who deserve it. May My vigilant peace be with you.»

429. The Journey in the Plain of Esdraelon Continues.
6th May 1946.

After the incident they continue to walk for some time in silence. But when they arrive at a road junction in the country, James of Zebedee says: «Here we are! This road here will take us to Micah's house... But... are we still going there? That man will certainly be waiting for us in his property in order to ill-treat us...»

«And to prevent You from speaking to the peasants. James is right. Don't go there » advises the Iscariot.

«They are waiting for Me. I sent word that I am going there. Their hearts are rejoicing. I am the Friend Who is coming to console them...»

«You can go some other time. They will resign themselves » says Judas shrugging

his shoulders.

«You do not resign yourself so easily when you are deprived of something for which you hoped.»

«My matters are serious ones. Theirs...»

«And what is more serious or greater than the perfecting and relief of a heart? Everything tries to separate those hearts from peace and hope... And they have but one hope: that of a future life. And they have but one means to go there: My help. No. I will go to see them at the cost of being stoned.»

«No, Brother! No, Lord! » say together the Zealot and James of Alphaeus. «It would only serve to have those poor servants punished. You did not hear him, but Johanan said: "So far I have tolerated the situation, but I will no longer do so. And woe betide the servant who will go to Him or welcome Him. He is a reprobate and a demon. I don't want corruption in my household", and he said to a companion: "Even if I have to kill them, I will cure them of their devilish attachment to that cursed man".»

Jesus lowers His head thinking... and suffering. His grief is evident... The others are sorry, but what can they do?

The situation is resolved by Thomas' practical serenity: «Let us do this. We will stay here until sunset, in order not to infringe the Sabbath. In the meantime one of us will steal away to the houses and say: "At dead of night, at the fountain outside Sephoris". And we will go there after sunset and wait for them in the thickets at the foot of the mountain on which is Sephoris. The Master will speak to those poor people and comfort them, and at daybreak they will go back to their houses and we will cross over the hill and go to Nazareth.»

«Thomas is right. Bravo Thomas! » say many.

But Philip remarks: «And who will go and warn them? He knows everyone of us and he may see us...»

«Judas of Simon could go. He knows the Pharisees well...» says Andrew innocently.

«What are you trying to insinuate? » replies Judas aggressively.

«I? Nothing. I am saying that you know them because you were for such a long time at the Temple and you have good friends there. You always boast about them. They will do no harm to a friend...» says meek Andrew.

«Don't you believe that, in no way. Let no one believe it. If we were still protected by Claudia, perhaps... I could... but not now. Because now, in short, she has disengaged herself, hasn't she, Master? »

«Claudia continues to admire the Wise Man. She has done nothing else or more than that. From such admiration she may pass to believe in the true God. But only the illusion of an excited mind could believe that she nourished other feelings for Me. And if she did, I would not want them. I can accept their heathenism, because I hope to change it into Christian faith. I cannot accept what would be idolatry on their side: that is, the adoration of a poor idol Man on a poor human throne.» Jesus says so calmly, as if He were speaking to everyone lecturing them. But He is so resolute as to leave no doubt about His intention and His decision to repress every possible deviation in that direction among His apostles.

No one therefore replies in regard to human regality, but they ask: «So what are we going to do for the peasants? »

«I will go. I made the proposal, I will go, if the Master allows me. The Pharisees will certainly not eat me...» says Thomas.

«You may go. And may your charity be blessed.»

«Oh! It is such a trifle, Master! »

«It is such a great thing, Thomas. You understand the desires of your brothers: Jesus and the peasants, and you feel sorry for them. And your Brother in the flesh blesses you also on their behalf » says Jesus laying a hand on the lowered head of Thomas, who is deeply moved and whispers: «I... Your... brother?! It is too great an honour, my Lord. I Your servant, You my God... That yes... I am going.»

«Are you going alone? I will come, too! » say Thaddeus and Peter.

«No. You are too impetuous. I can turn everything into laughter... the best means to disarm certain... characters. You become furious at once... I will go by myself.»

«I will come » say John and Andrew.

«Yes! One of you, yes, also one like Simon Zealot or James of Alphaeus.»
«No. I never react. I keep quiet and I act » insists Andrew.
«Come » and they go away in one direction while Jesus and those left with Him go in the other...

430. Near Sephoris, with Johanan's Peasants.
8th May 1946.

«Will they come? » Matthew asks his companions who are sat in a wood of holm-oaks in the lower slopes of the hill on which Sephoris rises. The Esdraelon plain is no longer visible, as it is beyond the hill where they are. But there is a much smaller plain between this hill and those in the region of Nazareth and which can be seen clearly in the bright moonlight.
«They promised. And they will come » replies Andrew.
«At least some of them. They were going to leave half-way through the first watch and they will be here at the beginning of the second one » says Thomas.
«Later » says Thaddeus.
«It took us less than three hours » objects Andrew.
«We are men and in full strength. They are tired and will have women with them » replies Thaddeus again.
«Provided their master does not find out! » says Matthew with a sigh.
«There is no danger. He left for Jezreel, where he will be the guest of a friend. The superintendent is there. But he is coming as well, because he does not hate the Master » says Thomas.
«Will that man be sincere? » asks Philip.
«Yes, because there is no reason why he should not be.»
«Well! To get into his master's good graces and...»
«No, Philip. When vintage time is over he will be dismissed by Johanan just because he does not hate the Master » replies Andrew.
«Who told you? » several of them ask.
«He himself and the peasants... each on his own account. And when two people of different categories agree in saying the same thing, it means that what they say is true. The peasants were weeping because the superintendent is leaving. He was very humane. And he said to us: "I am a man and not a clay puppet. Last year he said to me: 'Honour the Master, approach Him, become one of His believers'. I obeyed. Now he says to me: 'Woe betide you if you love my enemy and if you allow the servants to love Him. I do not want my land to be anathematised by receiving that cursed man'. But now that I know Him, how can I consider that order just? I said to the master: 'Last year you spoke differently, but He is always the same'. He beat me a first time. I said: 'I am not a slave, and even if I were, you would not be in possession of my thought. My thought judges Him to be holy Who you say is cursed'. He beat me again. This morning he said to me: "The anathema of Israel is in my property. Woe to you if disobey my order. You will no longer be my servant'. I replied: 'You are right. I will no longer be your servant. Look for another one who has a heart like yours and who is as rapacious about your property as you are about other people's souls'. And he threw me on the ground and struck me... But the work of the year will soon be over and at the new moon of Tishri I will be free. I am only sorry for these..." and he pointed at the peasants » says Thomas.
«But where did you see him?...»
«In the wood, as if we were highwaymen. Micah, to whom we had spoken, had informed him and he came while he was still bleeding and servants and maid-servants came a few at a time...» says Andrew.
«H'm! so Judas was right! He is familiar with the mood of the Pharisee...» remarks Bartholomew.
«Judas knows too many things!...» says James of Zebedee.
«Be quiet! He may hear you! » advises Matthew.
«No. He has gone away saying that he is sleepy and has a headache...» replies James.
«Moon! Moon in the sky and moon in his head. It is so: he is more changeable than the wind » pronounces Peter who has been silent so far.
«Yes! A real misfortune among us! » says Bartholomew with a sigh.

«No, don't say that! Not a misfortune! On the contrary: a way to sanctify oneself...» says the Zealot.

«Or to damn oneself, because he makes one lose one's virtues...» says Thaddeus resolutely.

«He is a poor wretch! » remarks Andrew sadly.

There is silence. Then Peter asks: «But is the Master still praying? »

«No. While you were dozing He passed by and joined John and his brother James, placed as sentries on the road. He wants to be with the poor peasants at once. Perhaps it is the last time He will see them » replies the Zealot.

«Why the last time? Why? Don't say that. It seems to bring bad luck! » says Thaddeus excitedly.

«Because you can see it... We are persecuted more and more... I don't know what we will do in future...»

«Simon is right... Eh! it will be lovely to be all spiritual... But... if we had been permitted to have a little... humanity... a pinch of protection from Claudia would have done no harm » says Matthew.

«No. It is better to be alone... and above all to be free from contacts with the heathens. I... do not approve of them » says Bartholomew resolutely.

«Not much myself... But... the Master says that His Doctrine must spread all over the world. And that we have to do that... We have to sow His words everywhere... So we will have to adapt ourselves to approaching Gentiles and idolaters...» says Thaddeus.

«Impure people. It seems to me something sacrilegious. Wisdom to pigs!...»

«They have a soul, too, Nathanael! You felt sorry for the girl yesterday...»

«Because... she is... a mere nothing which is to be perfected. She is like a new-born baby... But the others!... And she is not a Roman...»

«Do you think that the Gauls are not idolaters? They have their cruel gods as well. You will find out if you have to go and convert them!...» says the Zealot who is more learned than the others, I would say, in a cosmopolitan manner.

«But she does not belong to the race of those who are profaning Israel. I will never preach to the enemies of Israel, neither to the present nor to the old ones.»

«Then... you will have to go very far away, among the hyperboreans, because... it does not seem so, but Israel has had a taste of all the neighbouring peoples...» says Thomas.

«I will go far away... But here is the Master. Let us go and meet Him. How many people! They have all come! Even the children...»

«The Master will be happy...»

They join the Master Who is advancing with difficulty on the meadow, pressed as He is by so many surrounding Him.

«Is Judas still absent? » asks Jesus.

«Yes, Master. But we will call him, if You wish so...»

«It is not necessary. My voice will reach him where he is. And his free conscience speaks to him with its own voice. It is not necessary for you to add your voices and force a will. Come, let us sit down here with our brothers. And forgive Me if I have not been able to break the bread with you in a feast of love.»

They sit in a circle with Jesus in the centre, and Jesus wants around Him all the children who press against Him affectionately and full of confidence.

«Bless them, Lord! That they may see what we long to see: freedom to love You! » shouts a woman.

«Yes. They are depriving us also of that. They do not want Your words to be impressed in our souls. And now by forbidding You to come, they are preventing us from meeting... and we will have no more holy words! » moans an old man.

«If we are abandoned thus, we will become sinners. You taught us to forgive... You gave us so much love that we could bear our master and his ill-will... But now...» says a young man. I cannot see their faces very well, so I do not know exactly who is speaking. I base myself on the tones of the voices.

«Do not weep. I will see that you do not lack My word. I will come again, as long as I can...»

«No, Master and Lord. He is wicked and so are his friends. They could injure You and because of us. We will make the sacrifice of losing You, but do not give us the sorrow of having to say: "He was caught because of us".»

«Yes, save Yourself, Master.»

«Do not be afraid. We read in Jeremiah how the prophet told his secretary Baruch to write what the Lord dictated to him and to go and read what he had written to those who had gathered in the house of the Lord, and to read it in place of the prophet who was in prison and could not go there. I will do the same. Among My apostles and disciples I have many faithful Baruch's. They will come and tell you the word of the Lord and your souls will not perish. And I will not be caught through your fault, because the Most High God will conceal Me from their eyes until the hour when the King of Israel is to be shown to the crowds so that the whole world may know Him. And do not be afraid either of losing the words which are in you. We read, always in Jeremiah, that also after the destruction of the scroll by Jehoiakim, king of Judah, who by burning the scroll hoped to destroy the eternal truthful words, what God had dictated remained, because the Lord gave this order to the prophet: "Take another scroll and write down all the words that were written on the scroll burnt by the king". And Jeremiah gave a scroll to Baruch, a scroll without any writing, and he dictated once again to his secretary the eternal words and he added some more as well to complete the previous ones, because the Lord mends the damages caused by men when such amends are useful to souls, and He does not allow hatred to cancel the work of love. Well, even if I, comparing Myself to a scroll full of holy verities, should be destroyed, do you think that the Lord would let you perish without the help of other scrolls, which will contain My words and those of My witnesses telling you what I cannot tell you, as I am a prisoner of Violence and destroyed by it? And do you think that what is impressed in the scrolls of your hearts can be cancelled with the passing of time on the words? No. The angel of the Lord will repeat those words to you, keeping them fresh in your souls eager for Wisdom. Not only. But he will explain them to you and you will be wise through the word of your Master. You seal your love for Me by means of the seal of sorrow. Can what resists persecution perish? It cannot. I am telling you. God's gifts cannot be cancelled. Sin only can cancel them. But you certainly do not wish to commit sin, do you, My friends? »

«No, Lord. It would mean losing You in the next life » reply many.

«But they will make us sin. He has ordered us not to leave his fields any more on Sabbaths... and there will be no more Passovers for us. So we will commit sin...» say others.

«No. You will not sin. He will. He only, as he does violence to the right of God and of His children to embrace and love one another in sweet conversation of love and teaching on the day of the Lord.»

«But he makes amends through many fasting-days and offerings. We cannot, because the food we get is already too scanty as compared with the work we do, and we have nothing to offer... We are poor...»

«You offer what is appreciated by God: your hearts. Isaiah speaking to false penitents in the name of God says: "Look, on your fast-days your will is revealed and you oppress your debtors. Look, you fast to quarrel and squabble and fight cruelly. Do not fast any more as you have done so far, if you want to make your voice heard on high. Is that the sort of fast that pleases Me? That man for one day should just afflict his soul and torment his body and lie down on ashes? Is that what you call fasting, a day acceptable to the Lord? The fasting I prefer is a different one. Break the chains of sin, undo oppressive obligations, let the oppressed go free, remove all burdens. Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the poor and pilgrims, clothe the naked and do not despise your neighbour". But Johanan does not do that. You are his creditors because of the work you do for him making him rich, and he treats you worse than defaulting debtors and he raises his voice to threaten you and his hand to strike you. He is not merciful and he despises you because you are servants. But a servant is a man just like his master, and if it is his duty to serve, it is also his right to receive what is necessary to a man, with regard both to his body and to his spirit. The Sabbath is not honoured even if a man spends it in the synagogue, if on the same day the man who keeps it puts chains on his brothers and gives them aloë to drink. Keep your Sabbaths talking with one another of the Lord, and the Lord will be among you. Forgive and the Lord will glorify you.

I am the Good Shepherd and I have mercy on all My sheep. But I certainly love with particular fondness those which idolatrous shepherds have beaten, so that they may go away from My way. For them, more than for any other, I have come.

Because your Father and Mine ordered Me: "Pasture these sheep for slaughter, killed mercilessly by their masters who have sold them saying: 'We have become rich!' and on which the shepherds had no mercy". Well, I will pasture the flock for slaughter, o poor people of the herd, forsaking to their wickedness those who distress you and afflict the Father Who suffers in His children. I will stretch out My hand to the little ones among the children of God and I will draw them to Me, so that they may have My glory. The Lord promises that through the lips of the prophets who celebrate My pity and power as Shepherd. And I promise directly you who love Me. I will provide for My flock. To those who accuse good sheep of making the water turbid or spoiling the pasture to come to Me, I will say: "Go away. You are the ones who cause the springs of My children to dry up and their Pastures to parch. But I have led and will lead them to other pastures; to the pastures which satisfy the spirit. I will leave you a pasture for your big bellies, I will leave you the bitter spring which you made well up and I will go with My sheep, separating the true sheep of God from the false ones, and My lambs will no longer be distressed by anything, but they will exult for ever in the pastures of Heaven".

Persevere, My beloved children! Be patient a little longer, as I am. Be faithful, doing what your unfair master allows you to do. And God will judge that you have done everything and will reward you for everything. Do not hate, even if everything urges and teaches you to hate. Have faith in God. See: Jonah was relieved of his suffering and Jabez was taken towards love. And what the Lord did to the old man and to the boy, He will do to you: partly in this life, completely in the next one.

I have but money to give you to make your material situation less painful. I will give it to you. Give it to them, Matthew, so that they may share it. It is much, but always too little for you who are so many and so poor. But I have nothing else... materially. But I have My love, and the power of being the Son of the Father, so that I can ask infinite supernatural treasures for you, to comfort your grief and enlighten your darkness. Oh! your sad life can be made bright by God! By Him alone!... And I say: "Father, I pray You for them. I do not pray You for the happy and rich people in the world. But I pray for these, who have but You and Me. Let them rise so high in the ways of the spirit, that they may find all comfort in Our love, and let us give Ourselves to them with love, with all our infinite love, to fill their days and their work with peace, serenity, courage, with supernatural peace, serenity and strength, so that, as if they were estranged from the world through Our love, they may endure their calvary and after their death, they may have You, Us, infinite beatitude".» Jesus has prayed standing up, slowly freeing Himself from the children who had fallen asleep leaning against Him. And He is solemn and kind in His prayer. He now lowers His eyes and says: «I am going. You must go now, to be back in your homes in time. We will meet again. And I will bring Marjiam. But even when I can no longer come, My Spirit will always be with you and My apostles will love you as I did. May the Lord lay His blessing upon you. Go! » And He bends to caress the sleeping children and He gives Himself up to the effusive warm-heartedness of the poor people who cannot make up their minds to part from Him...

At last they all go their ways and the two groups part while the moon is setting and branches of trees are to be lit to illuminate the road. And the pungent smoke of the dampish branches is a good excuse for shining eyes...

Judas is waiting for them leaning against the trunk of a tree. Jesus looks at him and does not say anything, not even when Judas says: «I feel better.» They go on thus, as best they can during the night, then much quicker at dawn. When they are in sight of a cross-roads Jesus stops and says: «Let us part. Thomas, Simon Zealot and My brothers will come with Me. The others will go to the lake and wait for Me.»

«Thank You, Master... I did not dare ask You, But You are helping me. I am really tired. And if You allow me, I will stop at Tiberias...»

«At a friend's » James of Zebedee cannot refrain himself from saying. Judas opens his eyes wide... but nothing else.

Jesus hastens to say: «As far as I am concerned it is enough if you go to Capernaum on the Sabbath with your companions. Come, that I may kiss you, you who are leaving Me.» And He fondly kisses the apostles who are departing, giving each of them a piece of advice in a whisper...

No one objects. Peter only, when leaving, says: «Come soon, Master.»
«Yes, come soon » say the others, and John concludes: «The lake will look very sad without You.»
Jesus blesses them again and promises: «I will see you soon! » and then they all go their own way.

431. Arrival at Nazareth.
9th May 1946.

Coming from the Sephoris countryside one enters Nazareth on the north-eastern side, that is, on the highest and rockiest side. The entire amphitheatre, on the terraces of which Nazareth is spread, appears when one reaches the top of the hill, which is the last one coming from Sephoris and which slopes down rather steeply through ravines towards the town. If I remember correctly, because a long time has passed and many mountain places are alike, the spot where Jesus is, is the precise one where His fellow-citizens tried to stone Him, but He stopped them with His power, walking through them.

Jesus stops to look at His dear yet hostile town, and a smile of happiness brightens His face. What a blessing, ignored and undeserved by the Nazarenes, is His divine smile, which certainly pours and spreads graces on the land which received Him when He was a child, saw Him grow up and where His Mother was born and She became the Spouse of God and the Mother of God! Also the two cousins look at their town with evident joy, but Thaddeus' happiness is tempered by austere reserved gravity, whereas James' is more open and kind, more like Jesus'.

Although it is not his town, Thomas' face shines brightly with joy, and pointing at Mary's little house, from the stone oven of which rings of smoke are rising, he says: «The Mother is at home and She is baking bread...» and he utters these simple words with such fervent love, that he seems to be speaking of his mother with all the affection of a son.

The Zealot, more calm because of his age and upbringing, smiles saying: «Yes, and Her peace is already arriving in our hearts.»

«Let us go down quickly » says James. «We will go down this path and it is unlikely that any of the Nazarenes will see us arrive. They would delay us...»
«But you will be going away from your home... Your mother also is anxious to see you.»

«Oh! You may be sure, Simon, that our mother is with Mary. She is almost always there... And she will be there because they are baking and because of the sick girl.»

«Yes, let us go this way. We will pass at the rear of Alphaeus' kitchen garden and we will arrive at the hedge of ours » says Jesus.

They go down quickly along a path which at first is very steep, then it becomes more gentle near the town. They go through olive-groves and small fields bare of crops. They pass near the first kitchen gardens in town. And the tall leafy hedges around the gardens and over which hang branches of trees laden with fruit, or the little dry-stone walls all covered with branches hanging outside from orchards, prevent their passing from being noticed by housewives moving about the gardens, or doing the washing or spreading it on the patches of grass near the houses...

The hedge bordering one side of Mary's kitchen garden, which is a tangle of thorns in winter, then thick with leaves in summer, after the hawthorn blooms in spring or the little fruits become ruby-colour in autumn, is now adorned with a luxuriant jasmine and with the undulating calyces of a flower, the name of which I do not know, and which from the inside of the garden throw their branches onto the hedge making it thicker and more beautiful. A blackcap is singing in the thick of the hedge and the cooing of doves is heard from inside the garden.

«The fence also is protected and entirely covered with branches in bloom » says

James who has run ahead to look at the rustic gate at the rear of the garden, the one which, after not being used for years, was opened to let Peter's cart go in and out for John and Syntyche.

«We will go along the lane and will knock at the door. My Mother would suffer seeing this protection destroyed » replies Jesus.

«Her enclosed garden! » exclaims Judas of Alphaeus.

«Yes. And She is its rose » says Thomas.

«As a lily among the thistles » says James.

«The sealed fountain » says the Zealot.

«Better: the well of living water which gushing impetuously from the beautiful mountain gives the Water of Life to the Earth and spurts towards Heaven with its scented beauty » says Jesus.

«She will soon be delighted to see You » says James.

«Tell me, Brother, something which I have been longing to know for some time. How do You see Mary? As a Mother or as a subject? She is Your Mother, but She is a woman and You are God...» asks Thaddeus.

«As sister and as bride, as delight and rest of God and as comfort of Man. I see everything and I have everything in Mary, as God and as Man. She Who was the Delight of the Second Person of the Trinity in Heaven, Delight of the Word as well as of the Father and of the Spirit, is the Delight of the God Incarnate, and She will be the Delight of the Man God Glorified.»

«What a mystery! So God has deprived Himself twice of His delights? In You and in Mary and He gave You to the Earth...» meditates the Zealot.

«What love! You ought to say. Love induced the Trinity to give Mary and Jesus to the Earth » says James.

«And, not with regard to You, Who are God, but with regard to His Rose, was He not afraid to entrust Her to men, who are all unworthy of protecting Her? » asks Thomas.

«Thomas, the Song of Songs replies to you: "The Peaceful One had a vineyard and he entrusted it to vine-dressers who, being profaners instigated by the Desecrator, would have paid large amounts to have it, that is, all allurements to seduce it, but the beautiful Vineyard of the Lord looked after itself by itself, and would not give its fruits to anybody but to the Lord and it unbosomed itself to Him generating the priceless Treasure: the Saviour".»

They have now arrived at the door of the house, While Jesus knocks, Judas of Alphaeus comments: «It would be the case to say: "Open, my sister, my spouse, my beloved immaculate dove"...»

But when the door opens, and the sweet face of the Virgin appears, Jesus utters the sweetest word, stretching out His arms to receive Her: «Mother! »

«Oh! Son! Blessed! Come in and may peace and love be with You »

«And with My Mother and the house and those in it » says Jesus entering, followed by the others.

«Your mother is in there, and the two women disciples are busy baking and doing the washing...» explains Mary after exchanging greetings with the apostles and Her nephews, who discreetly withdraw leaving Mother and Son alone.

«Here I am with You, Mother. We will be together for some time... How sweet it is to come back... the house and You above all, Mother, after so much travelling amongst men...»

«And men become more and more acquainted with You and through such knowledge of You they become divided into two groups: those who love You... and those who hate You... And the latter group is the bigger...»

«Evil perceives that it is about to be defeated and it is furious... and makes people furious... How is the girl? »

«A little better... But she was on the point of death... And her words, now that she is not delirious correspond, although they are more reserved, to those which she spoke while raving. It would be a lie to say that we have not reconstructed her history... Poor girl!...»

«Yes, but Providence watched over her.»

«And now?...»

«Now I do not know. Aurea does not belong to Me as a creature. Her soul is Mine, her body belongs to Valeria. For the time being, she will stay here, to forget...»

«Myrtha would like to have her.»

«I know... But I am not entitled to do anything without permission of the Roman

lady. I do not even know whether they purchased her with money or simply used the weapon of promises ... When the Roman lady will claim her...»

«I will go in Your place, Son. It is not right that You should go... Let Your Mother see to it... We women... the least beings for Israel, are not noticed so much if we go and speak to Gentiles. And Your Mother is so unknown to the world! No one will notice the Jewess of the common people going through the streets in Tiberias, enveloped in her mantle, and knocking at the door of a Roman lady...»

«You could go to Johanna's... and speak to the lady there...»

«I will do that, Son. May Your heart be relieved, Jesus!... You are so distressed... I understand... and I would like to do so much for You...»

«And You do so much, Mother. Thank You for everything You do...»

«Oh! I am a very poor help, Son! Because I am not successful in making You loved, in giving You... joy... as long as You are allowed to enjoy some... So what am I? A poor disciple, indeed...»

«Mother! Mother! Do not say that! My strength comes to Me through Your prayers. My mind rests thinking of You, and, see, My heart finds comfort thus, with My head against Your blessed heart... Mother of Mine!...» Jesus has drawn His Mother to Himself, as She was standing in front of Him, while He was sitting on the chest against the wall, and He leans His forehead on the breast of Mary, Who gently caresses His hair... A pause of love.

Jesus then raises His head, stands up and says: «Let us go to the others and to the girl » and He goes out with His Mother into the kitchen garden.

The three women disciples, standing at the door of the room where the sick girl is, are talking to the apostles. But when they see Jesus, they become quiet and kneel down.

«Peace to you, Mary of Alphaeus, and to you, Myrtha and Naomi. Is the girl sleeping? »

«Yes, she is. She is still feverish and her temperature stupefies and consumes her. If it persists like this, she will die. Her frail body will not resist the disease and her mind is upset by remembrances » says Mary of Alphaeus.

«Yes... and she does not react because she says that she wants to die, so that she may not see any more Romans...» confirms Myrtha.

«And that grieves us because we are already fond of her...» says Naomi.

«Be not afraid! » replies Jesus going as far as the threshold of the little room and lifting the curtain...

On the little bed against the wall, facing the door, appears the little thin face of the girl, bright red at the cheek-bones, while all the rest is snow-white, buried in the mass of her long golden hair. She is sleeping restlessly, muttering incomprehensible words through her teeth and with her hand abandoned on the blankets she now and then makes a gesture as if she were rejecting something.

Jesus does not enter. He looks at her with pitiful eyes. He then calls her in a loud voice: «Aurea! Come! Your Saviour is here.»

All of a sudden the girl sits up in her bed, she sees Jesus and with a cry she gets up and runs barefooted in her long loose tunic towards Him, and kneels at His feet saying: «Lord! Now You have really freed me! »

«She is cured. See? She could not die because she must become acquainted with the Truth first.» And to the girl who is kissing His feet He says: «Rise and live in peace » and He lays His hand on the no longer feverish head.

Aurea, in her long linen dress, perhaps one of the Virgin's, so long as to form a train, her loose hair falling over her slender figure like a mantle, her grey-blue eyes still bright because of the temperature which has just dropped and of the joy which has just filled her, looks like an angel.

«Goodbye! We are withdrawing into the workshop while you look after the girl and the house...» says the Master and followed by His four apostles he goes into Joseph's old workshop and they sit on the benches no longer used...

432. Parable of Painted Wood.
10th May 1946.

The rustic workshop fireplace has been lit after not being used for such a long time, and the smell of glue boiling in a can mingles with the characteristic

smell of sawdust and fresh shavings, which are just piling up at the foot of a bench.

Jesus is working with zest to transform some timber, with the help of saw and plane, into legs for chairs, drawers and so forth. Some pieces of furniture, the modest furniture of the little house in Nazareth, have been taken into the workshop to be repaired: the kneading trough, one of Mary's looms, two stools, a garden ladder, a little chest and the door of the stone oven, the lower part of which I think has been perhaps gnawed away by mice. Jesus is working to repair what usage and old age have consumed.

Thomas, instead, with a complete outfit of a goldsmith's tiny tools, which he must have taken out of his sack lying on his little bed placed against the wall like the Zealot's, is working with a light hand at some thin silver plates. And the tapping of his little hammer on the burin, giving a silvery sound, mingles with the loud noise of the working tools used by Jesus.

Now and again they exchange a few words, and Thomas is so happy to be there with the Master and at his work of goldsmith - and in fact he says so - that in the intervals of conversation he whistles softly. Now and again he raises his eyes and thinks, and absorbed in thought he stares at the smoky wall of the large room.

Jesus notices that and asks: «Are you drawing your inspiration from that black wall, Tom? It is true that it was the long work of a just man that made it so, but I do not think that it can inspire a goldsmith...»

«No, Master, a goldsmith in fact cannot reproduce with rich metals the poetry of holy poverty... But with his metal he can imitate the beautiful things in nature and thus ennoble gold and silver reproducing with them the flowers and leaves which are in creation. I think of those flowers and leaves, and to remember their details precisely I become fixed thus, with my eyes on the wall, but in actual fact I see the woods and meadows of our Fatherland, the light leaves, the flowers resembling chalices or stars, the bearing of stalks and leafy branches...»

«You are a poet, then, a poet singing in metal what another person sings with ink on parchment.»

«Yes. A goldsmith in fact is a poet who writes on metal the beautiful things of nature. But our work, artistic and beautiful, is not worth Yours, which is humble and holy, because ours serves the vanity of rich people, whereas Yours serves the sanctity of the house and the usefulness of the poor.»

«What you say is right, Thomas » says the Zealot, who has appeared at the door opening on to the kitchen garden, with his tunic tucked up, his sleeves rolled up, with an old apron in front of him and a tin of paint in his hand.

Jesus and Thomas turn round looking at him and they smile. And Thomas replies:

«Yes, what I say is right. But I want that once in a while the work of a goldsmith may serve to adorn a... good holy thing...»

«What? »

«It's a secret of mine. I have had this idea for a long time, and since we were at Ramah I have been carrying a goldsmith's little outfit, waiting for this moment... And what about your work, Simon? »

«Oh! I am not a perfect craftsman like you, Tom. It is the first time that I have held a brush in my hand and what I paint is uneven, notwithstanding all my good will. That is why I began from the... most simple things... to acquire skill... and I can assure you that my inexperience made the girl laugh heartily. But I am glad! She is reviving hourly to a serene life, and that is what is required to cancel her past and renew her for You, Master.»

«H'm! perhaps Valeria will not give her up...» says Thomas.

«Oh! what do you think it matters to Valeria to have her or not? If she had kept her, it would have been only to prevent her from being left forlorn in the world. It would certainly be a good thing if the girl were safe for ever and in everything, above all in her spirit. Is that right, Master? »

«That is true. We must pray hard for that. The girl is really simple and good, and if she were brought up in the Truth, she could yield much. She is instinctively inclined to the Light.»

«I quite believe it! She has no consolation on the Earth... and she seeks it in Heaven, poor soul! I think that when Your Gospel is announced all over the world, the first and the most numerous to receive it will be the slaves, those who have no human comfort and who will take shelter in Your promises to have

some... And I say that if the honour of preaching You falls to me, I will love those poor wretches with a special love...»

«And you will do the right thing, Tom » says Jesus.

«Yes. But how will you approach them? »

«Oh! I will be a goldsmith for the ladies and... a master of their slaves. A goldsmith calls at houses or the servants of rich people come to his... and I will work... Two metals: those of the Earth for the rich... those of the spirit for slaves.»

«May God bless you for your good intentions, Tom. Persevere in them...»

«Yes, Master, I will.»

«Well, now that You have replied to Thomas, please come with me, Master... to see my work and to tell me what I must paint now. Simple things again, because I am a very incapable apprentice.»

«Let us go, Simon...» and Jesus lays down His tools and goes out with the Zealot...

They come back after some time and Jesus points at the garden ladder. «Paint that. Paint makes wood impenetrable and preserves it longer, in addition to making it more beautiful. It is like the defence and ornament of virtues on a human heart. It may be rough, coarse... But as soon as virtues clothe it, it becomes beautiful and pleasant. See, to have a beautiful paint which serves its purpose, one must take care of many things. First of all: you have to choose carefully what is necessary to make it. That is, a clean can free from mould and residues of old paints, good oils and good colours, and then you have to mix them patiently, working on them to make a liquid which is neither too thick nor too thin. And you must not tire working until the least clot is dissolved. When that is done, you have to take a brush the bristles of which do not come off, and they must be neither too hard nor too soft; the brush is to be cleaned of any previous paint, and before applying the paint, you have to remove from the wood all roughness, the peelings of old paints, dirt, everything, and then neatly, with a steady hand and much patience, you spread the paint, working in the same direction all the time. Because on the same board you meet different resistances. On knots, for instance, the paint remains smoother, that is true, but it does not cover them well, as if the wood rejected it. Viceversa, the paint sticks well on the soft parts of the wood, but the soft parts are generally not very smooth and thus blisters or stripes form... One then must remedy the defect by spreading the paint with a steady hand. Then in old pieces of furniture there are new parts, like this rung, for instance. And in order not to show that the poor ladder has been botched, but is very old, one must get the new rung and the old ones to be alike... There you are, like that! » Jesus bent at the foot of the ladder is working and speaking at the same time...

Thomas, who has left his burins to come near Jesus and see, asks: «Why did You begin from the bottom and not from the top? Was it not better the other way round? »

«It would appear to be better, but is not. Because the lower part is more worn out and will wear out more because it rests on the ground. So you must paint it several times. A first coat, a second and a third one if necessary... and not to waste time waiting for the lower part to dry and thus be ready for a new coat, you paint the top and then the central parts of the ladder.»

«But in doing so, one might stain one's clothes and spoil what was painted previously.»

«If you are careful you do not stain your clothes and you do not spoil anything. See? This is how you do it. You gather your clothes and stand apart. Not out of disgust for the paint, but not to spoil the paint which, being fresh, is delicate » and Jesus with His arms raised up paints the top of the ladder.

And He continues to speak:

«And you do the same with souls. At the beginning I told you that paint is like the ornament of virtues on human hearts. It adorns and protects wood from wood-worm, from rain, from the sun. Woe to the landlord who does not take care of painted fittings and allows them to deteriorate! When one sees that the wood is losing its paint, one must not waste time, but fresh paint is to be put on. Paints must be refreshed... Also virtues acquired in a first fit of enthusiasm towards justice may grow feeble or fade away completely if the landlord does not watch, and body and soul, laid bare, at the mercy of inclement weather and of parasites, that is, of passions and dissipations, can be attacked and lose the

garment which adorns them, and end by being... good only for the fire. Therefore, with regard both to ourselves and to those whom we love as our disciples, when we notice that the virtues which serve to defend our egos are being shattered or are fading away, we must provide at once with diligent patient work until the end of our lives, so that we may go to sleep, when we die, with body and soul worthy of a glorious resurrection. And in order to ensure that your virtues are true and good, you must begin with pure courageous intentions, which remove all rubbish and mould, and you must work not to leave any imperfection in the building up of virtues, and then take an attitude, which is neither too hard nor too lenient, because both intolerance and excessive indulgence are harmful. And the brush: your will. Let it be free from pre-existent human inclinations which might veer the spiritual hue with material disfigurements, and prepare yourselves or other people, with suitable operations, which are laborious, it is true, but necessary, to cleanse the old ego from any ancient leprosy, so that it may be pure to receive virtue. Because you cannot mix what is new with what is old.

You then begin to work: in good order, with consideration. You must not jump here and there without a good reason. You must not work a little in one direction and then a little in another. One would get less tired, that is true. But the paint would be uneven. As happens in disorderly souls. They display perfect points, then close to them there are deformities, different shades... One must insist on the spots resisting the paint, on the knots: confusion of matter or of dissolute passions, which, of course, have been mortified by will, which like a plane has laboriously smoothed them, but they remain to offer resistance like a knot amputated but not destroyed. And they deceive at times, as they appear to be well clad with virtue, whereas it is but a light veil which soon falls off. Beware of the knots of concupiscence. Ensure that virtue covers them over and over again, so that they may not flourish again disfiguring the new ego. And cover the soft parts, which receive the paint too easily, but they do so to their own liking: if there are blisters and stripes you must insist with isinglass, smoothing and smoothing in order to give one or more coats of paint, so that such parts may become as glossy as hardened enamel. And watch that you do not overload. To exact too much from virtue makes the creature rebel, boil over and blister at the first impact. No. Neither too much nor too little. Be fair when working on yourselves and on creatures made of flesh and soul.

And if, as in most cases - because girls like Aurea are an exception, not the rule - there are new parts mixed with old ones, as Israelites have, passing from Moses to the Christ, as well as heathens with their mosaic of beliefs which cannot be cancelled all of a sudden and will surface with nostalgic memories, at least in the most pure matters, then one must be more vigilant and tactful and insist until the old part is homogeneous with the new one making use of pre-existent situations to complete the new virtues. For instance, the Romans hold in high esteem patriotism and manlike courage. They are both considered almost as myths. Well, do not destroy them but inculcate a new spirit on patriotism, that is, the spirit of making Rome great also spiritually as the Centre of Christendom and make use of Roman manliness to strengthen in Faith those who are strong in battle. Another instance: Aurea. Her disgust at a brutal revelation urges her to love what is pure and to hate what is impure. Well, make use of both feelings to lead her to perfect purity hating corruptness, as if it were the brutal Roman.

Do you understand Me? And use habits as means of penetration. Do not destroy brutally. You would not dispose at once of what is needed to build. But slowly replace what must not remain in a convert, with charity, patience and tenacity. And since matter overwhelms people, heathens in particular as, even if they are converts, they are always in touch with the heathen world, in which they live, you must insist on the necessity of shunning sensual pleasures. All the rest comes in after sensuality. Watch the exasperated sensuality of heathens and which, let us admit it, is very strong also among us, and when you notice that the contact with the world spoils the preservative paint, do not continue to paint the top, but go back to the lower part, balancing spirit and flesh, top and bottom. But always start from the flesh, from material vice, to prepare the soul to receive the Guest Who does not cohabit in impure bodies or with spirits stinking with carnal corruption... Do you understand me?

And do not be afraid of becoming corrupted if you touch with your garment the lower parts, that is the material ones, of those whose spirits you are curing. Act wisely, so that at all times you may reconstruct rather than bring about ruination. Live engrossed in your ego nourished with God, enveloped with virtue, proceed gently particularly when you have to take care of the most sensitive spiritual ego of other people, and you will certainly succeed in changing even the most despicable beings into creatures worthy of Heaven.»

«What a beautiful parable You have told us! I want to write it for Marjiam! » says the Zealot.

«And for me, as all of me is to be made beautiful for the Lord » says slowly trying to find the words, Aurea who, barefooted, has been standing for some time at the door of the kitchen garden.

«Oh! Aurea! Were you listening to us? » asks Jesus.

«I was listening to You. It is so beautiful! Have I done wrong? »

«No, girl. Have you been here long? »

«No. And I am sorry because I do not know what You said previously. Your Mother has sent me to tell You that the meal will be ready shortly. The bread is about to be taken out of the oven. I have learned how to bake it... How lovely! And I have learned to bleach linen, and Your Mother has told me two parables concerning bread and linen.»

«Has She? What did She say? »

«That I am like flour still in the sieve, that Your goodness purifies me, Your grace works in me, Your apostolate perfects me, Your love cooks me and from coarse flour mixed with so much bran I will end up, if I allow myself to be worked on by You, by being flour for hosts, flour and bread of sacrifice, good for the Altar. And on the linen, which was dark, oily and coarse, and which after so much borit grass (1) and so many blows of mortification has become clean and soft, the sun will now shine, and it will become white... And She said that that is what the Sun of God will do with me, if I always remain in the Sun and I accept to be cleansed and mortified to become worthy of the King of kings, of You, my Lord. What lovely things I am learning... I seem to be dreaming... Lovely! Everything is beautiful here... Do not send me away, Lord! »

«Would you not like to go with Myrtha and Naomi? »

«I would prefer to stay here... But... also with them. But not with Romans, no, Lord...»

«Pray, child! » says Jesus laying His hand on her honey-blond hair. «Have you learned the prayer? »

«Oh! yes! It is so lovely to say: "My Father!" and think of Heaven... But the will of God frightens me a little... because I do not know whether God wants what I want...»

«God wants your welfare.»

«Does He? You say so?! In that case I am no longer afraid... I feel that I will remain in Israel... to become more and more acquainted with this Father of mine... And... to be the first disciple of Gaul, my Lord! »

«Your faith will be satisfied because it is good. Let us go...»

And they all go out towards the basin under the spring of water to wash themselves, while Aurea runs to Mary and their two feminine voices are heard: Mary's, which is fluent in speaking, whereas the other is uncertain, of a person trying to find words. And one can hear their shrill voices laughing when a

(1) Soap-wort.

language error is made and which Mary corrects kindly...

«The girl is learning well and quickly » remarks Thomas.

«Yes. She is good and willing.»

«And then! With Your Mother as teacher!... Not even Satan could resist Her!...» says the Zealot.

Jesus sighs without speaking...

«Why are You sighing thus, Master? Was I not right? »

«Yes, quite right. But there are men more resistant than Satan, who at least runs away from Mary's presence. There are men who are close to Her and who, although taught by Her, do not improve...»

«But not us, eh? » says Thomas.

«No, not you... Let us go...»

They go into the house and it all ends.

433. The Sabbaths in the Peace of Nazareth.

13th May 1946.

The Sabbath is a day of rest. That is already known. And men rest as well as having tools covered up or neatly arranged in their places.

Now that the red sunset of a summer Friday is almost over, Mary, who is sat at Her smaller loom in the shade of the huge apple-tree, stands up, covers it and with the help of Thomas She carries it back to its place in the house. And She asks Aurea, who is sitting on a little stool at Her feet sewing with still unskilful hand the dresses given to her by the Roman ladies and fitted on her by Mary, to fold her work tidily and put it on the shelf in her little room. And while Aurea is doing so, the Mother with Thomas goes into the workshop where Jesus and the Zealot are busy putting straight saws, planes, screwdrivers, hammers, tins of paint and glue and sweeping away sawdust and shavings from benches and the floor. Of all the work done so far only two small planks of wood remain, gripped in a vice, at an angle, so that the glue may dry up at the joints (it may be a future drawer), and a stool, half painted, besides the strong smell of fresh paint.

Aurea also goes in and she bends over Thomas's burin work, which she admires and asks, somewhat curious and instinctively coquettish, what it is for and whether it would suit her.

«It would suit you fine, but it suits you better to be good. These ornaments embellish the body only, but are of no use to the spirit. Nay, by cherishing coquetry, they are harmful to the spirit.»

«Why do you make them, then? » asks the logical girl. «Do you want to harm a spirit? »

Thomas, who is always kind-hearted, smiles at the remark and says: «What is superfluous is harmful to a weak spirit. But in the case of a strong spirit, an ornament remains exactly what it is: a brooch to hold a garment in place.»

«For whom are you making it? For your bride? »

«I have no bride and will never have one.»

«For your sister, then.»

«She has more than she needs.»

«For your mother, then.»

«Poor old soul! What would she do with it? »

«But it is for a woman...»

«Yes, but it is not you.»

«Oh! I would not even think of it... And, now that you have said that those things there are harmful to the spirit, I would not like to have it. And I will take the fringes off my dresses. I do not want to do any harm to what belongs to my Saviour! »

«Clever girl! See, with your good will you have done a nicer work than mine.»

«Oh! You are saying so because you are kind!...»

«I am saying it because it is true. See: I took this piece of silver, I reduced it to thin plates as I needed them, then with a tool, or rather with many tools, I folded it thus. But I still have to do the most important work: join the parts together in a natural manner. At present, only these two tiny leaves joined to their little flower are complete » and Thomas with his big fingers lifts a graceful stem of a lily of the valley joined to a leaf which is a perfect imitation of a natural one. It is impressive to see the trinket shining with the brilliancy of pure silver held by the strong dark fingers of the goldsmith.

«Oh! lovely! There were many on the island and we were allowed to pick them before sunrise. Because we blond girls had never to take the sun, so that we might be more valuable. They compelled brunettes instead to stay out in the sun, until they felt sick, to become darker. They... What do you say when one sells something saying that it is one thing, whereas it is another?...»

«Who knows!... Deceit... swindle... I don't know.»

«See, they deceived them saying that they were Arabs or that they came from the Upper Nile, where it rises. They sold one girl saying that she was a descendant of the Queen of Sheba.»

«Fancy that! They did not deceive the girls, but the purchasers. So you say: they cheated. What a race! A wonderful surprise for the purchaser when he saw... the false Ethiopian grow lighter! Did You hear that, Master? How many things we do not know!...»

«Yes, I heard. But the sad side is not the cheating of the purchasers... it is the destiny of the girls...»

«That is true. Souls desecrated for ever. Lost...»

«No. God can always intervene...»

«He did on my behalf. You saved me!...» says Aurea turning her clear serene eyes towards the Lord. And she concludes: «And I am so happy! » and as she cannot go and embrace Jesus, she clasps Mary with one arm bending her fair-haired head on the Virgin's shoulder in a gesture of confident love. The two fair-haired heads stand out, in their different shades, against the dark wall. A most gentle group.

But Mary has to see to the supper. They part and go away.

«May I come in? » says the rather hoarse voice of Peter at the workshop door which opens onto the road.

«Simon! Open the door! »

«Simon! He could not stay away! » exclaims Thomas laughing while he runs to open.

«Simon! This was to be expected...» says the Zealot smiling.

But it is not only Peter's face which appears at the door. All the apostles from the lake are there, with the exception of Bartholomew and the Iscariot. And Judas and James of Alphaeus have already joined them.

«Peace to you! But why did you come in this heat? »

«Because... we could not stay away any longer. It's two and a half weeks, You know? Do You understand? We have not seen You for two and a half weeks! » and Peter seems to be saying: «Two hundred years! An enormity! »

«But I told you to wait for Judas on every Sabbath.»

«Yes, but he did not come on the last two Sabbaths... and we have come here on the third one. Nathanael remained there because he is not too well. And he will receive Judas, if he goes there... But he will not go... Passing through Tiberias to come to us, before going to the Great Hermon, Benjamin and Daniel told us that they had seen him at Tiberias and... Of course. I will tell You later...» says Peter who has stopped speaking because of a tug at his tunic by his brother.

«All right. You will tell Me... But you were all so anxious to have a rest, and now that you had a chance you have been running about like this! When did you leave? »

«Yesterday evening. The lake was like a mirror. We landed at Tarichea to avoid Tiberias... so that we would not meet Judas...»

«Why? »

«Because, Master, we wanted to enjoy Your company in peace.»

«You are selfish! »

«No. He already has his joys... Well! I don't know who gives him so much money to enjoy it with... Yes, I have understood, Andrew. But don't pull my tunic so violently. You know that it is the only one I have. Do you want me to go back in rags? »

Andrew blushes. The others laugh. Jesus smiles.

«Well. We landed at Tarichea also because, well, don't reproach me... It may be the heat, it may be that I become wicked when I am far away from You, it may be the thought that he left you to join... Listen, stop tearing at my sleeve! You see that I can stop in time!... So, Master, it may be for many reasons... I did not want to commit a sin and if I had seen him I would have committed one. So I went straight to Tarichea. And at dawn we set off.»

«Did you pass through Cana? »

«No. We did not want to come the long way round... But it was a long way all the same. And the fish was beginning to go bad... We gave it to the people in a house, to have shelter for a few hours... the warm hours. And we left after the ninth hour, about the middle of the following hour... It was like an oven!...»

«You could have saved yourselves the trouble. I was coming soon...»

«When? »

«When the sun comes out of Leo.»

«And do You think we could stay so long without You? We will defy a thousand of

such hot days and we will come to see You. Our Master! Our adored Master! » and Peter embraces his lost Treasure.

«And yet, when we are together you do nothing but complain of the weather, of the length of journeys...»

«Because we are foolish. Because, while we are together we do not really understand what You are for us... But here we are. We are all already settled. Some will stay with Mary of Alphaeus, some with Simon of Alphaeus, some with Ishmael, some with Aser and some here, nearby, with Alphaeus. We will rest now and tomorrow evening we will leave, and we will be more happy.»

«On last Sabbath we had Myrtha and Naomi here, they came to see the girl again » says Thomas.

«You can see that whoever can manage to do so, comes here! »

«Yes, Peter. And what have you done during these days? »

«We have fished... painted the boats... mended the nets... Marjiam often goes fishing with the servants, which reduces the insults of my mother-in-law against "the sluggard who lets his wife die of starvation after bringing an illegitimate son to her". And yet Porphirea has never been so well as now that she has Marjiam for her heart... and for everything else. The sheep from three have become five and will soon be more... It is a great help for a little family like ours! And Marjiam by fishing makes up for what I do not do, except very rarely. But that woman has the tongue of a viper, whereas her daughter has the tongue of a dove... But I see that You have been working as well...»

«Yes, Simon. We have worked. All of us. My brothers in their house, these apostles and I in Mine. To make our mothers happy and let them rest.»

«Well, we have been working, too » say the sons of Zebedee.

«My wife and I have worked at the beehives and in the vineyard » says Philip.

«And what about you, Matthew? »

«I have no one to make happy... so I made myself happy by writing down the things that I like to remember...»

«Oh! in that case we will tell you the parable of the paint. I, a very inexperienced painter, was the cause of it...» says the Zealot.

«But you soon learned the trade. Look how smooth he made this seat! » says Thaddeus...

They are in perfect harmony. And Jesus, Who looks more rested since He has been at home, is bright with joy at having His dear apostles with Him.

Aurea comes and remains on the threshold surprised.

«Oh! here she is! Look how well she is! She looks like a true little Hebrew, dressed like that! »

Aurea blushes and does not know what to say. But Peter is so good natured and fatherly, that she soon recovers and says: «I am striving to become one... and with the help of my Teacher I hope to be one soon... Master, I am going to tell Your Mother that these people are here...» and she goes away quickly.

«She is a good girl » states the Zealot.

«Yes. I would like her to remain with us in Israel. Bartholomew lost a good chance and much joy by refusing her...» says Thomas.

«Bartholomew is very respectful of... formulae » says Philip excusing him.

«His only fault » remarks Jesus.

Mary comes in...

«Peace to You, Mary » say those who came from Capernaum.

«Peace to you... I did not know that you were here. I will provide at once... Come in the meantime...»

«Our mother is coming from our house with some provisions, and Salome is coming as well. Do not worry, Mary » says James of Alphaeus.

«Let us go into the kitchen garden... The evening breeze is rising and it is pleasant in there...» says Jesus.

And they go into the kitchen garden and sit here and there, conversing fraternally, while the doves coo competing for the last meal which Aurea is spreading on the ground... It is then time to water the flower-beds and the beautiful vegetables so useful to man. And the apostles want to do it cheerfully, while Mary of Alphaeus, who has just arrived, and Aurea and the Virgin prepare a meal for the guests. And the smell of sizzling food mingles with that of the moist earth, as the chirping of birds competing cheekily for a good spot among the thick leaves above the garden, mingles with the deep or shrill voices of the apostles...

434. Before Being a Mother, the Blessed Virgin Is a Daughter and
Servant of God.
14th May 1946.

And the Sabbath wears on. It is the true Sabbath. In the wonderful morning, when the air is still fresh and cool, it is beautiful to sit in a brotherly peaceful gathering under the shady pergola, or where the apple-tree, close to the fig and almond-trees, forms with them patches of shade extending that of the pergola on which grapes are ripening. And it is nice to walk up and down the paths between the flower-beds going from the beehives to the dove-cot and then to the little grotto, and, passing behind the women - Mary, Mary of Clopas, the daughter-in-law of the latter: Salome of Simon, Aurea - going towards the few olive-trees which from the cliff hang over the peaceful kitchen garden. And that is what Jesus and His disciples, Mary and the other women are doing. And Jesus teaches unintentionally, and so does Mary. And the apostles of the Former and the women disciples of the Latter are carefully listening to the words of the two Teachers.

Aurea, sat on her usual little stool at Mary's feet, almost in a squatting posture, is embracing her knees with joined hands, her face is raised and her wide-open eyes are staring at Mary's face. She looks like a little girl who is listening to a wonderful tale. But it is not a tale. It is a beautiful truth. Mary is telling the little heathen of yesterday the ancient stories of Israel and the other women, although they already know them, are listening attentively. Because it is pleasant to hear the story of Rachel, that of the daughter of Jephthah, that of Hannah of Elkanah, flowing from Her lips!

Judas of Alphaeus comes near slowly and listens smiling. He is behind Mary Who therefore cannot see him. But the smiling look of Mary of Clopas at her Judas tells Mary that someone is behind Her and She turns round: «Oh! Judas? Have you left Jesus to hear Me, a poor woman? »

«Yes. I left You to go to Jesus, because You were my first teacher. But at times it is pleasant for me to leave Him and come to You, and become again a boy as when I was Your disciple. Go on, please...»

«Aurea wants her reward each Sabbath. And the reward consists in telling her what impressed her most in our History, a little of which I explain to her every day while working.»

The others also have come near... Thaddeus asks: «And what do you like, child? »
«So much, I could say everything... But Rachel very much, and Hannah of Elkanah, then Ruth... then... ah! beautiful! Tobit and Tobias with the Angel, and then the bride who prays to be freed...»

«And Moses, no? »

«He frightens me... Too great... And of the prophets I like Daniel who defends Susanna.» She looks around and then whispers: «I also was defended by my Daniel » and she looks at Jesus.

«But also Moses' books are beautiful! »

«Yes. Where they teach not to do what is bad. And where they speak of that star which will be born of Jacob. I know its name now. I knew nothing before. And I am more fortunate than that prophet because I can see it and close by. She told me everything and I know as well » she concludes with an air of triumph.

«And do you not like Passover? »

«Yes... but... also the children of other people are the sons of mothers. Why kill them? I prefer the God Who saves to the God Who kills...»

«You are right... Mary, have You not told her anything yet of His Birth? » asks James pointing at the Lord Who is listening in silence.

«Not yet. I want her to know the past well before the present. She will thus understand the present which has in the past its reason for being. When she knows it, she will see that the God Who frightens her, the God of Sinai, is but a God of severe love, but still a God of love.»

«Oh! Mother! Tell me now! It will be less difficult for me to understand the past when I know the present, which, as far as I know, is so beautiful and makes

one love God without fear. I need not to be afraid! »

«The girl is right. You must remember that truth when you will be evangelizing. Souls need not to be afraid in order to go to God with full confidence. It is what I am striving to do, all the more when people, either through ignorance or because of their faults, are likely to be much afraid of God. But God, also the God Who struck the Egyptians and Who frightens you, Aurea, is always good. See: when He killed the sons of the cruel Egyptians, He had mercy on the sons, who did not grow up and did not become sinners like their fathers and He gave their parents time to repent of their evil doings. So it was severe goodness. One must be able to tell true goodness from loose upbringing. Also when I was a little baby, many little children were killed on the very laps of their mothers. And the world cried with horror. But when Time exists no more for individuals or for all Mankind, for a first time and for a second time you will realise that those were fortunate, blessed in Israel, in the Israel of the times of Christ, who slaughtered in their infancy, were preserved from the biggest sin, that of being accomplices in the death of the Saviour.»

«Jesus! » shouts Mary of Alphaeus springing to her feet, frightened, looking around as if she were afraid to see deicides appear from behind hedges and trunks of trees. «Jesus! » she repeats looking at him painfully.

«What? Do you perhaps not know the Scriptures, since you are so surprised at what I say? » asks Jesus.

«But... But... It is not possible... You must not allow that... Your Mother...»

«She is Saviour like Me, and She knows. Look at Her. And imitate Her.»

Mary is in fact austere, regal in Her deep pallor. She is motionless, with Her hands in Her lap clasped as if in prayer, Her head straight, looking into space...

Mary of Alphaeus looks at Her. She then addresses Jesus again: «All the same, You must not mention that horrible future! You are piercing Her heart with a sword.»

«That sword has been in Her heart for thirty-two years.»

«No! It's not possible! Mary... always so serene... Mary...»

«Ask Her, if you do not believe what I say.»

«I will ask Her! Is it true, Mary? You know?...»

And Mary in a gentle but firm voice says: «It is true. He was forty days old and I was told by a holy man... But also previously... Oh! When the Angel told Me that while remaining the Virgin I would conceive a Son, Who would be called the Son of God and is such because of His divine conception, when I was told that, and that in the barren womb of Elizabeth a fruit had been formed by a miracle of the Eternal Father, I had no difficulty in remembering the words of Isaiah: "The Virgin will give birth to a son and they will call Him the Immanuel"... All, all Isaiah! And where he speaks of the Precursor... And where he speaks of the Man of sorrows, stained with blood, unrecognizable... a leper... for our sins... The sword has been in My heart since then and everything has served to drive it in more deeply: the song of the angels and the words of Simeon and the visit of the Kings from the East, and everything...»

«But which other everything, Mary? Jesus is triumphing, Jesus works miracles, Jesus is followed by larger and larger crowds... Is that not the truth? » says Mary of Alphaeus.

And Mary, always in the same posture replies to each question: «Yes...» without anguish, without joy, only a quiet assent, because it is so...

«Well then? Which other everything is piercing Your heart with a sword? »

«Oh!... Everything...»

«And You are so calm? So serene? Always the same as when You arrived here, a young bride, thirty-three years ago, and I remember it so well that it seems yesterday to me... But how can You?... I... I would be mad... I would do... I don't know what I would do... I... No! It is not possible for a mother to know that and to be calm! »

«Before being a Mother, I am a daughter and servant of God... Where do I find My tranquillity? In doing the will of God. From where does My serenity come? From doing that will. If I had to do the will of a man, I might be upset, because a man, even the wisest, can always impose a wrong will. But the will of God! If He wanted Me to be the Mother of His Christ, have I perhaps to think that that is cruel, and in that thought lose My serenity? Am I to be upset by the thought of what Redemption will be to Him and to Me, also to Me, and how I will be able to

overcome that hour? Oh! it will be dreadful...» Mary gives an involuntary start, She suddenly shudders and clenches Her hands to prevent them from trembling, as if She wanted to pray more fervently, while Her face grows even paler and Her delicate eyelids close on Her kind sky-blue eyes with an expression full of anguish. But She steadies Her voice after a deep sigh of anxiety and She concludes: «But He, Who imposed His will on Me and Whom I serve with confident love, will grant Me His assistance for that hour. He will grant it to Me, to Him... Because the Father cannot impose a will that exceeds the strength of man... and He succours... always... And He will succour us, My Son... He will succour us... and there is no one but He, with His infinite means, who can succour us...»

«Yes, Mother. Love will succour us, and in love we will succour each other. And in love we will redeem...» Jesus has gone beside His Mother and lays His hand on Her shoulder and She raises Her face to look at Him, at Her handsome healthy Jesus destined to be disfigured by torture, killed with a thousand wounds, and She says: «In love and in sorrow... Yes. And together...»

No one speaks any more... Standing around the two chief Protagonists of the future tragedy of Golgotha, the apostles and women disciples look like pensive statues...

Aurea, on her little stool, is petrified... But she is the first to collect herself and without standing up she slides on her knees and thus finds herself facing Mary. She embraces Her knees and bends her head on Her lap saying: «All that also for me!... How much I cost You and how much I love You for what I cost! Oh! Mother of my God, bless me, that my cost may not be fruitless...» «Yes, My daughter. Be not afraid. God will help you as well, if you always accept His will.» She caresses her hair and cheeks and feels them wet with tears. «Do not weep! The first thing of the Christ with which you have become acquainted is His sorrowful destiny, the end of His mission as Man. It is not fair, having learned that, that you should be unacquainted with the first hour of His life in the world. Listen... Everybody will be pleased to come out of the dark bitter contemplation by recalling the sweet hour, full of light, of songs, of hosannas, of His Birth... Listen...» and Mary, explaining the reason for Her journey to Bethlehem in Judah, the town predicted to be the birthplace of the Saviour, in a soft gentle voice tells the story of the night of Christ's Nativity.

435. Jesus and His Mother Converse.

15th May 1946.

I do not know whether it is the evening of the same Sabbath. I know that I see Jesus and Mary, sitting on the stone seat against the house, near the door of the dining-room, from which comes the faint light of an oil lamp placed close to the door. The little flame palpitates in the air, rising and sinking, as if it were breathing. It is the only light in the moonless night: a faint light visible in the kitchen garden where it illuminates the small strip of ground before the door and dies on the first rose-bush in the flower-bed. But the feeble light is sufficient to illuminate the profiles of the Two engaged in intimate talk in the calm night full of the scent of jasmines and other summer flowers.

They are speaking of their relatives... of Joseph of Alphaeus persistently stubborn, of Simon not very brave in his profession of faith, overwhelmed as he is by his eldest brother, who is as overbearing and obstinate in his ideas as his father was. It is the great sorrow of Mary Who would like all Her nephews to be disciples of Her Jesus.

Jesus comforts Her and to excuse His cousin He points out his strong Israelitic

faith: «An obstacle, You know? A real obstacle. Because all the formulae and precepts form a barrier against the acceptance of the Messianic idea in its truth. It is easier to convert a heathen, provided his spirit is not completely corrupt. A heathen ponders and sees the good difference between his Olympus and My Kingdom. But Israel... the more learned part of Israel... finds it difficult to follow the new concept!...»

«And yet it is always that concept! »

«Yes. It is always that Decalogue, those prophecies. But their nature has been perverted by man. He has taken them, and from the supernatural spheres where they were, and has brought them down to the level of the Earth, in the atmosphere of the world, he has handled them with his humanity altering them... The Messiah, the spiritual King of the great Kingdom - which is called Kingdom of Israel, because the Messiah is born of the throne of Israel, but it would be more correct to call it: the Kingdom of Christ, because Christ centralises the better part of Israel, both past and present, and sublimates it in His perfection of God-Man - according to them the Messiah, cannot be the meek poor man, without yearning after power and riches, obedient to those who rule over us by divine punishment, because obedience is holiness when it does not invalidate the great Law. We can therefore say that their faith works against the true Faith. Of such stubborn people convinced that they are right, there are many... in every class... and even among My relatives and apostles. Believe, Mother, that their dullness in believing in My Passion lies in that. Their errors in valuation originate from that... Also their obstinate aversion to consider Gentiles and idolaters, not looking at man, but at the spirit of man, that spirit which has only one Origin and to which God would like to give only one Destiny: Heaven. Take Bartholomew... He is an instance. Very good, wise, willing to do everything to honour and comfort Me... But before, I will not say an Aglae or a Syntyche, who is already a flower compared with poor Aglae, whom penance only restores from filth to a flower, but not even before a child, a poor child whose lot excites pity and whose instinctive modesty draws admiration, does his disgust for the Gentiles vanish, neither does My example convince him, nor My words that I have come for everybody.»

«You are right. Nay, Bartholomew and Judas of Kerioth, the two most learned, or at least: the learned Bartholomew, and Judas of Kerioth, who I do not know to which class he belongs exactly, but who is imbued and saturated with the air of the Temple, are the most resistant. But... Bartholomew is good and his resistance can still be excused. Judas... no. You heard what Matthew, who went to Tiberias on purpose, said... And Matthew is a man of experience, particularly of that life... And the remark of James of Zebedee is correct: "Who is it that gives so much money to Judas?". Because that life costs... Poor Mary of Simon! » Jesus makes His gesture with His hands, to say: «It is so...» and He sighs. He then says: «Did You hear that? The Roman ladies are at Tiberias... Valeria has not told Me anything. But I must know before I resume My journey. Mother, I want You to come to Capernaum with Me for some time... You will then come back here, I will go towards the Syro-Phoenician border, and I will come back to say goodbye to You before going down towards Judaea, the obstinate sheep of Israel...»

«Son, I will go tomorrow evening... I will take Mary of Alphaeus with Me. Aurea will stay with Simon of Alphaeus, because her staying here with You for several days would certainly be criticised... Such is the world... And I will go... To Cana as first stage, then at dawn I will leave and stop at the house of the mother of Salome of Simon. Then I will set out again at sunset and we will arrive at Tiberias in daylight. I will stay in the house of Joseph, the disciple, because I want to go personally to Valeria's house, and if I went to Johanna's, she would want to go... No. I, the Mother of the Saviour, will appear in her eyes, different from the disciple of the Saviour... and she will not say no to Me. Do not be afraid, Son! »

«I am not afraid. But I am sorry for all Your trouble.»

«Oh! to save a soul! What are twenty miles in a good season? »

«It will also be a moral strain. To beg... perhaps to be humiliated...»

«A passing trifle. But a soul remains! »

«You will be like a lost swallow in corrupt Tiberias... Take Simon with You.»

«No, Son. Just the two of us, two poor women... But two mothers and two disciples. That is, two great moral strengths... I will not be long. Let Me

go... Just bless Me.»

«Yes, Mother. With all My heart as Son, and with all My power as God. Go and may the angels escort you along the way.»

«Thank You, Jesus. Well, let us go in. I will have to get up at dawn to prepare everything for those who leave and for those who are staying. Say the prayer, Son...»

Both Jesus and Mary stand up and they say together the Our Father... They then go back into the house, they close the door... the light disappears and human voices are heard no more. Only the rustling of the breeze among the leaves can be heard and the soft gurgling of the water in the fountain basin...

436. The Blessed Virgin at Tiberias.

16th May 1946.

Tiberias is already in sight when the two tired pilgrims are proceeding in the darkening twilight.

«It will soon be dark... And we are still in the middle of the country... Two women alone... And near a large town full of... Ugh! what people! Beelzebub! Beelzebub mostly...» says Mary of Alphaeus looking around frightened.

«Be not afraid, Mary. Beelzebub will do us no harm. He harms only those who receive him in their hearts...»

«These pagans have him!...»

«Not only pagans are in Tiberias. And also among the heathens there are just people.»

«What? They have not our God!...»

Mary does not reply because She understands that it would be useless. Her good sister-in-law is but one of the many Israelites who believe that they are the only depositaries of virtue... simply because they are Israelites.

They are silent: only the shuffling of the sandals on their tired dusty feet can be heard.

«It was better to take the usual road... We knew that one... it is more beaten by people... This one... among vegetable gardens, solitary... unknown... I am afraid, that's all! »

«No, Mary. Look. The town is over there, a few steps from here. And here are peaceful kitchen gardens of the cultivators of Tiberias, and over there is the shore, only a few steps from here. Do you want to go to the shore? We will find fishermen there... We have only to go across these vegetable gardens.»

«No! We would be going away from town again! And then... The boatmen are almost all Greeks, Cretans, Egyptians, Romans...» and it seems as if she were mentioning infernal classes. The Blessed Virgin cannot help smiling in the shadow of Her veil.

They go on. The road becomes an avenue, and thus darker... and Mary of Alphaeus is more frightened than ever and she invokes Jehovah at every step, while they proceed slower and slower.

«Come on, take heart! Make haste, if you are afraid! » says Mary urging her after replying: «Maran Atha! » at each invocation.

But Mary of Alphaeus stops and asks: «But why did You want to come here? To speak perhaps to the Iscariot? »

«No, Mary. Or at least that is not exactly the reason. I have come to speak to Valeria, the Roman lady...»

«Goodness gracious! Are we going to her house? Ah! no! Mary! Don't do that! I... I am not coming with You! But why are You going there? To those... those... anathemas!...»

The kind smile of the Blessed Virgin becomes a severe expression while She asks: «And do you not remember that Aurea is to be saved? My Son began her liberation. I will complete it. Is that how you practise love for souls? »

«But she is not from Israel...»

«Truly, you have not understood one word of the Gospel! You are a very imperfect disciple... You do not work for your Master and you grieve Me so deeply.»

Mary of Alphaeus lowers her head... But her heart, full of the prejudices of Israel but congenitally kind, gets the upper hand and bursting into tears she embraces Mary and says: «Forgive me! Don't say that I grieve You and I do not

serve my Jesus! Yes! I am very imperfect and I deserve to be reproached... But I will not do it again... I will come! Even to Hell if You should go there to save a soul and give it to Jesus... Give me a kiss, Mary, to tell me that You forgive me...»

Mary kisses her and they resume their journey, walking fast, cheered up by love...

They are now in Tiberias, near the little harbour of the fishermen. They look for the little house of Joseph, the fisherman disciple... They find it and knock at the door...

«The Mother of my Master! Come in, o Donna! And may God be with You and with me, who am giving You hospitality. And you, come in, too, and peace be with you, the mother of apostles.»

They go in while the wife and young daughter come to greet them followed by a little group of younger children...

The frugal meal is soon over and Mary of Clopas, being tired, withdraws with the children. On the high terrace, from which the lake can be seen - it can be heard lapping the bank, rather than be seen, because there is no moonlight as yet - are the Blessed Virgin, the boatman and his wife, who endeavours to be good company, but in actual fact is nodding...

«She is tired!...» says Joseph excusing her.

«Poor woman! Housewives are always tired in the evening.»

«Yes, they do work. They are not like those there, who lead a gay life! » says the boatman disdainfully, pointing at some illuminated boats departing from the shore among songs and music. «They are going out now! They begin to work at this time, when honest people go to sleep! And they do harm to workers, because they go to the best spots, pretending that they are fishing, and they drive away us, who earn our living on the lake...»

«Who are they? »

«Roman women and the like. And among the latter you can count Herodias and her lustful daughter and some Jewesses as well... Because we have many Maries of Magdala... I mean Maries before repentance...»

«They are poor wretches...»

«Poor wretches? We are poor wretches because we do not stone them to rid Israel of those who have become corrupted and bring down on us the curses of God.»

In the meantime other boats have left and the lake reddens with the lights of the revellers' boats.

«Can you smell resin burning? First they become intoxicated with smoke, and they do the rest in the course of banquets. They are quite capable of going to the hot springs on the other side... In those Thermal baths... Infernal things take place! They will come back at daybreak, at dawn, perhaps later... drunk, lying one on top of the other, men and women, just like sacks, and their slaves will carry them home, to sleep it off... All the beautiful boats are going out this evening! Look! Look!... But I am more angry with the Jews who mix with them. With regard to them... we know! Shameless animals. But we!... Donna, do You know that Judas, the apostle is here? »

«I know.»

«He is not setting a good example, You know? »

«Why? Does he go with those people?...»

«No... but... with bad companions... and a woman... I have not seen him... None of us has seen him in such company. But some Pharisees have sneered at us saying: "Your apostle has changed master. Now he has a woman and he is in the good company of publicans".»

«Do not judge, Joseph, what you have only heard people say. You know that the Pharisees do not love you and they do not even praise the Master.»

«That is true... But the rumour is spreading... and is harmful...»

«As it rose, so it will fall. Do not sin against your brother. Where does he live? Do you know? »

«Yes, with a friend, I think. One who has a warehouse of wines and spices. The third warehouse on the eastern side of the market, after the fountain...»

«Are all the Roman women alike? »

«Oh! more or less!... They do wrong, even if they do not let people see it.»

«Which are the ones that do not let people see? »

«The ones who came to Lazarus' at Passover. They are more retired... I mean... they do not always go to banquets. But they go so often that people can say that

they are impure.»

«Are you saying so because you are sure, or is it your Jewish prejudice that makes you say so? Think it over carefully...»

«Well... really... I don't know... I have not seen them any more in the boats of the filthy ones... But they go out on the lake at night.»

«You go out, too.»

«Certainly! If I want to go out fishing! »

«It is very warm! Only out on the lake is there relief at night. You said so yourself while we were having supper.»

«That is true.»

«So, why not consider that they go on the lake for that? »

The man is silent... He then says: «It is late. The stars say that it is the second watch. I am withdrawing, Donna. Are You not coming? »

«No. I will stay here and pray. I will go out early. Do not be surprised if you do not see Me at dawn.»

«You are free to do as You like. Anne! Come on! Let us go to bed! » and he shakes his wife who is fast asleep. They go away.

Mary remains alone... She kneels down and prays... but She never loses sight of the boats sailing on the lake, the boats of rich people, all bright with lights,. with flowers, singing and smell of incense... Many sail eastwards, they become very small in the distance, their singing is no longer heard. A splendid solitary boat remains out on the lake in a sheet of water upon which the moon, setting in front of Tiberias, is shining brightly. It sails slowly up and down... Mary watches it until She sees it steer towards the shore.

Mary then stands up saying: «Lord, help Me! Let it be...» She then goes downstairs nimbly, She enters a room the door of which is half open... In the moonlight it is possible to see a little bed. Mary bends over it and calls:

«Mary! Wake up! Let us go! »

Mary of Alphaeus wakes up and, overwhelmed with sleep, rubbing her eyes she asks: «Is it already time to go? Is it already daylight? » She is so sleepy that she does not realise that it is not the light of dawn but moonlight the feeble phosphorescence which enters through the open door. She becomes aware of it when she is outside, on the small piece of cultivated ground in front of the boatman's house.

«But it's night-time! » she exclaims.

«Yes. But we will finish sooner and we will get out of this town sooner... at least I hope so. Come! This way, along the shore. Quick! Before the boat sets ashore...»

«The boat? Which boat? » asks Mary. But she runs after the Virgin, Who is walking very fast on the deserted shore, towards the little pier, where the boat is heading.

They arrive panting a few moments before it... Mary is watching carefully. She exclaims: «Praised be the Lord! It is they! Follow Me now... because we must go where they go... I do not know where they live...»

«But Mary... for pity's sake!... They will think that we are prostitutes!...»

The Most Pure Mother shakes Her head and whispers: «The important thing is not to be one. Come! » and She draws her into the shadow of a house.

The boat lands and while it is manoeuvring, a litter, which was waiting nearby, is brought forward towards it. Two women get on it, while two remain outside and walk beside it, when it leaves carried by four Numidians walking in step and wearing very short sleeveless tunics, which hardly cover their trunks...

Mary follows it, notwithstanding that Mary of Alphaeus protests in a low voice:

«Two women alone!... Behind those men! They are half-naked... Oh!...»

After a few metres the litter stops. A woman gets off while the leader knocks at a portal.

«Goodbye, Lydia! »

«Goodbye, Valeria! A caress to Faustina from me. Tomorrow evening we will read again in peace, while the others revel...»

The portal is opened and Valeria, with her slave or freedwoman, is about to go in.

Mary goes forward and says: «Domina! A word! »

Valeria looks at the two women enveloped in very plain Jewish mantles lowered over their faces, and thinks that they are beggars. She orders: «Barbara, give them offerings! »

«No, domina. I am not asking for money. I am the Mother of Jesus of Nazareth and this is a relative of Mine. I have come in His Name to ask a favour of you.»
«Domina! Your Son is perhaps... persecuted...»
«Not more than usually. But He would like...»
«Come in, Domina. It does not become You to remain here in the street like a beggar.»
«No. A few words will suffice if you can listen to me in secret...»
«Go away, all of you! » Valeria orders her slave or freedwoman, whatever she may be, and the doorkeepers. «We are alone. What does the Master want? I did not come because I did not want to harm Him in His town. He did not come in order not to harm me, perhaps, with my husband? »
«No. I advised Him not to come. My Son is hated, domina.»
«I know.»
«And He finds comfort only in His mission.»
«I know.»
«He does not seek honours, or armies; He does not aspire to kingdoms or riches. But He asserts His rights on souls.»
«I know.»
«Domina... He should hand that girl back to you... But do not be offended if I tell you, she could not perfect her soul for Jesus here. You are better than the others... But around you... there is too much filth of the world.»
«That is true. So? »
«You are a mother... My Son has the feelings of a father for every soul. Would you allow your daughter to be brought up among people who can ruin her?...»
«No. I understand... Well... Say these words to Your Son: "In memory of Faustina, saved in her body, Valeria gives You Aurea that You may save her soul". It is true! We are too corrupt... to assure a saint... Domina, pray for me! » and she withdraws quickly, before Mary can thank her. She withdraws, I would say, weeping...
Mary of Alphaeus is dumbfounded.
«Let us go, Mary... We will leave during the night and tomorrow evening we will be in Nazareth...»
«Let us go... She gave her up... as if she were a thing...»
«She is a thing to them. To us she is a soul. Come. Look... It is already dawning over there. One can say that there is no night-time in this month...»
They go along a road which is no longer semi-dark and which opens in front of them, instead of taking the shore. It is a road behind a row of modest houses...
When they are half way along it, Judas springs out from a corner, manifestly drunk. A Judas returning from who knows what party, with dishevelled hair, crumpled clothes, his face beaten.
«Judas! You? In this state? »
Judas does not have time to feign that he does not know Her and he cannot run away... Surprise clears his thoughts and keeps him fixed where he is, immobile. Mary approaches him, overcoming the repulsion which the sight of the apostle stirs in Her, and She says to him: «Judas, wretched son, what are you doing? Are you not thinking of God? Of your soul? Of your mother? What are you doing, Judas? Why do you want to be a sinner? Look at Me, Judas! You have no right to kill your soul...» and She touches him trying to take his hand.
«Leave me alone. I am a man after all. And... I am free to do what everybody does. Tell Him, Who has sent You to spy on me, that I am not yet all spirit, and I am young! »
«You are not free to ruin yourself, Judas! Have pity on yourself... If you behave like that you will never be a happy spirit... Judas... He did not send Me to spy on you. He prays for you. Only that, and I pray with Him. In the name of your mother...»
«Leave me alone » says Judas rudely. Then realising that he has been rude, he rectifies himself: «I do not deserve Your pity... Goodbye...» and he runs away...
«What a demon!... I will tell Jesus » exclaims Mary of Alphaeus. «My Judas is right! »
«You will not say anything to anybody. You will pray for him. Yes...»
«Are You weeping? Weeping for him? Oh!...»
«I am weeping... I was happy having saved Aurea... I am now weeping because Judas is a sinner. But to Jesus, Who is distressed, we will take only the good

news. And we will snatch the sinner from Satan by penance and prayers... As if he were our son, Mary! As if he were our son!... You are a mother, too, and you know... For that unhappy mother, for this soul of a sinner, for our Jesus...»
«Yes, I will pray... But I do not think that he deserves it...»
«Mary, do not say that!...»
«I will not say it... But it is so. Are we not going to Johanna's? »
«No. We will come back soon, with Jesus...»

437. Aurea Does the Will of God.
20th May 1946.

The Virgin is very tired when She sets foot again in Her little house. But She is very happy. And She looks at once for Her Jesus, Who is still working, in the last light of the dying day, at the stone oven door, which He is repairing. Simon opens the door to Her, and after greeting Her, he wisely withdraws into the workshop. I do not see Thomas. Perhaps he is out. Jesus lays down His tools as soon as He sees His Mother, and goes towards Her cleaning His greasy hands (He is oiling hinges and latches to make them run smoothly) on His apron. Their reciprocal smiles seem to brighten up the kitchen garden where it is growing dark.
«Peace to You, Mother.»
«Peace to You, Son.»
«How tired You are! You have not rested...»
«I did, from dawn to sunset in Joseph's house... But if it had not been so warm, I would have left at once to come and tell You that Aurea is Yours.»
«Yes?! » The joyful surprise makes Jesus' face look even younger. It seems the face of a man about twenty years old, and as joy rids Him of the gravity which is generally on His face and in His gestures, He resembles even more His Mother, Who is always such a serene girl in Her deportment and looks.
«Yes, Jesus. And I achieved that without any effort. The lady agreed at once. She was moved admitting that she and her friends are too corrupt to educate a creature for God. Such a humble, sincere, true avowal! It is not easy to find people who admit they are faulty without being forced to do so.»
«No, it is not. Many in Israel are not capable. They are beautiful souls buried under a crust of filth. But when the filth falls off...»
«Will that happen, Son? »
«I am sure it will. They tend instinctively to Good. They will end up by adhering to it. What did she say? »
«Oh! Only a few words... We understood each other at once. But we had better have Aurea here at once. I want to tell her this, but only if You wish so, Son.»
«Yes, Mother. We will send Simon » and in a loud voice He calls Simon who comes immediately.
«Simon, go to Simon of Alphaeus' house and tell him that My Mother is back, then come here with the girl and Thomas, who must be there finishing the little job which Salome asked him to do.»
Simon bows and goes away at once.
«Tell Me, Mother... Your journey... your conversation... Poor Mother, how tired You are because of Me! »
«Oh! no, Jesus! It is no trouble when You are happy...» and Mary tells Him about Her journey and Mary of Alphaeus' fears, their rest in the house of the boatman, the meeting with Valeria, and She concludes: «I preferred to see her at that time, since Heaven allowed it. She was freer, I was freer, and Mary of Clopas was comforted sooner, because she was terrified at the idea of two women being all alone in Tiberias and only her love for You and the thought of serving You overcame her terror...» and Mary smiles remembering Her sister-in-law's anxiety...
And Jesus smiles saying: «Poor woman! She is the true woman of Israel, the ancient woman, reserved, wholly devoted to her family, the strong woman according to Proverbs. But in the new Religion women will not be strong only at home... Many will exceed Judith and Jael, being gifted with the same heroism as the mother of the Maccabees... And our Mary will be such. But for the time being... she is what she is... Did You see Johanna? »

Mary smiles no longer. She is perhaps afraid of a question about Judas. And She replies quickly: «I did not want to cause more worries to Mary. We remained in the house until half the time between the ninth hour and evening, resting, and then we left... I thought that we shall soon be seeing her on the lake...»

«You did the right thing. You have given Me proof of the feeling of the Roman ladies with regard to Me. If Johanna had intervened, we could have thought that they were yielding to their friend. We will now wait until the Sabbath and if Myrtha does not come we will go to her with Aurea.»

«Son, I would like to stay here...»

«I can see that You are very tired.»

«No, not because of that... I think that Judas may come here... As it is right that someone should always be in Capernaum to wait for him and give him a friendly welcome, it is equally right that someone should be here to receive him with love.»

«Thank You, Mother. You are the only one who understands what can still save him...»

They both sigh thinking of the disciple who causes grief...

Simon and Thomas come back with Aurea who runs towards Mary. Jesus leaves her with His Mother and goes into the house with His apostles.

«You have prayed very much, My daughter, and the good God has listened to you...» begins Mary.

But the girl interrupts Her with a cry of joy: «I am staying with You! » and she throws her arms round the Virgin's neck kissing Her.

Mary returns the kiss and holding Aurea in Her arms all the time She says: «When one does a great favour, it is necessary to reciprocate it, is that right? »

«Oh! Yes! And I will repay You with so much love.»

«Yes, My dear. But above Me there is God. It is He Who did you this great favour, this immeasurable grace of receiving you among the members of His people and making you a disciple of the Master Saviour. I have been but the instrument of the grace, but He, the Most High, granted the grace. What will you, therefore, give the Most High to tell Him that you thank Him? »

«Well... I don't know... Tell me, Mother...»

«Love, that is certain. But love, to be really such, is to be united to sacrifice, because a thing has more value if it costs, has it not? »

«Yes, Mother.»

«Then, I would say that, with the same joy with which you shouted: "I am staying with You!", you should shout: "Yes, o Lord" when I, His poor servant, tell you the will of the Lord concerning you.»

«Tell me, Mother » says Aurea whose countenance becomes grave.

«The will of God entrusts you to two good mothers, Naomi and Myrtha...»

Two big tears shine in the clear eyes of the girl, and stream down her rosy cheeks.

«They are good women. They are dear to Jesus and to Me. Jesus saved the son of one of them, I suckled the baby of the other one. And you have seen that they are good...»

«Yes... but I was hoping to stay with You...»

«My daughter, it is not possible to have everything! You see that I am not always with My Jesus. I have given Him to you all, and I am far, so far from Him, when He goes about Palestine preaching, curing and saving girls...»

«That is true...»

«If I had wanted Him all for Myself, you would not have been saved... If I had wanted Him all for Myself, your souls would not be saved. Consider how great is My sacrifice. I am giving you a Son to be sacrificed for your souls. In any case, you and I will always be united, because women disciples are and will always be united around Christ, forming a large family united by our love for Him.»

«That is true. And then... I will come here again, will I not? And we will meet again? »

«Certainly. As long as God wants...»

«And You will always pray for me...»

«And I will always pray for you.»

«And when we are together, will You still teach me? »

«Yes, My dear...»

«Ah! I wanted to become like You. Will I ever be able? To know, in order to be

good...»

«Naomi is the mother of a head of a synagogue and a disciple of the Lord. Myrtha is the mother of a son who deserved the grace of a miracle and is a good disciple. And the two women are good and wise, besides being so full of love.»

«Can You assure me? »

«Yes, My daughter.»

«Then... bless me and may the will of the Lord be done... as Jesus' prayer says. I have said it so many times... It is only right that now I should do what I said to obtain the grace of not going any more among the Romans...»

«You are a good girl. And God will always help you. Come, let us go and tell Jesus that the youngest woman disciple knows how to do the will of God...» and holding her by the hand Mary goes back into the house with the girl.

438. Another Sabbath at Nazareth.

21st May 1946.

Another Sabbath at Nazareth. That is, another beginning of a Sabbath, because Myrtha and Naomi arrive with young Abel, just when the sunset of Friday is beginning. They dismount from their little donkeys, which Abel takes away, obviously to a stable, probably to that of the two friendly ass-drivers of Nazareth, who have become disciples. The women go in through the workshop, door, which has been left open to ventilate the large room, where up to a short time before, the heat of the coarse fireplace has joined the intense summer heat. Thomas is putting away his tools, Simon is sweeping the sawdust, while Jesus is cleaning pots of glue and paint.

«Peace to You, Master, and to you, disciples » greet the two women, bowing low as soon as they enter and then, after walking across the workshop, prostrating themselves at Jesus' feet.

«Peace to you. You are very faithful, to come in this heat! »

«Oh! nothing! One feels so well here, that one forgets everything. Where is Your Mother? »

«She is in there, finishing a dress for Aurea. You may go in.»

The two women walk away with their knapsacks and one can hear their clear voices, which are rather deep, blend with the shrill rather strident voice of Aurea and with the silvery voice of Mary.

«They will be happy now! » says Thomas.

«Yes. They are good women » replies Jesus.

«Master, Myrtha has not only kept the son she had, but she got another child. And in little more than one year...» says the Zealot.

«Yes! In little more than one year! It is already over a year since Mary of Lazarus was converted. How time flies! It seems yesterday... How many things last year! The lovely retreat before the election! Then John of Endor! Then Marjiam! Then Daniel of Nain, then Mary of Lazarus and then Syntyche... But where is Syntyche? I often think about her and I cannot understand why...»

Thomas stops speaking to himself, because Jesus and Simon do not reply to him, on the contrary they go out into the kitchen garden to wash themselves and then join the women disciples.

And we begin to see again... Abel of Bethlehem in Galilee comes back and finds Thomas who is still pensive, in front of the place where he generally works, moving, lost in thought, his tiny masterpieces in gold-work.

«Have you found work? » asks the disciple bending over the tiny objects.

«Oh! I have made all the women in Nazareth happy. I would never have thought that there were so many buckles, bracelets, necklaces and lilies to be repaired. I had to ask Matthew to bring me some metal from Tiberias. I have more customers... ha! ha! (he laughs happily) than my father has. It is true that I do not ask for money...»

«You lose. everything? »

«No. I charge only the value of the metal. My work is a present.»

«You are generous.»

«No. I am wise. I am not idle. I set an example of industriousness and detachment from money and... I preach... Be quiet! I think that I have preached

more by doing so, without telling a parable, without saying a word in the synagogue, than I would have done if I had spoken incessantly. And then... I do a bit of training. I have promised myself to propagate our faith with my work when I will have to go and preach Jesus among the infidels. And I am training myself.»

«You are wise both as a goldsmith and as an apostle.»

«I strive to be so for Jesus' sake. So you have acquired a sister. Treat her well, you know? She is like a little dove in its nest. I am telling you, because in my trade I am accustomed to dealing with women. She is a candid dove who was scared to death by a hawk, and who is looking for motherly and brotherly wings to defend her. If your mother had not wanted her, I would have asked to have her for my twin sister. One child more, one less! My sister is so good, you know?»

«Also my mother. She lost a little daughter when she remained a widow. Perhaps her milk had gone bad, grieved as she was over the death of her husband... I can hardly remember my little sister... and perhaps I would not remember her at all if my mother did not mourn her death so often, and if every poor girl in Bethlehem were not entitled to some food and clothing in our house, in memory of the dead baby... But as I was brought up in the company of my mother only, I have ended up by loving little girls very much myself... I realise that this one is not a little girl... but I will consider her such, because of her heart, if she is as my mother, Naomi and you say...»

«You can be sure. Let us go into the other room.»

In the other room, that is, in the dining room, are the women, Jesus and the Zealot. And Myrtha, who came full of hope, is winning over Aurea by fitting for her a linen dress which she made for the girl.

«It fits you really well » she says taking it off her and caressing her while she adjusts her dress which had become crumpled when putting on the new one. «It really fits well. And everything will be all right. You will see, my dear daughter... Oh! here is my Abel. Come here, son. Here is Aurea. She will be a member of our family now, you know? »

«I know, mother, and I am happy with you.» He looks at the girl... he studies her... his dark eyes stare at and get lost in her large pale blue ones. He is satisfied with his examination. He smiles at her. He says to her: «We will love each other in the Lord Who saved us and we will love Him and have Him loved. And I will be a brother to you in spirit and in affection. I promise it in the presence of the Master and of my mother » and with a beautiful limpid smile of a pure youth, well advanced in high spirituality, he holds out his strong tanned hand to her.

Aurea hesitates and then, blushing, she puts her left hand into the right hand offered to her and says: «We will do that. In the Lord.»

The adults smile...

«One can enter here without knocking at the doors...»

«Here is Simon of Jonah! This time he could not resist temptation...» says Thomas laughing, while he runs out.

«Yes! I did not resist... Peace to You, Master! » He kisses Jesus and is kissed by Him. «Who can resist? » He sees Mary and bows greetings, he then resumes: «But, to satisfy our consciences, we came by Tiberias and we looked for Judas. Because... we are all here, eh?! The others are coming. Including Marjiam... So I was saying that we came by Tiberias. H'm! Yes! to look for Judas in the event that... he should think of coming to Capernaum, at least on the fourth. Sabbath... It would not be nice if we were all away... And we found him... yes! Nay, Isaac found him, as he had gone to see Jonathan... Because Isaac ended up by coming to Capernaum waiting for You with I don't know how many more, who have remained there to become more learned under the good guidance of Hermas and Stephen, of your son, Naomi, and of John, the priest... But Isaac came with us, because he, too, will die if he does not see You... Poor Isaac! he was not made welcome by Judas. But Isaac, during his long sickness, must have destroyed all feelings of impatience, grudge and anger... He never reacts! Even if they box his ears, he smiles... What a peaceful man! Well. He said to us: "I saw Judas. He is not coming. Do not insist". I understood. I asked him: "Did he answer you insolently? Tell me. I am the chief and I must know...". "Oh! no" he replied. "He did not answer insolently, but his insolence did. He is to be pitied..." Well, let us pity him... Well, we are here. And happy to... Here are the others...»

And with the others there are Judas and James of Alphaeus with their mother and the disciples of Nazareth: Aser, Ishmael and Simon of Alphaeus, and, a rarity, also Joseph of Alphaeus.

They unburden themselves of their bags. Nathanael has brought some apples and Philip a basketful of grapes as golden as Aurea's hair. Peter and Zebedee's sons some pickled fish. Matthew, who has no home cared for by women and thus has nothing good, has brought a jar full of earth with inside it a slender trunk, which judging by its foliage, I would say is a lemon or orange-tree or another citrus-tree and he explains: «It's a rarity... Only who goes to Cyrene can get them, and I know a man who was at Cyrene, one of the revenue authorities like me once. He has now retired at Ippo. I went to him to get the plant because it must be planted out at the new moon. The fruit is beautiful and good, its flower is sweet-smelling and looks like a waxen star, a star like Your name... Here » and he offers the plant to Mary.

«But what a trouble for you, Matthew, all this weight! I am grateful to you. My garden is becoming more and more beautiful, thanks to you all. Porphirea's camphor, Johanna's roses, you rare plant, Matthew, the other flower plants brought by Judas of Kerioth... How many beautiful things, how kind you all are to Jesus' Mother! »

All the apostles are moved; they only cast sidelong glances at each other when Mary mentions Judas' name.

«Yes. They love You. But we love You, too » says gravely and stiffly Joseph of Alphaeus.

«Of course! You are the dear children of My dear relative Alphaeus and of Mary, who is so good. And You love Me. It is natural. We are relatives... These instead are not our blood, and yet they are like sons to Me, like brothers to Jesus, as they love Him so much and follow Him...»

Joseph takes the hint immediately, he clears his throat, searching for words... He finds them... He says: «Of course! But if I am not yet with them, it is because I think also of the consequences for Him, for You... and... and... Well! I love You, too, You especially, poor woman, as You are left all by Yourself too long... And I have come to tell Jesus that I am glad that He has remembered also the needs of His Mother and has done what was necessary here...» and, satisfied with being the «head » of the kindred and thus in a position to praise and admonish, he deigns to commend Jesus for all the work of carpentry, painting and other jobs done in that month: «That is how it should be done! One can now see that this woman has a son! And I am happy to be able to say that I have found again my wise Jesus of Joseph. Bravo! »

And the wise Jesus of Joseph, the most wise Divine Word humiliated in our flesh, meek and humble, accepts the praises mixed with... the authoritative advice of His cousin Joseph, smiling so kindly, that it helps to check any untimely reaction of the apostles in His favour.

And Joseph, having set off, seeing that they listen to him, does not stop, but he continues: «I do hope that from now on Nazareth will no longer see a poor woman forlorn, while Her Son unwisely leaves the trodden path to beat paths which are uncertain, both with regard to their ends and their consequences. I will speak to my friends, to the head of the synagogue... We will forgive You... Oh! Nazareth will be happy to open out her arms to You, as to a son who has come back... as an example of virtue to all the citizens. Tomorrow I will take You to the synagogue myself and...»

Jesus raises His hand imposing silence and calmly but very resolutely, He says: «I will certainly come to the synagogue, as a believer, exactly as I went there on the other Sabbaths. But it is not necessary for you to plead in My favour. Because one hour after sunset I will set out again to evangelize, as it is My duty to obey the Most High.»

A bad let-down for Joseph!... A very bad one!... All his good naturedness is shattered and his hostile intolerance comes to light again: «All right! But do not look for me in the hour of need. I have done my duty and Your certain misfortunes will not fall on me. Goodbye. I am one too many here because I cannot understand you, and you cannot understand me. I am going away, with no grudge, but very sad... May the Lord protect You as He protects all those who... are simple-minded, incomplete... Goodbye, Mary! Take heart, poor Mother! »

«Goodbye, Joseph. But I must take heart for you, not for Him. Because you are the one who is out of the path of God and you grieve Me » says Mary calmly but

sure of Herself.

«You are a fool, that's what you are! And if you were not the head of the family I would give you a thrashing, as you are a creature of my blood but not of my spirit...» shouts Mary of Alphaeus. And she would have said more, but Mary implores her: «Be quiet! For My sake.»

«I'll be quiet. Yes. But... tell me if I have to see a rascal like him among my sons!...»

The rascal in the meantime has gone away, while good Mary of Alphaeus unburdens her soul with regard to that stubborn son. And she ends giving vent to her feelings by bursting into tears, and sobbing she expresses her greatest pain: «And I will not have him with me in Heaven, I will not have him! I will see him in torments! Oh! Jesus! It's for You to work the miracle! »

«Yes, Mary! Do not weep! His hour will come, too. The eleventh perhaps. But it will come. I can assure you. Do not weep...» says Jesus comforting her... And when her weeping is over He says to the apostles and disciples: «Let us go into the olive grove while the women prepare their things. We will speak among ourselves.»

439. The Departure from Nazareth and the Journey towards Bethlehem in Galilee.

22nd May 1946.

It is the evening of the true Sabbath and life begins again after the Sabbatical rest. Here, in the little house in Nazareth, it begins, after the rest, with the preparations for departure. Provisions are packed, clothes are crammed in knapsacks, the straps of which are fastened tightly, sandals are examined to ensure that the leather laces and buckles are in good condition, and the little donkeys are watered and fed near the hedge of the kitchen garden... and greetings and tears shed among smiles and blessings, and promises to meet again soon... And the unexpected offer of Thomas to Mary: a buckle, we could call it a brooch, to keep a dress closed at the neck. It is made of three thin, airy, perfect stems of lily of the valley, enclosed in two leaves, so like real ones, as the metal has been wrought by a master-hand.

«I know, Mary, that You will never wear it, but please accept it just the same. I have been anxious to make it since the day when my Lord spoke of You comparing You with the lilies of the valley... I have done nothing for Your house... but I made this for You, so that the praise of Your Son may be expressed in a symbol for You Who deserve it more than any other woman. And if I have not been able to give the stem the softness of a living one and the sweet scent of the flower, may my sincere respectful love for You soften it like a caress and put on it the scent of my devotion for You, Mother of my Lord.»

«Oh! Thomas! It is true. I never wear jewels, as they seem vain things to Me. But this one is not so. This is love of My Jesus and of His apostle, and it is dear to Me. I will look at it every day and think of good Thomas who loves his Master so much, that he remembers not only His Doctrine, but also His most humble words about the most humble thing and the most humble insignificant people. Thank you, Thomas. Not for its value, but for your love, thanks! » Everybody admires the perfect work and Thomas, beaming with joy, pulls out a smaller piece of work: three tiny jasmine stars with a tiny leaf bound in a thin circle, and gives it to Aurea. «Because you did not behave coquettishly to have it, because you were here when the jasmine bloomed, and so that these little stars may remind you of our Star. But mind! With your virtues you must perfume flowers and be a flower yourself, a candid, beautiful pure flower scenting towards Heaven. If you do not do that, I will take my brooch back. Come on, do not weep... everything passes... and we will soon come back to Mary's or She will come to us... and...» But Thomas, seeing that Aurea is shedding more and more tears, feels that it is better not to continue and he goes out, mortified, saying to Peter: «If I had known that... it was going to make her weep more, I would not have given it to her... I made that brooch just to comfort her in this hour... I guessed wrongly... »

And Peter, in the confusion of the moment, does not control himself and says: «It is always like that when parting... You should have seen Syntyche...» and he

realises that he has spoken, he wants to correct himself, he becomes purple... but... it is done...

Thomas understands, and kindly throws his arm round Peter's neck saying: «Don't be distressed, Peter. I know how to be quiet. And I understand why you have not said anything... Because of Judas of Simon. On the God of our fathers I swear to you that what I have learned involuntarily is forgotten. Do not be upset, Simon!...»

«It's because the Master did not want...»

«He certainly had good reasons for that. I don't take offence.»

«I know. But what will He say? »

«Nothing, because He will not know. You can trust me.»

«Ah! No! I will not resort to subterfuges with the Master. I made a mistake. I deserve to be reproached. And at once. I will not have peace unless I confess my error to Him. Thomas, be good. Go and call Him... I am going into the workshop. Go, and come back with Him. I am too upset to go and the others would notice me.»

Thomas looks at him with compassion full of admiration and goes back into the house to call Jesus: «Master, please come here for a moment. I have something to tell You.»

Jesus, Who was saying goodbye to Mary of Alphaeus, follows him at once. «What do you want? » He asks while walking beside him.

«I, nothing. Simon wants to speak to You. There he is...»

«Simon! What is the matter, why are you so upset? »

Peter throws himself at Jesus' feet moaning: «I have sinned! Absolve me! »

«Sinned? How? You were there with us, happy and peaceful ...»

«Ah! Master, I disobeyed You. I told Thomas about Syntyche... I was upset because of the tears and he was more upset than I was; he thought that he had increased them... to comfort him I said: "It is always like that when parting... If you had seen Syntyche..." and he understood!...» Peter raises his troubled face, he looks mortified and desolate.

«Praised be God, My Simon! I thought you had done something much graver than that. And your sincerity cancels even that. You spoke without malice, you spoke to one of your companions. Thomas is good and will not divulge the news...»

«He swore it to me, in fact... But see? Now I am afraid that I am too foolish and that I cannot keep a secret.»

«You have kept it so far.»

«Yes, but just consider! Never one word to Philip and Nathanael! And now...»

«Come on, stand up! Man is always imperfect. But when he is so without malice, he commits no sin. Be careful, but do not distress yourself any more. Your Jesus can but kiss you. Thomas, come here.» Thomas approaches Him. «You have certainly understood the reasons for being silent.»

«Yes, Master. And I swore to respect them as far as I am concerned and capable. I have already told Simon...»

«The foolish Simon » says Peter with a sigh.

«No, my friend. You have edified me through your perfect humility and sincerity. You have taught me a great lesson, which I will never forget. For prudential reasons I shall not be able to make it known, and that grieves me, because only a few among us are or would be as just as you have been... But they are calling us! Let us go. »

Many in fact are already in the street and the three women - Naomi, Myrtha and Aurea - have already mounted their little donkeys. Mary and Her sister-in-law are near Aurea, and they kiss her again, and when they see Jesus approaching, they kiss the two women disciples and they greet Jesus last and are blessed by Him, before He sets out...

And the Blessed Virgin and Mary of Clopas go back into the house... where, in remembrance of what was there a short while before, there are chairs out of place, kitchenware lying about... the disorder which takes place at every departure.

Mary, lost in thought, caresses the little loom on which She taught Aurea to work... Her eyes are shining with tears She has restrained.

«You are suffering, Mary! » says Mary of Clopas who is weeping without any effort to hold back her tears. «You had grown fond of her!... They come here... then they go away... and we suffer...»

«It is our life of women disciples. You heard what Jesus said today: "That is

what you will do in future; you will be hospitable, supernaturally hospitable, seeing in every creature a brotherly soul, considering yourselves pilgrims and welcoming your guests as pilgrims. You will give them help, comfort, advice, and then you will let your brothers go to their destiny, without holding them back with jealous love, sure as you are that you will meet them after your death. Persecutions will come and many will leave you to go towards martyrdom. Do not be cowardly and do not advise cowardice to anybody. Remain in your empty house praying to support the courage of martyrs, unperturbed to fortify the weaker ones, strong in order to be ready to imitate heroes. Get accustomed to separations, to heroism, to the apostolate of brotherly charity, as from now...". And we do so. Suffering... certainly! We are creatures made of flesh... But the spirit rejoices with a supernatural happiness which is to do the will of the Lord and cooperate to His glory. On the other hand... I am the Mother of everybody... and I must not be the Mother of one only. I am not even the Mother of Jesus exclusively... You see how I let Him go away without holding Him back... I would like to be with Him, that is true. But He deems that I must stay here until He will say: "Come". And I am staying. His days of rest here? My joys of a mother. My peregrinations with Him? My joys of a disciple. My solitude here? My joys of a believer who does the will of Her Lord.»

«That Lord, Mary, is Your Son...»

«Yes. But He is still My Lord ... Are you staying with Me, Mary? »

«Yes, if You will allow me... My house is so sad during the first hours, when my sons go away!... Tomorrow it will be different... And this time, I would weep even more...»

«Why, Mary? »

«Because I have been weeping my heart out since yesterday... I am like a cistern... A cistern in the rainy season.»

«But why, My dear? »

«Because of Joseph... yesterday... Oh! I don't know whether I should go and reprimand him severely, because after all he is my son, because I carried him in my womb and I suckled him at my breast and no first-born son is above his mother, ... or whether I should not speak any more to that rascal who was born of me and offends my Jesus and You and...»

«You will do nothing of the kind. You will always be his "mother". The mother who pities her stubborn, sick, perverted son and soothes him with her kindness, and leads him to God with prayers and patience... Cheer up, do not weep!... Come with Me. We will pray for him in My room, and for those who are travelling, for the girl, that she may not suffer too much and she may grow in holiness... Come, Mary » and She takes her away...

The pilgrims in the meantime are going their way south-westwards. The women are in front, on their donkeys, which, being well fed and rested, are trotting lively, compelling Marjiam and Abel, who for prudential motives are at either side of Aurea, as she is in the saddle for the first time, to proceed almost at a running pace. But although it is tiring, it helps to take the girl's mind off the sorrowful separation from Mary. Now and again, to let the two young men take breath, Myrtha reins in her donkey and makes a halt. And she resumes going only when the apostolic group joins them. And during such pauses, Aurea becomes sad again, as she is not distracted by the adventures of horseback riding... Marjiam, who is experienced in the misfortunes of a little orphan taken in, out of charity, by an adoptive mother after he had known Mary, comforts her telling her how one becomes attached to the adoptive mother «exactly as if she were one's own mother », and mentions his own impressions and relates how happy are Mary and Matthias with Johanna, and Anastasica with Eliza.

Aurea listens to the stories, and when Marjiam concludes by saying: «Believe me, the women disciples are all good, and Jesus knows to whom we poor wretches should be entrusted », and Abel corroborates saying: «And you must trust my mother who is so happy to have you and has prayed so much during these days to have you from God », Aurea replies: «I believe it. And I love her... But Mary is Mary... and you must bear with me...»

«Yes. But we are sorry to see you sad...»

«Oh! but I am not so sad as I was in the house of the Roman or during the first hours after my liberation... I am only... lost. For years I have never received a caress... Only Mary caressed me after I had been subjected to masters for many

years...»

«My darling! But I am here to caress you! I will be another Mary for you. Come here, near me... If you were a little girl, I would take you in the saddle with me, as I used to do with my Abel when he was a little boy... But you are already a woman...» says Myrtha approaching her and taking her by the hand. «You are my little woman and I will teach you many things, and when Abel goes away evangelizing, you and I will receive pilgrims as the Lord says, and we will do much good in His Name. You are young and you will help me...»

«But look at that light over there, beyond that hill! » exclaims James of Zebedee, who has come up to the women.

«Is it a wood on fire? »

«Or a village? »

«Let us run up there and see...»

No one is tired any longer, because curiosity overwhelms all sensations. Jesus follows them benevolently, leaving the road to take a path which climbs up a hillock. They soon reach the top...

But it is neither a wood nor a village which is on fire, but a large hollow moor all covered with heather, lying between two hills. The heather, parched by the summer heat, has caught fire perhaps because of a spark which escaped the woodmen working higher up cutting trees, and is now burning: a carpet of low but bright flames which move around seeking new heather to burn, after having consumed where they had been burning previously. The woodcutters try to fight the fire by striking the flames. But in vain. They are too few and if they work on one side, the fire spreads on another.

«If it reaches the wood, it will be a disaster. There are resin trees there » says Philip.

Jesus, with folded arms, standing on the extreme edge of the hillock, looks and smiles... thinking...

The contrast between the white moonlight to the east and the red glow of the flames to the west, is strong and the backs of the onlookers are white in the moon-beams, whereas their faces are red in the reverberation of the flames. And the flames spread unceasingly, like water which rises, overflows and floods... The fire is now only a few metres from the wood and it is already lighting up the piles of wood placed at its borders, while the light, which is becoming brighter and brighter, shows the little houses of a village on the top of the hill where the fire is climbing.

«Poor people! They will lose everything! » say many. And they look at Jesus, Who is smiling, but does not speak...

Then... He unfolds His arms and cries: «Stop! Die down! I want it.»

And suddenly, as if a huge bank of earth had fallen to suffocate the flames, the fire goes out prodigiously, the lively nimble dance of the flames changes into red flameless embers, then the red becomes violet, grey-red... an occasional flash quivers among the ashes... and then only the silvery moonlight shines on the forests.

In the clear light the woodcutters are seen while they gather gesticulating, looking around, above... for the angel of the miracle...

«Let us go down. I will work on those souls through the unforeseen opportunity given to Me and we will stop in the village instead of resting in the town. We will leave at dawn. They will certainly have room for the women. The wood is quite enough for us » says Jesus and He goes down quickly followed by the others.

«But why were You laughing? You looked very happy! » asks Peter.

«You will find out from My words.»

They are already where the fallow ground is covered with ashes still warm and creaking under their sandals. They go across it. When they are in the middle, where the moon shines fully, they are seen by the woodcutters.

«Oh! I told you! He is the only one who could do that! Let us run and venerate Him » shouts a woodman and he does so by throwing himself on the ashes at Jesus' feet.

«What makes you think that I could do it? »

«Because only the Messiah can do that.»

«And how do you know that I am the Messiah? Do you know Me, perhaps? »

«No. But only the Good One Who loves the poor can have had pity, and only the Holy One of God can have given an order to the fire and be obeyed. Blessed be

the Most High Who sent us His Messiah! And blessed be the Messiah Who came in time to save our homes! »

«You ought to be more anxious to save your souls.»

«We save them by believing in You and endeavouring to do what You teach. But You realise, Lord, that the distress of being deprived of everything can weaken our already weak souls... and lead us to doubt Providence.»

«Who informed you of Me? »

«Some of Your disciples... Here are our families... We had them woken because we were afraid that the whole hill would catch fire... Come here... Then we sent another man to inform them that a miracle had been worked and to come and see. Here they are, Lord. Mine. Jacob's, this one is Jonathan's, this one Mark's, this is the family of my brother Tobias, this one is of my brother-in-law Melkia, this is Philip's and this is Eleazar's. The others are the families of the shepherds who are now at the pastures up in the high mountains...»

It is a group of about two hundred and fifty people at most, including the little ones, sucking infants or babies just weaned, whimpering half asleep, or sleeping unaware of the danger in which they had been.

«Peace to you all. The angel of God has saved you. Let us praise the Lord together.»

«You saved us! You are always present where faithful people believe in You!» say many women... And the men nod solemnly.

«Yes. Providence is present where there is faith in Me. But one must act with constant circumspection both in spiritual matters and in material ones. What set fire to the moor? Probably a spark from one of your fires or a little branch which one of the boys wanted to light on the fire to play with it, waving it and throwing it down the slope with the thoughtlessness of his age. It is in fact pleasant to see an arrow of fire furrow the air at dusk. But you can see what an imprudent act may cause! It can cause serious damage. A spark or a little branch which fell on the dry heather was enough to set a valley on fire, and if the Eternal Father had not sent Me, the whole wood would have become a bonfire, which in the grip of fire would have consumed your goods and your lives.

The same applies to matters of the spirit. You must pay continual prudent attention to ensure that no arrow of fire or spark may cling to your faith and destroy it, after smouldering unnoticed in your hearts, by means of arson wanted by those who hate Me and committed to deprive Me of believers. Since the fire was stopped here in time, from malefic it became beneficent, destroying the useless heath which you allowed to flourish in the valley, and preparing, by such destruction and the fertilizing ashes, a ground which you can exploit with useful cultivations, if you are willing to do so. But with hearts it is quite a different matter! When all the Good has been destroyed, nothing but bramble for the fodder of demons will grow in them. Remember that and be vigilant against My enemies' insinuations, which will be thrown into your hearts like infernal sparks. Be ready to fight the fire then. And what is that fight? A stronger and stronger Faith, a firm will to belong to God. It means to belong to a holy Fire. Because fire does not consume fire. Now, if you are fire of love for the true God, the fire of hatred against God will not be able to harm you. The Fire of love defeats every other fire. My Doctrine is love and those who accept it enter the Fire of Charity and cannot be tortured by the fire of the Demon.

From the top of that hill, while I was watching the heather burning and I heard the words of your souls to the Lord their God, more than I noticed your actions aiming at putting out the flames, I was smiling. And one of My apostles asked Me: "Why are You smiling?". I promised him: "I will tell you when speaking to those who have been saved". And I am doing that now. I was smiling thinking that as the flames spread among the heather of the valley, in vain restrained by your efforts, so My Doctrine will spread throughout the world, persecuted in vain by those who reject Light. And it will be light. It will be purification. It will be beneficent. How many little snakes have perished among these ashes, and other harmful insects with them! You were afraid to come to the valley, because there were too many asps in it. Well, not even one has survived. Likewise the world will be freed of many heresies, of many sins, of many sorrows, when it becomes acquainted with Me and is cleansed by the fire of My Doctrine. Cleansed and freed of harmful vegetation, it will be ready for the seed, and will become rich in holy fruits. That is why I was smiling... In the fire which was advancing, I saw a symbol of the spreading of My Doctrine in the world. Then the love for our

neighbour, which is never to be separated from that for the Lord, made Me consider your necessities. And I lowered My thoughts from the contemplation of the interests of God to that of the interests of My brothers, and I stopped the fire, so that while rejoicing, you might praise the Lord. You can thus see that My thought rose to God, it descended from Him made more powerful, because union with God always increases our powers, and rose, once again, to God with yours. Thus, through charity, I did at the same time promote the interests of the Father and of My brothers. Do likewise in your future lives. And now I ask you to give shelter to these women for the night. The moon is setting and the fire has delayed our journey. We cannot therefore proceed to the next town.»

«Come! Come all of you! There is room for everybody. We might have been homeless! Our homes are yours. Our houses are poor, but clean. Come and they will be blessed » they all shout.

And they slowly climb the rather steep slope as far as the little village, which miraculously escaped destruction, then each pilgrim disappears with his host...

440. Judas of Kerioth with the Blessed Virgin at Nazareth.
23rd May 1946.

Dawn is breaking and the eastern sky is just beginning to redden, when Judas of Kerioth knocks at the door of the little house in Nazareth. On the road there are only peasants, or rather: small landowners of Nazareth, who are going to their vineyards or olive-groves with their working tools and are greatly surprised at seeing the man knock at Mary's door so early in the morning. They speak in low voices to one another.

«He is a disciple » says one replying to the remarks of another. «He is certainly looking for Jesus of Joseph.»

«It's no use. He went away yesterday evening. I saw Him myself. I will tell him...» says another man.

«Never mind! It's Judas of Kerioth. I don't like him. Perhaps we are guilty of much wrong doing with regard to Jesus and we are making a mistake. But he, that man over there, did much harm to us here last year... We might have been converted. But he...»

«What? How do you know? »

«I was present one evening in the house of the head of the synagogue and I foolishly believed everything at once... Now... that's enough! I think I have sinned and...»

«Perhaps he also realised that he had sinned and...»

They move away and I can hear nothing else.

Judas knocks once again at the little door, to which he has been clinging, his face pressed against the wood, as if he wished to avoid being seen and recognised. But the little door remains closed. Judas makes a gesture of disappointment and he goes away along a path skirting the kitchen garden and he goes to the rear of the house. He casts a glance over the hedge of the quiet garden. Only the doves animate it.

Judas considers what to do. He talks to himself: «Has She perhaps gone away, too? And yet... I would have seen Her. And then! No. I heard Her voice yesterday evening... Perhaps She has gone to sleep at Her sister-in-law's... Ugh! This is as annoying as a bee on one's face, because She will come back with her, and I want to speak to Her alone, without that old woman as a witness. She is gossipy and would raise objections. And I don't want any. And she is as sly as every old wife of the people. She would not -accept my excuses and she would point that out to that stupid dove of her sister-in-law... I know I can make a fool of Her... in every way. She is as dull as ditch-water... And I must put right what happened at Tiberias. Because if She speaks... I wonder whether She has mentioned it or has kept quiet? If She has spoken, it is more difficult to put matters right... But She will not have spoken... She confuses virtue with foolishness. Like Mother like Son... And the others are busy while they are fast

asleep. In any case they are right. Why leave them aside if they seem to be wanting... But what do they want after all?... My notions are foggy... I must stop drinking and... Of course! But money is a temptation, and I am like a colt which has been kept inside too long. Two years, I say! Even longer! Two years of all kinds of abstinence... But in the meantime... What did Helkai say the day before yesterday? Eh! He is not a bad teacher! Certainly! Everything is legal providing we succeed in putting Jesus on the throne. But if He does not want that? But He must certainly consider that if we do not triumph, we will all end up like the followers of Theudas or of Judas the Galilean... Perhaps I ought to part company with them because... well, I do not know whether what they want is right. I don't trust them very much... They have changed too much recently... I would not like to... How dreadful! I to be the means to damage Jesus? No. I will part company. But it is sad to have dreamt of a kingdom and have to go back to what? To nothing... But better nothing than... He always says: "He who will commit the great sin". Hey!? It won't be me, eh! Me? Me? I will sooner drown myself in the lake... I'll go away. It is better for me to go away. I will go to my mother, I will get her to give me some money, because I certainly cannot ask the members of the Sanhedrin to give me the money to go away. They help me because they hope that I will help them to get over their state of uncertainty. Once Jesus is acknowledged as king, we will be settled. The crowds will side with us... Herod... who will bother about him? Neither the Romans nor the people. They all hate him! And... and... But Jesus is quite capable of renouncing the throne as soon as He is proclaimed king. Oh! Well! When Eleazar ben Annas assures me that his father is ready to crown Him king!... Afterwards He cannot remove His sacred character. After all... I am doing what the unfaithful steward of His parable did... I am having resort to my friends on my behalf, that is true, but also on His. So I am making unfair means serve as... Well, no! I must try once again to persuade Him. I am not convinced that I am doing the right thing by resorting to this subterfuge... and... Oh! If I could only convince Him! Because it would be so beautiful! Yes... very! That is the best solution: to tell the Master everything frankly. To implore Him... Providing Mary has not told Him about Tiberias... What did I say I should tell Mary?... Ah! yes! The refusal of the Roman ladies. Cursed be that woman! If I had not gone to her, I would not have met Mary that evening! But who could have imagined that Mary was in Tiberias? And yet I never went out on the day before the Sabbath, on the Sabbath or the day after it, as I did not want to see any of the apostles... What a fool! I could have gone to Hippos, to Gerghesa to find a woman! No! I had to go just there! To Tiberias through which the people of Capernaum must pass to come here... And all that because of the Roman ladies... I was hoping... No, that is what I must say to excuse myself, but it is not true. There is no sense in saying that to myself, as I know why I went: to meet some of the powerful people in Israel and to have a good time, since I had plenty of money... But... how quickly money goes. I will soon have none left... Ha! Ha! I will invent some story for Helkai and his partners and they will give me some more...»

«O Judas! Have you gone mad? I have been watching you for some time from the top of this olive-tree. You are gesticulating, speaking by yourself... Has the sun of the month of Tammuz harmed you? » shouts Alphaeus of Sarah leaning out of the forked branches of a huge olive-tree, about thirty metres away from the spot where Judas is standing.

Judas starts, looks round, sees him and moans: «May death rake you! Cursed village of spies! » But smiling affably he shouts: «No. But I am worried because Mary is not opening... Is She perhaps not well? I have knocked several times!...»

«Mary? You can knock as long as you like! She is in the house of a poor old woman who is dying. They sent for Her at the third watch...»

«But I must speak to Her.»

«Wait. I will come down and I will go and tell Her. But do you really need Her? »

«Eh! I should say so! I have been here since sunrise.»

Alphaeus climbs down the tree solicitously and runs away.

«He has seen me, too! And he will certainly come back with that other woman! Everything is going awry? » and he hurls a string of insults at Nazareth, the Nazarenes, Mary of Alphaeus, and even at the Blessed Virgin's charity for the

dying woman and at the dying woman herself...

He has not yet finished when the door, which from the dining-room leads into the kitchen garden, is opened and Mary appears looking very pale and sad.

«Judas! », «Mary! » they say simultaneously.

«I will now open the door to you. Alphaeus said to Me only: "Go home. There is someone wanting You" and I ran here, also because the old woman no longer needs Me. She has finished suffering because of a bad son...»

Judas, while Mary is speaking, runs along the path and goes back to the front of the house... Mary opens the door.

«Peace to you, Judas of Kerioth. Come in.»

«Peace to You, Mary.»

Judas is somewhat hesitant. Mary is kind, but serious.

«I knocked so much, at dawn.»

«Yesterday evening a son broke his mother's heart... And they came looking for Jesus. But Jesus is not here. I am saying that to you, too: Jesus is not here. You came late.»

«I know that He is not here.»

«How do you know? You have just arrived...»

«Mother, I will be frank with You, since You are good: I have been here since yesterday...»

«And why did you not come? Your companions came here every Sabbath, except one...»

«Eh! I know! I went to Capernaum but I did not find them.»

«Do not lie, Judas. You never went to Capernaum. Bartholomew remained there all the time and he never saw you. Bartholomew came here only yesterday. But you were not here yesterday... So... Why are you telling lies, Judas? Do you not know that a lie is the first step towards theft and homicide?... Poor Esther died, killed by grief because of the behaviour of her son. And Samuel, her son, became the shame of Nazareth through little lies, which became bigger and bigger... And from them he passed on to all the rest. Do you, an apostle of the Lord, wish to imitate him? Do you want your mother to die broken-hearted? »

She reproaches him slowly, in a low voice. But Her words bear heavily on him.

Judas does not know what to reply. He sits down abruptly, his head in his hands.

Mary watches him. She then says: «Well? Why did you want to see Me? While assisting poor Esther I prayed for your mother... and for you... Because I feel sorry for both of you, and for two different reasons.»

«Then, if you pity me, forgive me.»

«I have never had ill-feelings.»

«What?... Not even because... of that morning at Tiberias?... You know? I was in that state because the evening before the Roman ladies had maltreated me as madman and... as the traitor of the Master. Yes, I admit it. I did the wrong thing in speaking to Claudia. I was mistaken with regard to her. But I do it for a good purpose. I grieved the Master. He has not mentioned it to me, but I am aware that He knows that I spoke. It was certainly Johanna who told Him. Johanna has never liked me and the Roman ladies grieved me... To forget, I drank...»

Mary's expression of compassion is unintentionally ironic, and She says: «Jesus, then, should get drunk every night, considering the grief He supposedly enjoys every day...»

«Did You tell Him? »

«I do not increase the bitterness of the chalice of My Son with the news of fresh defections, falls, sins, snares... I have been and will be silent.»

Judas falls on his knees trying to kiss Mary's hand, but She withdraws, without being rude, but quite decided not to be touched or kissed.

«Thank You, Mother! You are saving me. That is why I came here... and that You might make it easier for me to approach the Master without being reproached or ashamed.»

«To avoid that, all you had to do was to go to Capernaum and then come here with the others. It was very simple.»

«That is true... But the others are not kind, and they had me spied upon in order to reproach and accuse me.»

«Do not give offence to your brothers, Judas. Stop committing sins! You have been spying here, in Nazareth, the fatherland of the Christ, you...»

Judas interrupts Her: «When? Last year? They have distorted my words! But believe me, I...»

«I do not know what you did or said last year. I am referring to yesterday. You have been here since yesterday. You know that Jesus went away. So you have been investigating. But not in the friendly houses of Aser, Ishmael, Alphaeus, or of the brother of Judas and James, or of Mary of Alphaeus, or of any of the few people here who love Jesus. Because if you had done so, they would have come and told Me. Esther's house became crowded with women at dawn, when she died, but none of them had heard of you. They are the best among the women of Nazareth, those who love Me and love Jesus, and they strive to practise His Doctrine notwithstanding the hostility of their husbands, fathers and children. So you made inquiries among those who are enemies of My Jesus. What do you call that? I do not want to know. I tell you this only. Many swords will be plunged into My heart, which will be pierced over and over again, mercilessly, by the men who grieve My Jesus and hate Him. And one of the swords will be yours, and it will never be withdrawn. Because the memory of you, Judas, who do not want to be saved, who are ruining yourself, who are frightening Me, not because I am afraid for Myself, but for your soul, the memory of you will never be forgotten by My heart. Just Simeon pierced my soul with one sword, while I was carrying My Baby, My holy little Lamb, against My heart... You... you are the other sword. The point of your sword is already torturing My heart. But you are not yet satisfied with distressing a poor woman thus... and you are waiting to thrust your sword, like an executioner, right through the heart which has given you nothing but love... But it is foolish of Me to expect pity from you, who have none for your own mother!... On the contrary, now, I tell you! With one blow you will transfix Me and her, o wretched son, whom the prayers of two mothers cannot save!...»
Mary weeps while speaking, but her tears do not fall on Judas' dark-haired head, because he has remained where he fell on his knees, apart from Mary... The holy tears are absorbed by the brick floor. And the scene reminds me of Aglae, on whom, instead, Mary's tears fell, because she was pressing against Mary in sincere desire of redemption.

«Can you not find one word, Judas? Can you not find within yourself the strength for a good purpose? Oh! Judas! Judas! Tell Me: are you satisfied with your way of living? Examine yourself, Judas. First of all, be humble and sincere with yourself, and then with God, so that you may go to Him, after removing your burden of stones from your heart, and say to Him: "Here I am. For Your sake I got rid of these stones".»

«I haven't... the courage to confess to Jesus.»

«You have not the humility to do it.»

«That is true. Help me...»

«Go to Capernaum and wait for Him, humbly.»

«But You could...»

«I can but tell you to do what My Son always does: to have mercy. I do not teach Jesus, but it is Jesus Who teaches Me, His disciple.»

«You are His Mother.»

«And that concerns My heart. But, by right, He is My Master. Exactly the same as He is for all the other women disciples.»

«You are perfect.»

«He is the Most Perfect One.»

Judas is silent and pensive. He then asks: «Where has the Master gone? »

«To Bethlehem in Galilee.»

«And then?»

«I do not know.»

«Is He coming back here? »

«Yes, He is.»

«When? »

«I do not know.»

«You do not want to tell me! »

«I cannot tell you what I do not know. You have followed Him for two years. Can you say that His itinerary was always certain? How many times did the will of men compel Him to change it? »

«True. I will go away... To Capernaum.»

«The sun is too strong to travel. Stay here. You are a pilgrim like all the others. And He said that the women disciples are to take care of them.»

«My presence is unpleasant to You...»

«The fact that you do not want to be cured is grievous to Me! Only that... Take

off your mantle... Where did you sleep? »

«I did not sleep. I waited until dawn as I wanted to see You all alone.»

«Then you must be tired. In the large room there are the little beds which Simon and Thomas used. It is still quiet and cool in there. Go and sleep while I prepare some food for you.»

Judas goes away without discussion. And Mary, without a rest after sitting up the whole night, goes into the kitchen to light the fire and then into the kitchen garden to get some vegetables. And tears and tears fall silently while She bends over the fireplace arranging the firewood, or when She stoops to pick the vegetables, and while She washes them in the basin and prepares them... And tears fall with the golden grains of corn when She feeds the doves, and they fall on the clothes which She takes out of the wash-tub and hangs out in the sun... The tears of the Mother of God... of the Faultless Mother, Who was not exempt from sorrow and suffered more than any other woman, in order to be the Co-Redeemer...

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Maria Valtorta

THE POEM OF THE MAN-GOD

VOLUME FIVE

PREPARATION FOR THE PASSION

539. The Judaeans in Lazarus' House.
18th December 1946.

A large imposing group of Judaeans enter Bethany on magnificent mounts. They are scribes and Pharisees, some Sadducees and Herodians, whom I have seen previously, if I am not mistaken, at the banquet in Chuza's house to induce Jesus to proclaim Himself king. They are followed by servants on foot. The riding-party go slowly through the little town, and the hoofs resounding on the hard ground, the jingling of the trappings and the voices of the men draw out of their houses the inhabitants, who look and with evident astonishment bow humbly, then they rise again and gather in groups whispering.

«Have you seen that? »

«All the members of the Sanhedrin from Jerusalem.»

«No. Joseph the Elder, Nicodemus and others were not there.»

«Nor the most famous Pharisees.»

«Nor the scribes.»

«And who was the one on horseback? »

«They are certainly going to Lazarus' house.»

«He must be on the point of dying.»

«I don't understand why the Rabbi is not here.»

«How can you expect Him to be here, if those in Jerusalem want to kill Him?»

«You are right. Nay, I am sure that those snakes who have just gone by, have come to see whether the Rabbi is here.»

«Praised be the Lord that He isn't! »

«Do you know what they said to my husband, at the market in Jerusalem? To be ready, because He will soon proclaim Himself king, and we shall all have to help Him to... What did they say? Well! A word that meant something like... if I said that I will send everybody away from the house, and make myself the landlady.»

«A plot?... A conspiracy?... A rebellion?...» they ask, making suggestions at the same time.

A man says: «Yes. They told me as well. But I don't believe it.»

«But those who say that, are disciples of the Rabbi!...»

«H'm! I am not prepared to believe that the Rabbi will make use of violence and remove the Tetrarchs, usurping a throne that, rightly or wrongly, belongs to the Herodians. You ought to tell Joachim not to believe all the rumours...»

«But do you know that those who help Him will be rewarded on the Earth and in Heaven? I would be very happy if my husband were one of them. I have a large family and life is difficult. If he could have a job among the servants of the King of Israel! »

«Listen, Rachel, I think it is better for me to look after my kitchen garden and my dates. Oh! if He should tell me, then I would leave everything to follow Him. But if other people tell me!...»

«But they are His disciples.»

«I have never seen them with Him and then... No. They pretend to be lambs, but their scoundrelly faces do not convince me.»

«That is true. Strange things have happened for some time and they always say that the Rabbi's disciples are the cause of them. The day before the Sabbath,

some of them manhandled a woman who was taking eggs to the market, and they said: "We want them in the name of the Galilean Rabbi".»

«Do you think it can be Him Who wants such things, as He always gives and never takes? And just Him Who could live among rich people and prefers to be with the poor, and He gave away His mantle, as that leprous woman, who was cured and whom Jacob met, told everybody? »

Another man who approached the group and has been listening says: «You are right. And what about the other thing they say? That the Rabbi will bring about great trouble, because the Romans will punish us all owing to His urging the crowds? Do you believe it? I say - and I don't think I am wrong because I am old and wise - I say that those who tell us poor people that the Rabbi wants to usurp the throne and drive away the Romans - I wish He did! if it were possible to do so! - and those who do violence in His name, and those who incite us to rebel promising future profit, and those who would like us to hate the Rabbi as a dangerous person who will lead us into trouble, are all enemies of the Rabbi and they are anxious to ruin Him so that they may triumph. Don't believe them! Don't believe the false friends of the poor people! Did you notice how arrogantly they passed by? They almost gave me a blow with a cudgel, because I had difficulty in moving the sheep aside and I was preventing them from proceeding... And you say they are our friends? Never. They are our vampires, and, God forbid it, they are also His vampires.»

«As you live near Lazarus' fields, do you know whether he is dead? »

«No. He is not dead. He is between life and death... I asked Sarah who was picking aromatic leaves to wash him.»

«Well, why did they come? »

«Who knows! They went right round the house, then round the leper's house, then they went away towards Bethlehem.»

«I told you! They came to see whether the Rabbi is here! To do Him wrong. Do you realise what it meant to them to be able to harm Him? And just in Lazarus' house? Tell me, Nathan. That Herodian... was he not the lover of Mary of Teophilus some time ago? »

«He was. Perhaps that is how he wanted to revenge himself on Mary...»

A little boy runs towards them. He shouts: «How many people there are in Lazarus' house! I was coming from the stream with Levi, Marcus and Isaiah, and we saw them. The servants opened the gate and took the mounts. And Maximinus ran to meet the Judaeans and other servants came making low bows. And Martha and Mary came out of the house to greet them with their maidservants. We wanted to go on watching, but they closed the gate and they all went into the house.» The boy is very excited because of the news he has brought and of what he has seen...

The adults are commenting.

540. The Judaeans with Martha and Mary.
19th December 1946.

Martha, although broken-hearted and exhausted, is always a lady who knows how to welcome guests, honouring them with the perfect urbanity of a true-born lady. Thus, after leading the group into one of the halls, she gives instructions to bring the refreshments that are customary, so that the guests may have what can restore them.

The servants move around pouring hot drinks or vintage wines and offering beautiful fruit, dates as fair as topazes, raisins, something like our sweet grapes, in bunches fantastically perfect, liquid honey, all served from precious amphorae, cups, plates and trays. And Martha watches carefully that no one is neglected, nay, she instructs her domestics to serve the guests according to their ages and to each individual, whose tempers are well known to her. She stops a servant, who is going towards Helkai with an amphora full of wine and a chalice and she says to him: «Tobias, don't offer him wine, but honied water and the juice of dates.» And she says to another one: «I am sure John will prefer wine. Offer him some of our white raisin wine.» And she personally offers old Hananiah, the scribe, warm milk, which she sweetens with plenty golden honey, saying: «It will do your cough good. You sacrificed yourself by coming here,

particularly as you are poorly, and it is a cold day. It affects me to see you all so thoughtful.»

«It is our duty, Martha. Eucheria belonged to our race. A true Jewess who honoured us all.»

«The homage paid to the venerated memory of my mother touches my heart. I will repeat your words to Lazarus.»

«But we want to greet him. He is such a good friend! » says Helkai with his habitual falseness, approaching her.

«Greet him? It is not possible. He is too exhausted.»

«Oh! We shall not disturb him. Shall we, my friends? It is enough for us to say goodbye to him, from the threshold of his room » says Felix.

«I cannot, I really cannot. Nicomedes has forbidden fatigue and emotions.»

«A glance at our dying friend will not kill him, Martha » says Callascebona. «It would grieve us too much not having greeted him! »

Martha is upset and hesitant. She looks towards the door, perhaps to see whether Mary is coming to help her. But Mary is absent.

The Judaeans notice her excitement, and Sadoc, the scribe, points it out to Martha: «It looks as if our visit is upsetting you, woman.»

«No. Not at all. Have sympathy for my grief. I have been living for months near my dying brother and... I am no longer able... and I no longer know how to behave at parties, as I did in the past...»

«Oh! it is not a party! We did not even expect you to honour us thus! Perhaps... Perhaps you want to hide something from us and that is why you are not letting us see Lazarus and you forbid us to go to his room. Eh! It is obvious! But be not afraid! The room of a sick person is a sanctuary for everybody, believe me...» says Helkai.

«There is nothing to be concealed in our brother's room. There is nothing hidden in it. There is only a dying man, who for pity's sake ought to be spared all painful memories. And you, Helkai, and you all, are painful memories for Lazarus» says Mary in her beautiful harmonious voice, appearing at the door and holding the curtain to one side with her hand.

«Mary! » says Martha moaning imploringly, to check her.

«Nothing, sister. Let me speak...» She then addresses the others: «And to remove every possible doubt of yours, one of you - it will thus be only one memory of the past renewing grief - may come with me, if the sight of a dying man does not disgust him and the stench of a dying body does not make him sick.»

«And are you not a grieving memory? » asks ironically the Herodian, whom I have already seen, but I do not remember where, coming away from his corner and standing in front of Mary.

Martha utters a groan, Mary looks like an angry eagle. Her eyes are flashing. She draws herself up proudly, forgetting the fatigue and grief that bent her body, and with the countenance of an offended queen she says: «Yes. I am a memory as well. But not of sorrow, as you say. I am the memory of God's Mercy. And Lazarus is dying in peace seeing me, because he knows that he is giving up his spirit into the hands of Infinite Mercy.»

«Ha! Ha! Those are not the words of days gone by! Your virtue! You may display it to those who do not know you...»

«But not to you, is that right? But I am going to place it right under your eyes, to tell you that birds of a feather, flock together. In those days, unfortunately, I was near you, and I was like you. Now I am near the Holy One, and I am becoming honest.»

«What has been destroyed cannot be rebuilt, Mary.»

«In fact, you, all of you, can no longer rebuild your past. You cannot rebuild what you have destroyed. You cannot, personally, as you horrify me. And none of the rest can, who offended my brother, when he was grieved, and now you pretend to be his friends, for a wicked purpose.»

«Oh! You are bold, woman. The Rabbi may have driven many demons out of you, but He did not make you become mild! » says one who is about forty years old.

«No, Jonathan ben Annas. He did not make me weak. He made me stronger with the boldness of one who is honest, of one who wants to become honest once again and has broken all ties with the past to start a new life. Come on! Who is coming to see Lazarus? » She is as authoritative as a queen. She dominates them all with her frankness, with no mercy even towards herself. Martha, instead, is dejected, with tears in her eyes looking imploringly at Mary that she may keep quiet.

«I will come! » says Helkai, sighing like a victim, and he is as false as a serpent. They go out together.

The others address Martha: «Your sister!... Still the same character. But she should not behave like that. She has so much to be forgiven for » says Uriel, the rabbi seen at Giscala, the one who struck Jesus with stones.

Under the lash of such words, Martha recovers her strength and she says: «God has forgiven her. No other forgiveness is thus required. And her present life is an example for the world.» But her daring soon abates and turns into tears. She moans weeping: «You are cruel! Towards her... and towards me... You have no pity for our past or our present sorrow. Why did you come? To offend and grieve us? » «No, woman. No. Only to greet the great Judaeen who is dying. For no other reason! You must not take our good intentions amiss. We heard from Joseph and Nicodemus that he was growing worse, and we came... as they did, the two great friends of the Rabbi and of Lazarus. Why do you want to treat us differently, since we love the Rabbi and Lazarus, as they do? You are not fair. Can you deny that they have come with John, Eleazar, Philip, Joshua and Joachim, to hear how Lazarus was, and that also Manaen has come?...»

«I am not denying anything. But I am surprised that you are so well informed. I did not think that also the interior of houses is pried into by you. I did not know that there is a new precept in addition to the sixhundred and thirteen: that is, to inquire into and spy upon the intimate affairs of families... Oh! Excuse me! I am offending you! Sorrow is depriving me of my senses and you are aggravating it.»

«Oh! we understand you, woman! And because we thought you would be both deprived of your senses, we have come to give you some good advice. Send for the Master. Also yesterday seven lepers have come to praise the Lord because the Rabbi had cured them. Send for Him also on behalf of Lazarus.»

«My brother is not a leper » shouts Martha convulsively. «Is that why you wanted to see him? Is that why you have come? No, he is not a leper! Look at my hands. I have cured him for years and there is no leprosy on me. My hands are reddened by spices, but I am not a leper. I have no...»

«Peace! Peace, woman. And who said that Lazarus is a leper? And who suspects such a dreadful sin in you, as that of hiding a leper? And do you think that, for all your power, we would not have struck you, if you had sinned? In order to have the precepts obeyed we are quite prepared to pass over our fathers and mothers, our wives and children. I, Jonathan of Uziel, am telling you.»

«Certainly! That's right! And now we tell you, out of the love we have for you and we had for your mother and for Lazarus' sake, send for the Master. Are you shaking your head? Do you mean that it is too late by now? What? You, Martha, the faithful disciple, have no faith in Him? That's bad! Are you beginning to doubt as well? » says Archelaus.

«You are blaspheming, scribe. I believe in the Master as I believe in the true God.»

«Why do you not want to try, then? He has raised the dead... At least so they say... Perhaps you do not know where He is? If you wish, we will look for Him, we will help you » says Felix in an insinuating way.

«No! In Lazarus' house they certainly know where the Rabbi is. Tell us frankly, woman, and we will depart and look for Him and we will bring Him to you, and we shall be present at the miracle to rejoice with you, with all of you » says Sadoc tempting her.

Martha is hesitant, she is almost tempted to yield. The others insist while she says: «I do not know where He is... I really do not know... He went away some days ago and He said goodbye to us like one who goes away for a long time... I would be relieved if I knew where He is... If at least I knew... But I do not know, that is the truth...»

«Poor woman! But we will help you... We will bring Him to you » says Cornelius. «No! It is not necessary. The Master... You are speaking of Him, are you not? The Master said that we must hope beyond hope, and in God only. And we will do that » says Mary in a thundering voice, as she comes back with Helkai, who departs from her at once and goes towards three Pharisees bending down to speak to them.

«But he is dying, according to what I hear! » says Doras, who is one of the three.

«So what? Let him die! I will not obstruct God's decree and I will not disobey

the Rabbi.»

«And what do you expect after his death, foolish woman? » says the Herodian mockingly.

«What? Life! » Her voice is a cry of absolute faith.

«Life? Ha! Ha! Be sincere. You know that He has no power against real death, and in your foolish love for Him you do not want that to become known.»

«Go out, all of you! It would be for Martha to tell you. But she is afraid of you. I am only afraid of offending God, Who has forgiven me. And I am telling you in Martha's stead. Go out, all of you. There is no room in this house for those who hate Jesus Christ. Out! Go to your gloomy dens! All out! Or I will get the servants to drive you out like a herd of unclean beggars.»

She is imposing in her wrath. The Judaeans slink away in the most cowardly way, in front of the woman. It is true that that woman looks like an enraged archangel...

As they leave the hall and cross the threshold passing in front of Mary, she glares at them, creating for each an immaterial Caudine Fork under which the pride of the defeated Judaeans is compelled to stoop. The hall is at last cleared out.

Martha collapses on the carpet bursting into tears.

«Why are you weeping, sister? I do not see why you should...»

«Oh! you offended them... and they offended you, they offended us... and now they will avenge themselves... and...»

«Be silent, silly woman! On whom do you expect them to avenge themselves? On Lazarus? They must decide first, and before they do that... No one revenges oneself on a man who is done for! On us? Are we in need of their bread to live? They will not touch our property. The shadow of Rome is cast over it. On what then? And even if they were able to do that, are we not both young and strong? Shall we not be able to work? Is Jesus not poor? Was our Jesus not a workman? Shall we not be more like Him, if we are poor and workers? You ought to be proud in becoming so! Hope for it! Ask God to grant it! »

«But what they said to you...»

«Ah! What they said to me! It's the truth. And I repeat it to myself. I was unclean. I am now the ewe-lamb of the Shepherd! And the past is dead. Come on, come to see Lazarus.»

541. Martha Sends a Servant to Inform the Master.
20th December 1946.

I am still in Lazarus' house and I see Martha and Mary go out into the garden in the company of a rather elderly man, who looks very dignified and I would say that he is not a Hebrew because his face is clean-shaven, as is customary with Romans. As soon as they are at a little distance from the house, Mary asks him: «Well, Nicomedes? What do you think of our brother? We see that he is seriously... ill... Tell us.»

The man opens his arms in a gesture of commiseration and acknowledgement of the ineluctable situation, and he stops and says: «He is very ill... I have never deceived you since I began to attend him. I have tried everything, as you know. But to no avail. I also... hoped, yes, I hoped that he might at least live reacting against the exhaustion of the disease with the good nourishment and the cordials I prepared for him. I tried also with poisons that preserve the blood from corruption and support one's strength, according to the old schools of the great masters in medicine. But the disease is stronger than the means we use to cure it. Such diseases are like corrosions, they destroy one. And when they appear exteriorly, the inside of the bones has already been affected, and like the lymph that in a tree ascends from the roots to its top, also in this case, the disease has spread from his feet to his whole body...»

«But only his legs are diseased...» says Martha plaintively.

«Yes, but a high temperature causes damage to parts of the body that instead you think are healthy. Look at this little branch that has fallen off that tree. It seems to be warm-eaten only here, where it is broken. But, look... (he crumbles it with his fingers). See? Under the bark, which is still smooth, it is rotten right to the top, where there still seems to be life, because there are still some little leaves. Lazarus is now... dying, poor sisters! The God of your fathers, and the gods and demigods of our medicine have not been able to do anything... or they did not want to do it. I am speaking of your God. Therefore... I do foresee that his death is close at hand, also because his temperature has risen, a symptom of the deterioration of his blood brought about by his disorderly heart-beats, and by the lack of stimuli and reactions in the invalid and in all his organs. As you can see, he gets no nourishment any more, he cannot hold the little food he takes and he does not assimilate the little he can hold. It's the end... And - believe a doctor who is grateful to you because he remembers Theophilus - the thing to be most desired now is death... Such diseases are dreadful. For thousands of years they have destroyed man and man cannot destroy them. Only the gods could if...» He stops, he looks at them rubbing his clean-shaven chin. He is pensive. He then says: «Why do you not call the Galilean? He is a friend of yours. He can cure him because He can do everything. I have examined people who were doomed and who have been cured. A strange power emanates from Him. It is a mysterious fluid that revives and gathers together the scattered reactions and makes them wish to recover... I don't know. I know that I have followed Him, being also mingled with the crowd, and I have seen wonderful things... Send for Him. I am a Gentile. But I pay homage to the mysterious Thaurnature of your people. And I would be happy if He could do what I could not do.»

«He is God, Nicomedes. That is why He can. The power that you call fluid is His will of God » says Mary.

«I do not ridicule your faith. On the contrary I spur it to reach impossible limits. In any case... We read that at times the gods have descended upon the Earth. I... had never believed it... But, with the science and conscience of a man and a doctor, I must admit that it is so, because the Galilean works such cures that only a god can work.»

«Not a god, Nicomedes. The true God » insists Mary.

«All right. As you wish. And I will believe in Him and become one of His followers if I see Lazarus... rise from the dead. Because we must speak of resurrection now, rather than recovery. So send for Him urgently... because, if I have not become a fool, he will die within the next three days, at most. I said "at most". But it could be sooner, now.»

«Oh! I wish we could! But we do not know where He is...» says Martha.

«I know where He is. I was told by one of His disciples who was going to meet Him taking some sick people, two of whom were my patients. He is beyond the Jordan, near the ford. So he said. Perhaps you know the place better than I do.»

«Ah! He is certainly in Solomon's house! » says Mary.

«Is it very far? »

«No, Nicomedes.»

«Then send a servant at once to tell Him to come. I will come back later and I will stay here to see His action on Lazarus. Hail, ladies. And... give courage to each other.» He bows to them and goes away towards the exit, where a servant is waiting for him to hold his horse and open the gate to him.

«What shall we do, Mary? » asks Martha after she sees the doctor depart.

«We will obey the Master. He told us to send for Him after Lazarus' death. And we will do that.»

«But when he is dead... what is the use of having the Master here? It will only help our hearts, I agree. But with regard to Lazarus!... I am going to send a servant to call Him.»

«No. You would destroy the miracle. He said that we must be able to hope and believe against every adverse reality. And if we do so, we shall have the miracle, I am sure of it. If we do not do so, God will leave us with the presumption that we can act better than He can, and He will grant us nothing.»

«But don't you see how much Lazarus is suffering? Have you not heard, when he recovers consciousness, how he longs to see the Master? You are hard-hearted if you want to deny our poor brother this last joy!... Our poor brother! We shall soon have no brother! No father, no mother, no brother! The family is destroyed,

and we are all alone, like two palm-trees in a desert.» She is overwhelmed by grief and I would say that she falls into hysterics, in typically eastern style, and she tosses herself, striking her face and ruffling her hair.

Mary grasps her. She commands her to be silent saying: «Be quiet! Be quiet, I tell you! He may hear you. I love him more and better than you do, and I can control myself. You look like a sickly woman. Be silent, I tell you! It is not with such frenzies that one can change situations or move hearts. If you behave thus to move mine, you are making a mistake. Think about it. My heart breaks, but it obeys: it persists in obedience.»

Martha, overwhelmed by the strength of her sister and by her words, calms down a little but in her grief, which is more composed, she moans invoking her mother: «Mother! oh! mother, console me. I have had no peace since you died. If you were here, mother! If sorrows had not killed you! If you were here, you would guide us and we would obey you, for the welfare of us all... Oh! »

Mary changes colour and she weeps noiselessly, she looks dejected and wrings her hands without speaking.

Martha looks at her and says: «When our mother was about to die, she made me promise that I would look after Lazarus like a mother. If she were here...»

«She would obey the Master, because she was a just woman. You are trying to move me in vain. You can say to me that I murdered my mother through the pains I gave her. I will say to you. "You are right". But if you want to make me say that you are right in wanting the Master, I say to you: "No". And I will always say:

"No". And I am sure that from Abraham's bosom she approves of me and blesses me. Let us go into the house.»

«We have nothing left! Nothing left! »

«Everything! You must say everything! You do listen to the Master and you seem to pay attention while He speaks, but later you do not remember what He says. Has He not always said that to love and obey makes us the children of God and the heirs to His Kingdom? So how can you say that we will be left without anything, if we have God and we possess the Kingdom through our loyalty? Oh! it is true that one must be firmly determined in evil, as I was, in order to be, to know how to be, and to want to be firmly determined in good, in obedience, in hope, in faith, in love!...»

«You allow the Judaeans to laugh at and throw out innuendoes against the Master. You heard them the day before yesterday...»

«Are you still thinking of the chattering of those crows, of the cheeping of those vultures? Let them spit out what they have inside! What does the world matter to you? What is the world as compared with God? Look: it is less than this filthy bluebottle, which is benumbed or poisoned with the filth it has sucked and which I trample on thus » and with a vigorous blow of her heel she crushes a horse-fly that is creeping slowly on the gravel of the avenue. She then takes Martha by the arm saying: «Come into the house and...»

«At least let us inform the Master. Let us send someone to tell Him that Lazarus is dying, without saying anything else...»

«As if He needed to be told by us! No! It is useless. He said: "Let Me know when he is dead". And that is what we will do. But not before his death.»

«No one takes pity on my grief! Least of all you...»

«Stop weeping like that. I cannot bear it...» In her own sorrow she bites her lip to encourage her sister and restrain her tears.

Marcella runs out of the house followed by Maximinus: «Martha! Mary! Quick! Lazarus is not well. He does not reply any more...»

The two sisters rush back into the house... and shortly afterwards one can hear Mary's loud voice giving orders for the circumstance, and see servants run with cordials and basins steaming with boiling water, whispering and making gestures of sorrow...

Calm slowly takes over after so much excitement. I see the servants talking to one another in low voices, less excitedly, but with gestures of deep depression to give emphasis to their words. Some shake their heads, some raise them looking at the sky and stretching out their arms as if to say: «It is so », some weep, and some still hope for a miracle.

Martha appears again. She is as white as death. She turns round to see whether she is being followed. She looks at the servants who press round her anxiously. She turns round again to see whether anyone has come out of the house to follow her. She then says to a servant: «Come with me.»

The servant leaves the group and follows her towards the jasmine pergola and goes into it. Martha speaks, still keeping an eye on the house, which can be seen through the thickly entangled branches, and she says: «Listen to me carefully. When all the servants have gone back into the house, and I have given them orders to keep them busy inside, you shall go to the stables, you shall take one of the fastest horses and saddle it... If anyone should by chance see you, say that you are going to call the doctor... You will not be telling a lie and I am not teaching you to lie, because I am really sending you to the blessed Doctor... Take some fodder for the horse and some food for yourself and this purse for what you may need. Go out through the small gate and through the ploughed fields, where the hoofs make no noise, when you go away from the house. Then take the Jericho road and gallop without ever stopping, not even at night. Have you understood? You must never stop. The new moon will illuminate the road for you if it gets dark while you are still galloping. Bear in mind that the life of your master is in your hands and depends on your speed. I rely on you.» «Mistress, I will serve you as a faithful slave.»

«Go to the Bethabara ford. Cross the river and go to the village after Bethany beyond the Jordan. You know... where John used to baptise at the beginning.»

«I know. I went there as well to be purified.»

«The Master is in that village. Anybody will tell you the house where He is a guest. But it is better if you follow the banks of the river, instead of taking the main road. You will not be noticed so much and you will find the house by yourself. It is the first one on the only road of the village and it takes one from the country to the river. You cannot go wrong. It's a low house, with no terrace or upper room, with a kitchen garden, when coming from the river, before the house, and the kitchen garden is enclosed by a small wooden gate and a hawthorn hedge, I think, a hedge, in any case. Is that clear? Repeat those details.»

The servant repeats them patiently.

«All right. Ask to speak to Him, to Him alone, and tell Him that your mistresses have sent you to inform Him that Lazarus is very ill, that he is dying, that we cannot resist any longer, that Lazarus wants Him and ask Him to come at once, at once, for pity's sake. Have you understood? »

«Yes, I have, mistress.»

«Then come back here immediately, so that no one may notice your absence. Take a lamp with you, you will need it when it gets dark. Go, be quick, gallop, run the horse off its legs, but come back quickly with the Master's reply.»

«I will do so, mistress.»

«Go now! See? They have all gone back into the house. Go at once. No one will see you making preparations. I will bring you some food myself. Go! I will leave it on the threshold of the small gate. Go! And may God be with you. Go!...»

She pushes him anxiously and then she runs into the house cautiously, and shortly afterwards she steals out from a back door on the southern side of the house, with a little bag in her hands, she walks along a hedge as far as the first opening, she turns and disappears...

542. Lazarus' Death.

21st December 1946.

They have opened all the doors and windows in Lazarus' room, to make it easier for him to breathe. And around him, who is unconscious, in a coma - a deep coma like death, from which it differs only because of his breathing movement - there are his two sisters, Maximinus, Marcella and Naomi, intent on the least act of the dying man.

Every time the pangs of death contract his mouth and it seems to assume the expression of one about to speak, or his eyes can be partly seen when he half-opens his eyelids, the two sisters bend over him to catch a word, a glance... But in vain. They are nothing but movements lacking coordination, independent of his will and intelligence, which are by now both inert and lost. They are acts brought about by the suffering flesh, just like the perspiration that makes the face of the dying man shiny, and the tremor that at intervals shakes his skeletal fingers, making them look like contracted claws. The two sisters also

call him, with all their love in their voices. But his name and their love collide with the barrier of intellectual insensibility, and the silence of death is the reply to their calling.

Naomi, weeping, continues to place warm bricks, enveloped in strips of woollen cloth, near his feet, which must be very cold. Marcella is holding in her hands a cup into which she dips a piece of thin linen, which Martha uses to moisten her brother's dry lips. Mary with another piece of linen wipes the plentiful perspiration which streams down the skeletal face and wets the hands of the dying man. Maximinus, leaning against a tall dark cabinet near Lazarus' bed, watches standing behind Mary, who is bent over her brother. There is no one else. There is dead silence, as if they were in an empty house, in a desert place. The maidservants who bring the warm bricks are barefooted and make no noise walking on the marble floor. They look like apparitions.

At a certain moment Mary says: «His hands seem to become warm. Look, Martha, his lips are not so pale.»

«Yes. And he is breathing more freely. I have noticed that for some time » remarks Maximinus.

Martha bends over him and calls him in a low voice, in a very warm tone: «Lazarus! Lazarus! Oh! Look, Mary! He seemed to smile and to bat his eyelids. He is improving, Mary! He is getting better! What time is it? »

«It's one hour past sunset.»

«Ah! » and Martha stands up, pressing her hands against her breast, raising her eyes in a visible gesture of mute but confident prayer. A smile brightens her face.

The others look at her in amazement and Mary says to her: «I fail to see why the fact that it is evening should make you happy...» and she scans her face suspiciously and anxiously.

Martha does not reply, but she resumes the same posture she had previously.

A maid comes in with some bricks, which she hands to Naomi. Mary says to her: «Bring two lamps. It is getting dark and I want to see him.» The maid goes out noiselessly and soon comes back with two lighted oil-lamps, and she lays one on the cabinet near Maximinus, and the other on a table encumbered with bandages and tiny amphorae, on the other side of the bed.

«Oh! Mary! Mary! He is really less pale.»

«And not so exhausted looking. He is reviving! » says Marcella.

«Give him a few more drops of that spicy wine that Sarah prepared. It did him good » suggests Maximinus.

From the top of the cabinet Mary takes a tiny slender-necked amphora, shaped like the beak of a bird, and she carefully pours a few drops of wine between Lazarus' half-closed lips.

«Slowly, Mary. That he may not choke! » advises, Naomi.

«Oh! he swallows it! He wants it! Look, Martha! Look! He is sticking his tongue out, seeking it...»

They all bend to look, and Naomi calls him: «Darling! Look at your wet-nurse, o blessed soul! » and she moves forward to kiss him.

«Look! Look, Naomi, he is drinking your tears! One fell near his lips, he felt it, he sought it and he absorbed it.»

«Oh! my darling! If I had the milk of days gone by, I would squeeze it out for you drop by drop, my little lamb, even if I had to squeeze my heart and then die!» I gather that Naomi, Mary's wet nurse, nursed also Lazarus.

«Mistresses, Nicomedes has come back » says a servant appearing at the door.

«Let him come in! He will help us to make him recover.»

«Look! Look! He is opening his eyes and moving his lips » says Maximinus.

«He is pressing my fingers with his own! » shouts Mary. And she bends saying:

«Lazarus! Can you hear me? Who am I? »

Lazarus really opens his eyes and looks, an uncertain veiled look, but still a look. He moves his lips with difficulty and says: «Mother! »

«I am Mary. Mary! Your sister! »

«Mother! »

«He does not recognise you and he is calling his mother. Dying people always do that » says Naomi, whose face is wet with tears.

«But he speaks. After such a long time he speaks. It is already a good deal... He will feel better later. Oh! my Lord, reward your maidservant! » says Martha once again with the gesture of fervent confident prayer.

«But what happened to you? Have you seen the Master? Did He appear to you? Tell me, Martha. Relieve my anguish! » says Mary.

Nicomedes' coming in prevents a reply. They all address him telling him how after his departure Lazarus had grown worse, so much so that he was on the point of dying, and in fact they believed that he was dead, then, with some aids they had made him come to himself, but only as far as to make him breathe. And how, a short time ago, with a spicy wine prepared by one of the women, he had begun to warm up again, he had swallowed some and tried to drink, and he had also opened his eyes and had spoken... They are all speaking together, with revived hope, contrasting with the somewhat sceptical calmness of the doctor who lets them speak without uttering one word.

At last, when they have finished, he says: «All right. Let me see.» He pushes them aside as he approaches the bed and asks them to bring some lights and to close the window, as he wants to uncover the patient. He bends over him, he calls him, he questions him, he moves an oil-lamp to and fro in front of the face of Lazarus, who has now opened his eyes and seems amazed at everything; he then uncovers him, studies his breathing, his heartbeats, the temperature and stiffness of his limbs... They are all anxiously awaiting his word. Nicomedes covers the patient again, looks at him and is pensive. He then turns round looking at the people present and says: «It is undeniable that he has recovered strength. He has improved since the last time I saw him. But do not delude yourselves. It is nothing but the fictitious improvement of death. I am so certain, as I was certain that it is the end, that, as you can see, I have come back, after freeing myself of my commitments, to make his death less painful, as far as I can do so... or to see the miracle if... Have you taken action? »

«Yes, Nicomedes, we have » says Martha interrupting him. And to prevent him from asking further questions, she says: «But did you not say that... within three days... I...» She weeps.

«I said. I am a doctor. I live amidst agonies and tears. But the habitual sight of grief has not yet turned me into a heartless man. And today... I prepared you... with a rather long... and vague date... But my medical knowledge warned me that the end would come sooner, and my heart misrepresented the truth as a pitiful deception... Now! Be brave... Go out... We never know how much dying people understand...» He pushes them out, while they weep, repeating: «Be brave! Be brave! »

Maximinus remains with the dying man... The doctor also goes away to prepare some medicines capable of making the agony less distressing, as he says: «I foresee that it will be very painful.»

«Make him live! Make him live till tomorrow. It is almost night, as you can see, Nicomedes. It is no problem for your science to keep a man alive for less than one day! Make him live! »

«Madam, I do what I can. But when the wick ends, nothing can keep the flame alive! » replies the doctor, and he goes away.

The two sisters embrace each other, weeping disconsolately, and Mary is the one who is weeping more. Her sister has a hopeful heart...

They hear Lazarus' voice coming from his room. A loud authoritative voice that startles them because it is unexpected from such a weak person. He calls them: «Martha! Mary! Where are you? I want to get up. I want to get dressed! I want to tell the Master that I am cured! I must go to the Master. A wagon! At once. And a fast horse. It was certainly He Who cured me...»

He speaks fast, syllabising the words, sitting on his bed, flushed with a high temperature, trying to get out of the bed, prevented from doing so by Maximinus, who says to the women rushing into the room: «He is raving! »

«No! Let him go. The miracle! The miracle! Oh! I am so happy that I provoked it! As soon as Jesus was told! God of our fathers, may You be blessed and praised for Your power and because of Your Messiah...» Martha, who has dropped on her knees, is beside herself with joy.

In the meantime Lazarus continues to speak, excited more and more by his temperature, which Martha does not understand is the cause of everything, and he says: «He came so often to see me, when I was ill. It is fair that I should go to Him and say: "I am cured". I am cured! I feel no more pains! I am strong. I want to get up. I want to go. God wanted to test my resignation. I shall be called the new Job...» He assumes a hieratic attitude and making wide gestures he says: «"The Lord was moved by Job's penance... and gave him double what he

had before. And the Lord blessed the last years of Job more than the first ones... and he lived until...". No, I am not Job! I was among the flames and He pulled me out, I was in the belly of the monster and I have come back to light. So I am Jonah, and I am the three children of Daniel...»

The doctor, called by someone, comes in. He looks at him: «It's delirium. I was expecting it. The corruption of the blood affects the brains.» He strives to lay him down and exhorts the others to hold him carefully, and he goes out again to attend to his decoctions.

Lazarus at times becomes rather impatient of being held, at times he weeps like a child.

«He is really delirious » moans Mary.

«No. None of you understand anything. You cannot believe. Of course! You do not know... By now the Master is aware that Lazarus is dying. Yes, I informed Him, Mary! I did it without saying anything to you...»

«Ah! wretch! You have destroyed the miracle! » shouts Mary.

«No! As you can see, he began to feel better when Jonah reached the Master. He is raving... Certainly... He is weak, and his brain is still dulled with death that had already grasped at him. But he is not raving as the doctor thinks.

Listen to him! Are those the words of a delirious person? »

Lazarus in fact is saying: «I bent my head to the decree of death and I tasted how bitter it is to die, and God has now said that He is satisfied with my resignation and He is restoring me to life and giving me back to my sisters. I shall still be able to serve the Lord and sanctify myself with Martha and Mary... With Mary! What is Mary? Mary is Jesus' gift to poor Lazarus. He had told me... What a long time since then! "Your forgiveness will do more than anything else. It will help Me". He promised me: "She will be your joy". And on that day that I was upset because she had brought her shame here, near the Holy One, what words He spoke inviting her to come back! Wisdom and Charity had joined together to touch her heart... And the other day, when He found me offering myself for her redemption?... I want to live to rejoice with my redeemed sister! I want to praise the Lord with her! Streams of tears, insults, shame, bitterness... everything has pierced me and killed my life because of her... Here is the fire, the fire of the furnace! It is coming back, with its memory... Mary of Theophilus and Eucheria, my sister, the prostitute. She could have been a queen and she became the filth that even a pig tramples on. And my mother who dies. And not being able to go among people any longer without having to put up with their mockery. Because of her! Where are you, you wretch? Were you lacking bread, perhaps, that you should sell yourself? What did you suck from the nipple of your wet-nurse? What did your mother teach you? Lust the former? Sin the latter? Go away! Disgrace of our family! »

His voice is a shout. He seems to be mad. Marcella and Naomi hasten to close the doors and to draw the heavy curtains to deaden the sound, whilst the doctor, who has come into the room, strives in vain to calm the delirium that is becoming more and more violent. Mary, prostrated dejectedly on the floor, is sobbing under the implacable charge of the dying man who goes on:

«One, two, ten lovers. The shame of Israel passed from one embrace to another one... Her mother was dying, she was rejoicing in her obscene love affairs. Beast! Vampire! You sucked your mother's life. You destroyed our joy. Martha was sacrificed because of you. No one marries the sister of a prostitute. I... Ah! I! Lazarus, a knight, the son of Theophilus... The urchins in Ophel used to spit at me!! "Here is the accomplice of an adulteress and of a prostitute" the scribes and Pharisees used to say shaking their garments meaning that they rejected the sin of which I was foul through her contact! "Here is the sinner! He who is not capable of striking the culprit is guilty himself" the rabbis used to shout when I went up to the Temple, and I was bathed in perspiration under the fiery eyes of the priests... The fire. You! You vomited the fire that was within you. Because you are a demon, Mary. You are filthy. You are anathema. Your fire clung to everybody, because your fire comprised many fires, and there was some for lustful people who looked like fish caught in a drag-net whenever you passed by... Why did I not kill you? I shall burn in Gehenna for allowing you to live ruining so many families, scandalising thousands of people... Who said: "Alas for the man who provides scandal"? Who said so? Ah! the Master! I want the Master! I want Him! That He may forgive me. I want to tell Him that I could not kill her because I loved her... Mary was sunshine in our house... I

want the Master! Why is He not here? I don't want to live! But I want to be forgiven for the scandal that I stirred up by allowing the cause of scandal to live. I am already enveloped in flames. It's the fire of Mary. It is burning me. It burnt everybody. To give lust to her, to bring hatred against us, to burn my flesh. Take these blankets away, take everything away! I am on fire. It is burning my flesh and my spirit. I am lost because of her. Master! Master! Forgive me! He is not coming. He cannot come to Lazarus' house. It's a dunghill because of her. So... I want to forget. Everything. I am no longer Lazarus. Give me some wine. Solomon says: "Give wine to those who are broken-hearted, let them drink and forget their misery, so that they may remember their grief no more". I don't want to remember any more. Everybody says: "Lazarus is rich, the richest man in Judaea". It's not true! It is all straw. It is not gold. And the houses? They are clouds. His vineyards, oases, gardens, olive-groves? Nothing. Deceit. I am Job. I have nothing. I had a pearl. Beautiful! Of infinite value. She was my pride. Her name was Mary. I no longer have her. I am poor. The poorest of them all. The most deceived... Jesus also deceived me. Because He told me that He would give her back to me, instead she... Where is she? There she is. The woman of Israel, the daughter of a holy mother, looks like a heathen hetaera! Half-naked, drunk, mad... And around her, with their eyes fixed on the naked body of my sister, the pack of her lovers... And she enjoys being admired and craved for thus. I want to make amends for my crime. I want to go through Israel saying: "Don't go near the house of my sister. Her house is the path to hell and it descends into the abyss of death". Then I want to go to her and tread on her, because it is written: "Every unchaste woman will be trampled on like dung on the road". Oh! Have you the nerve to show yourself to me who am dying like a dishonoured man, destroyed by you? After I offered my life to redeem your soul, and to no avail? Are you asking me how I wanted you? How I wanted you in order not to die thus? This is how I wanted you: like the chaste Susanna. Are you saying that they tempted you? And did you not have a brother to defend you? Susanna, who was all alone, replied: "I prefer to fall innocent into your power, than to sin in the eyes of the Lord", and God made her innocence shine. I would have spoken the necessary words to those who tempted you and I would have defended you. Instead, you went away. Judith was a widow and she lived in seclusion, wearing sack-cloth and fasting and she was held in high esteem by everybody, because she feared the Lord and people sing of her: "You are the glory of Jerusalem, the joy of Israel, the honour of our race, because you acted in a manly manner and bravely, because you loved chastity and after your marriage you have known no other man. That is why the hand of the Lord made you strong and you will be blessed for ever". If Mary had been like Judith, the Lord would have cured me. But He could not cure me because of her. That is why I did not ask to be cured. There can be no miracle where she is. But it is nothing to die, to suffer. I would suffer ten times as much and die several times, provided she were saved. Oh! Most High Lord! I am prepared to suffer all deaths and all sorrows, but let Mary be saved! To enjoy her company for one hour, for one hour only, when she has become holy and as pure as she was in her childhood! One hour of that joy! To be proud of her, the golden flower of my house, the kind gazelle with meek eyes, the evening nightingale, the loving dove... I want the Master to tell Him that that is what I want: Mary! Mary! Come! Mary! How grieved is your brother, Mary! But if you come, if you redeem yourself, my sorrow will turn into delight. Look for Mary! I am at the end! I am dying! Mary! Light! Air... I... I'm suffocating... Oh! what I feel!...»

The doctor makes a gesture and says: «It is the end. After delirium, sopor then death. But he may have a revival of intelligence. Come close to him. You in particular. It will make him happy » and after laying Lazarus down with care, exhausted as he is with so much excitement, he goes towards Mary, who has been weeping all the time moaning on the floor: «Make him keep quiet! ». He lifts her up and takes her to the bed.

Lazarus has closed his eyes. But he must be suffering dreadfully. His whole body trembles spasmodically. The doctor tries to help him with potions... Some time goes by thus.

Lazarus opens his eyes. He does not seem to remember what happened before, but he is conscious. He smiles at his sisters and tries to take their hands and to reply to their kisses. He turns deadly pale. He moans: «I am cold...» and his teeth chatter as he tries to cover his face with the bedclothes. He groans:

«Nicomedes, I cannot resist the pain any longer. Wolves are eating the flesh of my legs and devouring my heart. How painful it is! And if this is agony, what will death be like? What shall I do? Oh! if I had the Master here! Why did you not bring Him to me? I would have died a happy death on His lap...» he says weeping.

Martha casts a severe glance at Mary. Mary understands the meaning of that glance, and still crushed by her brother's frenzy, she is conscience-stricken and kneeling against the bed, she bends to kiss Lazarus' hand saying plaintively: «I am the guilty one. Martha wanted to do so two days ago. I did not let her. Because He told us that we had to inform Him only after your death. Forgive me! I have been the cause of all the grief of your lifetime... And yet I loved you and I love you, brother. After the Master, I love you more than anybody and God knows that I am not lying. Tell me that you absolve me of my past, that I may have peace...»

«Madam! » says the doctor reproachingly. «The patient is in no need of emotions.»

«That is true... Tell me that you forgive me for not calling Jesus...»

«Mary! Jesus came here for you... and He comes because of you... because you know how to love... more than all the rest... You have loved me more than the rest... A life... of delights would not have given me... not have given me... the joy that I experienced because of you... I bless you... I say to you... that you did the right thing... in obeying Jesus... I did not know... I know... I say... it is right... Help me to die!... Naomi... you knew once... how to... make me fall asleep... Martha... blessed... my peace... Maximinus... with Jesus. Also... for me... My share... to the poor... to Jesus... for the poor... And forgive... everybody... Ah! what atrocious pangs!... Air!... Light!...

Everything is trembling... There a kind of light around you and it dazzles me if... I look at you... Speak... loud...» He has laid his left hand on Mary's head and has abandoned his right one into Martha's hands. He is panting...

They lift him carefully adding pillows, and Nicomedes makes him sip some more drops of potions. His poor head hangs and dangles in deadly languor. The only sign of life is his breathing. And yet he opens his eyes and looks at Mary who is holding his head and he smiles at her saying: «Mother! She has come back... Mother! Speak! Your voice... You know... the secret... of God... Have I served... the Lord?...»

Mary in a low voice, which grief has made as thin as a girl's, whispers: «The Lord is saying to you: " Come with Me, My good and faithful servant, because you have listened to every word of Mine and you have loved the Word Whom I sent".» «I can't hear. Speak louder! »

Mary repeats in a louder voice...

«It is really mother!...» says Lazarus contentedly relaxing his head on his sister's shoulder...

He does not speak any more. Only wails and spasmodic tremor, only perspiration and heavy breathing. Insensible by now to the Earth, to affections, he sinks into the more and more absolute darkness of death. His eyelids close on his glassy eyes in which his last tears shine.

«Nicomedes! He is getting heavier! He is becoming cold!...» says Mary.

«Madam, death is a relief for him.»

«Keep him alive! Jesus will be certainly here tomorrow. He will have left at once. Perhaps He has taken the servant's horse or another mount » says Martha. And addressing her sister she says: «Oh! If you had let me send him earlier! » She then orders the doctor convulsively: «Make him live! »

The doctor stretches out his arms. He tries with some cordials. But Lazarus does not swallow any more.

His death-rattle increases... It is heart-rending...

«Oh! we cannot bear this any more! » says Naomi moaning.

«Yes. It's a long agony...» says the doctor assenting.

But he has hardly finished speaking when with a convulsion of his whole body, that arches and then collapses, Lazarus breathes his last.

His sisters shout... seeing his spasm, they shout seeing him collapse. Mary calls her brother, kissing him. Martha clings to the doctor as he bends over the dead body and says: «He is dead. It is now too late to wait for the miracle. There is nothing to wait for. Too late!... I am going, dominae. There is no reason why I should remain. Make haste for the funeral, because the body is

already decomposed.» He closes the eyelids of the dead man and looking at him he says: «What a misfortune! He was a virtuous and intelligent man. He shouldn't have died! » He turns towards the sisters, he bows and greets them: «Ave! Dominae! » and he goes away.

Mournful laments fill the room. Mary has no more self-control and she throws herself on her brother's body shouting her remorse and invoking his forgiveness. Martha is weeping in Naomi's arms.

Then Mary shouts: «You did not have faith or obedience! I killed him first, you have killed him now; I, with my sins, you, with your disobedience.» She seems to have gone mad. Martha lifts her up, embraces her and apologises.

Maximinus, Naomi, Marcella try to bring both to reason and to resignation. And they succeed by remembering Jesus... Their grief quietens down, and while the room becomes crowded with weeping servants, and those responsible for the preparation of the corpse come in, the two sisters are led into another room to give vent to their grief.

Maximinus who is leading them says: «He passed away at the end of the second watch of the night.»

And Naomi says: «He will have to be buried early tomorrow, before sunset, when the Sabbath begins. You said that the Master wants solemn funeral ceremonies...» «Yes. I leave that to you, Maximinus. I am not in the right frame of mind » says Martha.

«I am going and I will send servants to all the people concerned, both close at hand and far away, and I will give all the necessary instructions » says Maximinus and he withdraws.

The two sisters are weeping in each other's arms. They no longer reproach each other. They weep and try to console each other...

Some hours go by. The dead body is prepared in the room: a long figure enveloped in bandages under the sudarium.

«Why is he already covered like that! » exclaims Martha reproachingly.

«Mistress... A bad smell came from his nose and he threw up tainted blood when we moved him » says a servant apologising.

The sisters weep more loudly. Lazarus is already more remote under those bandages... A further step towards the remoteness of death.

They keep vigil by his bedside weeping, until dawn, when the servant comes back from beyond the Jordan. The servant is dismayed, but he informs them of his fast journey to bring them the news that Jesus is coming.

«Did He say that He is coming? Did He not reproach us? » asks Martha.

«No, mistress. He said: "I will come. Tell them that I will come and to have faith". And before that He said: "Tell them not to worry. It is not a deadly disease. But it is for the glory of God, that His power may be glorified in His Son".»

«Did He say exactly that? Are you sure? » asks Mary.

«Mistress, I have been repeating His words all the way back! »

«Go, then. You are tired. You have done everything well. But it is too late, now!...» says Martha with a sigh. And she bursts into tears as soon as she is left with her sister.

«Martha, why?...»

«Oh! in addition to his death, there is disappointment! Mary! Mary! Are you not considering that the Master is wrong this time? Look at Lazarus. He is really dead! We have hoped against hope, but to no avail. When I sent for Him, I certainly made a mistake, for he was more dead than alive. And our faith had no result or reward. And the Master has sent word that it is not a deadly disease! So is the Master no longer the Truth? He is no longer... Oh! That's the end of everything! »

Mary is wringing her hands. She does not know what to say. Facts are facts... But she does not speak. She does not say one word against her Jesus. She weeps. She is really exhausted.

Martha has a fixed idea in her heart: that she delayed too long. «It's your fault» she says reproachingly. «He wanted to test our faith thus. By obeying, I agree, but also by disobeying out of faith, to show to Him that we believed that He alone could and had to work the miracle. My poor brother! And he longed for Him so much! At least that: to see Him! Poor Lazarus! Poor brother! » And her weeping changes into howling, which is echoed in the adjoining rooms by the howls of the maids and servants, according to the eastern custom...

543. The Servant of Bethany Informs Jesus of Martha's Message.
22nd December 1946.

It is already nightfall when the servant, who is proceeding through the brushwood near the river, spurs his horse, steaming with perspiration, to overcome the difference in level between the river and the road leading to the village. The poor animal's sides are heaving because of the long fast run. Its dark coat is all veined with perspiration and its breast is spread with the white foam of the bit. It puffs arching its neck and shaking its head. They are now on the narrow road and they soon reach the house. The servant jumps to the ground, ties the horse to a hedge and gives a shout.

From the rear of the house the head of Peter appears and in his harsh voice he asks: «Who is calling? The Master is tired. He has not had any peace for many hours. It is almost dark. Come back tomorrow.»

«I do not want anything of the Master. I am healthy and I have only to speak a few words to Him.»

Peter comes forward saying: «From whom, if you do not mind me asking you? I will not let anybody pass without safe identification, particularly those who stink of Jerusalem, as you do.» He has come slowly forward as his suspicion has been aroused more by the beauty of the richly harnessed dark horse than by the man. But when he is in front of him, he is amazed: «You? Are you not one of Lazarus' servant? »

The servant does not know what to say. His mistress told him to speak only to Jesus. But the apostle seems to be quite determined not to let him pass. As he knows that Lazarus' name has great influence over the apostles, he makes up his mind and says: «Yes, I am Jonah, Lazarus' servant. I must speak to the Master.»

«Is Lazarus not well? Has he sent you? »

«No, he is not well. But don't make me waste time. I must go back as soon as possible.» And to convince Peter he says: «The members of the Sanhedrin came to Bethany...»

«The members of the Sanhedrin!!! Come in! Come in! » and he opens the gate saying: «Bring the horse in. We will water it and give it some grass, if you wish so.»

«I have some fodder, but some grass will not do it any harm. We will give it some water later, it may be harmful now.»

They go into the large room where the beds are and they tie the horse in a corner to protect it from draughts; the servant covers it with a blanket that was tied to the saddle, he gives it some fodder and the grass that Peter has brought from I do not know where. They go out again and Peter takes the servant into the kitchen and gives him a cup of warm milk that he takes from a pot near the fire, instead of the water that the servant had asked for. While the servant drinks it and warms himself near the fire, Peter, who is heroic in not asking curious questions, says: «Milk is better than the water you wanted. And since we have it! Did you come all the way without a stop? »

«Without a stop. And I'll do the same going back.»

«You must be tired. And can the horse stand it? »

«I hope so. In any case, on my way back, I shall not gallop as I did coming.»

«It will soon be dark. The moon is already rising... How will you manage at the river? »

«I hope to arrive there before the moon sets. Otherwise I shall stop in the wood until dawn. But I shall get there before.»

«And then? It's a long way from the river to Bethany. And the moon sets early. She is in her first days.»

«I have a good lamp. I will light it and go slow. No matter how slow I may go, I shall be approaching home.»

«Would you like some bread and cheese? We have some. We have also some fish, I caught it. Because I remained here with Thomas. But Thomas has now gone to get some bread from a woman who helps us.»

«No, don't deprive yourself of anything. I had some food on the way, but I was thirsty and I needed something warm. I am all right now. But will you go to the Master? Is He in? »

«Yes, He is. If He had not been here, I would have told you at once. He is in that room, resting. Because so many people come here... I am even afraid that the news may spread and that the Pharisees may come and disturb. Take some more milk. You have to let the horse eat... and rest. Its sides were beating like a badly secured sail...»

«No, you need the milk. You are so many.»

«Yes. But with the exception of the Master, Who speaks so much that His chest aches, and of the older ones, we, who are sturdy, prefer food that keeps our teeth busy. Take some. It's the milk of the sheep left by the old man. When we are here, the woman brings it to us. But, if we want more, everybody is willing to give it to us. They like us, here, and they help us. And... tell me: were there many members of the Sanhedrin? »

«Oh! they were almost all there and other people with them: Sadducees, scribes, Pharisees, wealthy Judaeans, some Herodians....»

«And why did all those people come to Bethany? Was Joseph with them? And Nicodemus? »

«No. They had come previously, Manaen also had come. The others were not friends of the Lord.»

«Eh! I believe that! They are so few the members of the Sanhedrin who love Him! But what did they want exactly? »

«To greet Lazarus, so they said coming in...»

«H'm! How strange their love is! They have always shunned Him for so many reasons!... Well!... Let us believe it... Did they stay long? »

«Quite a long time. And they were upset when they left. I do not work in the house, so I was not serving at the tables. But the other servants who were serving in the house say that they spoke with the mistresses and they wanted to see Lazarus. Helkai went into Lazarus' room and...»

«A fine crook!...» whispers Peter between his teeth.

«What did you say? »

«Oh! nothing! Go on. And did he speak to Lazarus? »

«I think so. He went with Mary. But later, I do not know why... Mary became irritated and the servants, who rushed there from the nearby rooms, say that she turned them out ruthlessly...»

«Well done! Just what is needed! And have they sent you to tell us? »

«Don't make me waste more time, Simon of Jonah.»

«You are right. Come.»

He takes him towards a door and knocks saying: «Master, there is one of Lazarus' servants who wants to speak to You.»

«Let him come in » says Jesus.

Peter opens the door, lets the servant enter, closes the door and withdraws, meritoriously, to the fireplace, to mortify his curiosity.

Jesus, sitting on the edge of His little bed in the small room where there is hardly space for the bed and the person who lives in it, and which previously was certainly a store-room as there are still hooks on the walls and shelves, looks smiling at the servant who has knelt down and He greets him: «Peace be with you.» And He then adds: «What news do you bring Me? Stand up and speak.»

«My mistresses have sent me to tell You to go to them at once, because Lazarus is very ill and the doctor says that he will die. Martha and Mary implore You and they have sent me to say to You: "Come, because You alone can cure him".»

«Tell them not to worry. This is not a disease that will cause his death, but it is for the glory of God, that His power may be glorified in His Son.»

«But his condition is very serious, Master! His body is affected with gangrene and he no longer takes any food. I have worn out my horse to arrive here in the shortest possible time...»

«It does not matter. It is as I say.»

«But will You come? »

«I will come. Tell them that I will come and to have faith. Tell them to have faith. Absolute faith. Have you understood? Go. Peace to you and to those who sent you. I tell you once again: "They must have faith. Absolute faith". Go.» The servant greets Him and withdraws.

Peter rushes towards him saying: «You were quick in telling Him. I thought that it was a long speech...» He looks at him intently... His face is shot through with the anxiety to be informed. But he checks himself...

«I am going. Will you give me some water for the horse? Then I will leave.»

«Come. Some water!... We have a whole river to give you some, in addition to our well » and Peter, holding a lamp, walks before him and gives him the water he asked for.

They water the horse. The servant removes the blanket, he checks its shoes, the belly-band, the reins, the stirrups. He explains: «It has run so much and so fast! But everything is in order. Goodbye, Simon Peter, and pray for us.»

He leads the horse out. Holding it by the bridle he goes out on to the road, puts one foot in the stirrup and is about to mount.

Peter holds him back putting one hand on his arms saying: «There is only one thing I wish to know: is there any danger for Him to stay here? Have they made threats? Did they want to learn from the sisters where we were? Tell me, in the name of God! »

«No, Simon. No. They never said that. They came for Lazarus... We suspect that they came to see whether the Master was there and whether Lazarus was leprous, because Martha was shouting out loud that he is not leprous and she was weeping... Goodbye, Simon. Peace be with you.»

«And with you and your mistresses. May God accompany you back home...» He watches him depart... and soon disappear at the end of the street, because the servant prefers to take the main road, clear in the moonlight, rather than the dark path in the wood along the river. He remains thoughtful. Then he closes the gate and goes back into the house.

He goes to Jesus, Who is still sitting on the little bed, leaning His hands on its edge, engrossed in thought. But He rouses Himself when He hears Peter come close to Him and look at Him inquisitively. He smiles at the apostle.

«Are You smiling, Master? »

«I am smiling at you, Simon of Jonah. Sit down here, near Me. Have the others come back? »

«No, Master. Not even Thomas. He must have found someone to speak to.»

«That is all right.»

«All right that he should speak? All right that the others should be late? He speaks even too much. He is always cheerful! And the others? I am always worried until they come back. I am always afraid.»

«Of what, My dear Simon? No harm will befall us for the time being, believe Me. Set your mind at rest and imitate Thomas who is always cheerful. You, on the contrary, have been very sad for some time.»

«I defy anyone who loves You not to be so! I am old now and I ponder more than the younger ones. Because they also love you, but they are young and less thoughtful... But if You like me more when I am happy, I will be so, I will strive to be so. But in order to be able to be so, give me a reason for it. Tell me the truth, my Lord. I am asking You on my knees (he in fact kneels down). What did Lazarus' servant tell You? That they are looking for You? That they want to harm You? That...»

Jesus lays His hand on Peter's head saying: «No, Simon! Nothing of the kind. He came to tell Me that Lazarus has got worse, and we spoke only of Lazarus.»

«Really? »

«Really, Simon. And I told them to have faith.»

«But do You know that those of the Sanhedrin have been to Bethany? »

«Which is natural! Lazarus' household is a great one. And according to our custom such honours are to be given to a powerful man who is dying. Do not distress yourself, Simon.»

«But do You really think that they did not use that as an excuse to...»

«To see whether I was there. Well, they did not find Me. Cheer up, do not be so frightened as if they had already captured Me. Come here, beside Me, poor Simon, who on no account will be convinced that no harm can befall Me until the moment decreed by God, and that then... nothing will be able to defend Me from Evil...»

Peter throws his arms round Jesus' neck and keeps Him quiet by kissing His lips and saying: «Be quiet! Be quiet! Don't tell me such things! I don't want to hear them! »

Jesus succeeds in releasing Himself so that He can speak and He whispers: «You do not want to hear them! That is the error! But I pity you... Listen, Simon. Since you were the only one to be here, only you and I are to know what happened. Do you understand Me? »

«Yes, Master. I will not mention it to any of my companions.»

«How many sacrifices, is that right, Simon? »

«Sacrifices? Which? It is pleasant to be here. We have what is necessary.»
 «The sacrifice of not asking questions, of not speaking, of putting up with Judas... of being away from your lake... But God will reward you for everything.»
 «Oh! if that is what You mean!... In place of the lake I have the river and... I make it suffice. With regard to Judas... I have You Who make up for him fully... And with regard to the other things!... Trifles! And they help me to become less coarse and more like You. How happy I am to be here with You! In Your arms! Caesar's palace would not seem more beautiful than this house, if I could always be in it thus, in Your arms.»
 «What do you know of Caesar's palace? Have you seen it? »
 «No, and I shall never see it. And I do not care. But I imagine it large, beautiful, full of lovely things... and of filth. Like the whole of Rome, I suppose. I would not stay there even if they covered me with gold! »
 «Where? In Caesar's palace or in Rome? »
 «In neither. Anathema! »
 «But because they are like that, they are to be evangelized.»
 «And what do You expect to do in Rome?! It is a brothel! There is nothing to be done there, unless You come. Then!...»
 «I will come. Rome is the capital of the world. Once Rome is conquered, the world is conquered.»
 «Are we going to Rome? You are proclaiming Yourself king, there! Mercy and power of God! That is a miracle! »
 Peter has stood up and with raised arms he is standing before Jesus Who smiles and replies to him: «I will go there in My apostles. You will conquer it for Me. And I shall be with you. But there is someone out there. Let us go, Peter.»

544. At Lazarus' Funeral.
 23rd December 1946.

The news of Lazarus' death must have had the same effect as a stick stirred inside a beehive. Everybody in Jerusalem talks about it. Notables, merchants, common people, poor people, the townspeople, people from the nearby country, foreigners passing through but familiar with the place, strangers who are there for the first time and ask who is the man whose death is the cause of so much commotion, Romans, legionaries, members of the staff, and Levites and priests who continually gather together and then part, running here and there... Small knots of people discussing the event with different words and expressions. Some utter words of praise, some weep, some feel they are more pauper than usual now that their benefactor is dead, some moan: «I shall never have such a master again», some mention his merits, some describe his wealth and kindred, his father's services and offices and his mother's beauty and riches and her «regal » birth; some, on the contrary, recall family events over which one should draw a veil of kindness, particularly when a dead man is involved who has suffered through them...

The small groups of people come up with the most desperate news on the cause of Lazarus' death, on the place of his burial, on the absence of Christ from the house of His great friend and protector just in that circumstance. The prevailing opinions are two: one is that all this happened, nay, was brought about by the bad behaviour of Judaeans, members of the Sanhedrin, Pharisees and the like towards the Master; the other, that the Master, being faced with a real deadly disease, sneaked away because His deceit would not be successful in this case. Also without being astute one can understand the source of the latter opinion, which embitters many who retort: «Are you a Pharisee as well? If you are, take care of yourself because the Holy One is not to be cursed in our presence! You abominable vipers born of hyenas coupled with Leviathan! Who pays you to curse the Messiah? » Squabbles, insults, also some blows, pungent rude remarks addressed to the richly dressed Pharisees and scribes, who pass by giving themselves the airs of gods, without condescending to look at the common people shouting in favour or against them, in favour or against the Messiah, resound in the streets. And how many accusations!
 «This man is saying that Jesus is a false Master! He is certainly one who has put on weight with the money he received from those snakes who have just gone

by! »

«With their money? With ours, you should say! They fleece us for such noble purposes! But where is he? I want to see whether he is one of those who came yesterday to tell me...»

«He has run away. But, blessed be the Lord, we must join together and take action. They are too insolent.»

Another conversation: «I have heard you and I know you. I will tell the people concerned what you said of the Supreme Court! »

«I belong to Christ, and the slaver of a demon does me no harm. If you wish, you can tell Annas and Caiaphas, and may it help them to become more honest.»

And farther away: «Me? You say that I am a perjurer and a blasphemer because I follow the living God? You are a perjurer and a blasphemer since you offend and persecute Him. I know who you are. I have seen you and heard you. You corrupt informer! Come! Take this!...» and in the meantime he begins to cuff the ears of a Judaeon whose bony greenish face reddens.

«Comelius, Simon, look! They are bullying me » says another one farther away, addressing a group of members of the Sanhedrin.

«Endure it with faith and do not soil your hands and lips on a Sabbath's eve » replies one of the men, who had been called, without even turning to look at the unlucky person to whom a group of common people are dispensing rough justice... Women are shouting calling their husbands whom they entreat not to compromise themselves.

Legionaries on patrol go around dispersing the crowds with their lances and threatening arrests and punishments.

Lazarus' death, the main fact, is the starting point to go on to secondary facts, to give vent to the long lasting tension in hearts...

The members of the Sanhedrin, the elders, scribes, Sadducees, the mighty Judaeans go by slyly, with indifference, as if all the outbursts of petty anger, of personal revenge, of nervousness were not rooted in them. And as the time goes by the agitation and the excitement increase more and more.

«Listen to this, these people here say that the Christ cannot cure sick people. I was a leper and now I am healthy. Do you know who they are? I do not come from Jerusalem, but I have never seen them among the disciples of the Christ these last two years.»

«Those men? Let me see the one in the middle! Ah! you rascal and thief! You are the one who last month came to me to offer me money in the name of the Christ, saying that He hires men to seize Palestine. And you now say... But why did you let him escape? »

«Have you seen that? How mischievous they are! And they almost caught me! My father-in-law was right! There is Joseph the Elder with John and Joshua. Let us go and ask them whether it is true that the Master wants to assemble an army. They are just and they know.» They all rush towards the three members of the Sanhedrin and ask their question.

«Go home, men. One sins and does harmful things in the streets. Do not argue. Don't take fright. Mind your own business and take care of your families. Don't listen to agitators or dreamers and don't allow yourselves to be beguiled. The Master is a master, not a warrior. You know Him. And He speaks His mind. He would not have sent other people to ask you to follow Him as warriors, if He wanted you to be such. Don't do any harm to Him, to yourselves and to our Fatherland. Home, men! Home! Do not allow what is already a misfortune - the death of a just man - to become a series of misfortunes. Go back to your houses and pray for Lazarus, who was charitable to everybody » says Joseph of Arimathea, who must be loved and listened to by the people who know him to be a just man.

Also John (the man who was jealous) says: «He is a peaceful not a warlike man. Don't listen to false disciples. Remember how different the others were, who said they were the Messiah. Remember and ponder, and your justice will tell you that those instigations to violence could not come from Him! Go home! Go back to your women who are weeping and to your children who are frightened. It is said: "Woe to those who are violent and to those who encourage brawls".»

A group of weeping women approach the three members of the Sanhedrin and one of them says: «The scribes have threatened my man. I am afraid! Joseph, please speak to them.»

«Yes, I will. But let your husband be quiet. Do you think that you are assisting

the Master by means of these agitations and that you are honouring the dead man? You are wrong. You are harmful to both of them » replies Joseph and he leaves them to go towards Nicodemus, who is coming from one of the streets, followed by servants, and he says to him: «I was not hoping to meet you, Nicodemus. I do not know myself how I managed. Lazarus' servant came to me at the end of the fourth watch to inform me of the sad event.»

«And he came to me later. I left at once. Do you know whether the Master is at Bethany? »

«No, He is not there. My steward in Bezetha was there at the third hour and he told me that the Master is not there.»

«I do not know how... miracles for everybody but not for him! » exclaims John.

«Probably because He gave the household more than a miraculous cure: He redeemed Mary and granted peace and honour...» says Joseph.

«Peace and honour! Of good people to good people. Because many... have not paid and do not pay honour even now that Mary... You do not know... Three days ago Helkai and many others were there... and they did not pay honour. And Mary drove them away. They were furious when they told me, and I just let them say what they liked, as I did not want to disclose my heart to them...» says Joshua.

«And are they going to the funeral now? » asks Nicodemus.

«They have been informed and they have met at the Temple to decide. Oh! their servants have been very busy running about at dawn this morning! »

«Why such hurry for the funeral? Immediately after the sixth hour!...»

«Because Lazarus was already rotten when he died. My steward told me that although resins are burning in the rooms and perfumes have been spread profusely on the dead body, the stench of the corpse is smelt even at the porch of the house. In any case the Sabbath begins at sunset. It was not possible to do otherwise.»

«And you say that they held a meeting at the Temple? Why? »

«Well... in actual fact the meeting had already been called to discuss Lazarus' case. They wanted to state that he was leprous...» says Joshua.

«Surely not. He would have been the first to live in isolation according to the Law » says Joseph defending him. And he adds: «I spoke to their doctor. He excluded it without any possibility of doubt. He was affected by putrid consumption.»

«So what did they discuss, since Lazarus was already dead? » asks Nicodemus.

«Whether they should go to the funeral, after Mary has driven them away. Some wanted to go, some were against it. Those who wanted to go were the majority and for three reasons. To see whether the Master was there, the first reason agreed to by everybody. To see whether He will work a miracle, the second reason. The third reason: the remembrance of words spoken recently by the Master to some scribes at the Jordan near Jericho » explains Joshua once again.

«The miracle! Which, if he is already dead? » asks John shrugging his shoulders, and he concludes: «The usual... seekers of what is impossible! »

«The Master has raised other people from the dead » remarks Joseph.

«That is true. But if He had wanted him to be alive, He would not have let him die. The reason mentioned by you previously is correct. They have already been granted much.»

«Yes. But Uziel and Sadoc have recalled a challenge of many months ago. The Christ said that He will give proof that He can recompose also a decomposed body. And Lazarus is such. And Sadoc, the scribe, also says that, near the Jordan, the Rabbi spontaneously told him that at the new moon he would see half of the challenge being accomplished. That is: a decomposed person that revives, without further decomposition or disease. And their opinion prevailed. If that happens, it is because the Master is there. And if that happens, there will be no more doubts about Him.»

«Providing that is not detrimental...» whispers Joseph.

«Detrimental? Why? The scribes and Pharisees will be convinced...»

«Oh! John! Are you a stranger that you should say that? Do you not know your fellow-citizens? When has the truth ever made them holy? Does it mean nothing to you that no invitation to the meeting was brought to my house? »

«It was not brought to mine either. They suspect us and they often leave us out » says Nicodemus. Then he asks: «Was Gamaliel there? »

«His son was there. And he will come also in place of his father, who is unwell at Gamala in Judaea.»

«And what did Simeon say? »

«Nothing. Nothing at all. He listened. Then he went away. Not long ago he passed with some of his father's disciples, going towards Bethany.»

They are almost at the gate leading onto the road to Bethany. And John exclaims: «Look! It is garrisoned. Why? And they are stopping those coming out.»

«There is agitation in town...»

«Oh! But it is not a very fierce one...»

They arrive at the gate and they are stopped like everybody else.

«What is the reason for this, soldier? I am well known to everybody in the Antonia, and you cannot speak ill of me. I respect you and your laws » says Joseph of Arimathea.

«It is the order of the Centurion. The Commander is about to enter the town and we want to know who comes out of the gates, particularly of this one that opens onto the Jericho road. We know you. But we also know the feelings of the Judaeans towards us. You and those who are with you may go on. And if you have influence on the people tell them that it is better for them to be calm. Pontius does not like to change his habits because of subjects who cause him trouble... and he might be too severe. A piece of sincere advice to you who are sincere.» They go on.

«Did you hear that? I foresee troublesome days... It will be necessary to advise the others, rather than the people...» says Joseph.

The Bethany road is crowded with people all going in the same direction: to Bethany. They are all going to the funeral. One can see members of the Sanhedrin and Pharisees mingled with Sadducees and scribes, with peasants, servants, with the stewards of the various houses and estates that Lazarus owned in town and in the country, and the more one approaches Bethany, the more people pour into the main road from paths and other side roads.

There is Bethany. Bethany mourning for its greatest citizen. All the inhabitants, wearing their best clothes, have already left their houses, which are locked as if no one lived in them. But they are not yet in the house of the dead man. Curiosity holds them back near the gate and along the road. They watch the people who have been invited, as they pass by, they mention their names and exchange impressions.

«There is Nathanael ben Faba. Oh! Old Mattathias, Jacob's relative! Annas' son! He is over there with Doras, Callascebona and Archelaus. Oh! How did those of Galilee manage to come? They are all there. Look: Eli, Johanan, Ishmael, Uriah, Joachim, Elias, Joseph... Old Hananiah with Sadoc, Zacharias and Johanan, the Sadducees. There is also Simeon of Gamaliel. He is all alone. The rabbi is not there. There is Helkai with Nahum, Felix, Annas the scribe, Zacharias, Jonathan ben Uriel! Saul with Eleazar, Triphon and Joazar. Fine rascals these last ones! Another son of Annas. The youngest. He is talking to Simon Camit. Philip with John Antipatrides. Alexander, Isaac and Jonah of Babaon. Sadoc. Judas, a descendant of the Asideans, the last one, I think, of that class. There are the stewards of the various buildings. I do not see any of the faithful friends. How many people! »

Really! How many people. They are all supercilious, some with an expression for the occasion, some with the signs of true grief on their faces. They are all swallowed up by the wide open gate, and I see pass by all those who in successive stages appeared to be friendly or hostile to the Master. Everybody, with the exception of Gamaliel and of Simon, the member of the Sanhedrin. And I see also other people, whom I have never seen before, or whom I may have seen without knowing their names, disputing round Jesus... Rabbis pass by with their disciples, and scribes in close groups. And Judaeans go along while I hear their riches being listed... The garden is full of people who, after going to express their sympathy with the sisters - who, probably according to the local custom, are sitting under the porch, and are therefore outside the house - come back and spread out in the garden in continuous blending of colours and bowing in salutation.

Martha and Mary are worn out. They are holding each other's hand like two little girls, frightened of the sad gap in their family, of the emptiness of their days now that they no longer have to take care of Lazarus. They listen to the words of visitors, they weep with true friends, with loyal subordinates, they bow to the icy imposing stiff members of the Sanhedrin who have come more to attract attention to themselves than to honour the dead man, and although they are tired

of repeating the same things hundreds of times, they reply to those asking them about Lazarus' last moments.

Joseph, Nicodemus, the most devoted friends are near them speaking only few words, but their friendship comforts them more than any word.

Helkai comes back with the more intransigent members of the Sanhedrin, to whom he has been speaking for a long time and he asks: «Could we see the dead body? » Martha grievously wipes her forehead with her hand and asks: «When is that ever done in Israel? It is already prepared...» and tears stream slowly from her eyes.

«It is not the custom, that is true. But that is what we wish. The more loyal friends are certainly entitled to see their friends for the last time.»

«We also, as his sisters, should have been entitled to see him. But it was necessary to embalm him at once... And when we went back into Lazarus' room we only saw the form of his body wrapped in linen cloths...»

«You should have given clear instructions. Could you not have had the sudarium removed from his face? Can you not remove it now? »

«Oh! it is already decomposed... And it is time for the funeral...»

Joseph joins in the conversation: «Helkai, I think that we... out of excess of love, are the cause of grief. Let us leave the sisters in peace...»

Simeon, Gamaliel's son, moves forward to prevent Helkai from replying: «My father will come as soon as he is able. I represent him. He held Lazarus in high esteem. So do I.»

Martha replies bowing: «May the honour of the rabbi for our brother be rewarded by God.»

As Gamaliel's son is there, Helkai stands aside without insisting further, and he talks the matter over with the others who point out to him: «Can you not smell the stench? Do you wish to doubt it? In any case we shall see whether they wall up the sepulchre. One cannot live without air.»

Another group of Pharisees approach the sisters. They are almost all from Galilee. After receiving their homage Martha cannot restrain herself from expressing her surprise at their presence.

«Woman, the Sanhedrin is in session to resolve upon matters of great importance and we are in town for that purpose » explains Simon of Capernaum, and he looks at Mary whose conversion he certainly remembers. But he just looks at her.

Then Johanan comes forward with Doras, the son of Doras, and with Ishmael, Hananiah, Sadoc and others whom I do not know. Their viperous faces express their intentions before their words do. But in order to strike they wait till Joseph goes away with Nicodemus to speak to three Judaeans. It is old Hananiah who with his clucking voice of a decrepit old man delivers the blow: «What do you think, Mary? Your Master is the only one to be absent among the many friends of your brother. Peculiar friendship! So much love while Lazarus was well! And so much indifference when it was time to love him! Everybody receives miracles from Him. But there is no miracle here. What do you say, woman, of such a situation? He has deceived you bitterly, the handsome Galilean Rabbi, hey! Did you not say that He told you to hope beyond what can be hoped for? So did you not hope, or is it of no avail to hope in Him? You were hoping in the Life, you said. Of course! He says that He is the "Life", hey! But in there there is your dead brother. And over there the entrance of the sepulchre is already open. But the Rabbi is not here. Hey! Hey! »

«He can give death, not life » says Doras with a sneer.

Martha lowers her head covering her face with her hands and weeps. That is the real situation. Her hope has been bitterly disappointed. The Rabbi is not there. He did not even come to console them. And by now He could be there. Martha is weeping. She can but weep.

Mary is weeping, too. She also has to face facts. She believed, she hoped beyond what is credible... but nothing happened and the servants have already removed the stone from the entrance to the sepulchre because the sun is beginning to set and it sets early in winter, and it is Friday and everything must be done in time so that the guests may not have to infringe the law of the Sabbath that is about to begin. She has hoped so much, always, she hoped too much. She has consumed her energies in that hope. And she is disappointed.

Hananiah insists: «Are you not replying to me? Are you now persuaded that He is an impostor who has taken advantage of you and scoffed at you? Poor women! » and he shakes his head among his friends who imitate him saying also: «Poor women! »

Maximinus approaches them saying: «It is time. Give the order. It's for you to give it.»

Martha collapses on the floor, she is assisted and carried away among the cries of the servants, who realise that the time to lay their master in the sepulchre has come and they intone their lamentations.

Mary wrings her hands convulsively. She implores: «A little longer! A little longer! And send servants on the road to En-shemesh and to the fountain, on every road. Servants on horseback. To see whether He is coming...»

«Are you still hopeful, poor wretch? How can one convince you that He has betrayed and disappointed you? He has hated you and sneered at you...»

It is too much! With her face wet with tears, tortured but still faithful, in the semicircle formed by the guests who have gathered together to see the corpse go out, Mary proclaims: «If Jesus of Nazareth has done that, it is well done, and great is His love for us all in Bethany. Everything for God's glory and His own! He said that this will bring about glory to the Lord because the power of His Word will shine completely. Execute the order, Maximinus. The sepulchre is no obstacle to the power of God...»

She moves away, supported by Naomi who has approached her, and she makes a gesture... The corpse, enveloped in linen cloths, departs from the house, crosses the garden between the crowds forming a double hedge and shouting their grief. Mary would like to follow the corpse, but she staggers. She follows the crowds when they are all near the sepulchre. And she arrives in time to see the long motionless body disappear in the darkness of the sepulchre, where the reddish light of the torches held high by the servants illuminates the steps for those who are descending with the corpse. Lazarus' sepulchre in fact is rather deep in the ground, probably to take advantage of strata of underground rock. Mary utters a cry... It is a torture... She shouts... And with the name of her brother she utters also Jesus'. She looks as if they were tearing her heart. And she only mentions those two names, and she repeats them until the heavy thud of the stone placed against the entrance of the sepulchre tells her that Lazarus is no longer on the Earth, not even with his body. She is then overwhelmed and loses consciousness. She collapses into the arms of those supporting her and while sinking into a deep swoon she whispers again: «Jesus! Jesus! ». They carry her away.

Maximinus remains to dismiss the guests and thank them on behalf of all the relatives. He remains to hear them all say that they will come back to condole every day...

They disperse slowly. The last to depart are Joseph, Nicodemus, Eleazar, John, Joachim, Joshua. And at the gate they find Sadoc with Uriel, who laugh maliciously saying: «His challenge! And we were afraid of it! »

«Oh! He is really dead. How he stank notwithstanding the aromatic essences! There is no doubt about it! It was not necessary to remove the sudarium. I think that he is already decadent.» They are happy.

Joseph looks at them. His glance is so severe that it cuts short words and laughter. They all make haste to go back to be in town before sunset is over.

545. Jesus Decides to Go to Lazarus.

24th December 1946.

It is getting dark in the little kitchen garden of Solomon's house, and the trees, the outlines of the houses beyond the road, and the very end of the road itself, where it disappears in the woodland near the river, are becoming more and more vague, blending into one only line of shadows, which are more or less clear, more or less dark, in the deepening twilight. Rather than shades, the things spread on the Earth are by now sounds. Voices of children from houses, calls of mothers, cries of men urging sheep or donkeys, the late squeaking of well-pulleys, the rustling noise of leaves in the evening breeze, sharp cracks as of clashing branches or sticks spread in the woodland. High above the first twinkling of stars, still feeble as there is still a reflection of daylight and because the early phosphorescent moonlight is beginning to spread in the sky.

«You will tell the rest tomorrow. That's enough now. It is getting dark. Let everybody go home. Peace to you. Peace to you. Yes... Of course... Tomorrow. Eh? What did you say? You have a scruple? Sleep on it till tomorrow and then, if you still have it, come back. That would be the last straw! Also scruples to make Him more weary! And men craving for wealth! And mothers-in-law who want young wives to recover their wits, and young wives who want their mothers-in-law to be less sharp, while both would deserve to have their tongues cut off. And what else is there? Ehi! you? What are you saying? Oh! this one, yes, poor little thing! John, take this little boy to the Master. His mother is ill and she has sent him to tell Jesus to pray for her. Poor child! He has been left at the rear because he is so small. And he comes from so far. How will he be able to go back home? Ehi! all you over there! Instead of standing there to enjoy His company, could you not put into practice what the Master told you: to help one another and that the stronger ones should help the weaker ones? Come on! Who is taking this boy home? God forbid it, he might find his mother dead... Let him at least see her... You have got some donkeys... It is night-time? And what is there more beautiful than night-time? I worked for years and years by starlight, and I am healthy and strong. Are you taking him home? May God bless you, Ruben. Here is the boy. Has the Master comforted you? He has? Go then, and be happy. But we must give him some food. Perhaps he has had none since this morning.»

«The Master has given him some warm milk and bread, and some fruit; he has them in his little tunic » says John.

«Then go with this man. He will take you home on his donkey.»

At last all the people have gone, and Peter can rest with James, Judas, the other James and Thomas, who have helped him to send the more obstinate ones home.

«Let us close the door, lest someone may change his mind and come back, like those two over there. Ugh! The day after the Sabbath is really toilsome! » says Peter going into the kitchen and closing the door. And he adds: «We shall be in peace now.»

He looks at Jesus Who is sitting near the table, engrossed in thought, with one elbow on the table and His head resting on His hand. Peter approaches Him and laying his hand on His shoulder he says: «You are tired, eh! So many people! They come from all parts of the country notwithstanding the season.»

«They seem to be afraid of losing us soon » remarks Andrew who is gutting some fish. Also the others are busy preparing the fire to roast them, or stirring some chicory in a boiling pot. Their shadows are projected on the dark walls, which are illuminated more by the fire than by the lamp.

Peter looks for a cup to give some milk to Jesus Who looks very tired. But he does not find the milk and he asks the others about it.

«The boy drank the last drop of milk we had. The rest was given to the old beggar and to the woman whose husband was ill » explains Bartholomew.

«And the Master has been left without! You should not have given it all away.»
«He wanted that...»

«Oh! He would always like that. But we must not let Him do so. He gives away His garments, He gives away His milk, He gives Himself away and He wastes away...» Peter is dissatisfied.

«Be good, Peter! It is better to give than to receive » says Jesus quietly, coming out of His engrossment.

«Of course! And You give and keep giving and You are worn out. And the more You show people that You are willing to be generous, the more men take advantage of You.» And in the meantime he rubs the table with some coarse leaves exhaling a scent that is a mixture of bitter almond and chrysanthemum, he cleans it thoroughly to lay bread and water on it, and he puts a cup in front of Jesus. Jesus pours Himself some water as if He were very thirsty. Peter puts another cup on the opposite side of the table near a plate containing some olives and stalks of wild fennel. He adds the tray of chicory already dressed by Philip, and together with his companions he draws some very rustic stools near the table adding them to the four chairs available in the kitchen, but quite insufficient for thirteen people. Andrew, who has been grilling the fish, puts it on another plate and with more bread he goes towards the table. John takes the oil-lamp and puts it in the middle of the table.

Jesus stands up while they all approach the table for supper and He prays in a loud voice, offering the bread and blessing the table. He sits down imitated by

the others and He hands out the bread and the fish, that is, He lays the fish on the thick large slices of bread, part new part stale, that each apostle has placed in front of himself. They then help themselves to the chicory using the large wooden fork served with the chicory. Also for the vegetables the slice of bread serves as plate. Jesus alone has in front of Himself a large metal plate, which is rather in bad condition, and He makes use of it to divide the fish giving a dainty now to this one now to that one. He looks like a father among his children, even if Nathanael, Simon Zealot and Philip are old enough to be His fathers, and Matthew and Peter look like His older brothers.

They eat and speak of the events of the day and John laughs heartily at Peter's disdain of the shepherd of the Gilead mountains, who expected Jesus to go up there, where his herd was, to bless it and thus make him earn much money for his daughter's dowry.

«There is nothing to laugh at. While he said: "My sheep are suffering from a disease and if they die I am ruined" I felt pity for him. We fishermen would feel the same if our boat became worm-eaten. One would no longer be able to work and earn one's daily bread. And we are all entitled to live. But when he said: "And I want my sheep to be healthy because I want to become rich and dumbfound the village on account of the dowry I will give Esther and of the house I will build for myself", then I got angry. I said to him: "And you have come from so far just for that? Have you nothing at heart but the dowry and your wealth and sheep? Have you no soul?". He replied to me: "There is time for that. My sheep and the marriage interest me more at present because it is a good match and Esther is becoming old". Then, if I had not remembered that Jesus says that we must be merciful towards everybody, he would have been for it! I really almost lost my temper when speaking to him...»

«And we thought that you were never going to stop. You never took breath. The veins in your neck were bulging and protruding like sticks » says James of Zebedee.

«The shepherd had already gone for some time and you were continuing to preach. It's a good job that you say that you are not able to speak to people! » adds Thomas. And he embraces him saying: «Poor Simon! He was beside himself with fury! »

«But was I not right? What is the Master? The fortune maker of all the fools in Israel? The procurer of other people' weddings? »

«Don't get angry, Simon. The fish will give you indigestion if you eat it with so much poison » says good-natured Matthew teasingly.

«You are right. I taste all the flavour of the banquets in the houses of Pharisees, when I eat bread with fear and meat with anger.»

They all laugh. Jesus smiles and is silent.

They are at the end of the meal. They remain round the table, somewhat lazily satisfied with food and heat. They are not so talkative and some are dozing. Thomas enjoys himself drawing with a knife a little branch with flowers on the wood of the table.

They are roused by the voice of Jesus Who, opening His arms, which were folded, leaning on the edge of the table, and stretching out His hands as the priest does when he says: "The Lord be with you", says: «And yet we must go! »

«Where, Master? To the shepherd? » asks Peter.

«No, Simon. To Lazarus. We are going back to Judaea.»

«Master, remember that the Judaeans hate You! » exclaims Peter.

«They wanted to stone You not long ago » says James of Alphaeus.

«No, Master, it is not prudent! » exclaims Matthew.

«Do You not care for us? » asks the Iscariot.

«Oh! My Master and brother, I beseech You in the name of Your Mother, and also in the name of the Divinity that is in You: do not allow satans to lay their hands on Your person, to stifle Your word. You are alone, all alone against the world that hates You and is powerful on the Earth » says Thaddeus.

«Master, protect Your life! What would happen to me, to all of us, if we no longer had You? » says John who is upset and looks at Him with the wide open eyes of a frightened grieved child.

After his first exclamation, Peter has turned round to speak excitedly the older apostles and to Thomas and James of Zebedee. They are all of the opinion that Jesus must not go near Jerusalem, at least until Passover time may make His stay there safer because, they say, the presence of a very large number of followers

of the Master, who come from everywhere in Palestine for the Passover festival, will defend the Master. None of those who hate Him will dare touch Him when all the people crowd round Him with love... And they tell Him anxiously, almost overbearingly... Love makes them speak.

«Peace! Peace! Are there not twelve hours in the day? A man who walks in the daytime does not stumble because he has the light of this world to see by, but if he walks at night he stumbles because he cannot see. I know what I am doing because the Light is in Me. Allow yourselves to be guided by Him Who can see. And bear in mind that until the hour of darkness comes, nothing sinister will take place. But when that hour comes, no distance or power, not even Caesar's armies, will be able to save Me from the Judaeans. Because what is written must take place and the powers of evil are already working secretly to accomplish their deed. Do let Me do as I wish and do good while I am free to do so. The hour will come when I shall no longer be able to move a finger or utter one word to work the miracle. The world will be devoid of all My power. A dreadful hour of punishment for man. Not for Me. For man who will have refused to love Me. An hour that will repeat itself, through the will of man who will have rejected Divinity to the extent of making himself godless, a follower of Satan and of his cursed son. An hour that will take place when the end of this world is close at hand. The prevailing lack of faith will make My power of miracle of no use, not because I can lose it, but because no miracle can be granted where there is no faith and no will to have it, where a miracle would be made a butt of and an instrument of evil, by using the good received to turn it into greater evil. Now I can still work miracles, and work them to give glory to God. So let us go to our friend Lazarus who is sleeping. Let us go and wake him from his sleep, that he may be fresh and ready to serve his Master.»

«But if he is sleeping, it is a good thing. He is sure to get better. Sleep itself is a cure. Why wake him? » they point out to Him.

«Lazarus is dead. I waited until he died, before going there, not for his sisters and for him. But for you. That you may believe. That you may grow in faith. Let us go to Lazarus.»

«All right! Let us go! We shall all die as he died and You want to die » says Thomas, a resigned fatalist.

«Thomas, Thomas, and you all who are criticising and grumbling in your hearts, you ought to know that he who wants to follow Me must have for his life the same care that a bird has for a passing cloud. That is, to let it pass and go wherever the wind blows it. The wind is the will of God Who can give you life or take it away as He wishes, neither you must regret it, as the bird does not regret the passing cloud, but it sings just the same as it is sure that the sky will clear up again. Because the cloud is the incident, the sky is reality. The sky is always blue even if clouds seem to make it grey. It is and remains blue above the clouds. The same applies to true Life. It is and remains, even if human life ends. He who wants to follow Me must not be anxious about his life or afraid for it. I will show you how one conquers Heaven. But how can you imitate Me if you are afraid to come to Judaea, whereas no harm will be done to you now? Are you hesitating about showing yourselves with Me? You are free to leave Me. But if you want to stay you must learn to defy the world, with its criticism, its snares, its mockery, its torments, in order to conquer My Kingdom. So let us go and bring back from the dead Lazarus, who has been sleeping in his sepulchre for two days, as he died on the evening that his servant came here from Bethany. Tomorrow at the sixth hour, after dismissing those who have been waiting for the morrow to be comforted by Me and receive the reward for their faith, we shall depart from here and cross the river, stopping for the night in Nike's house. Then at dawn we shall set out towards Bethany, via En-shemesh. We shall be in Bethany before the sixth hour. And there will be many people and their hearts will be roused. I promised it and I will keep My promise...»

«To whom did You promise it, Lord? » asks James of Alphaeus almost fearfully.

«To those who hate Me and those who love Me, to both in the most clear manner.

Do you not remember the dispute with the scribes at Kedesh? It was still possible for them to say that I was mendacious, as I had raised from the dead a girl who had just died and a man who had been dead for one day. They said: "You have not yet recomposed a decomposed body". In fact God only can make a man from dust and remake a healthy living body from rot. Well, I will do that. At the moon of Chislev, on the banks of the Jordan, I Myself reminded the scribes of

this challenge and I said: "At the new moon it shall be accomplished". That with regard to those who hate Me. I promised the sisters, who love Me in a perfect manner, to reward their faith if they continued to hope against credibility. I have tried them severely and grieved them deeply and I alone am aware of how much their hearts suffered in the past days and I only know how perfect is their love. I solemnly tell you that they deserve a great reward because they grieve more at the possibility that I may be derided than over the fact that they cannot see their brother raised from the dead. I looked absorbed, tired and sad. I was close to them with My spirit and I could hear their wailing and I counted their tears. Poor sisters! I am now eager to bring a just man back to the Earth, a brother to the embrace of his sisters, a disciple back to My disciples. Are you weeping, Simon? Yes, you and I are Lazarus' greatest friends, and in your tears there is your sorrow for Martha's and Mary's grief and there is also the agony of a friend, but there is also the joy of knowing that he will soon be brought back to our love. Let us move and prepare our bags and go to rest in order to get up at dawn and tidy up here where... our return is not certain. We shall have to hand out to the poor everything we have and tell the most active ones to keep pilgrims from looking for Me until I am in a safe place. We shall also have to tell them to warn the disciples to look for Me at Lazarus' house. There are so many things to be done. They shall be done before the pilgrims arrive... Let us go. Put the fire out and light the lamps and let everyone do what is to be done and go to rest. Peace to you all.» He stands up, blesses them and withdraws to His little room...

«He has been dead for some days! » says the Zealot.

«That is a miracle! » exclaims Thomas.

«I want to see what excuse they will find then to be in doubt! » says Andrew.

«But when did the servant come? » asks Judas Iscariot.

«The evening before Friday » replies Peter.

«Did he? Why did you not tell us? » asks the Iscariot again.

«Because the Master told me not to mention it » replies Peter.

«So... when we arrive there... he will have been in the sepulchre four days? »

«Certainly! Friday evening one day, the Sabbath evening two days, this evening three days, tomorrow four... So four days and a half... Eternal power! But he will be decomposing! » says Matthew.

«He will be decomposing... I want to see also that and then...»

«What, Simon Peter? » asks James of Alphaeus.

«Then if Israel does not become converted, not even Jahweh among lightning will be able to convert her.»

And they go away speaking thus.

546. Resurrection of Lazarus.

26th December 1946.

Jesus is coming towards Bethany from En-shemesh. They must have marched really hard up the difficult paths on the Adummim mountains. The apostles, who are out of breath, find it difficult to follow Jesus Who walks rapidly, as if love carried Him on its ardent wings. A smile brightens Jesus' face as He proceeds ahead of them all, with His head raised, in the mild midday sunshine. Before they arrive at the first houses of Bethany, a barefooted boy, who is going to the fountain near the village with an empty copper pitcher, sees Him and gives a shout. He lays the pitcher on the ground and runs away, with all the speed of his little legs, towards the centre of the village. «He is certainly going to inform them that You are arriving » remarks Judas Thaddeus after smiling, like everybody else, upon the quick... decision of the little boy, who also left his pitcher at the mercy of the first passer-by. The little town, as seen from the fountain, which is a little higher up, seems quiet as if it were deserted. Only the grey smoke rising from chimneys indicates that in the houses women are busy preparing the midday meal, and the thick voices of men in the vast silent olive-groves and orchards inform one that men are working. Even so Jesus prefers to take a path that runs round the rear of the village, so that He may arrive at Lazarus' house without drawing the attention of the citizens.

They have gone almost half way when they hear the boy mentioned previously come after them; he runs past them and then stops thoughtfully in the middle of the path looking at Jesus...

«Peace to you, little Mark. Were you afraid of Me that you ran away? » asks Jesus caressing him.

«No, Lord, I was not afraid. But as for many days Martha and Mary have been sending servants on the roads leading here to see whether You were coming, when I saw You I ran to tell them that You were coming...»

«You did the right thing. The sisters will be preparing their hearts to see Me.»

«No, Lord. The sisters are not preparing anything, because they do not know. They would not let me tell them. They got hold of me when I entered the garden saying: "The Rabbi is here" and they drove me out saying: "You are a liar or a fool. He is not coming any more because He knows by now that He cannot work the miracle any more". And as I said that it was really You, they gave me two mighty slaps as I never had before... Look how red my cheeks are. They are smarting! And they pushed me away saying: "That will purify you for looking at a demon". And I was looking at You to see whether You had become a demon. But I can't see any... You are always my Jesus, as beautiful as an angel, as my mother tells me.»

Jesus bends to kiss his cheeks, which have been slapped, saying: «They will no longer smart. I am sorry that you had to suffer because of Me...»

«I am not sorry, Lord, because those two slaps made You give me two kisses» and he clings to His legs hoping to receive more.

«Tell me, Mark. Who was it that drove you away? Those of Lazarus' household? » asks Thaddeus.

«No. The Judaeans. They come to condole every day. They are so many! They stay in the house and in the garden. They come early and go away late. They behave as if they were the masters. They ill-treat everybody. Can't you see that there is nobody in the streets? The first days people remained to watch... then... Now only children wander about to... Oh! my pitcher! My mother is waiting for water... She will give me a beating as well!...»

They all laugh at his distress over the prospect of further smacks, and Jesus says: «Hurry up then...»

«The fact is... that I wanted to go in with You and see You work the miracle...» and he concludes: «...and see their faces... to avenge myself for the slaps...»

«No, that's wrong. You must not wish for revenge. You must be good and forgive... But your mother is waiting for the water...»

«I will go, Master. I know where Mark lives. I will tell the woman and then join You...» says James of Zebedee running away.

They set out again slowly and Jesus holds the delighted boy by the hand...

They are now at the garden railing. They walk along it. Many mounts are tied to it, watched by the owners' servants. Their whispering draws the attention of some Judaeans who turn towards the open gate just when Jesus sets foot on the border of the garden.

«The Master! » exclaim the first to see Him, and the word flies from group to group like the rustling of the wind; it spreads, like a wave that comes from afar and breaks on the shore as far as the walls of the house and enters it, certainly carried by the many Judaeans present, or by some Pharisees, rabbis or scribes or Sadducees, scattered here and there.

Jesus advances very slowly while people, although rushing from every directions, move away from the alley along which He is walking. As no one greets Him, He does not greet anybody, as if He did not know any of the many people gathered there looking at Him with eyes full of anger and hatred, with the exception of a few who, being secret disciples or at least righteous-hearted, even if they do not love Him as Messiah, respect Him as a just man. And those are Joseph, Nicodemus, John, Eleazar, the other John the scribe, whom I saw at the multiplication of the loaves, and another John, the one who fed the people that had come down from the mountain of the beatitudes, Gamaliel with his son, Joshua, Joachim, Manaen, the scribe Joel of Abijah, seen at the Jordan in the episode of Sabea, Joseph Barnabas the disciple of Gamaliel, Chuza who looks at Jesus from afar, somewhat shy seeing Him again after the mistake he had made, or perhaps fear of what people may think prevents him from approaching Him as a friend. It is a fact that neither friends nor those who look at Him without hatred nor enemies greet Him. And Jesus does not greet anyone either. He just

bowed lightly when setting foot in the alley. He has then moved straight on as if He were a stranger to the large crowd around Him. The little boy is walking beside Him all the time, in his garments of a poor little peasant and barefooted, but with the bright countenance of one who is really enjoying himself, his lively dark eyes wide open to see everything... and to defy everybody...

Martha comes out of the house with a group of Judaeen visitors among whom there are Helkai and Sadoc. With her hand she shades her eyes tired of weeping from the sun, as the light hurts them, so that she may see where is Jesus. She sees Him. She departs from those accompanying her and she runs towards Jesus Who is at a few steps from the fountain shining in the sunshine. She throws herself at Jesus' feet after bowing to Him and kisses them, while bursting into tears she says: «Peace to You, Master! »

Jesus also, as soon as she is close to Him, says to her: «Peace to you! » and He raises His hand to bless her, releasing the hand of the boy, who is taken by Bartholomew and held a little back.

Martha goes on: «But there is no more peace for Your servant.» Still on her knees she looks up at Jesus and with a cry of grief that is clearly heard in the prevailing silence she exclaims: «Lazarus is dead! If You had been here, he would not have died. Why did You not come sooner, Master? » There is an unintentional tone of reproach in her question. She then reverts to the depressed tone of one who no longer has the strength to reproach and whose only comfort is to recollect the last acts and wishes of a relative to whom one has tried to give what he wanted, and there is therefore no remorse in one's heart, and she says: «Lazarus, our brother, has called You so much!... Now, see! I am grieved and Mary is weeping and she cannot set her mind at rest. And he is no longer here! You know how much we loved him! We were hoping everything from You!...»

A murmur of pity for the woman and of reproach for Jesus is heard, approving the understood thought: «...and You could have satisfied our request because we deserve it for the love we have for You, whereas You have disappointed us » and the murmur passes from one group to the next one as people shake their heads or cast derisory glances. Only the few secret disciples mingled with the crowd look compassionately at Jesus, Who, pale and sad, listens to the grieved woman speaking to Him. Gamaliel, his arms folded across his chest in his wide rich robe of very fine wool adorned with blue tassels, a little apart in a group of young men among whom is his son and Joseph Barnabas, stares at Jesus, without hatred and without love.

Martha, after wiping her face, resumes: «But even now I hope because I know that whatever You ask of God, He will grant You.» A sorrowful heroic profession of faith uttered in a trembling weeping voice, with her eyes full of anxiety and her heart throbbing with the last hope.

«Your brother will rise again. Stand up, Martha.»

Martha stands up, stooping out of respect before Jesus to Whom she replies: «I know, Master. He will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.»

«I am the Resurrection and Life. Whoever believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. And whoever believes and lives in Me will never die. Do you believe all that?» Jesus, Who had previously spoken in a rather low voice, addressing Martha only, raises His voice when saying these sentences in which He proclaims His power of God, and its perfect timbre resounds like a golden blare in the vast garden. The people present quiver with an emotion resembling fear. Then some sneer shaking their heads.

Martha, into whom Jesus seems to wish to instil a stronger and stronger hope by holding His hand on her shoulder, raises her lowered head. She raises it towards Jesus staring with her sad eyes at the Christ's bright ones and pressing her hands against her breast with a different anxiety she replies: «Yes, I do, my Lord. I believe all that. I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, that You have come to the world and that You can do everything You want. I believe. I am now going to tell Mary » and she disappears quickly into the house.

Jesus remains where He was. That is, He takes a few steps forward and approaches the flower-bed that surrounds the basin of the fountain. The flower-bed is strewn on one side with the diamond drops of the very fine droplets of water of the jet, blown to that side by a light breeze, like silver down, and Jesus seems

to be lost in contemplating the fish wriggle in the limpid water and play describing silver commas and golden reflections in the crystalline water shining in the sunshine.

The Judaeans are watching Him. They have involuntarily divided into clearly distinct groups. On one side, in front of Jesus, all those who are hostile to Him, usually separated from one another by sectarian spirit, but now concordant in opposing Jesus. Beside Him, behind the apostles who have been joined by James of Zebedee, there are Joseph, Nicodemus and others who are well-disposed to Him. Farther away there is Gamaliel, still in the same place and attitude, and all alone, because his son and disciples have parted from him and joined the two main groups to be closer to Jesus.

With her usual cry: «Rabboni! » Mary runs out of the house with her arms stretched out towards Jesus and throws herself at His feet, which she kisses sobbing deeply. Several Judaeans who were in the house with her and who have followed her, weep with her with doubtful sincerity. Also Maximinus, Marcella, Sara, Naomi have followed Mary, as well as all the servants and their wailing is loud and high-pitched. I think that there is no one left in the house. When Martha sees Mary cry thus, she cries copiously, too.

«Peace to you, Mary. Stand up! Look at Me! Why weep thus, like one who has no hope? » Jesus stoops to say these words in a low voice, His eyes staring at Mary's, who on her knees, relaxing on her heels, stretches her hands towards Him imploringly and is unable to speak, so deep is her sobbing: «Did I not tell you to hope beyond what is credible in order to see the glory of God? Has your Master perhaps changed, that you are so depressed? »

But Mary does not listen to the words that aim at preparing her for too great a joy after so much anguish, and being able to speak at last, she shouts: «Oh! Lord! Why did You not come sooner? Why did You go away from us? You knew that Lazarus was ill! If You had been here my brother would not have died. Why did You not come? I still had to prove to him that I loved him. He should have lived. I had to show him that I persevered in honesty. I afflicted my brother so much! And now! And now that I could have made him happy, he has been taken away from me! You could have left him with me. You could have given poor Mary the joy of comforting him after grieving him so deeply. Oh! Jesus! Jesus! My Master! My Saviour! My hope! » and she collapses again, her forehead on Jesus' feet, which are washed once again by her tears, and she moans: «Why have you done that, Lord?! Also on account of those who hate You and are now rejoicing at what has happened... Why have You done that, Jesus?! » But there is no reproach in Mary's tone as there was in Martha's, there is only the anguish of a woman, who is grieved not only as a sister but also as a disciple who feels that the opinion of her Master is diminished in the hearts of many people.

Jesus, Who has bent very low to hear those words whispered with her face near the ground, stands up and says in a loud voice: «Mary, do not weep! Also your Master is suffering for the death of His faithful friend... for having had to let him die...»

Oh! How sneering and radiant with hateful joy are the faces of the enemies of Christ! They feel that He is defeated and rejoice, whilst His friends are becoming sadder and sadder.

Jesus says in an even louder voice: «But I tell you: do not weep. Stand up! Look at Me! Do you think that I, Who loved you so much, have done this without a reason? Can you believe that I have grieved you thus in vain? Come. Let us go to Lazarus. Where have you put him? »

Jesus' question, rather than to Mary and Martha, who cannot speak as they are crying even louder, is addressed to all the others and particularly to those who have come out of the house with Mary and look more upset. Perhaps they are older relatives, I do not know.

And they reply to Jesus, Who is clearly distressed: «Come and see », and they set out towards the place of the sepulchre, which is at the end of the orchard, where the ground is undulated and veins of calcareous rock appear on its surface.

Martha, beside Jesus Who has forced Mary to stand up and is now guiding her, as she is blinded by her copious tears, points out to Jesus where Lazarus is, and when they are near the place she also says: «It is there, Master, that Your friend is buried » and she points at the stone placed across the entrance of the sepulchre.

Jesus, followed by everybody, has to pass in front of Gamaliel, in order to go there. But neither He nor Gamaliel greet each other. Gamaliel then joins the others stopping with all the more rigid Pharisees a few metres from the sepulchre, while Jesus goes on, very close to it, with the two sisters, Maximinus and those who are perhaps relatives. Jesus looks at the heavy stone placed as a door against the sepulchre, a heavy obstacle between Him and His dead friend, and He weeps. The wailing of the sisters grows louder, as well as that of intimate friends and relatives.

«Remove that stone » shouts Jesus all of a sudden, after wiping His tears. Everybody is surprised and a murmur runs through the crowd that has become larger as some people of Bethany have entered the garden and have followed the guests. I can see some Pharisees touch their foreheads and shake their heads meaning: «He is mad! ». No one carries out the order. Even the most faithful ones are hesitant and feel repugnance to do it.

Jesus repeats His order in a louder voice astonishing even more the people, who urged by opposed feelings react at first as if they wanted to run away, but immediately afterwards they wish to draw closer, to see, defying the stench of the sepulchre that Jesus wants opened.

«Master, it is not possible » says Martha striving to restrain her tears to be able to speak. «He has been down there for four days. And You know of what disease he died! Only our love made it possible for us to cure him... By now he will certainly smell notwithstanding the ointments... What do You want to see? His rottenness?... It is not possible... also because of the uncleanness of putrefaction and...»

«Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God? Remove that stone. I want it! » It is the cry of divine will...

A subdued «oh! » is uttered by every mouth. Faces grow pale. Some people shiver as if an icy wind of death had blown over everybody.

Martha nods to Maximinus who orders the servants to get the necessary tools to remove the heavy stone.

The servants run away and come back with picks and sturdy levers. And they work inserting the points of the shining picks between the rock and the stone, and then replacing the picks with the sturdy levers and finally lifting the stone carefully, letting it slide to one side and dragging it cautiously against the rocky wall. An infected stench comes out of the dark hole making everyone withdraw.

Martha asks in a low voice: «Master, do You want to go down there? If You do, torches will be required...» But she is wan at the thought of having to go down. Jesus does not reply to her. He raises His eyes to the sky, He stretches out His arms crosswise and prays in a very loud voice syllabising the words: «Father! I thank You for hearing Me. I knew that You always hear Me. But I said so for those who are present here, for the people surrounding Me, that they may believe in You, in Me, and that You have sent Me! »

He remains thus for a moment and He becomes so transfigured that He seems to be enraptured, while without uttering any sound He says more secret words of prayer or adoration. I do not know. What I know is that He is so transhumanised that it is not possible to look at Him without feeling one's heart quiver. His body seems to become light, spiritualised, rising in height and also from the earth. Although the shades of His hair, eyes, complexion, garments remain unchanged - contrary to what happened during the transfiguration on mount Tabor when everything became light and dazzling brightness - He seems to shed light and that His whole body becomes light. Light seems to form a halo around Him, particularly round His face raised to the sky, certainly enraptured in the contemplation of His Father.

He remains thus for some time, then He becomes Himself, the Man, but powerfully majestic. He proceeds as far as the threshold of the sepulchre. He moves His arms forward - so far He had held them crosswise, the palms turned upwards - now with palms turned downwards, so that His hands are already inside the hole of the sepulchre and their whiteness is outstanding in the darkness of the hole. His blue eyes are blazing and their flash forecasting a miracle is today unsustainable, in the silent darkness, and in a powerful voice and with a cry louder than the one He uttered on the lake when He ordered the wind to abate, in a voice that I never heard in any other miracle, He shouts: «Lazarus! Come out!» His voice is echoed by the sepulchral cave and coming out of it, it spreads all

over the garden, it is repeated by the undulations of the ground of Bethany, I think it travels as far as the first hills beyond the fields and then comes back, repeated and subdued, like an order that cannot fail. It is certain that from numberless directions one can hear again: «out! out! out! »

Everybody is thrilled with emotion and if curiosity rivets everyone in his place, faces grow pale and eyes are opened wide while mouths are closed involuntarily with cries of surprise already on their lips.

Martha, a little behind and to one side, seems fascinated looking at Jesus.

Mary, who has never moved away from the Master, falls on her knees at the entrance of the sepulchre, one hand on her breast to check her throbbing heart, the other holding the edge of Jesus' mantle unconsciously and convulsively, and one realises that she is trembling because the mantle is shaken lightly by the hand holding it.

"Something white seems to emerge from the deep end of the sepulchre. At first it is just a short convex line, then it becomes oval-shaped, then wider and longer lines appear. And the dead body, enveloped in its bandages, comes slowly forward, becoming more visible, more mysterious and more awful.

Jesus draws back, imperceptibly, but continuously, as the other moves forward. Thus the distance between the two is always the same.

Mary is compelled to drop the edge of the mantle, but she does not move from where she is. Joy, emotion, everything, nail her to the place where she is.

An «oh! » is uttered more and more clearly by the lips previously closed by the anxiety of suspense: from a whisper hardly distinguishable it changes into a voice, from a voice into a powerful cry.

Lazarus is by now on the threshold of the sepulchre and he remains there rigid and silent, like a plaster statue just rough-hewed, thus shapeless, a long thing, thin at the head and legs, thicker at the trunk, as macabre as death itself, ghost-like in the white bandages against the dark background of the sepulchre. As the sun shines on him, putrid matter can be seen dripping already here and there from the bandages.

Jesus shouts out in a loud voice: «Unbind him and let him go. Give him clothes and food.»

«Master!...» says Martha, and perhaps she would like to say more, but Jesus stares at her subduing her with His bright eyes and He says: «Here! At once! Bring a garment. Dress him in the presence of all the people and give him something to eat.» He orders and never turns round to look at those who are behind and around Him. He looks only at Lazarus, at Mary who is near her resurrected brother, heedless of the disgust caused to everybody by the putrid bandages, and at Martha who is panting as if she felt her heart break and does not know whether she should shout for joy or weep...

The servants rush to carry out the instructions. Naomi is the first to run away and to come back with garments folded on her arm. Some untie the bandages after rolling up their sleeves and tucking up their garments so that they may not touch the dripping rot. Marcella and Sarah come back with amphoras of perfumes followed by servants carrying basins and jugs of water steaming hot or trays with cups of milk, wine, fruit, honey-cakes.

The very long narrow bandages, which I think are of linen, with selvedge on each side, obviously woven for that purpose, unroll like rolls of tape from a reel and pile up on the ground, heavy with spices and pus. The servants move them to one side by means of sticks. They have started from the head, but even there there is matter that has certainly dripped from the nose, ears and mouth. The sudarium placed on the face is soaked with putrid matter and Lazarus' face, which is very pale and emaciated, with his eyes closed with the pomade placed in the eye-sockets, with his hair and thin short beard sticking together, is soiled with it. The shroud placed round his body falls off slowly as the bandages are removed, freeing the trunk that they had enveloped for days, restoring a human figure to what they had previously transformed into something like a huge chrysalid. The bony shoulders, the emaciated arms, the ribs just covered with skin, the sunken stomach begin to appear slowly. And as the bandages fall off, the sisters, Maximinus, the servants busy themselves removing the first layer of dirt and balms and they insist continuously changing the water made detergent with spices, until the skin appears clean.

"When they uncover Lazarus' face and he can look, he directs his gaze towards Jesus before looking at his sisters, and he seems absent-minded and does not pay

attention to what is happening while he looks at his Jesus with a loving smile on his lips and tears shining in his deep-sunken eyes. Jesus also smiles at him, His eyes shining with tears, and without speaking He directs Lazarus' gaze towards the sky; Lazarus understands and moves his lips in silent prayer. Martha thinks that he wishes to say something but has no voice yet and she asks: «What are you saying to me, my Lazarus? »
«Nothing, Martha. I was thanking the Most High.» His pronunciation is steady, his voice loud.

The crowds utter an «oh! » of amazement once again.

He has now been freed and cleaned down to his sides. And they can put on him his short tunic, a kind of a short shirt that reaches below his inguen falling on his thighs.

They make him sit down to untie his legs and wash them. As soon as they appear Martha and Mary utter a loud cry pointing to the legs and bandages. And whilst on the bandages tied round the legs and on the shroud placed under the bandages the putrid matter is so copious as to stream down the cloth, the legs are completely healed. Only red cyanotic scars indicate the parts affected by gangrene.

All the people shout their amazement more loudly; Jesus smiles and Lazarus smiles, too, looking for a moment at his healed legs, then he becomes engrossed again in looking at Jesus. He never seems to gratify his desire to see Him. The Judaeans, Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, rabbis come forward cautiously in order not to contaminate their garments. They examine Lazarus closely. They examine Jesus closely. But neither Lazarus nor Jesus minds them. They look at each other and all the rest means nothing to them.

They now put sandals on Lazarus' feet and he stands up, agile and steady. He takes the tunic that Martha hands him, he puts it on by himself, he fastens his belt and adjusts the fold of the garment. And there he is, lean and pale, but like everybody else. He washes again his hands and arms as far as his elbows, after tucking up his sleeves. And with clean water he washes his face and head again, until he feels that he is thoroughly clean. He dries his hair and face, hands the towel to the servant and goes straight towards Jesus. He prostrates himself. He kisses His feet.

Jesus bends, lifts him up, presses him to His heart saying: «Welcome back home, My dear friend. May peace and joy be with you. Live to accomplish your happy destiny. Raise your face that I may greet you with a kiss.» And He kisses Lazarus' cheeks and is kissed by him.

Only after worshipping and kissing the Master, Lazarus speaks to his sisters and kisses them; he then kisses Maximinus and Naomi, who are weeping for joy, and some of those who I think are related to the family or are very close friends. He then kisses Joseph, Nicodemus, Simon Zealot and a few more.

Jesus goes personally towards a servant who is carrying a tray on which there is some food and He takes a honey-cake, an apple, a goblet of wine, and He offers them to Lazarus, after offering and blessing them, so that he may nourish himself. And Lazarus eats with the healthy appetite of one who is well. A further «oh! » of amazement is uttered by the crowd.

Jesus seems to see no one but Lazarus, but in actual fact He observes everything and everybody and when He sees with what furious gestures Sadoc, Helkai, Hananiah, Felix, Doras and Cornelius and others are about to go away, He says in a loud voice: «Wait a moment, Sadoc. I want to have a word with you, with you and your friends.»

They stop with the sinister look of criminals.

Joseph of Arimathea makes a gesture as if he were frightened and beckons to the Zealot to restrain Jesus. But He is already going towards the rancorous group and is already saying loud: «Sadoc, is what you have seen enough for you? One day you told Me that in order to believe, you and your peers needed to see a decomposed dead body be recomposed and in good health. Are you satisfied with the rottenness you have seen? Can you admit that Lazarus was dead and that now he is alive and healthy, as he has never been for many years? I know. You came here to tempt these people, to increase their grief and their doubt. You came here looking for Me, hoping to find Me hiding in the room of the dying man. You did not come with feelings of love and with the desire to honour the deceased man, but to ensure that Lazarus was really dead, and you have continued to come rejoicing all the more as time went by. If the situation had evolved as you were

hoping, as you believed it would evolve, you would have been right in exulting. The Friend Who cures everybody, but does not cure His friend. The Master Who rewards everybody's faith, but not the faith of His friends in Bethany. The Messiah powerless against the reality of death. That is what was making you exult. Then God gave you His reply. No prophet had ever been able to put together what was decomposed, in addition to being dead. God did it. That is the living witness of what I am. One day it was God Who took some dust and made it into a form and He breathed the vital spirit into it and man was. I was there to say: "Let man be made in our own image and likeness". Because I am the Word of the Father. Today, I, the Word, said to what is even less than dust, I said to rottenness: "Live", and decomposition was recomposed into flesh, into wholesome, living, breathing flesh. There it is looking at you. And to the flesh I joined the spirit that had been lying for days in Abraham's bosom. I called him with My will, because I can do everything, as I am the Living Being, the King of kings to Whom all creatures and things are subject. What are you going to reply to Me now? »

He is in front of them, tall, ablaze with majesty, really Judge and God. They do not reply.

He insists: «Is it not yet enough for you to believe, to accept what is ineluctable? »

«You have kept but one part of Your promise. This is not the sign of Jonah...» says Sadoc harshly.

«You shall have that one as well. I promised it and I will keep My promise » says the Lord. And another person, who is present here, and is waiting for another sign, shall have it. And as he is a just man, he will accept it. You will not. You will remain what you are.»

He turns round and sees Simon, the member of the Sanhedrin, the son of Elianna. He gazes at him. He leaves the previous group and when He is face to face with him, He says in a low but incisive voice: «You are fortunate that Lazarus does not remember his stay among the dead! What have you done with your father, o Cain? »

Simon runs away with a cry of fear that he changes into a howl of malediction: «May You be cursed, Nazarene! » to which Jesus replies: «Your curse is rising to Heaven and from Heaven the Most High throws it back at you. You are marked with the sign, you wretch! »

He goes back to the groups that are astonished, almost frightened. He meets Gamaliel who is going towards the road. He looks at Gamaliel, who looks at Him. Jesus says to him without stopping: «Be ready, rabbi. The sign will come soon. I never lie.»

The garden slowly becomes empty. The Judaeans are dumbfounded, but most of them are bursting with wrath. If glances could reduce one to ashes, Jesus would have been pulverised a long time ago. They speak and discuss among themselves while going away, and they are so upset by their defeat that they are unable to conceal the purpose of their presence here under the hypocritical appearance of friendship. They go away without saying goodbye to Lazarus or to the sisters. Some remain behind as they have been conquered to the Lord by the miracle. Among them there is Joseph Barnabas, who throws himself on his knees before Jesus worshipping Him. Another one is Joel of Abijah, the scribe, who does the same thing before departing. And there are others as well, whom I do not know, but they must be influential people.

In the meantime Lazarus, surrounded by his more intimates, has withdrawn into the house. Joseph, Nicodemus and other good people greet Jesus and go away. The Judaeans who were staying with Martha and Mary depart giving low bows. The servants close the gate. The house becomes peaceful again.

Jesus looks about Himself. He sees smoke and flames at the end of the garden, towards the sepulchre. All alone, standing in the middle of a path Jesus says: «Rottenness that is being destroyed by fire... The rottenness of death... But no fire will ever destroy the corruption of hearts... of those hearts... Not even the fire of Hell. It will last for ever... How horrible!... Worse than death... Worse than putrefaction... And... But who will save you, o Mankind, if you love so much to be corrupt? You want to be corrupt. And I... I have torn a man from his sepulchre with one word... And with a multitude of words... and a multitude of sorrows I shall not be able to tear away from sin man, men, Nations of men.» He sits down and with His hands He covers His face dejectedly...

A servant, who is passing by, sees Him. He goes into the house. Shortly afterwards Mary comes out. She goes towards Jesus walking so lightly that she does not seem to be touching the ground. She approaches Him and says in a low voice: «Rabboni, You are tired... Come, my Lord. Your tired apostles have gone to the other house, except Simon the Zealot... Are You weeping, Master? Why?...» She kneels at Jesus' feet... she watches Him...

Jesus looks at her. He does not reply. He stands up and directs His steps towards the house followed by Mary.

They go into one of the halls. Lazarus is not there, neither is the Zealot. But Martha is there, she is happy, transfigured by joy. She turns towards Jesus explaining: «Lazarus has gone to the bathroom. To purify himself further. Oh! Master! Master! What shall I tell You? » She adores Him with her whole being. She becomes aware of Jesus' sadness and says: «Are You sad, Lord? Are You not happy that Lazarus...» She becomes suspicious: «Oh! You are grave with me. I have sinned. It is true.»

«We have sinned, sister » says Mary.

«No. You did not. Oh! Master, Mary did not sin. Mary obeyed. I only disobeyed. I sent for You... because I could no longer bear their insinuations that You were not the Messiah, the Lord... and I could no longer put up with all that suffering... Lazarus was so anxious to have You. He called You so much... Forgive me, Jesus.»

«Are you not saying anything, Mary? » asks Jesus.

«Master... I... I suffered then only as a woman. I suffered because... Martha, swear here, before the Master that you will never tell Lazarus of his frenzy... my Master... I have known You completely, o Divine Mercy, during Lazarus' last hours. Oh! my God! How much You have loved me, as You have forgiven me. You, God, You, Pure, You..., if my brother, who does love me, but is a man, only a man, has not forgiven me everything from the bottom of his heart?! No. I am wrong. He has not forgiven my past and when his weakness on the point of death blunted his goodness, which I thought was oblivion of the past, he shouted his grief and his indignation against me... Oh!...» Mary weeps... «Do not weep, Mary. God has forgiven you and has forgotten. Lazarus' soul has also forgiven and forgotten, it wanted to forget. The man has not been able to forget everything. And when the flesh overwhelmed the weakened will with its last pangs, the man spoke.»

«I am not indignant at it, Lord. It helped me to love You more and to love Lazarus more. But it was from that moment that I also wished to have You here... because it was too distressing to think that Lazarus should die without peace through my fault... and later, when I heard the Judaeans deride You... when I saw that You were not coming even after his death, not even after I had obeyed You hoping beyond what is credible, hoping till the moment when the sepulchre was opened to receive him, then my spirit suffered. Lord, if I had anything to expiate, and I certainly had it, I did expiate...»

«Poor Mary! I know your heart. You deserved the miracle and let that confirm you in hoping and believing.»

«My Master, I will always hope and believe now. I will never doubt again, Lord. I will live on faith. You have enabled me to believe what is unbelievable.»

«And what about you, Martha? Have you learned? No. Not yet. You are My Martha. But you are not yet My perfect worshipper. Why do you act and you do not contemplate? It is holier. See? Your strength, as it is too inclined towards earthly things, yielded to the ascertainment of earthly matters that at time seem without remedy. In actual fact earthly matters are without remedy, unless God intervenes. That is why human creatures must be able to believe and contemplate, and love to the utmost power of their whole being, with thought, soul, flesh, blood; I repeat: with all the strength of man. I want you to be strong, Martha. I want you to be perfect. You did not obey because you did not believe and hope completely, and you did not believe and hope because you did not love absolutely. But I absolve you. I forgive you, Martha. I raised Lazarus today. I will now give you a stronger heart. I gave him life. I will instil into you the strength to love, believe and hope perfectly. Be happy now and in peace. Forgive those who offended you in the past days...»

«Lord, I have sinned against that. Not long ago I said to old Hananiah, who had sneered at You in previous days: "Who has triumphed? You or God? Your mockery or my faith? Christ is the Living Being and the Truth. I knew that His glory would

shine more brightly. And you, old man, make yourself a new soul, if you do not want to know what death is.»

«You spoke the truth, but do not contend with the wicked, Mary. And forgive. Forgive if you want to imitate Me... Here is Lazarus. I can hear his voice.» Lazarus in fact comes in, wearing fresh clothes and clean-shaven, his hair dressed and scented. Maximinus and the Zealot are with him. «Master! » Lazarus kneels down once again worshipping.

Jesus lays a hand on his head and smiles saying: «The test is over, My friend. For you and for your sisters. Be happy and strong now in serving the Lord. What do you remember, Me friend, of the past? I mean of your last hours? »

«A great desire to see You and a great peace in the love of my sisters.»

«What did you regret most to leave dying? »

«You, Lord, and my sisters. You, because I would not have been able to serve You, them... because they have given my every joy...»

«Oh! me, brother! » says Mary with a sigh.

«You more than Martha. You have given me Jesus and the measure of what is Jesus. And Jesus has given you to me. You are the gift of God, Mary.»

«You said so also when you were dying...» says Mary and she scrutinises her brother's face.

«Because it is my constant thought.»

«But I have grieved you so deeply...»

«Also my disease was painful. But through it I hope I have expiated the faults of old Lazarus and that I have risen purified to be worthy of God. You and I, the two who have risen again to serve the Lord, and Martha between us, as she has always been the peace of the house.»

«Do you hear that, Mary? Lazarus is speaking words of wisdom and truth. I will now withdraw and leave you to your joy...»

«No, Lord. Stay here with us. Stay in Bethany and in my house. It will be lovely...»

«I will stay. I want to make up for what you have suffered. Martha, do not be sad. Martha thinks that she has grieved Me. But My grief is not brought about by you, but by those who do not want to be redeemed. They hate more and more. Their hearts are poisoned... Well... let us forgive...»

«Let us forgive, Lord » says Lazarus with his mild smile... and it all ends on that word.

"Jesus says: «The dictation dated 23rd March 1944 on Lazarus' Resurrection can be put here.»

23rd March 1944.

Jesus says:

«I could have intervened in time to prevent Lazarus' death. But I did not want to do that. I knew that his resurrection would be a double-edged weapon, because it would convert the righteous-minded Judaeans and would make the non-righteous-minded ones even more rancorous. The latter, because of this final blow of My power, would sentence Me to death. But I had come for that and it was now time that that should be accomplished. I could have gone at once, but I needed to convince the most stubborn incredulous people by means of a resurrection from advanced rottenness. And also My apostles, destined to spread My Faith in the world, needed a faith supported by miracles of the first magnitude.

There was so much humanity in the apostles. I have already said so. It was not an insurmountable obstacle, on the contrary it was a logical consequence of their condition of men called to be My apostles when they were already grown-up. The mentality, the frame of mind of a person cannot be changed between one day and the next one. And, in My wisdom, I did not want to choose and educate children bringing them up according to My thought to make them My apostles. I could have done that, but I did not want to, lest souls should reproach Me for despising those who are not innocent and should justify themselves with the excuse that I also had made it clear that those whose characters are already formed cannot change. No. Everything can be changed if one is willing. In fact I turned cowardly, quarrelsome, usurious, sensual, incredulous people into martyrs, saints and evangelizers of the world. Only those who did not want, did not change.

I loved and still love little and weak people - you are an example - providing

they are willing to love and follow Me, and I turn such "nonentities" into My favourites, My friends, My ministers. I still make use of them, and they are a continuous miracle that I work to lead others to believe in Me, and not to kill the possibility of miracles. How languishing that possibility is at present! Like a lamp lacking oil it is in the throes of death and it dies, killed by the scanty or lacking faith in the God of miracles.

There are two forms of insistence in requesting a miracle. God yields to one with love. He turns His back disdainfully to the other. The former asks, as I taught to ask, without lack of confidence and without tiredness, and does not admit that God may not grant the request, because God is good and who is good grants, because God is powerful and can do everything. That is love and God hears those who love. The latter is the overbearingness of rebels who want God to be their servant and to lower Himself to their wickedness and to give them what they do not give Him: love and obedience. This form is an offence that God punishes by denying His graces.

You complain that I no longer work collective miracles. How could I work them? Where are the communities that believe in Me? Where are the true believers? How many true believers are there in a community? Like surviving flowers in a wood burnt by a fire I can see a believing spirit now and again. Satan has burnt the rest with his doctrines. And he will burn them more and more.

I beg you to bear in mind My reply to Thomas, as a supernatural rule for yourselves. It is not possible to be My true disciples if one cannot give human life the importance it deserves: a means to conquer the true Life, not an aim. He who wants to save his life in this world will lose eternal Life. I have told you and I repeat it. What are trials? Passing clouds. Heaven remains and is waiting for you after the trial.

I conquered Heaven for you through My heroism. You must imitate Me. Heroism is not laid aside exclusively for those who are to suffer martyrdom. Christian life is perpetual heroism because it is a perpetual struggle against the world, the demon and the flesh. I do not compel you to follow Me. I leave you free. But I do not want you to be hypocrites. Either with Me and like Me, or against Me. You cannot deceive Me. No, I cannot be deceived, and I do not form alliances with the Enemy. If you prefer him to Me, you cannot think that you can have Me as your Friend at the same time. Either him or Me. Make your choice.

Martha's grief is different from Mary's because of the different psyche of the two sisters and because of their different behaviour. Happy are those who behave in such a way as to have no remorse for grieving one who is now dead and can no longer be comforted for the sorrow caused to him. But how much happier is he who has no remorse for grieving his God, Me, Jesus, and is not afraid of the day he will have to meet Me, on the contrary he pines for it, as for a joy anxiously dreamt of for a whole lifetime and at long last achieved.

I am your Father, Brother and Friend. So why do you offend Me so often? Do you know how long you still have to live? To live in order to make amends? No, you do not know that. So act righteously hour by hour, day by day. Always righteously. You will always make Me happy. And even if sorrow comes to you, because sorrow is sanctification, it is the myrrh that preserves you from the putridity of sensuality, you will always be certain that I love you - and that I love you also in that grief - and you will always have the peace that comes from My love. You, My little John, know whether I can comfort one also in grief.

In My prayer to the Father there is repeated what I said at the beginning: it was necessary to rouse the opacity of the Judaeans and of the world in general by means of a main miracle. And the resurrection of a man who had been buried four days and had gone down into the tomb after a long, chronic, disgusting well-known disease is not an event that can leave people indifferent or doubtful. If I had cured him while he was alive, or if I had infused the spirit into him as soon as he had breathed his last, the acridity of enemies might have raised doubts on the entity of the miracle. But the stench of the corpse, the putrefaction of the bandages, the long period in the sepulchre left no doubts. And, a miracle in the miracle, I wanted Lazarus to be freed and cleaned in the presence of everybody so that they could see that not only life but also the wholesomeness of the limbs had been restored where previously the ulcerated flesh had spread the germs of death in the blood. When I grant a grace I always give more than what you ask for.

I wept before Lazarus' tomb. And many names have been given to My tears. In the

meantime you must bear in mind that graces are obtained through grief mixed with unfaltering faith in the Eternal Father. I wept not so much because of the loss of My friend and because of the sorrow of the sisters, as because three thoughts that had always pierced My heart like three sharp nails surfaced then, more lively than ever, like depths stirred up.

The ascertainment of the ruin that Satan had brought to man by seducing him to Evil. A ruin the human punishment of which was sorrow and death. Physical death, the symbol and living metaphor of spiritual death that sin causes to the soul, hurling it into infernal darkness, whereas it was destined, like a queen, to live in the kingdom of Light.

The persuasion that not even this miracle, worked almost as a sublime corollary to three years of evangelization, would convince the Judaic world of the Truth of which I was the Bearer. And that no miracle would in future convert the world to Christ. Oh! How grievous it was to be so close to death for so few!

The mental vision of My imminent death. I was God. But I was also Man. And to be the Redeemer I was to feel the weight of expiation. Therefore the horror of death and of such a death. I was a living healthy being who was saying to himself: "I shall soon be dead, I shall be in a sepulchre like Lazarus. Soon the most dreadful agony will be my companion. I must die". God's kindness spares you the knowledge of the future. But I was not spared it.

Oh! believe Me, you who complain of your destiny. None was more sad than Mine, because I always clearly foresaw everything that was to happen to Me, joined to the poverty, the hardships, the bitterness that accompanied Me from My birth to My death. So, do not complain. And hope in Me. I give you My peace.»

[undated]

Marginal notes on Lazarus' resurrection and in connection with a sentence of St. John. Jesus says:

«In the Gospel of John, as it has now been read for ages, there is written: "Jesus had not yet come into the village of Bethany" (John 9, 30). To avoid possible objections I wish to point out that, with regard to this sentence and the one of the Work which states that I met Martha a few steps away from the fountain in Lazarus' garden, there is no contradiction of events, but only a discrepancy of translation and description. Three quarters of the village of Bethany belonged to Lazarus. Likewise a large part of Jerusalem belonged to him. But let us speak of Bethany. As three quarters of it belonged to Lazarus, one could say: Bethany of Lazarus. So the text would not be wrong even if I had met Martha in the village or at the fountain, as some people wish to say. In actual fact I had not gone into the village, to prevent the people of Bethany, who were all hostile to the members of the Sanhedrin, from rushing towards Me. I had gone round the back of Bethany to reach Lazarus' house, which was at the opposite end with respect to one who entered Bethany coming from En-shemes. So John rightly says that I had not yet entered the village. And equally right is little John who says that I had stopped near the basin (fountain for the Jews) already in Lazarus' garden, but still very far from the house. One should also consider that during the period of mourning and uncleanness (it was not yet the seventh day after Lazarus' death) his sisters did not leave the house. So the meeting took place within the enclosure of their property. Note that little John states that the people of Bethany came into the garden only when I had ordered the stone to be removed. Previously the people of Bethany did not know that I was in Bethany, and only when the news was spread they rushed to Lazarus' house.»

547. In Jerusalem and in the Temple after the Resurrection of Lazarus.
27th December 1946.

If the news of the death of Lazarus had shaken and agitated Jerusalem and a large part of Judaea, the news of his resurrection ended by shaking and penetrating also where the news of the death had not caused any excitement. Perhaps the few Pharisees and scribes, that is the members of the Sanhedrin present at the resurrection, did not mention it to the people. But the Judaeans certainly have spoken about it, and the news has spread in a flash, and the voices of women repeat it from house to house, from terrace to terrace, while

the common people propagate it in the streets with great jubilation for Jesus' triumph and for Lazarus. People fill the streets running here and there, thinking they are the first to give the news, but they are disappointed because it is already known in Ophel as well as in Bezetha, in Zion as at the Sixtus market. It is known in synagogues, in warehouses, in the Temple and in Herod's palace. It is known at the Antonia and from there, or vice versa, it spreads to the guard-rooms at the gates. It fills mansions and hovels: «The Rabbi of Nazareth has raised from the dead Lazarus of Bethany, who died the day before Friday and was buried before the beginning of the Sabbath and he rose again today at the sixth hour.» The Jewish acclamations to the Christ and to the Most High mingle with the various «By Jove! By Pollux! By Libitina! » etc. of the Romans.

The only ones I do not see among the crowds talking in the streets are the members of the Sanhedrin. I do not see even one of them, whereas I see Chuza and Manaen come out from a stately mansion and I hear Chuza say: «Wonderful! Wonderful! I sent word to Johanna at once. He is really God! »; and Manaen replies to him: «Herod, who came from Jericho to pay his respects to... the chief, Pontius Pilate, seems to have gone mad in his palace, while Herodias is frantic and she presses him to have the Christ arrested. She trembles dreading His power; he is torn with remorse. With chattering teeth he tells his devoted followers to defend him from... ghosts. He got drunk to muster up courage and the wine eddying in his head makes him see phantasms. He shouts saying that the Christ has raised also John who is now yelling God's maledictions close to him. I ran away from that Gehenna. I was content with saying to him: "Lazarus has been raised from the dead by Jesus the Nazarene. Mind you do not touch Him, because He is God". I stimulate his fear so that he may not yield to her murderous intents.»

«On the contrary, I shall have to go there... I must go. But I wanted to call on Eliel and Elkanah first. They live in seclusion, but their opinions are always highly thought of in Israel! And Johanna is pleased that I honour them. And I...»

«A good protection for you. That is true. But not so good as the Master's love. That is the only protection that matters...»

Chuza does not reply. He is pensive... I lose sight of them.

Joseph of Arimathea comes forward hurriedly from Bezetha. He is stopped by a group of citizens who are still uncertain whether they should believe the news. They ask him.

«It's true. Very true. Lazarus has risen and he has also been cured. I saw him with my own eyes.»

«So... He is really the Messiah! »

«His deeds are such. His life is perfect. This is the right time. Satan fights Him. Let each man conclude in his own heart who is the Nazarene » says Joseph wisely and fairly at the same time. He greets them and goes away.

They continue to discuss and end up by saying: «He is really the Messiah.»

There is a group of legionaries and one of them says: «I will go to Bethany tomorrow if I can. By Venus and Mars, the gods I prefer! I may travel all over the world, from the hot deserts to the icy German lands, but never again shall I find a man who comes to life again after being dead for days. I want to see what a man, who comes back from death, is like. He will be black with the water of the rivers of the beyond...»

«If he was a virtuous man, he will be bluish after drinking the sky-blue water of the Elysian Fields. There is not only the Styx there...»

«He will tell us what the meadows of asphodels in Hades are like... I will come as well...»

«If Pontius will allow us...»

«Of course he will! He sent a messenger to Claudia at once telling her to come. Claudia loves these things. I have heard her more than once converse, with the other women and her Greek freedmen, about souls and immortality.»

«Claudia believes in the Nazarene. According to her He is greater than any other man.»

«Yes, but according to Valeria He is more than a man. He is God. A kind of Jupiter and Apollo with regard to power and handsomeness, they say, and wiser than Minerva. Have you seen Him? I came here with Pontius and it is the first time that I have been here, so I do not know...»

«I think that you have arrived in time to see many things. Not long ago Pontius was shouting as loud as Stentor saying: «Everything is to be changed here. They must understand that Rome is the ruler and that they, all of them, are servants. And the greater they are, the more servile they are, because they are more dangerous". I think it was because of that tablet that Annas' servant took to him...»

«Of course. He will not listen to them... And he keeps shifting us... because he does not want us to be friendly with them.»

«Friendly with them? Ah! Ah! With those big-nosed types stinking like billy-goats? Pontius suffers from indigestion because he eats too much pork. If anything... we are friendly with some of the women who do not disdain the kisses of clean-shaven lips...» says a mischievous one laughing.

«It is a fact that after the unruliness at the feast of the Tabernacles he insisted in having all the troops changed with the result that we have to go away...»

«That is true. The arrival of the galley bringing Longinus and his century was already notified at Caesarea. New officers and new troops... and all because of those crocodiles of the Temple. I liked this place.»

«I preferred Brindisi... But I shall get accustomed to this place » says the one who arrived in Palestine recently.

They also move away.

Some guards of the Temple pass by with wax-tablets. People watch them and say:

«The Sanhedrin is meeting with urgency. What are they going to do? »

A man replies: «Let us go up to the Temple And see...» They set out towards the street leading to the Moriah.

The sun disappears behind the houses in Zion and the western mountains. Night falls and the streets are soon cleared of curious people. Those who went up to the Temple come down looking upset because they have been driven away from the gates, where they had lingered to see the members of the Sanhedrin pass by. The inside of the Temple, now empty, desert, enveloped in moonlight, seems immense. The members of the Sanhedrin slowly gather in their meeting hall. They are all there, exactly as they were for Jesus' death sentence, but those who were then acting as clerks are not present (1). Only the members of the Sanhedrin are there, some sitting in their places, some in groups near the doors.

Caiaphas comes in with his face and body resembling those of an excessively fat and wicked frog, and he goes to his seat.

They begin to discuss the events at once and they become so impassioned of the matter that the session is soon animated. They leave their seats, they go down into the empty space gesticulating and speaking in loud voices.

Some counsel calm and circumspection before taking a decision. Others answer back: «But have you not heard those who came here after the ninth hour? If we lose the most important Judaeans, what is the use of accumulating charges? The longer He lives, the less we shall be believed if we accuse Him.»

(1) The present chapter was written after the one describing Jesus being sentenced to death and which is part of volume 5.

«And this fact cannot be denied. We cannot say to the many people who were there: "What you have seen is not true. It is a make-believe. You were drunk". The man was dead. Putrid. Decomposed. The corpse was placed in a closed sepulchre and the sepulchre was properly walled up. The corpse had been enveloped in bandages and covered with balms for several days. And it was tied. And yet it came out of its place, it came as far as the entrance by itself without walking. And when it was freed, the body was no longer dead. It breathed. There was no putrefaction. Whereas before, when it was alive, it was covered in sores, and when it died it was rotten.»

«Have you heard the most influential Judaeans, whom we urged to go there to have them completely on our side? They came and said to us: "As far as we are concerned He is the Messiah". Almost every one of them has come! Not to mention the people!...»

«And those cursed Romans full of nonsense! What about them? They say that He is Jupiter Maximus. And if they get that idea into their heads! They made us acquainted with their stories, and it was a curse. Cursed be those who wanted Hellenism among us and out of flattery desecrated us with foreign usages! But it

helps us to know people. And we know that the Romans are quick in demolishing and elevating by means of plots and coups d'etat. Now if anyone of these mad people goes into raptures over the Nazarene and proclaims Him Caesar, and therefore, divine, who will ever dare touch Him? »

«Certainly not! Who do you think would dream of doing that? They do not give a fig for Him or for us. No matter how great is what He does, He is always "a Jew" as far as they are concerned. So nothing but a miserable wretch. Fear has turned your brain, dear son of Annas! »

«Fear? Did you hear how Pontius replied to my father's invitation? He is upset, I tell you. He is upset by this last event, and he is afraid of the Nazarene. How wretched we are! That man has come to ruin us! »

«I wish we had not gone there and we had not almost ordered the most mighty Judaeans to go as well! If Lazarus had risen without witnesses...»

«So? What would have changed? We certainly could not have made him disappear for good to make people believe that he was always dead! »

«Certainly not. But we could have said that it was apparent death. You can always find witnesses bribed to commit perjury.»

«But why so much excitement? I can see no reason for it! Has He perhaps provoked the Sanhedrin and the Pontificate? No, He has not. He just worked a miracle.»

«Just?! But are you mad or has He bribed you, Eleazar? Did He not provoke the Sanhedrin and the Pontificate? What else do you want? The people...»

«People can say what they like, but the situation is exactly as Eleazar said. The Nazarene has only worked a miracle.»

«That's another one defending Him! You are no longer fair, Nicodemus! You are no longer just! That is an action against us. Against us, do you realise it? Nothing will convince the crowds any longer. Ah! How miserable we are! Today some Judaeans scoffed at me! At me they scoffed! »

«Be quiet, Doras! You are only a man. It's the principle that is attacked! Our laws! Our prerogatives! »

«You are right, Simon, and we must defend them.»

«How? »

«By offending and destroying His! »

«That is easily said, Sadoc. But how can you destroy them if with your own power you cannot even make a midge come to life again? What is required here is a miracle greater than His. But none of us can work it because...» The speaker cannot explain why.

Joseph of Arimathea completes the sentence: «Because we are just men, only men.» They rush upon him asking: «And what is He, then? »

Joseph of Arimathea replies without hesitation: «He is God. If I still had had any doubt...»

«But you had no doubt. We know, Joseph. We are well aware. You may state clearly that you love Him! »

«There is nothing wrong if Joseph loves Him. I also admit that He is the greatest Rabbi in Israel.»

«Are you, Gamaliel, saying that? »

«Yes, I maintain that. And it is an honour to me to be... dethroned by Him, because so far I had kept the tradition of the great rabbis, the last one of whom was Hillel, but after me I do not know who was able to receive the wisdom of centuries. Now I shall go away happily, because I know that it will not be lost, on the contrary it will grow greater, as it will be increased by His own wisdom, in which the Spirit of God is certainly present.»

«But what are you saying, Gamaliel? »

«I am speaking the truth. It is not by closing our eyes that we can ignore what we are. We are no longer wise, because the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and we are sinners without the fear of God. If we had such fear we would not trample on the just, neither would we be foolishly greedy for the wealth of the world. God gives and God takes away, according to merits and demerits. And if God deprives us of what He had given us, in order to give it to other people, may He be blessed because holy is the Lord and holy are all His deeds.»

«But we were talking of miracles and we meant that none of us can work them because Satan is not with us.»

«No. Because God is not with us. Moses parted the waters and he struck the rock, Joshua stopped the sun, Elijah raised the boy from death and made the sky give rain, but God was with them. I remind you that there are six things that God

hates and the seventh He abhors: a haughty look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that weaves wicked plots, feet that hurry to do evil, a false witness who lies and he who sows dissension among brothers. We do all these things. I say: we. But you only do them. Because I refrain from shouting "Hosanna" and from crying "Anathema". I am waiting.»

«For the sign! Of course! You are waiting for the sign! But what sign can you expect from a poor madman, even if we want to forgive Him all the rest? » Gamaliel stretches his hands and arms forward, and with closed eyes and lightly lowered head, looking most grave, he says in a slow distant voice: «I have anxiously asked the Lord to show me the truth, and He enlightened for me the words of Jesus the son of Sirach. These ones: "The Creator of all things spoke to me and gave me His instructions, and He Who created me rested in my Tabernacle and said to me: 'Dwell in Jacob, make Israel your inheritance, take root among My chosen people' ". And He enlightened also the following words and I have acknowledged them: "Approach Me, you who desire Me, and take your fill of My fruits because My spirit is sweeter than honey and My inheritance is sweeter than the honey-comb. The memories of Me will last for ever. They who eat Me will hunger for more, they who drink me will thirst for more; whoever listens to Me will never have to blush, whoever works for Me will never sin, whoever explains Me will have eternal life". And the light of God became brighter in my spirit while my eyes were reading these words: "All these things are contained in the book of Life, the will of the Most High, the doctrine of Truth... God promised David that from him would descend the most powerful King Who is to sit on the throne of glory for ever. His wisdom brims like the Pishon and the Tigris in the season of fruit, like the Euphrates He brims with intelligence, He rises like the Jordan at harvest time. He diffuses wisdom like light... He was the first to become perfectly aware of it". That is what God had enlightened for me! Alas! I say that the Wisdom among us is too great to be understood by us, neither can we contain a thought vaster than oceans nor an advice deeper than the great abyss. And we hear Him shout: "Like an immense watercourse I gushed out of Paradise and I said: 'I am going to water My garden', and then my watercourse became a river, and the river a sea. Like dawn I shed My doctrine on everybody, and I shall make it known to the remotest peoples. I shall descend into the lowest parts, I shall cast glances on those who are sleeping, I shall enlighten those who hope in the Lord. I shall pour out teaching like prophecy and I shall leave it to those who seek wisdom, I shall not stop announcing it until the holy century. I have not toiled for Myself alone, but for all who are seeking the truth". This is what God, the Most High God, made me read» and he lowers his arms and raises his head.

«So, according to you He is the Messiah?! Tell us! »

«He is not the Messiah.»

«He is not? Then what is He according to you? Not a demon. Not an angel. Not the Messiah...»

«He is He Who is.»

«You are raving! Is He God? Is that madman God according to you? »

«He is He Who is. God knows what He is. We see His works. God sees also His thoughts. But He is not the Messiah because Messiah to us means King. He is not and never will be king. But He is holy. And His works are those of a holy man. And we cannot threaten the Innocent without committing sin. I will not assent to sin.»

«But with your words you have almost said that He is the Expected One! »

«I have said so. While the light of the Most High lasted I saw Him as such. Then... as the hand of the Lord no longer held me uplifted in His light, I became man again, the man of Israel, and the words were only those to which the man of Israel, I, you, those before us, and, God forbid it, those after us, attach the meaning of their, of our thoughts, not the meaning they have in the eternal Thought that dictated them to His servant.»

«We are talking, digressing, wasting time. And the crowds in the meantime are excited » says Hananiah in a croaking voice.

«You are right! It is necessary to take a decision and act, to save ourselves and to triumph.»

«You say that Pilate would not listen to us when we asked his help against the Nazarene. But if we informed him... You said previously that if the troops become excited they may proclaim Him Caesar... Eh! A good idea! Let us go and

point this danger out to the Proconsul. We shall be honoured as faithful servants of Rome and... and if he takes action we shall get rid of the Rabbi. Let us go! Since you, o Eleazar of Annas, are more friendly with him than we are, be our guide » says Helkai laughing malignantly.

There is some hesitancy, then a group of the most fanatics leaves to go to the Antonia. Caiaphas remains with the others.

«At this time! He will not receive them » remarks one.

«On the contrary! It's the best time. Pontius is always in high spirits after eating and drinking as a pagan does...»

I leave them there discussing, and I see the scene at the Antonia.

They cover the short distance quickly and without difficulty, so bright is the moonlight that is so different from the red light of the lamps lit in the entrance-hall of the praetorium building.

Eleazar is successful in sending in his name to Pilate, and they are led into a large empty hall. It is completely empty. There is only a heavy chair with low back covered with a purple cloth that stands out strongly against the complete whiteness of the hall. They remain in a group, somewhat timid and cold, standing on the white marble floor. No one comes in. There is dead silence, broken at intervals by remote music.

«Pilate is at table. He is certainly with friends. The music is played in the triclinium. There will be dances in honour of the guests says Eleazar of Annas.»

«They are corrupt. I will purify myself tomorrow. Lust oozes from these walls» says Helkai with disgust.

«Why did you come, then? It was your idea » replies Eleazar.

«For the honour of God and the welfare of our fatherland I can make any sacrifice. And this is a great one! I had purified myself after approaching Lazarus... and now!... A dreadful day, this one!...»

There is no sign of Pilate. Eleazar, being familiar with the place, tries the doors. They are all closed. The Judaeans in the hall are seized with fear.

Frightening stories come to light again. They regret having come. They feel that they are already lost.

At long last, on the side opposite to them, who are near the door through which they came in and thus close to the only chair available in the hall, a door is opened and Pilate comes in, wearing a tunic as white as the hall. He comes in speaking to some guests. He is laughing. He turns round to instruct a slave, who is holding up the curtain beyond the door, to throw essences into a brazier and to bring scents and water for their hands and a slave to come with mirror and combs. He pays no attention to the Hebrews, as if they were not there. They get enraged but they dare not react...

Over there, in the meantime, they bring braziers, they spread resins on the fire and pour scented water on the hands of the Romans. And a slave, with skilful movements, tidies their hair according to the fashion of rich Romans of those days. And the Hebrews get enraged.

The Romans laugh and jest among themselves looking now and again at the group waiting at the other end, and one of them speaks to Pilate who has never turned round to look; but Pilate shrugs his shoulders making gesture of boredom and he claps his hands to call a slave whom he orders in a loud voice to bring sweets and to let in the dancers. The Hebrews tremble with rage and are scandalised. Just imagine Helkai compelled to watch girls dancing! His countenance is a poem of suffering and hatred.

The slaves come back with sweets in precious cups, and they are followed by the dancers wearing garlands of flowers and hardly covered with fabrics that are so light as to seem veils. Their very white bodies appear through their light garments dyed pink and blue, when they pass before the burning braziers and the many lights placed at the other end. The Romans admire the gracefulness of bodies and movements and Pilate asks them to repeat a dance that he particularly liked. Helkai, imitated by his companions, turns indignantly towards the wall not to see the dancers move as lightly as butterflies with their dresses fluttering indecorously.

When the short dance is over Pilate dismisses them putting in the hand of each a cup full of sweets and he throws a bracelet into each cup nonchalantly. And at last he condescends to turn round and look at the Hebrews saying to his friends in a weary voice: «And now... I must pass from dreams to reality... from poetry... to hypocrisy... from gracefulness to the filthy things of life. The

miseries of being a Proconsul!... Hail, friends, and have pity on me.»

He is left alone and he slowly approaches the Hebrews. He sits down, he examines his well-cared for hands and he discovers something wrong under one nail. He attends to it anxiously taking from under his tunic a tiny thin golden stick with which he remedies the great damage of an imperfect nail...

He is then so kind as to turn his head round slowly. He sneers seeing the Hebrews still bowing servilely and he says: «You! Here! And be quick. I have no time to waste on trifles.»

The Hebrews approach Pilate in an attitude that is always servile until he shouts: «That's enough. Don't come too close » and his words seem to nail them to the floor. «Speak! And stand up straight because animals only stoop towards the ground » and he laughs.

The Hebrews straighten themselves at the sneering words and remain stiff. «So? Speak! You insisted on coming. Speak, now that you are here.»

«We wanted to tell you... We are told... We are faithful servants of Rome...»

«Ah! Ah! Faithful servants of Rome! I will let divine Caesar know and he will be happy! He will certainly be happy! Speak up, you clowns! And be quick!»

The members of the Sanhedrin quiver with indignation, but they do not react. Helkai speaks on behalf of everybody: «We must inform you, o Pontius, that a man was raised from the dead today at Bethany.»

«I know. Is that why you have come? I was informed several hours ago. He is a lucky man as he already knows what it is to die and what the next world is like! What can I do if Lazarus of Theophilus has been raised from the dead? Has he perhaps brought me a message from Hades? » He is ironic.

«No. But His resurrection is a danger...»

«For him? Of course! The danger of having to die again. Not a very pleasant event. So? What can I do? Am I perhaps Jupiter? »

«A danger not for Lazarus. But for Caesar.»

«For?... Domine! Am I perhaps drunk? Did you say: for Caesar? And how can Lazarus be harmful to Caesar? Are you afraid that the stench of the sepulchre may infect the air that the Emperor breathes? Do not worry! He is too far away!

»

«No, not that. The fact is that Lazarus by rising from the dead may have the Emperor dethroned.»

«Dethroned? Ah! Ah! That's a bigger fib than the whole world! So you are drunk, not I. Perhaps the fright has deranged your minds. To see a man rise... I think it may upset one. Go, go to bed. And have a good rest. And a warm bath. A very warm one. It is very good against deliriums.»

«We are not delirious, Pontius. We are telling you that unless you take a decision you will go through a sad time. You will certainly be punished, if not killed, by the usurper. The Nazarene will soon be proclaimed king, king of the world, do you understand? Your very legionaries will proclaim Him. They have been enticed by the Nazarene and today's event has elated them. What servant of Rome are you, if you do not take care of her peace? So, do you want to see the Empire upset and divided because of your inertness? Do you want to see Rome defeated, the ensigns pulled down, the Emperor killed, everything destroyed...»

«Be silent! I will now speak. And I say to you: you are mad! You are even worse. You are liars. You are criminals. You deserve death. Get out of here, you filthy servants of your own interests, of your hatred, of your meanness. You are servants, not I. I am a Roman citizen and Roman citizens are not subject to anybody. I am an imperial official and I work for the welfare of our fatherland. You... are our subjects. You... are under our rule. You... you are the galley-slaves tied to the benches and you fret in vain. The lash of the chief is over you. The Nazarene!... Would you like me to kill the Nazarene? Would you like me to put Him in prison? By Jove! If for the safety of Rome and of the divine Emperor I should imprison dangerous subjects or kill them here where I am the governor, I should leave free and alive the Nazarene and His followers, and them alone. Go away. Clear off and never come back here again. You riotous fellows, instigators, thieves and accomplices of thieves! I am well aware of all your manoeuvres. You had better know that. And bear in mind that new weapons and fresh legionaries have served to discover your snares and your instruments. You complain of Roman taxes. But how much have you paid for Melkiah of Gilead, and Jonah of Scythopolis, and Philip of Shochoh, and John of Beth-aven and Joseph of Ramoth, and for all the others who will soon be caught? And do not go towards

the caves in the valley because there are more legionaries there than stones, and the law and galley are the same for everybody. For everybody! Do you understand? For everybody. And I hope to live long enough to see you all in chains, slaves among slaves under the heel of Rome. Get out! Go and report - you as well, Eleazar of Annas whom I do not wish to see any more in my house - that the time of clemency is over, and that I am the Proconsul and you the subjects. The subjects. And I give orders. In the name of Rome. Go out! You night snakes and vampires! And the Nazarene wants to redeem you? If He were God, He ought to strike you by lightning! Thus the most revolting stain would disappear from the world. Out! And dare not conspire, or you will become acquainted with sword and whip.»

He stands up and goes away slamming the door before the dismayed members of the Sanhedrin, who have no time to come to themselves because an armed squad comes in and drives them out of the hall and of the building as if they were dogs. They go back to the hall in the Sanhedrin. They make their report. The excitement is great. The news of the arrest of many highwaymen and of raids into caves to catch more upsets very much all the members who have remained. Many, in fact, tired of waiting, have gone away.

«And yet we cannot let Him live » shout some of the priests.

«We cannot leave Him alone. He is active. We are doing nothing. And we are losing ground day by day. If we leave Him free, He will continue to work miracles and everybody will believe in Him. And the Romans will end up by opposing us and destroying us all together. Pontius says so. But if the crowds should proclaim Him king, oh! Pontius will have to punish all of us. We must not allow that » shouts Sadoc.

«All right. But how? The attempt... by Roman law has failed. Pontius is sure of the Nazarene. The attempt... through our law is impossible. He does not commit sin...» points out one of the members.

«If no sin exists, one can be invented » insinuates Caiaphas.

«It's a sin to do that! To swear what is false! To have an innocent condemned! It's... too much!...» say most of them in horror. «It's a crime, because it would be His death.»

«So? Does that frighten you? You are foolish and you understand nothing. After what happened Jesus must die. Do you not consider that it is better for us if one man dies instead of many? So let Him die to save His people so that all our country may not perish. In any case... He says that He is the Saviour. So let Him sacrifice Himself to save everybody » says Caiaphas with disgusting cold sly hatred.

«But... Caiaphas! Consider! He...»

«I have spoken. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, the High Priest. Woe to those who do not respect the Pontiff of Israel. The thunderbolts of the Lord upon them! We have waited enough! We have had enough flurry! I order and decree that whoever knows where the Nazarene is must come and inform us of the place, and anathema on those who will not obey my word.»

«But Annas...» say some objecting.

«Annas said to me: "Whatever you do will be holy". Let us close the meeting. We shall all be here on Friday between the third and the sixth hour to decide what to do. All of us, I said. Inform those who are absent. And ensure that all the heads of families and classes, all the cream of Israel are summoned. The Sanhedrin has spoken. Go.»

And he is the first to withdraw to the place from which he came, whilst the others go in different directions and they leave the Temple speaking in low voices while going home.

548. At Bethany after the Resurrection of Lazarus.

30th December 1946.

It is pleasant to rest among loving friends and near the Master in sunny days that show the early charms of springtime, contemplating the fields growing verdant with the tender sprouts of corn, admiring the meadows that break the

even green winter shade with the first little many-coloured flowers, gazing at the hedges displaying gems that begin to open smiling in the more sunny spots, looking at almond-trees the tops of which are covered with early foam-like flowers. And Jesus rejoices at the sight, as well as the apostles and the three friends at Bethany. And everything seems far and remote: malevolence, sorrow, sadness, illness, death, hatred, envy, all the painful, tormenting, worrying things on the Earth.

All the apostles are overjoyed and they say so. They express their conviction - that is so certain, so triumphant - that Jesus has now defeated all His enemies, that His mission will now proceed without any obstacle, that He will be acknowledged as the Messiah also by those who have been most tenacious in opposing Him. And they speak, somewhat elated, rejuvenated, happy as they are, making plans for the future, dreaming... dreaming so much... and so humanly. The most elated, also because of his psyche that carries him to extremes, is Judas of Kerioth. He congratulates himself on having waited, on his ability in acting, on his lasting faith in the Master's triumph, on defying the threats of the Sanhedrin... He is so elated that he ends up by telling what he has concealed so far, amid the utter astonishment of his companions: «Yes, they wanted to bribe me, they wanted to entice me with blandishments, and when they saw that they were of no avail, with threats. If you only knew! But I paid them back in their own coin. I pretended to love them as they feigned to love me. I allured them as they allured me, I betrayed them as they wanted to betray me... Because that is what they wanted to do. They wanted to make me believe that they were testing the Master to be able to proclaim Him the Holy Man of God solemnly. But I know them, I know them very well. And in all their plans of which they informed me, I contrived to make Jesus' holiness shine more brightly than the sun at midday in a cloudless sky... It was a dangerous game! If they had realised that! But I was prepared for every eventuality, even to die, to serve God in my Master. And thus I was informed of everything... Eh! at times I must have seemed to be mad, wicked, bad-tempered. If you had known what the situation was like! I alone know what I suffered at night, the precautions I had to take to do a good turn without attracting anybody's attention! You were somewhat suspicious of me. I know. But I bear you no grudge. My behaviour could have roused suspicion. But my purpose was good and that was all I worried about. Jesus is not aware of anything. That is, I think that He also suspects me. But I will keep quiet without wishing to be praised by Him. And I ask you not to say anything either. One day, one of the first times I was with Him - and you, Simon Zealot, and you, John of Zebedee, were with me - He reproached me because I boasted of having a practical sense. Since then... I never enhanced this quality of mine in His presence, but I continued to make use of it, for His own good. I did what a mother does for her inexperienced child. She removes obstacles from his way, she bends a thornless branch towards him, she pushes aside one that may hurt him, or with shrewd acts she gets him to do what he must learn to do and to avoid what is bad, without the child being aware of it. On the contrary, the son believes that he succeeded by himself in walking without stumbling, in picking a lovely flower for his mother, in doing this and that thing spontaneously. I did the same with the Master. Because holiness is not sufficient in a world of men and demons. It is necessary to fight with equal weapons, at least as men... and at times... it is not a bad thing to add a pinch of infernal cunning to the other weapons. That is my idea. But He will not listen to me... He is too good... Well. I understand everything and everybody, and I excuse everybody for the evil thoughts you might have had about me. You now know. And now we love one another as good companions, and we do everything for His love and His glory » and he points at Jesus Who is walking farther away in a sunny alley speaking to Lazarus, who listens to Him smiling ecstatically. The apostles go away towards Simon's house. Jesus instead comes closer with His friend. I listen to them.

Lazarus says: «Yes. I had understood that there was some great purpose, certainly a good one, in letting me die. I thought it was to spare me the sight of their persecution against You. And, You know whether I am telling the truth, I was glad to die so that I would not see it. It embitters me. It upsets me. See, Master. I have forgiven those who are the chiefs of our people many things. I had to forgive up to my last days... Helkai... But death and resurrection have cancelled all previous things. Why remember their last efforts to grieve me? I

have forgiven Mary everything. She seems to doubt it. And more than that, I do not know why, since I came to life again she has taken an attitude that is so... I do not know how to define it. She is so mild and submissive, which is so strange with my Mary... Not even during the first days when she came here, after being redeemed by You, was she like that... Perhaps You know something and You can tell me, because Mary tells You everything... Do You know whether those who came here have reproached her too severely? I have always tried to weaken the memory of her fault when I saw her engrossed in the thought of her past, in order to alleviate her suffering. She cannot set her mind at rest over it. She seems so... above what might be dejection. Some people may even think that she does not show much regret... But I understand... I know. Everything makes one expiate. I think she does a great deal of penance, of all kinds. I would not be surprised if she wore a cilice under her dresses and if her flesh were familiar to the blows of the scourge... But the brotherly love I have for her and that aims at supporting her by laying a veil between past and present, is not shared by anybody else... Do you know, by any chance, whether she was ill-treated by someone who is not capable of forgiving... and who needs to be forgiven? »

«I do not know, Lazarus. Mary has not mentioned it to Me. She only told Me that she suffered very much on hearing the Pharisees insinuate that I was not the Messiah because I was not curing you or raising you from the dead.»

«And... has she not said anything to You about me? You know... I was suffering so much... I remember that my mother in her last hours revealed things that had escaped Martha's notice and mine. It was as if the depths of her soul and of her past surfaced again with the last agitations of her heart. I hope that... My heart has suffered so much because of Mary... and it has striven in every way not to give her the sensation of what I suffered because of her... I would not like to have struck her now that she is good, whilst out of brotherly love first, and then for Your sake, I never struck her in infamous days when she was a disgrace. What did she say to You about me, Master? »

«Her grief for having had too short a time to give you her holy love as your sister and fellow-disciple. Your loss made her measure the extent of the treasures of love that she had crushed under her feet once... and now she is happy to be able to give all the love that she wishes to give you, to tell you that you are her holy beloved brother.»

«Ah! that is it! I realised that! I am glad of that. But I was afraid I might have offended her... Since yesterday I have been thinking over and over again... I have been trying to remember... but I cannot...»

«But why do you want to remember? There is your future in front of you. Your past was left in the sepulchre. Nay, it was not even left there. It was burnt with the funeral bandages. But if it serves to give you peace, I will tell you your last words to your sisters. To Mary in particular. You said that it was because of Mary that I came and I come here, because Mary knows how to love more than anybody else. That is true. You said that she has loved you more than all the others who have loved you. That is also true, because she has loved you renovating herself for God's sake and for yours. You said to her, and quite rightly, that a whole life of delights would not have given you the joy that you received through her. And you blessed your sisters as a patriarch used to bless his dearest creatures. You equally blessed Martha, whom you called your peace; and Mary, whom you called your joy. Are you happy now? »

«Yes, Master, my mind is at peace now.»

«Then, as peace gives mercy, forgive also the chiefs of the people who are persecuting Me. Because that is what you wanted to say: that you can forgive everything, except the evil they do Me.»

«It is so, Master.»

«No, Lazarus, I forgive them. You must forgive them if you want to be like Me.»

«Oh! Like You! I cannot! I am only a man! »

«The man was left down there. The man! Your spirit... You know what happens at the death of a man...»

«No, Lord. I remember nothing of what happened to me » interrupts Lazarus vehemently.

Jesus smiles and replies: «I was not referring to your personal knowledge, to your particular experience. I was speaking of what every believer knows will happen to him when he dies.»

«Ah! The particular Judgement. I know. I believe. The soul presents itself to

God, and God judges it.»

«It is so. And the judgement of God is just and inviolable. And it has infinite value. If the soul is judged mortally guilty it becomes a damned soul. If it is lightly guilty it is sent to Purgatory. If it is just it goes to the peace of Limbo awaiting Me to open the gates of Heaven. So I called your soul back after it had been judged by God. If you had been damned I could not have called you back to life, because by doing so I would have cancelled My Father's judgement. For damned souls no further changes are possible. They are judged for ever. So you belonged to the number of those who were not damned. So you either belonged to the class of the blessed souls, or to the class of those who will be blessed after being purified. But consider this, My dear friend. If the sincere will of repentance that man can have while being still a man, that is, body and soul, is valid as purification; if the symbolical rite of baptism in water, that one wants out of spirit of contrition to be cleansed of the foulness contracted in the world and because of one's flesh, has the value of purification for us Hebrews; what value will repentance have, a more real and perfect repentance, a much more perfect repentance of a soul freed from the body, aware of what God is, enlightened on the gravity of its errors, enlightened on the extent of the joy that had moved away for hours, for years, for ages: the joy of the peace of Limbo that will soon be the joy of the achieved possession of God: the double, treble purification of perfect repentance, of perfect love, of the bath in the ardour of the flames lit by the love of God and by the love of spirits, in which and by which the spirits are stripped of all impurity and emerge as beautiful as seraphim, crowned with what does not even crown seraphim: their earthly and ultra-earthly martyrdom against vices and for the sake of love? What will it be? Tell Me, My dear friend.»

«Well... I do not know... perfection. Better still... a new creation.»

«There you are: you have said the right word. The soul becomes as if it were created again. It becomes like the soul of an infant. It is new. The past no longer exists. Its past of man. When the original Sin falls, the soul without stain and the shadow of stain, will be super-created and worthy of Paradise. I called back your soul that had been re-created through your willing attachment to Good, through the expiation of pain and death, and through your perfect repentance and your perfect love, achieved beyond death. So your soul is as innocent as the soul of a baby a few hours old. And if you are a new-born baby, why do you want to put on your spiritual childhood the heavy cumbersome clothes of an adult? The cheerful spirit of a child has wings, not chains. They imitate Me quite easily as they have not yet assumed any personality. They become like Me, because My figure and My doctrine can be impressed on their souls devoid of all traces without any confusion of lines. Their souls are free from human memories, from resentment, from prejudice. There is nothing in them, so I can be there, perfect and absolute as I am in Heaven. You, who are born again, a new-born, because in your old flesh the driving power is new, clean, without past and without traces of what it was, you, who have come back to serve Me, and only for that purpose, you must be as I am, more than anybody else. Look at Me. Look at Me carefully. Look at yourself in Me, and mirror Me in yourself. Two mirrors that look at each other to reflect in each other the figure of what they love. You are a man and a child. A man by age, a child by the purity of your heart. You have the advantage over children of being already acquainted with Good and Evil, and of choosing Good even before your Baptism in the fire of love. Well, I say to you, to the man whose spirit has been cleansed by the purification received: "Be as perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect and as I am. Be perfect, that is, be like Me Who have loved you so much as to go against all the laws of life and death, of heaven and the earth, in order to have once again on the Earth a servant of God and a true friend of Mine, and a blessed soul, a great blessed soul in Heaven". I say that to everybody: "Be perfect". And they, the majority, do not have the heart that you had, worthy of the miracle, worthy of being used as an instrument to glorify God in His Son. And they do not have your debt of love with God... I can say that, I can exact it from you. And first of all I exact it by asking you to bear no grudge on those who offended you and now offend Me. Forgive, Lazarus, forgive. You have been immersed in the burning flames of love. You must be "love", so that you may no longer know anything but the embrace of God.»

«And by doing so shall I fulfil the mission for which You have raised me from

the dead? »

«By doing so you will fulfil it.»

«That is enough, Lord. I need not ask or know more. It was my dream to serve You. If I served You by doing nothing, as a sick man and a dead body, and if I shall be able to serve You by doing much, as a man who has recovered, my dream has come true and I do not ask for anything else. May You be blessed, my Jesus, Lord and Master! And may He Who sent You be blessed with You.»

«May the Almighty Lord God be always blessed.»

They go towards the house stopping now and again to watch the reawakening of trees and Jesus, tall as He is, lifts one arm and picks a little bunch of flowers from an almond-tree that is getting warm in the sun, against the southern wall of the house.

Mary comes out and sees them and she approaches them to hear what Jesus is saying: «See, Lazarus? Also to these flowers the Lord said: "Come out". And they obeyed to serve the Lord.»

«What a mystery germination is! It seems impossible for such fragile petals and such tender stems to sprout from a hard trunk or hard seeds and to change into fruit or plants. Is it wrong, Master, to say that the lymph or the germ is like the soul of the plant or of the seed? »

«It is not wrong because it is the vital part. It is not eternal in them, but was created for each species on the first day that plants and cereals existed. In man it is eternal, like its Creator, created each time a new man is conceived. But matter is alive through it. That is why I say that only through his soul man is alive. And he does not live only here. But also in the beyond. He lives because of his soul. We Hebrews do not draw designs on sepulchres as the Gentiles do. But if we did, we should not design an extinguished torch, an empty sand-glass or any other item symbolising the end, but the seed that is thrown into the furrow and grows into an ear. Because it is the death of the body that frees the soul from the bark and makes it fructify in the flower-beds of God. The seed. The vital spark that God put into our dust and becomes an ear if through our good will and also through sorrow we can fertilise the clod that encloses it. The seed. The symbol of life that lasts for ever... But Maximinus is calling you...»

«I will go, Master. Some of the stewards have probably come. Everything came to a standstill these last months. They are now making haste to show me their accounts...»

«That you approve in advance because you are a good master.»

«And because they are good servants.»

«A good master makes servants good.»

«So I shall certainly become a good servant because I have You as a perfect Master » and he goes away smiling, walking nimby, so different from the poor Lazarus as he had been for years.

Mary remains with Jesus.

«And what about you, Mary, will you become a good servant of your Lord? »

«You only know, Rabboni. I... only know that I was a big sinner.»

Jesus smiles: «Have you seen Lazarus? He, too, was seriously ill, and yet do you not think that he is quite well? »

«It is so, Rabboni. You have cured him. What You do is always complete. Lazarus has never been so strong and cheerful as he has been since he came out of the sepulchre.»

«You are right, Mary. What I do is always complete. Thus also your redemption is complete because I worked it.»

«That is true, my beloved Saviour and Redeemer, my King and God. It is true. And, if You want it, I also shall be a good servant of my Lord. As for me, I want it, Lord. I do not know whether you do.»

«I want it, Mary. A good servant of Mine. Today more than yesterday. Tomorrow more than today. Until I will say to you: "Enough, Mary. It is time for you to rest".»

«Agreed, Lord. I would like You to call me, then. As You called my brother out of the sepulchre. Oh! call me out of this life! »

«No, not out of this life. I will call you to the Life, to the true Life. I will call you out of the sepulchre that is the flesh and the Earth. I will call you to the wedding of your soul with your Lord.»

«My wedding! You love virgins, Lord...»

«I love those who love Me, Mary.»

«You are divinely good, Rabboni! That is why I could not set my mind at rest when I heard people say that You were bad because You were not coming. Everything seemed to be collapsing around me. How hard it was to say to myself: "No. You must not accept this evidence. What seems to you to be obvious is only a dream. The real fact is the power, the goodness, the divinity of your Lord". Ah! How much I suffered! So much grief for Lazarus' death and for his words... Did he say anything to You? Does he not remember? Tell me the truth...»

«I never lie, Mary. He is afraid that he may have spoken and said what had grieved his life. But I reassured him, without lying, and he is now tranquil.»

«Thank You, Lord. Those words... have done me good. Yes. Just like the cure of a doctor who lays bare the roots of a disease and burns them. They finished destroying the old Mary. I still had too high an opinion of myself. Now... I measure the bottom of my abjection and I know that I must go a long way to climb out of it. But I will do it, if You help me.»

«I will help you, Mary. I will help you also when I have gone away.»

«How, my Lord? »

«By increasing your love in an immeasurable way. There is not other way for you.»

«Too mild when compared with what I have to expiate! Everybody is saved through love. Everybody obtains Heaven. But what is sufficient for the pure, the just, is not sufficient for the great sinner.»

«There is no other way for you, Mary. Because, whatever way you may take, it will still be love. Love if you help people in My name. Love if you evangelize. Love if you live in isolation. Love if you martyrize yourself. Love if you will make people martyrize you. You can but love, Mary. It is your nature. Flames can but burn whether they creep on the ground, burning straw, or they arise like a bright embrace around a trunk, a house or an altar to ascend towards the sky. Everyone has his nature. The wisdom of the masters of the spirit rests in the ability to exploit the inclinations of men directing them along the way where they can develop profitably. Such a law exists also among plants and animals and it would be silly to pretend that a fruit-tree should yield flowers only, or should bear other fruit than its natural ones, or that an animal should fulfil the functions typical of another species. Could you pretend that a bee, destined to make honey, should become a little bird that sings among the leafy branches of a hedge? Or that this little branch of an almond-tree that I am holding in My hands, with all the tree from which I picked it, instead of yielding almonds should exude sweet-smelling resins from its bark? A bee works, a bird sings, an almond-tree bears fruit, a resiniferous plant secretes resins. And each fulfils its task. Souls do the same. Your task is to love.»

«Then inflame me, Lord. Grant me it as a grace.»

«Is the power of love that you possess not sufficient for you?»

«It's too little, Lord. It could have served to love men. Not to love You Who are the infinite Lord.»

«And just because I am such, a limitless love would be required...»

«Yes, my Lord. That is what I want: that You give me a limitless love.»

«Mary, the Most High Who knows what love is, said to man: "You shall love Me with all your strength". He does not exact more than that. Because He is aware that it is already a martyrdom to love with all one's strength...»

«It does not matter, my Lord. Give me an infinite love that I may love You as You deserve to be loved, that I may love You as I have not loved anybody else.»

«You are asking Me for a suffering that is like a fire that burns and consumes, Mary. It burns and consumes slowly... Think about it.»

«I have been thinking about it for such a long time, my Lord. But I dared not ask You. Now I know how much You love me. Just now I am aware of how much You love me and I dare to ask You. Give me that infinite love, Lord.»

Jesus looks at her. She is in front of Him, still thin after so many long hours of watch and so much grief, wearing a modest dress and with her hair arranged in a simple way, like a girl without malice, her pale face full of eagerness, her imploring eyes already shining with love, looking more like a seraph than a woman. She is really the contemplator asking for the martyrdom of absolute contemplation.

Jesus says one word only after looking at her carefully, as if He wanted to weigh her will: «Yes.»

«Ah! my Lord! What a grace to die out of love for You! » she says falling on her knees and kissing Jesus' feet.

«Stand up, Mary. Take these flowers. They are those of your spiritual wedding. Be as sweet as the fruit of the almond-tree, as pure as its flower and as bright as the oil that is extracted from its fruit, when it is lit, and as sweet smelling as this oil when sated with essences it is spread in banquets or on the heads of kings, scented with your virtues. Then you will really spread on your Lord the balm that He will appreciate infinitely.»

Mary takes the flowers but she does not stand up and in advance of her balms of love she kisses and sheds tears on the feet of her Master.

Lazarus joins them and says: «Master, there is a little boy who wants You. He had gone to Simon's house looking for You and found only John who brought him here. But he does not want to speak to anybody but You.»

«All right. Bring him here. I shall go under the jasmine pergola.»

Mary goes back into the house with Lazarus. Jesus goes under the pergola. Lazarus comes back holding by the hand the boy whom I saw in the house of Joseph of Sephoris. Jesus recognises him at once and greets him: «You, Martial! Peace be with you. How come you are here? »

«They have sent me to tell You something...» and he looks at Lazarus who understands and is about to go away.

«Stay, Lazarus. This is Lazarus, a friend of Mine. You can speak before him, My boy, because I have no other friend more faithful than he is.»

The boy is reassured. He says: «Joseph the Elder has sent me, because I live with him now, to tell You to go at once to Bethphage, to the house of Cleanthes. He must speak to You at once. But it must be at once. And he said that You are to come by Yourself. Because he must speak to You in all secrecy.»

«Master! What is happening? » asks Lazarus worriedly.

«I do not know, Lazarus. There is only one thing to do: to go there. Come with Me.»

«At once, Lord. We can go with the boy.»

«No, Lord. I am going alone. Joseph insisted on that. He said: "If you can do it properly and by yourself, I will love you as if I were your father", and I want to be loved as a son by Joseph. I am going away at once, and I will run. Come after I have gone. Hail, Lord. Hail, sir.»

«Peace to you, Martial.»

The boy runs away as swift as a swallow.

«Let us go, Lazarus. Bring Me My mantle. I will proceed because, as you can see, the little boy cannot open the gate, and he certainly does not wish to call anybody.»

Jesus walks fast towards the gate, Lazarus hastens towards the house. The former releases the iron lock of the gate for the boy, who runs away. The latter brings Jesus' mantle to Him and walks beside Him on the road towards Bethphage.

«I wonder what Joseph wants? If he sent a boy with so much secrecy...»

«A boy escapes the notice of anyone who may be watching » replies Jesus.

«Do You think that... do You suspect... Do You feel that You are in danger, Lord? »

«I am certain, My dear friend.»

«What? Even now? But You could not have given a greater proof!...»

«Hatred becomes more furious when urged by facts.»

«Oh! it's because of me, then! I have harmed You!... My grief is incomparable! » exclaims Lazarus who is deeply grieved.

«Not because of you. Do not be distressed without reason. You have been the means, but you must understand that the cause was the necessity to give the world the proof of My divine nature. If it had not been you, it would have been somebody else, because I had to prove to the world that I, being God, can do anything I want. And to bring back to life a body that has been dead for days and is already decomposed, can only be the work of God.»

«Ah! You want to comfort me. But my joy, all my joy has vanished... I am distressed, Lord.»

Jesus makes a gesture as if He wanted to say «Who knows! » and then they both become silent.

They walk fast. The distance between Bethany and Bethphage is a short one, and they soon arrive there.

Joseph is walking up and down the street at the beginning of the village. He has

his back turned when Jesus and Lazarus come out of a path concealed by a hedge. Lazarus calls him.

«Oh! Peace to you. Come, Master. I waited for You here so that I might see You at once, but let us go into the olive-grove. I do not want anybody to see us...» He takes them behind the houses into a thick olive-grove that is a comfortable shelter where they can speak without being noticed, as the ruffled leafy branches of the trees conceal the slopes.

«Master, I sent the boy who is smart and obedient and very fond of me, because I had to speak to You but I was not to be seen. I came along the Kidron to get here... Master, You must go away, at once. The Sanhedrin has ordained Your arrest and the announcement will be read in the synagogues tomorrow. Whoever knows where You are, must denounce You. I need not tell you, Lazarus, that your house will be the first one to be watched. I came out of the Temple at the sixth hour and I acted at once, because while they were discussing I had already planned what to do. I went home and I took the boy. I came out through Herod's Gate on horseback, as if I were leaving the town. Then I crossed the Kidron and followed it. I left my mount at Gethsemane and I sent the boy who knew the way as he had already been to Bethany with me. Go away at once, Master. To a safe place. Do You know where to go? Have You got a place where to go? »

«But is it not enough for Him to go away from here? At most from Judaea? »

«It is not enough, Lazarus. They are furious. He must go where they do not go...»

«But they go everywhere, they do! You surely do not want the Master to leave Palestine!...» says Lazarus excitedly.

«Well! What can I tell you?! That's what the Sanhedrin wants...»

«Because of me, is that right? Tell me! »

«H'm! Well... yes. Because of you... that is, because everybody is being converted to Him, and they... they do not want that.»

«But it is a crime! It's a sacrilege... It's...»

Jesus, pale but calm, lifts His hand imposing silence and He says: «Be silent, Lazarus. Everybody is doing his work. Everything is written. I thank you, Joseph, and I assure you that I will go away. Go, you may go, Joseph. So that your absence may not be noticed... May God bless you. I will get Lazarus to let you know where I am. Go. I bless you, Nicodemus and all righteous-hearted people.» He kisses him and they part. Through the olive-grove Jesus goes towards Bethany with Lazarus, while Joseph goes towards the town.

«What will You do, Master? » asks Lazarus who is anguished.

«I do not know. In a few days' time the women disciples will be coming with My Mother. I would have liked to wait for them...»

«With regard to that. I could receive them in Your name and then I would bring them to You. But, in the meantime, where are You going? I don't think You can go to Solomon's house... nor to any of the well-known disciples. Tomorrow!... You must go away at once! »

«I have a place. But I would like to wait for My Mother. Her anguish would begin too early if She did not find Me...»

«Where would You go, Master? »

«To Ephraim.»

«To Samaria? »

«To Samaria. The Samaritans are less samaritans than many people and they love Me. Ephraim is at the border...»

«Oh! and to spite the Judaeans they honour and defend You! But... wait! Your Mother will either come via Samaria or along the Jordan. I will go with some servants along one route, Maximinus with other servants along the other, and either one or the other will find Her. We will come back only when we meet them. You know that no one in Lazarus' house will betray You. In the meantime You will go to Ephraim. At once. Ah! it was my destiny that I should not enjoy Your company! But I will come. Across the Adummim mountains. I am sound now. I can do what I like. Nay! Yes. I will make them believe that I am going to Ptolemais via Samaria to sail to Antioch. Everybody knows that I own land there... My sisters will remain at Bethany... You... Yes. I will now have two carts equipped for You and you can all go to Jericho in them. Then tomorrow at dawn you will resume the journey on foot. Oh! Master! My Master! Take care of Yourself! » After the excitement of the first moment Lazarus becomes sad and weeps.

Jesus sighs, but does not say anything. What can He say?...

They are now in Simon's house. They part. Jesus goes into the house. The apostles, who are surprised that the Master had gone away without saying anything, press round Him as He says: «Take your garments. Prepare your bags. We must depart from here at once. Be quick. And join Me in Lazarus' house.» «Also the clothes that are damp? Can we not get them when we come back? » asks Thomas.

«We shall not come back. Take everything.»

The apostles go away casting meaningful glances at one another.

Jesus goes to get His belongings in Lazarus' house and He says goodbye to the dismayed sisters...

The two carts are soon ready. Two heavy carts with tilts, drawn by strong horses. Jesus says goodbye to Lazarus, to Maximinus and to the servants who have rushed there. They get on the carts that are waiting at one of the gates at the rear of the house. The drivers urge on the horses and the journey begins along the same road by which Jesus had come a few days previously to raise Lazarus.

549. Going to Ephraim.

2nd January 1947.

In the fresh clear early dawn the fields around Nike's house are all green with new shoots of corn only a few centimetres high, as delicate in shade as very clear emeralds. The orchard, which is closer to the house and is still bare, looks even darker and more massive, compared with the delicate stems and with the paradisiac serenity of the airy sky. The white house is crowned in the early sunshine with the flights of doves.

Nike is already up and she is diligently ensuring that the departing persons have what may comfort them during their journey. First of all she dismisses Lazarus' two servants who were kept by her for that night and who, after taking some refreshment, go away trotting their horses. She then goes back into the kitchen where the maidservants are preparing milk and food on big fires. And from a large earthen pot she pours some oil into two smaller ones, and then some wine into two small wineskins. She urges a servant who is preparing loaves of bread as thin as buns to take them to the stone-oven that is ready. From large boards, on which cheese is desiccated in the warmth of the kitchen, she picks the best whole ones. She takes some honey and pours it slowly into some small vessels fitted with firm taps. She then makes up several bundles containing the foodstuffs, and one of them contains a whole kid or lamb that a servant takes off the spit on which it was roasted. Another contains apples as red as corals. In another there are edible olives. In a third one there are dried currants. There is one of peeled barley.

She is closing this last package when Jesus enters the kitchen and greets all the people present.

«Master, peace to You. Are You up already? »

«I should have been up earlier. But My disciples were so tired that I let them sleep on. What are you doing, Nike? »

«I am preparing... They will not be heavy, see? Twelve parcels. And I have taken into consideration the strength of the bearers.»

«And what about me? »

«Oh! Master! You already have Your burden...» and tears begin to shine in Nike's eyes.

«Let us go outside, Nike. We shall be able to speak in peace.»

They go out and they move away from the house.

«My heart is aching, Master...»

«I know. But it is necessary to be strong considering that you have not grieved Me...»

«Oh! Let that never happen! But I thought that I would be able to stay near You and that is why I came to Jerusalem. Otherwise I would have stayed here, where I own these fields...»

«Also Lazarus, Mary and Martha thought they would be able to be with Me. And you can see!...»

«Yes, I can see. I am not going back to Jerusalem any more as You are not there. I shall be closer to You if I remain here and I shall be able to help You.»

«You have already given so much...»

«I have not given anything. I would like to be able to take my house wherever You go. But I will come, I will certainly come to see what You need. What You told me to do now is right. I shall stay here until they are convinced that You are not here. But later...»

«It is a long and difficult road for a woman, and it is not safe either.»

«Oh! I am not afraid. I am too old to be pleasant and attractive as a woman, and I do not carry treasures to be sought as a prey. Highwaymen are better than many people who consider themselves holy and instead are thieves and want to rob you of your peace and freedom...»

«Do not hate them, Nike.»

«That is more difficult for me than anything else. But I will try not to hate them for Your sake... I wept all night, Lord! »

«I heard you go to and fro in the house as indefatigable as a bee. And you seemed a mother anxious about her persecuted son... Do not weep. Guilty people must weep. Not you. God is good to His Messiah. In the most grievous hours He always makes Me find a motherly heart close to Me...»

«And what are You going to do about Your Mother? You told me that She was coming soon...»

«She will come to Ephraim... Lazarus is going to inform Her. Here is Simon of Jonah with My brothers...»

«Do they know? »

«Not yet, Nike. I will tell them when we are far away...»

«And when I come, I will tell You what happens here and in Jerusalem.»

They join the apostles who are coming out of the house one after the other looking for Jesus.

«Come, brothers. Take some food before departing. Everything is ready.»

«Nike did not sleep last night to provide for us. Thank the good disciple » says Jesus entering the large kitchen where on a refectory table - it is so long - there are cups full of milk steaming hot and sweet smelling buns just out of the oven. And Nike spreads butter and honey generously on them, saying that they are invigorating food for people who have to go on a long journey when the weather is still cold.

The meal is soon over. Nike in the meantime has made up the last parcels with the crisp fragrant bread just taken out of the oven. Each apostle takes his bundle that has been tied in such a way as to be carried without much trouble. It is time to go. Jesus greets and blesses. The apostles say goodbye. But Nike wants to go with them as far as the border of her fields and she then goes back slowly weeping in her veil, while Jesus with His apostles goes away along a secondary road pointed out to Him by Nike.

The country is still desert. The path runs through fields of new corn and bare vineyards. Thus there are no shepherds either, as they do not take their flocks into cultivated fields. The morning air is warmed a little by the sun. The first little flowers on the edges of the fields are shining like gems under the veil of dew brightened by sunshine. The birds are singing the first love songs. The good season is coming. Everything is beautiful and fresh. Everything is love... And Jesus is going into the exile that precedes His death brought about by hatred.

They apostles are silent. They are pensive. The sudden departure has disconcerted them. They were so certain that everything was settled by now! They are proceeding with their backs more curved than the weight of their bags and of Nike's provisions can bend them. They are bent by disappointment and by the ascertainment of what the world and men are.

Jesus instead, although He is not smiling, is neither sad nor dejected. He is walking with His head erect, ahead of everybody, without arrogance, but also without fear. He is Proceeding like one who knows where to go and what to do. He walks courageously, like a hero, whom nothing shakes or frightens.

The secondary road joins with a main one, which Jesus takes going northwards. And the apostles follow Him, without speaking. As the road comes from Galilee and through the Decapolis and Samaria goes to Judaea, there are wayfarers on it, mostly caravans of merchants.

As time goes by the sun becomes pleasantly warmer and warmer, when Jesus leaves the main road to take another path that across corn fields goes towards the first hills.

The apostles cast glances at one another. Perhaps they begin to understand that they are not going towards Galilee along the road in the Jordan valley, but are instead going towards Samaria. But they remain silent.

When they arrive at the first woods on the hills, Jesus says: «Let us stop and rest while we take some food. The sun indicates that it is midday.»

They are near a torrent with little water in it as it has not rained for some time. But its little water is clear in the gravel-bed and its banks are spread with large stones that can be used as tables and seats. They sit down after Jesus has blessed and offered the food and they eat in silence and as if they were lost in thought.

Jesus rouses them saying: «Are you not asking Me where we are going? Do your worries of the future make you dumb or do I no longer seem to you to be your Master? »

The Twelve raise their heads: twelve distressed or at least bewildered faces that turn towards the tranquil face of Jesus and one only «Oh! » is exclaimed by twelve mouths. And the exclamation is followed by the reply of Peter who speaks on behalf of everybody: «Master, You know that we always consider You our Master. But since yesterday we are like people who have received hard blows on their heads. And everything seems a dream to us. And although we see and know that it is You, You seem to be already... far away. We somehow have had this impression since You spoke to Your Father before calling Lazarus, and since You brought him out of his sepulchre, tied as he was, only by means of Your will, and You made him live only by the strength of Your power. You almost frighten us. I am speaking of myself... but I think it is the same for everybody... And now... We... This departure... so sudden and so mysterious! »

«Have you a double fear? Do you feel that the danger is more impending? Do you not have, do you feel that you do not have the strength to face and overcome the last trials? Speak without restraint. We are still in Judaea. We are near the low roads that take one to Galilee. Everyone may go if he wishes, and you can go in time to avoid being hated by the Sanhedrin...»

The apostles are roused by these words. Those who were almost lying on the grass warmed by the sun, sit up. Those who were sitting, stand up.

Jesus goes on: «Because as from today I am the legally Persecuted One. Bear that in mind. Just now they are about to proclaim in the five hundred and more synagogues in Jerusalem and in those of the towns that have received the ban issued yesterday at the sixth hour, that I am the great sinner, and that whoever knows where I am must denounce Me to the Sanhedrin so that I may be captured...»

The apostles shout as if they already saw Him captured. John clings to His neck moaning: «Ah! I have always foreseen that! » and he sobs loud. Some curse the Sanhedrin, some invoke divine justice, some weep, some become petrified.

«Be silent and listen. I have never deceived you. I have always told you the truth. When possible I defended and protected you. Your presence near Me has been as pleasant as that of sons. I did not even hide My last hour... My dangers... My passion from you. But those were problems that concerned Me exclusively. Now your dangers, your safety, and that of your families are to be taken into consideration. I ask you to do that. With absolute freedom. Do not consider them in the light of your love for Me, or of your election made by Me. As I am releasing you from every obligation towards God and His Christ, just imagine that we have met here, now, for this first time and that, after listening to Me, you decide whether it is convenient for you or not to follow the Unknown man whose words have moved you. Imagine that you hear and see Me for the first time and that I say to you: "Bear in mind that I am persecuted and hated and that whoever loves Me is persecuted and hated as I am, in his person, his interests, his affections. Remember that persecution may end up with death and the confiscation of the family property". Think it over and decide. I will love you just the same if you say to me: "Master, I cannot come with You any more". Are you becoming sad? No, you must not. We are good friends who decide with peace and love what is to be done, with reciprocal compassion. I cannot let you face the future without making you ponder over it. I do not disesteem you. I love you all. I am the Master. It is obvious that the Master should know His disciples. I am the Shepherd and it is obvious that a shepherd should know his lambs. I know that My disciples, if they had to face a test without being sufficiently prepared not only in the wisdom coming from their Master, and which is therefore good and perfect, but also in their own ponderation of the

situation, might fail, or at least they would not triumph like athletes in a stadium. To measure oneself and to evaluate circumstances is always a wise rule. In little and great things. I, the Shepherd, must say to My lambs: "Here, I am now going to enter a place of wolves and butchers. Have you enough strength to go among them?". I could also tell you now which of you will not have the strength to withstand the trial, although I can assure and reassure you that none of you will fall at the hands of the executioners who will sacrifice the Lamb of God. My capture is of such weight that it will suffice them... So I say to you: "Think it over". Once I said to you: "Be not afraid of those who kill". I said: "He who, having laid his hand on the plough, looks back to consider the past and what he may lose or acquire, is not fit for My mission". But they were rules to give you the measure of what it meant to be disciples, and rules for the future that will take place when I am no longer the Master, but My believers are the masters. They served to strengthen your souls. But even such strength, which is undeniable you have acquired, as compared with the nonentities you were - I am referring to your spirits - is still too little with respect to the greatness of the trial. Oh! do not think in the secrecy of your hearts: "The Master is scandalised at us!". I am not scandalised. On the contrary I tell you that you must not be scandalised, neither now nor in the future, at your own weakness. In all future times there will always be people among the members of My Church, both lambs and shepherds, who will be inferior to the greatness of their mission. There will be periods when the idol shepherds and the idol believers are more numerous than the true shepherds and the true believers. Periods of eclipse of the spirit of faith of the world. But an eclipse is not the death of a star. It is only a temporary more or less partial obscuring of a star. Afterwards its beauty reappears and it looks brighter. The same will happen to My Fold. I say to you: "Ponder over it". I say so to you as your Master, Shepherd and Friend. I leave you completely free to discuss the matter among yourselves. I am going over there, to that thicket, to pray. One by one will come and tell Me what you have decided. And I will bless your sincere honesty, whatever it may be. And I will love you for what you have given Me so far. Goodbye.» He stands up and goes away.

The apostles are terrified, puzzled, moved. At first they cannot even speak.

Then Peter is the first to say: «May hell swallow me if I want to leave Him! I am sure of myself. Even if all the demons in Gehenna led by Leviathan should come against me, I would not move away from Him out of fear! »

«Neither would I. Am I to be inferior to my daughters? » says Philip.

«I am sure that they will do Him no harm. The members of the Sanhedrin threaten but they do so to convince themselves that the Sanhedrin still exists. They know very well that they have no power if Rome is not agreeable. Their sentences! It's Rome that judges! » says the Iscariot boldly.

«But the Sanhedrin is still concerned with religious matters » remarks Andrew.

«Are you afraid perhaps, brother? Bear in mind that there have never been cowards in our family » says Peter threateningly, as he feels that his heart is overflowing with warlike spirit.

«I am not afraid and I hope I shall be able to prove it. I am only telling Judas what I think.»

«You are right. But the mistake of the Sanhedrin consists in wishing to make use of a political weapon, as they do not wish to say or to be told that they have lifted their hands against the Christ. I know that for certain. They would like, that is, they would have liked to make Jesus commit sin and thus make Him contemptible to the crowds. But with regard to killing Him! Ehi! No. They are afraid! Their fright has no human comparison, because their souls are frightened. They do know that He is the Messiah! They know that very well. So much so that they realise that they are done for, because the new time is coming. And they want to overthrow Him. But will they overthrow Him!? No. That is why they are seeking a political reason so that the Proconsul, that is Rome, should overthrow Him. But the Christ does no harm to Rome, and Rome will do no harm to Him, and the members of the Sanhedrin are howling in vain.»

«So are you staying with Him? »

«Of course. More than anybody else! »

«I have nothing to lose or to gain by staying or going away. I have only to love Him. And I will do that » says the Zealot.

«I recognise Him as the Messiah and consequently I will follow Him » says

Nathanael.

«So will I. I have believed Him to be the Messiah since John the Baptist pointed Him out to me as such » says James of Zebedee.

«We are His brothers. To our faith we add the love of kinship. Is that right, James? » says Thaddeus.

«He has been my sun for years and I follow His course. If He falls into the abyss dug by His enemies, I will follow Him » replies James of Alphaeus.

«And what about me? Can I forget that He has redeemed me? » asks Matthew.

«My father would curse me seven times seven if I should leave Him. In any case, even if it were only for Mary's sake, I would never part from Jesus » says Thomas.

John does not speak. His head is lowered, he looks dejected. The others mistake his attitude for weakness and many ask him.

«And what about you? Are you the only one who wants to go away? »

John looks up, so pure also in his attitude and eyes, and fixing his limpid blue eyes on those who are questioning him he says: «I was praying for all of us. Because we want to say and do things and we rely on ourselves, and by doing so we do not realise that we challenge the words of the Master. If He says that we are not prepared, it means that we are not. If we have not become prepared in three years, we shall not become so in few months...»

«What are you saying? In few months? What do you know? Are you a prophet, perhaps? » They assail him with questions, almost reproaching him.

«I know nothing.»

«So? What do you know? Has He perhaps told you? You always know His secrets...» says Judas of Kerioth with envy.

«Do not hate me, my friend, if I understand that the fine weather is over. When will it be? I do not know. I know that it will happen. He says so. How many times has He said so! We do not want to believe it. But the hatred of the others confirms His words... So I pray. Because there is nothing else to be done. I pray God to make us strong. Do you not remember, Judas, when He told us that He had prayed His Father to have strength against temptations? All strength comes from God. I imitate my Master, as is right to do...»

«Well, are you staying or not? » asks Peter.

«And where do you want me to go if I do not stay with Him Who is my life and welfare? But as I am a poor boy, the most miserable of all, I ask everything of God, the Father of Jesus and ours.»

«That is settled. So we are all staying! Let us go to Him. As He is certainly sad, our loyalty will make Him happy » says Peter.

Jesus is prostrated in prayer. With His face on the ground, in the grass, He is certainly imploring His Father, but at the shuffling of feet He stands up and looks at His apostles. He looks at them with a rather sad gravity.

«Be happy, Master. None of us are going to leave You » says Peter.

«You have decided too soon and...»

«Hours or ages will not change our minds » says Peter.

«Neither will threats change our love » proclaims the Iscariot.

Jesus stops looking at them as a group and He gazes at them one by one. A long look which everyone withstands fearlessly. His eyes delay in particular on the Iscariot, who looks at Him more resolutely than the others. He opens His arms in a gesture of resignation and He says: «Let us go. You, all of you, have signed your destiny.» He goes back to the place where He was, He picks up His bag and says: «Let us take the road to Ephraim, the one they pointed out to us.»

«To Samaria?! » They are utterly astonished.

«To Samaria. Or, at least, to its borders. John also went to live there until the hour fixed for his preaching the Christ.»

«But that did not save him! » objects James of Zebedee.

«I am not trying to save Myself, but to save. And I will save at the appointed hour. The persecuted Shepherd is going to the most unfortunate sheep. So that, forlorn as they are, they may have their share of wisdom to prepare them for the new time.»

He strides away, after the stop that has served both to rest and to respect the Sabbath, as He wishes to arrive before the paths become impassable at night. When they arrive at the little torrent that flows from Ephraim towards the Jordan, Jesus calls Peter and Nathanael and gives them a bag saying: «Go ahead and look for Mary of Jacob. I remember that Malachi told Me that she is the

poorest woman in the village, in spite of her large house, now that she has no sons and daughters in it. We shall stay with her. Give her plenty money so that she may give us hospitality without applying to many people. You know where the house is. It is the large one, shaded by four pomegranade-trees, near the bridge across the torrent.»

«We know, Master. We will do as You say.» They go away quickly and Jesus follows them slowly with the others.

From the dell, in the middle of which the torrent flows, one can see the white houses of the village in the late daylight and in the early moonlight. There is not a soul about when they arrive at the house that is all white in the moonlight. Only the torrent can be heard in the silence of the night. Turning round and looking at the horizon, one can see a large stretch of the starry sky bend over a large expanse of ground that slopes downwards towards the desert plain that stretches as far as the Jordan. A solemn peace reigns over the Earth. They knock at the door. Peter opens it. «Everything is settled, Lord. The old woman wept when we gave her the money. She had not a coin left. I said to her: "Do not weep, woman. There is no more pain where Jesus of Nazareth is". She replied to me: "I know. I have suffered all my life and just now I was at the very limit of endurance. But Heaven opened on the evening of my life and brought me the Star of Jacob to give me peace". She is now preparing the rooms that have been closed for such a long time. H'm! There isn't very much. But the woman appears to be very good. Here she is! Woman! The Rabbi is here! »

A very thin old woman comes forward, her meek eyes full of melancholy. She stops perplexed a few steps from Jesus. She feels uneasy.

«Peace to you, woman. I shall not give you much trouble.»

«I wish You could walk on my heart, to make it more pleasant for You to enter my poor house. Come in, Lord, and may God enter with You.» She has recovered her breath and taken heart in the light of Jesus' glance.

They all go in and close the door. The house is as large as a hotel and as empty as a desert. Only the kitchen looks cheerful because of a bright fire in the fireplace in the middle of the room.

Bartholomew, who was tending the fire, turns round and says smiling: «Console the woman, Master. She is sad because she cannot honour You.»

«Your heart is enough for Me, woman. Do not worry about anything. We will provide tomorrow. I am poor as well. Bring her our provisions. Poor people share their bread and salt without shame, but with brotherly love. Filial love in your case, woman. Because you could be My mother. And I honour you as such...»

The woman weeps the silent tears of an old distressed soul, wiping her tears with her veil and she whispers: «I had three sons and seven daughters. One of the sons was carried away by the torrent and another one by a disease. The third one has left me. Five of the girls caught the same disease as their father had and died, the sixth died of childbirth and the seventh... What death did not do, sin did. In my old age I am not honoured by my children and it makes me so... In the village they are good to me... that is, to the poor woman. You are kind to the mother...»

«I have a mother, too. And in every woman who is a mother I honour Her. But do not weep. God is good. Have faith, and the children who are still left may come back to you again. The others are in peace...»

«I think it is a punishment, because I come from this place...»

«Have faith. God is more just than men...»

The apostles who had gone to their rooms with Peter come back. They bring provisions. They warm up on the fire the little lamb that Nike had roasted. They put it on the table. Jesus offers and blesses them and He wants the little old woman to sit at the table with them, instead of sitting in her little corner, eating the poor chicory of her supper...

The exile at the border of Judaea has begun...

550. The First Day at Ephraim.

8th January 1947.

«Peace to You, Master » say Peter and James of Zebedee coming back home laden with pitchers full of water.

«Peace to you. Where are you coming from? »

«From the stream. We went to get some water, and we shall go for more, to keep the house clean. Considering that we are stopping... And it is not fair that the old woman should work for us. She is in the other room where she lit a fire to warm the water. My brother went to the wood to get some firewood. It has not rained for some time and it burns like heath » explains James of Zebedee.

«Of course. But the trouble is that, although it was hardly daybreak, they saw us both at the stream and in the wood. And I went to the stream to avoid going to the fountain...» says Peter.

«Why, Simon of Jonah? »

«Because there are always people at the fountain, and they might have recognised us and come here...»

While they are speaking, Alphaeus' two sons, Judas of Kerioth and Thomas have come into the long corridor that divides the house, and thus they can hear Peter's last words and Jesus' reply: «What might not have happened at daybreak today, would certainly have happened later, tomorrow at the latest, because we are staying here...»

«Here? But... I thought we were stopping only to rest...» many of them say.

«We are not stopping to rest. But to stay. We shall depart from here only to go back to Jerusalem for Passover.»

«Oh! I thought that when You referred to the place of wolves and butchers, You meant this region through which You wanted to pass, as You did in the past, to go to other places without taking the roads frequented by Judaeans and Pharisees...» says Philip who has just arrived, and others say: «I also thought that.»

«You have misunderstood. This is not the place of wolves and butchers, although real wolves hide in its mountains. But I am not referring to animals...»

«Oh! that was quite clear! » exclaims Judas of Kerioth somewhat ironically. «As You refer to Yourself as the Lamb, one understands that the wolves are men. We are not completely stupid.»

«No. You are not stupid but in what you do not want to understand. That is, in what concerns My nature and mission, and the grief you give Me by not working assiduously at preparing your future. It is for your own good that I speak and teach you by means of deeds and words., But you reject what upsets your human nature through presage of sorrows or what exacts efforts against your egos. Listen to Me before strangers come here. I will now divide you into two groups of five apostles and guided by the head of each group you will go across the nearby countryside, as you did when I sent you in the early days. Remember what I told you then and put it into practice. The only exception is that now you will pass through villages announcing also to Samaritans that the day of the Lord is close at hand, so that they may be ready when it comes, and it may be easier for you to convert them to the Only God. Be full of charity and wisdom and devoid of prejudice. You can see, and you will realise this even more, that we are granted here what we are denied in other places. So be kind to these people who, although innocent, are expiating the sins of their ancestors. Peter will be at the head of Judas of Alphaeus, Thomas, Philip and Matthew. James of Alphaeus will be the guide of Andrew, Bartholomew, Simon Zealot and James of Zebedee. Judas of Kerioth and John will stay with Me. That will apply as from tomorrow. Today we shall rest making the necessary preparations for future days. We shall spend the Sabbath together. So you must be here before the Sabbath, in order to leave the day after it. It will be a day of love for us, after loving our neighbour in the flock that has left the fold of the Father. Go now and attend to your tasks.»

He remains alone and withdraws to a room at the end of the corridor.

The house resounds with steps and voices, although they are all in their rooms and no one can be seen but the old woman who goes up and down the corridor several times, attending to her household duties, one of which is certainly baking bread because her hair is spread with flour and her hands are covered with dough.

After some time Jesus comes out and goes up to the terrace of the house. He walks up and down meditating up there and now and again He looks at the view around Him.

He is joined by Peter and Judas of Kerioth who do not look very cheerful.

Perhaps it is painful for Peter to part from Jesus. And perhaps it is painful

for the Iscariot not to be able to do so and show off in the villages. They certainly look very thoughtful when they go up to the terrace.

«Come here. Look what a beautiful view you can see from here.» And He points at the varied landscape. To north-west high woody mountains stretching like a spine from north to south. One of them behind Ephraim is a real giant overlooking the others. To northeast and south-east there are mild undulating hills. The village is in a green valley with distant flat backgrounds between the two higher and lower chains, that from the central part of the region slope down to the Jordan plain. Through a fissure in the lower mountains it is possible to see the green plain beyond which flows the blue Jordan. At the height of springtime this must be a beautiful place, all green and fertile. At present the dark shades of vineyards and orchards interrupt the green of fields of cereals, the tender stems of which sprout from the clods of earth, and the verdant pastures nourished by the rich soil.

If what lies beyond Ephraim is called a desert by John, it means that the desert of Judaea was a very mild one, at least in this area, or at least it was a desert only because it was devoid of villages, all covered with woods and pastures among cheerfully gurgling streams, quite different from the land near the Dead Sea, an and land that can rightly be called a «desert », as it is devoid of vegetation, with the exception of the low thorny twisted shrubs that grow in deserts among scattered stones and the sand rich in salt. But this pleasant desert, which lies beyond Ephraim, is widely adorned with vineyards, olive-groves and orchards, and the almond-trees are now smiling at the sun, scattered here and there like white-pink tufts, on the slopes that will soon be covered with the festoons of the new vine-shoots.

«I almost seem to be in my own town » says Judas.

«It looks also like Juttah. The only difference it that there the torrent is down in the plain and the town up on the hill. Here instead the town seems to be in a wide valley with the river in the middle. A country rich in vines! It must be lovely and very profitable, for owners, to own such land » remarks Peter.

«It is written: "May his land be blessed by Yahweh with the fruit of the sky and with dews, with the springs gushing from the abyss, with the fruit blessed by the sun and the moon, with the fruit from the tops of the ancient mountains, with the fruit of the eternal hills and with plentiful crops of the land". And on those words of the Pentateuch they base their proud obstinacy in considering themselves superior. It is so. Even the word of God and the gifts of God, if they descend into hearts full of pride, become the cause of ruin. Not through their own fault, but because of the pride that adulterates their good juice » says Jesus.

«Of course. And of just Joseph they have kept only the fury of a bull and the neck of a rhinoceros. I do not like to stay here. Why do You not let me go with the others? » says the Iscariot.

«Do you not like to stay with Me? » asks Jesus, Who stops looking at the landscape and turns round to look at Judas.

«I do love to be with You, but not with the people of Ephraim.»

«What a very fine excuse! And what about us then? As we shall be going through Samaria and the Decapolis - because we shall be able to go only to these places in the time prescribed between one Sabbath and the next one - are we perhaps going among saints? » says Peter, reproaching Judas who does not reply.

«What does it matter to you who is near you, if you can love everything through Me? Love Me in your neighbour, and all places will be alike as far as you are concerned » says Jesus calmly.

Judas does not reply to Him either.

«Just think of it! I have to go away... whereas I would stay here so willingly. After all... considering what I can do. At least appoint Philip or Your brother head of the group, Master. I... as long as I have to say: let us do this, let us go to that place, I can still manage. But if I have to speak!... I spoil everything.»

«Obedience will make you do everything well. What you do will please Me.»

«In that case... if it pleases You, it will please me. It is enough for me to make You happy. But there they are! I told You! Half of the town is coming... Look! The head of the synagogue... the notables... their women... the children and the people!...»

«Let us go down and meet them » says Jesus and He hastens down the staircase

calling the apostles so that they may leave the house with Him. The inhabitants of Ephraim are coming forward with signs of the deepest respect, and after the customary salutations, one of them, perhaps the head of the synagogue, speaks on behalf of everybody: «May the Most High be blessed for this day, and blessed be His Prophet Who has come to us because He loves all men in the name of the Most High God. May You be blessed, Master and Lord, as You have remembered our hearts and our words, and You have come to rest among us. We will open our hearts and homes to You, asking You to speak to us for our health. May this day be blessed, because through it he who receives Him with upright spirit will see the desert bear fruit.»

«What you said is correct, Malachi. He who knows how to receive with an upright spirit Him Who has come in the name of God, will see his desert bear fruit and the sturdy but wild plants in it become cultivated. I shall stay with you. And you will come to Me. As good friends. And My apostles will take My word to those who can accept it.»

«Will You not teach us, Master? » asks Malachi somewhat disappointed.

«I have come to collect My thoughts and pray, to prepare Myself for the great events of the future. Are you sorry that I have chosen your town for My tranquillity? »

«Oh! no. The very fact of seeing You pray will make us wise. Thank for choosing us for that purpose. We shall not disturb Your prayers and we will not allow Your enemies to disturb them. Because it is already known what happened and happens in Judaea. We shall keep good watch. And we shall be satisfied with Your word when it is not troublesome for You to give it to us. Accept in the meantime our gifts of hospitality.»

«I am Jesus and I do not reject anybody. So I will accept what you are offering Me to prove to you that I do not reject you. But if you want to love Me, from now on give to the poor people of the village or to those passing by what you would give Me. I need only peace and love.»

«We know that. We know everything. And we feel sure that we shall give You what You need, so as to make You exclaim: "The land that was to be for Me like Egypt, that is sorrow, was for Me, as for Joseph of Jacob, the land of peace and glory".»

«If you love Me by accepting My word, I will say so.»

The citizens hand their gifts to the apostles and then withdraw, with the exception of Malachi and two more men who speak to Jesus in low voices. The children also stay, captured by the usual charm emanating from Jesus; they remain, turning deaf ears to their mothers who call them, and they only go away after Jesus has caressed and blessed them. Then, as garrulous as swallows, they run away, followed by the three men.

551. Jesus Respects the Precept of Love More Than the Sabbatic Law.
11th January 1947.

The ten apostles, tired and covered in dust, have come back to the house. When the woman greets them opening the door, they ask her at once: «Where is the Master? »

«I think He is in the wood, praying as usual. He went out very early this morning and has not come back yet.»

«And has no one gone to look for Him? What are those two doing?! » shouts Peter excitedly.

«Don't become impatient, man. He is as safe among us, as He would be in His Mother's house.»

«Safe! Of course! Do you remember the Baptist? Was he safe? »

«He was not because he could not read the hearts of those who spoke to him. But if the Most High allowed that for the Baptist, He will certainly not allow it for His Messiah. You must believe that more than I do, as I am a woman and a

Samaritan.»

«Mary is right. But where did He go exactly? »

«I don't know. At times He goes one way, at times He goes another. At times He is all alone, at times with children who are so fond of Him. He teaches them how to pray by seeing God in everything. He is probably alone today because He did not come back at midday. When the children are with Him, He always comes back because they are little birds who want to be fed at the right time...» says the old woman smiling, as she perhaps remembers her ten children, and then she sighs... because joys and sorrows are in all the memories of one's life.

«And Judas and John, where are they? »

«Judas has gone to the fountain, John to get firewood. I have none left as I finished it all washing all your clothes to let you have them clean when you depart.»

«May God reward you, mother. We are making you work hard... says Thomas laying his hand on her thin bent shoulder, as if he wished to caress her.

«Oh!... It is not hard work. I feel as if I had my children again... she says smiling again as tears begin to shine in her hollow eyes.

John comes in bent under a huge bundle of sticks, and the rather dark corridor seems to brighten up as he enters it. I have always noticed the brilliance that seems to light up wherever John is. His childish smile that is so sweet and candid, his limpid eyes that smile like a beautiful April sky, his joyful voice that is so affectionate in greeting his companions, are like sunbeams or a rainbow of peace. Everybody loves him except Judas of Kerioth; I do not know whether he loves him or hates him, he certainly envies him, he often makes a fool of him and at times offends him. But Judas for the time being is not here. They help him to lay down his load and they ask him where Jesus may be. John also becomes somewhat frightened at the delay. But, confiding in God more than the others he says: «His Father will deliver Him from evil. We must believe in the Lord.» And he adds: «But... come. You are tired and covered in dust. We have prepared food and hot water for you. Come...»

Judas of Kerioth also comes back with his dripping pitchers. «Peace to you. Have you had a good trip? » he asks, but there is no kindness in his voice. It is mingled with mockery and discontent.

«Yes. We began from the Decapolis.»

«Because you were afraid of being pelted with stones or of being contaminated? » asks the Iscariot ironically.

«We were afraid of neither. We did it out of prudence as beginners. And the proposal was made by me, who - I do not wish to reproach you for anything - have grown hoary over parchments » says Bartholomew.

Judas does not reply. He leaves the kitchen where the apostles who have just come back refresh themselves with what has been prepared.

Peter looks at the Iscariot depart and shakes his head. But he does not say anything. Thaddeus instead plucks at John's sleeves and asks: «How did he behave these past days? Always so cross? Be frank...»

«I'm always sincere, Judas. But I can assure you that he caused no trouble. The Master is almost always isolated. I stay with the old mother who is so kind, and I listen to those who come to speak to the Master, and then I tell Him. Judas instead goes about the village. He has made some friends... What can we do! He is just like that... He cannot live tranquilly, as we would do...»

«As far as I am concerned he can do what he likes. I am happy providing he does not cause grief.»

«No. He does not do that. He certainly grows weary. But Here is the Master! I can hear His voice. He is speaking to somebody...»

They rush out and see Jesus coming forward, in the deepening twilight, carrying two children in His arms and one clinging to His mantle, and He is comforting them as they are weeping.

«May God bless You, Master! But where are You coming from at this late hour? »

Jesus on entering the house replies: «I am coming from the highwaymen. I got My prey as well. I walked after sunset, but My Father will absolve Me because I accomplished a deed of mercy... John, and you, Simon, take them... My arms are aching with tiredness... I am really tired.» He sits on a stool near the fireplace. He smiles: He is tired but happy.

«From the highwaymen? But where have You been? Who are these children? Have You had anything to eat? But where were You? It is not wise to be out when it is

dark and to be so far away!... We were worried. Were You not in the wood? » they all ask at the same time.

«I was not in the wood. I went towards Jericho...»

«How imprudent of You! On those roads You may find someone who hates You! » says Thaddeus reproaching Him.

«I took the path that they told us. I had been wanting to go there for days... There are poor wretches to be redeemed. They could do Me no harm. And I went just in time for these children. Give them something to eat. I do not think they have had any food, because they were afraid of the highwaymen. And I had no food with Me. If at least I had found a shepherd!... But because of the oncoming Sabbath all the pastures had been deserted...»

«Of course! We are the only ones who for some time have not kept the Sabbath...» remarks Judas of Kerioth who is always sharp.

«What are you saying? What are you insinuating? » they ask him.

«I am saying that for two Sabbaths we have worked after sunset.»

«Judas, you know why we had to walk on last Sabbath. It is not always the sin of the person who commits it, but also of those who force one to commit it. And today... I know. You want to tell Me that also today I have infringed the Sabbath. My reply is that if the law of the Sabbatic rest is great, the precept of love is very great. I am not obliged to justify Myself with you. But I am doing it to teach you meekness, humility and the great truth that in the case of a holy necessity one must apply the law with resilience of spirit. Our history has many instances of such necessity. At dawn I went towards the Adummim mountains, because I know that there are some wretches there, whose souls are affected with the leprosy of crime. I was hoping to meet them, speak to them and come back before sunset. I found them. But I was not able to deliver them the intended speech, because there were other things to be said... They had found these three children weeping at the entrance of a poor fold in the plain. They had gone down during the night to steal lambs and also kill, if the shepherd had opposed resistance. Hunger pains are dreadful in the mountains in winter... And when cruel hearts suffer them, they make men more ferocious than wolves. These children were there with a little shepherd not much older than they are, but just as frightened as they were. The father of the children, I do not know why, had died during the night. Perhaps he had been bitten by some beast, or because of heart failure... His cold body was lying on the straw near the sheep. The oldest son, who was sleeping beside him, became aware of it. So the highwaymen, instead of making a massacre, found a dead man and four weeping children. They left the dead man and drove away the sheep and the little shepherd, and as even in the most wicked people there can be a piety hard to be beaten, they took also the children... I found them while they were consulting one another on what to do. The more ferocious ones wanted to kill the ten-year-old boy, who was a dangerous witness of their theft and refuge; the less fierce ones wanted to send him away after threatening him and they intended to keep the flock. They all wanted to keep the little ones.»

«To do what? Have they no family? »

«Their mother is dead. That is why the father had taken them with him to the winter pastures, and he was now going back to his lonely home crossing these mountains. Could I have left the little ones to the highwaymen to bring them up like themselves? I spoke to them... In all truth I tell you that they understood Me more than many other people. So much so that they left the little ones with Me and tomorrow they will take the little shepherd to the road to Shechem. Because the brothers of the children's mother live in that part of the country. In the meantime I accepted the children. I shall keep them until their relatives arrive.»

«And You flatter Yourself that the highwaymen...» says the Iscariot and he laughs...

«I am sure that they will not hurt the little shepherd in the least. They are wretches. We must not judge why they are such, but we must try to save them. A good deed may be the beginning of their salvation...» Jesus bends His head, absorbed in I wonder what thought.

The apostles and the old woman speak to one another pitying the frightened children whom they do their best to comfort...

Jesus raises His head when the youngest one, a brunet hardly three years old, begins to weep, and He says to James, who in vain busies himself to give the

child some milk: «Give Me the boy and go and get My bag...» and He smiles as the little one calms down on His knees and greedily drinks the milk that he had previously refused. The others, who are a little older, eat the soup placed before them, but tears stream from their eyes.

«Dear me! How much misery! Now! It is fair that we should suffer, but innocent children!...» says Peter who cannot bear to see children suffer.

«You are a sinner, Simon. You are reproaching God » points out the Iscariot.

«I may be a sinner. But I am not reproaching God. I am only saying... Master, why must children suffer? They have not committed any sin.»

«Everybody has sins, at least the original one » says the Iscariot.

Peter does not reply to him. He awaits Jesus' reply. And Jesus, Who is lulling to sleep the child now sated and drowsy, replies: «Simon, sorrow is the consequence of sin.»

«All right. So... after You have removed sin, children will no longer suffer.»

«They will still suffer. Do not be scandalised, Simon. Sorrow and death will always be on the Earth. Also the purest people suffer and will suffer. Nay, they are the ones who will suffer on behalf of everybody. The victims propitiatory to the Lord.»

«But why? I don't understand...»

«There are many things that you do not understand on the Earth. You must at least believe that they are wanted by the perfect Love. And when Grace restored to men makes the holiest men know the hidden truths, then one will see the holiest people wish to be victims, because they will have understood the power of sorrow... The child has fallen asleep. Mary, will you take him with you? »

«Certainly, Master. We say: a frightened child sleeps little and weeps much, and a bird without nest needs a motherly wing. My bed is a very large one now that I am its only occupant. I will put the children in it and watch over them. These other ones are also about to fall asleep and forget their sorrow. Come, let us put them to bed.»

She picks up the little one from Jesus' lap and she goes out followed by Peter and Philip as James of Zebedee comes back with Jesus' bag.

Jesus opens it and rummages in it. He pulls out a heavy tunic, he unfolds it and examines its width. He is not satisfied. He looks for the mantle of the same dark shade as the tunic. He puts them aside, closes the bag and hands it back to James.

Peter comes back with Philip. The old woman has remained with the three children and Peter sees at once the garments unfolded and laid aside and he asks: «Are You going to change your clothes, Master? Tired as You are, a hot bath should refresh You. There is hot water and we will warm Your clothes, then we shall have supper and go to bed. This story of the poor children has moved me deeply...»

Jesus smiles but He does not make any remark on the matter. He only says: «Let us praise the Lord Who has led Me here in time to save the innocent children.» He then becomes silent, as He is obviously tired...

The old woman comes back with the children's garments. «They should be changed... They are torn and dirty... But I no longer have my children's garments to replace them. I will wash them tomorrow...»

«No, mother. When the Sabbath is over you will make three small garments out of Mine...»

«But, Lord, do You realise that You have only three tunics left? If You give one away, what will You be left with? Lazarus is not here, as when You gave Your mantle to the leprous woman! » says Peter.

«Never mind! There will be two left, and they are too many for the Son of man. Take this, Mary. Tomorrow at sunset you will begin your work, and the Persecuted One will rejoice in helping the poor whose worries He understands.»

552.The Following Day at Ephraim. Parable on the Remembrance of Man's
Eternal Destiny.
12th January 1947.

«Get up and let us go along the stream. Like the Jews who live abroad and where there are no synagogues, we shall celebrate the Sabbath among ourselves. Come children...» says Jesus to the apostles idling in the kitchen garden, and He stretches out His hand to the three poor children who are in a group in a corner.

They go towards Him with an expression of timid joy on their faces prematurely pensive of children who have seen things far greater than themselves, and the two older ones put their hands in those of Jesus, but the little one wants to be taken in His arms, and Jesus satisfies him saying to the oldest one: «You will stay beside Me just the same and you will hold on to My tunic as you did yesterday. Isaac is too tired and too young to walk by himself...» The boy is delighted with Jesus' smile and he agrees, being satisfied with walking like a little man beside Jesus.

«Give me the child, Master. You must be tired after yesterday's fatigue, and Ruben is not happy because You are not taking him by the hand...» says Bartholomew and he stretches his arms to take the child who clings to Jesus' neck.

«He is as stubborn as all his race! » exclaims the Iscariot.

«No. He is frightened. You have no experience of children. Babies are like that. When they are distressed or seared they seek shelter in the first person who has smiled at them and comforted them » replies Bartholomew, and as he cannot take the youngest one in his arms, he takes the oldest one by the hand after caressing his head and smiling at him in a fatherly way.

They leave the house where only the old woman remains and they follow the stream beyond the village. Its banks are beautiful, covered as they are with fresh grass and studded with wild flowers. The clear water gurgles among stones and, although meagre, it sounds as sweet as a harp and rustles breaking against the larger stones scattered in its bed or insinuating itself into the recesses of some tiny island covered with reeds. Birds fly away from the trees near the banks trilling merrily, or they perch on boughs in the sunshine singing the first songs of springtime, or they fly down to the ground gracefully and lively, seeking insects and worms or drinking near the banks. Two wild turtle-doves are bathing at a bend of the stream pecking at each other and cooing; they then fly away carrying in their beaks strands of wool left by some sheep on a plant of hawthorn, the top branches of which are beginning to bloom.

«They do that to build their nest » says the oldest boy. «They certainly have young ones...» He lowers his head and, after smiling faintly when uttering the first words, he weeps silently wiping his eyes with his hand.

Bartholomew takes him in his arms, as he realises what anguish the two turtle-doves have brought about with their care for their nest. And Bartholomew, who has the kind heart of a good father of a family, sighs deeply. The boy weeps on his shoulder and the other one, the second one, seeing him weep, begins to cry as well, imitated by the third one who calls his father in the thin voice of a little child who has just begun to speak.

«This is going to be our Sabbath prayer today! You could have left them at home! Women are better suited to such cases and...» remarks the Iscariot.

«But she does nothing but weep herself! As I feel like doing myself... Because such situations... do make one weep...» replies Peter taking the second boy in his arms.

«Yes, they do make one weep. That is true. And Mary of Jacob, a poor old distressed soul, is not very good at consoling...» confirms the Zealot.

«We do not think that she is very successful either. The only one capable of consoling was the Master. And He did not do it.»

«He did not do it? And what else should He have done? He convinced the highwaymen, He walked for miles with the children in His arms, He had their relatives informed...»

«All trifling matters. Since He has power also over death He could, nay He should have gone down to the fold and raised the dead shepherd. He did it for

Lazarus, who was of no use to anybody! In this case there was a father, and a widower into the bargain, and there are children who are left all alone... That resurrection should have been worked. I do not understand You, Master...»

«And we do not understand you, as you are so disrespectful...»

«Peace, peace! Judas does not understand. He is not the only one who does not understand the reasons of God and the consequences of sin. You also, Simon of Jonah, do not understand why children should suffer. So do not judge Judas of Simon, who does not understand why the man has not been raised from the dead. If Judas ponders on the matter, since he always reproaches Me for going far away all alone, he will realise that I was not able to go so far... Because the fold was in the Jericho plain, but beyond the town, near the ford. What would you have said if I had been away for at least three days? »

«You could have ordered the man to rise again with Your spirit.»

«Are you more exacting than the Pharisees and scribes, who wanted the proof of a decomposed body, so that you may say that I really do raise the dead? »

«They wanted that because they hate You. I would like it because I love You and I would like to see You crush all Your enemies.»

«Your old feelings and your disorderly love. You have not been able to extirpate the old plants from your heart and replace them with new ones; and the old ones, fertilised by the Light that you approached, have become even sturdier. Many people make your error at present and many will make it in future. It is the error of those who, notwithstanding the assistance from God, do not improve themselves because they do not correspond to God's help with heroic wills.»

«Have these men, who, like me, are Your disciples, destroyed the old plants?»

«They have at least pruned them down and engrafted them considerably. You did not. You did not even examine them carefully to see whether they deserved to be engrafted, pruned or removed. You are an improvident gardener, Judas.»

«But only with regard to my soul. Because I know what to do with gardens.»

«You know what to do. You are an expert with all earthly matters. I would like to see you equally capable in matters concerning Heaven.»

«But Your light should work wonders in us by itself! Is it really good? If it fertilises evil and invigorates it, it cannot be good, and it is its fault if we do not become good.»

«Speak for yourself, my friend. As far as I know, the Master has not made my bad tendencies any stronger » says Thomas.

«I agree.» «I agree, too » say Andrew and James of Zebedee.

«With regard to me, His power has freed me from evil and has made a new man of me. Why do you say that? Do you not consider what you say? » asks Matthew. Peter is about to say something, but he prefers to go away, and he begins to walk fast with the child astride his shoulders imitating the rolling of a boat to make him laugh, and when he passes near Thaddeus he takes him by the arm and shouts: «Come on, let's go to that island! It's full of flowers like a basket. Come, Nathanael, Philip, Simon, John... In one bound we are there. The torrent, divided as it is, is only two brooks, one on each side of the island...» And he is the first to jump resting his foot on a sandy protrusion a few metres wide, covered with grass like a meadow and so full of early flowers that it looks like a carpet, with in its middle only one tall thin poplar, the top of which is swaying in a light breeze. He is slowly joined by those he called and then by the others who were closer to Jesus, Who is left behind speaking to the Iscariot.

«But has he not finished yet? » Peter asks his brother.

«The Master is working at his heart » replies Andrew.

«Eh! it is easier for me to make figs grow on this tree than it is for justice to enter Judas' heart.»

«And his mind » adds Matthew.

«He is a fool because he wants to be so, and when he likes » says Thaddeus.

«He is upset because he has not been selected to evangelize. I know » says John.

«As far as I am concerned... If he wants to go in my place... I am not at all anxious to wander about! » exclaims Peter.

«None of us are anxious. But he is. And my Brother does not want to send him. I spoke to Him this morning because I was aware of Judas' mood and of its causes. But Jesus said: "Just because his heart is so unsound I am keeping him with Me. Those who suffer and are weak need a doctor and someone to support them".»

«Of course!... Well!... Come, children. We shall now take these lovely reeds and

make little boats with them. See how beautiful they are! And we shall put these little flowers in them to act as fishermen. Look: do they not seem heads with white and red caps?... We shall make the harbour here, and here... the fishermen's little houses... Now let us tie the boats to these lovely slender grass-blades, and you will put them in the water, like that.... then you will beach them when you finish fishing... You can also make the tour of the island... and watch the rocks, eh!...» Peter's patience is wonderful. He cuts the reed into pieces with a knife, from knot to knot, removing one side to make little boats, he puts daisies still in bud in them as fishermen, he dug a Lilliputian harbour in the sand and makes some little houses with the damp sand, and when he is successful in pleasing the children he sits down satisfied whispering: «Poor children!...»

Jesus sets foot on the island just when the two children are beginning to play and He caresses them putting down the little one who joins in the game of his brothers.

«Here I am with you. Let us speak of God now. Because to speak of God and to God is a preparation for one's mission. And after praying, that is, after speaking to God, we shall speak of God, Who is present in everything to teach men good things. Stand up and let us pray » and He intones some psalms in Hebrew and the apostles join Him singing in chorus.

The children, who had moved aside with their little boats, on hearing the men sing, stop playing and prattling in their shrill voices, and approach the group. They listen attentively, their eyes fixed on Jesus Who is everything to them, then, with the spirit of imitation of children, they take the same posture of the praying apostles humming the tune as they do not know the words of the psalms. Jesus looks at them with a smile that encourages the humming of their innocent voices. They feel as if He approved of them and they are encouraged... The singing of the psalms comes to an end. Jesus sits down on the grass and begins to speak: «When the kings of Israel, of Edom and of Judah united to fight the king of Moab and they applied to the prophet Elisha for advice, he replied to the kings' messenger: "If I did not respect Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I should not even look at you. Now bring me someone who can play the lyre". And as the harpist played, God spoke to His prophet ordering ditch on ditch to be dug in the wadi so that it might be filled with water for men and animals. And the following morning at the hour of the oblation, although there was neither wind nor rain, the torrent was filled as the Lord had said. According to you, what is the teaching of that episode? Speak up! »

The apostles consult with one another. Some say: «God does not speak to an agitated heart. Elisha wants to appease his anger, brought about by seeing the king of Israel appear in his presence, so that he may hear God.» Some instead say: «It is a lesson of justice. Elisha, in order not to punish the innocent king of Judah, saves also the guilty one.» Others say: «It is a lesson of faith and obedience. They dug the ditches obeying an apparently silly order, and they waited for the water although it was a clear windless day.»

«Your replies are correct but not complete. God does not speak to an agitated heart. That is true. But lyres are not required to calm a heart. It is sufficient to have charity, which is the spiritual lyre with paradisiac notes. When a soul lives in charity, its heart is calm and it can hear and understand the voice of God.»

«So Elisha did not have charity because he was upset.»

«Elisha lived at the time of Justice. We must learn to transfer ancient episodes to the time of Charity and see them not in the light of thunder and lightning but in the light of stars. (1) You belong to the new times. So why are you so often more irascible and agitated than people of the ancient times? Divest yourselves of the past. I repeat that to you, although Judas does not like to hear it being repeated. Extirpate, prune, engraft, plant new trees. Renovate yourselves, dig the ditches of humility, obedience and faith. Those kings were able to do so although two of them did not come from Judah, and they did not hear God but the prophet of God repeat the orders of the Most High. Had they not obeyed they would have died of thirst in the and land. They obeyed and the water filled the ditches they had dug, and they were not only saved from dying of thirst but they also defeated their enemies. I am the Water of Life. Dig ditches in your hearts in order to be able to receive Me. And now listen. I am not going to make long speeches. I will just give you some simple thoughts on which you

can meditate. You will always be like these children and even inferior to them, because they are innocent and you are not, and thus the spiritual light will be dimmer in you, if you do not get accustomed to meditation. You always listen but you never remember, because your intelligence is asleep instead of being awake. So listen. When the son of the woman of Shunem died, she wanted to go to the prophet although her husband told her that it was not the first day of the month or the Sabbath. But she knew that she had to go, because for certain matters no delay is allowed. And as she was able to understand the matter from a spiritual point of view, she had her son restored to life. What do you say about that? »
«That it is a reproach to me because of the Sabbath » says the Iscariot.
«So, Judas, do you realise that you understand things when you want to? So open your heart to justice.»
«Yes... but You did not infringe the Sabbath to raise the man from the dead.»
«I did more than that. I prevented their ruin and death, their true death. And I reminded the thieves that...»

(1) Allusion to the lightning that accompanied the manifestations of the ancient Law (Exodus 19,1 - 20,21) and to the star that indicated the coming and manifestation of Jesus in the world (Matthew 2, 1 - 12).

«Wait before consoling Yourself with the idea of having done some good! I don't believe they obeyed You...»

«If the Master says so...»

«Also Elisha, in the story of the woman of Shunem, says: "The Lord has hidden it from me". So not even the prophets always know everything » replies the Iscariot.

«Our Brother is greater than a prophet » remarks Thaddeus.

«I know. He is the Son of God. But He is also the Man. And as such He may be subject to being unaware of secondary matters like this one concerning a conversion and a return... Master, do You always, really always, know everything? I often wonder...» says the Iscariot with stubborn insistence.

«And with what mind do you wish to know? For the sake of peace, of advice, or to be upset? » asks Jesus.

«Well... I do not know. I wonder and...»

«And you seem to be upset even in wondering » says Thomas.

«Me? Of course perplexity always upsets one...»

«How many quibbles! I do not worry about so many problems. I believe without inquiring, and I am not perplexed or upset about anything. But let us allow the Master to speak. I do not like this lesson. Tell us a beautiful parable, Master. The children also will like it » says Peter.

«I have still one question to ask you. This one. According to you, what is the meaning of the flour that removed the bitterness from the soup of the prophet's children? »

Dead silence is the reply to the question.

«What? Can you not reply? »

«Probably because the flour absorbed the bitterness...» says Matthew with no certainty.

«Everything would have been bitter, also the flour.»

«Because of a miracle of the prophet who did not want to mortify his servant» suggests Philip.

«Yes. But not only for that.»

«The Lord wanted the power of the prophet to shine also on common matters» says the Zealot.

«Yes. But it is not yet the right meaning. The lives of prophets anticipate what will take place in the fullness of time: Mine, they reflect My earthly days by means of symbols and figures. So...»

There is silence. They look at one another. Then John lowers his head blushing and he smiles.

«Why do you not express your thought, John? » asks Jesus. «There is no lack of love in speaking, because you do not intend to mortify anybody.»

«I think it means this. That in the time of hunger for Truth and of famine of Wisdom, that is, this time when You came, every tree has become wild and has yielded bitter fruits as inedible as poison for the sons of men, who thus in vain pick them and prepare them to nourish themselves. But the Eternal Father's

Bounty sends You, the flour of selected corn, and with Your perfection You remove the poison from all food, restoring both the trees of the Scriptures again, perverted throughout ages, and the palates of men, corrupted by concupiscence. In this case it is the Father Who orders the flour to be brought and He pours it into the bitter soup, and You are the flour that sacrifices itself to become food for men. And after Your consummation no bitterness will be left in the world, because You will have re-established our friendship with God. I may be wrong.»

«You are not wrong. That is the symbol.»

«Oh! and what made you think that? » asks Peter, who is astonished.

Jesus replies to him: «I will tell you with the very words you spoke a few minutes ago. One bound and you are in the peaceful flowery island of spirituality. But one must have the courage to make a leap leaving the shore, the world. It is necessary to jump without worrying whether there is someone who may laugh at our clumsy jump or may deride us for our simplicity in preferring a lonely islet to the world. One must jump without being afraid of getting hurt or wet or being disappointed. You must leave everything to take refuge in God. One must remain on the island separated from the world and leave it only to distribute the flowers and pure water picked up on the island of the spirit, where there is only one tree, the tree of Wisdom, to those who are left on the shores. By being close to that tree, away from the noise of the world, one catches all its words and becomes a master, being aware of being a disciple. Also that is a symbol. But we shall now tell the children a lovely parable. Come here close to Me.»

The three children go so close to Him as to sit on His knees. Jesus embraces them and begins to speak.

«One day the Lord God said: "I will make man, and man will live in the Earthly Paradise where the great river is that then divides into four water-courses, which are the Pishon, the Gihon, the Euphrates and the Tigris, that flow on the Earth. And man will be happy as he will have all the beautiful and good things of Creation and My love for the joy of his spirit". And He did so. It was as if man were in a large island, more flowery than this one, with all kinds of trees and animals, and upon him there were the love of God shining like a sun on his soul, and the voice of God were heard in the winds, more sweet-sounding than the songs of birds.

But suddenly a serpent crept into that beautiful flowery garden, among all the animals and plants, and that serpent was different from all those that had been created by God and were good, without poisonous teeth and without fierceness in the spires of their flexuous bodies. Also that serpent had dressed itself with a skin having the shades of gems as the other snakes had, nay, it was even more beautiful than they were, so much so that it looked like a huge jewel of a king wriggling among the wonderful trees in the Garden. It went and coiled round a tree growing in the middle of the garden, a beautiful solitary tree that was much taller than this one and it was covered with marvellous leaves and fruits. And the serpent looked like a beautiful jewel around the lovely tree, and it shone in the sun, and all the animals were looking at it because none of them remembered seeing it being created, or seeing it before. But none of them approached it, nay, they all moved away from the tree, now that the snake was round its trunk.

Only the man and woman went near it, and the woman before the man, because she liked that bright thing shining in the sun and moving its head like a flower still half-closed, and she listened to what the serpent was saying, and she disobeyed the Lord and she made Adam disobey. Only after their disobedience they saw the snake for what it was and they understood sin, as by now they had lost the innocence of their hearts. And they hid themselves from God Who was looking for them and then they lied to God Who was questioning them.

God then put some angels at the borders of the Garden and drove the men out. And they felt as if they had been thrown from the safe shore of Eden into the rivers on the earth full of water, as when they are flooded in springtime. But in the hearts of the men who had been driven out God left the remembrance of their eternal destiny, that is, of the passage from the beautiful Garden, where they heard the voice of God and felt His love, to Paradise where they would enjoy God completely. And with that remembrance He left the holy incentive to ascend to the place they had lost, by means of a life of justice.

But, My dear children, you have just now experienced that as long as the boat sails with the stream its voyage is easy, whereas while it sails against the stream it finds it difficult to keep afloat, without being swept away by waves or being wrecked among the vegetation, sand or stones of the river. If Simon had not tied your little boats with the thin withes of the shores, you would have lost them all, as it happened to Isaac who did not hold his withe.

The same happens to men thrown into the streams of the Earth. They must always remain in the hands of God, trusting their will, which is like a withe, to the hands of the good Father Who is in Heaven and Who is the Father of all men, and in particular of innocent people, and they must be on the look-out to avoid herbs and bog grass, stones, whirlpools and mud that might hold back, shatter or swallow up the boat of their souls by tearing away the thread of the will that keeps them joined to God. Because the Serpent, which is no longer in the Garden, is now on the Earth, and it really tries to wreck souls, preventing them from going up the Euphrates, the Tigris, the Gihon and the Pishon to the Great River that flows in the eternal Paradise and nourishes the trees of Life and Health, that yield perpetual fruits, that will be the delight of all those who have been able to go upstream to be united to God and to His angels, without having to suffer any further for ever.»

«My mother also used to say that » says the oldest boy.

«Yes, she did » lisps the youngest one.

«You don't know. I do, because I am big. But if you say things that are not true you will certainly not go to Paradise.»

«But our father used to say that it was not true » says the second-born son.

«Because he did not believe in the Lord of our mother.»

«Was your father not a Samaritan? » asks James of Alphaeus.

«No. He came from another place. But mother was, and we are as well, because she wanted us to be like her. And she told us of Paradise and of the Garden, but not so well as You did. I was afraid of the serpent and of death, because mother used to say that one was the devil and our father said that death puts an end to everything. That is why I was so unhappy to be alone and I also said that it was quite useless to be good now, because as long as father and mother lived, we made them happy by being good, but now there was nobody to make happy if we were good. But now I know... And I will be good. I will never take my thread away from the hands of God so that I will not be carried away by the waters of the Earth.»

«Did mother go upstream or downstream? » asks the second son perplexedly.

«What do you mean, child? » asks Matthew.

«I mean: where is she? Did she go to the river of the eternal Paradise? »

«Let us hope so, my child. If she was good...»

«She was a Samaritan...» says the Iscariot contemptuously.

«Then is there no Paradise for us, because we are Samaritans? Then shall we not have God? He called Him the "Father of all men". As an orphan I liked to think that I still have a Father... But if there is not one for us...» he says lowering his head sadly.

«God is the Father of everybody, My child. Have I loved you less because you are a Samaritan? I contended with the highwaymen for you, and I will contend with the demon for you, in the same way as I would contend for the little son of the High Priest of the Temple in Jerusalem, if he did not consider it disgraceful that the Saviour should save his son. Nay: I would contend for you more firmly because you are alone and unhappy. There is no difference for Me between the soul of a Judaeon and that of a Samaritan. And before long there will be no division between Samaria and Judaea, because the Messiah will have one people only that will bear His Name and will comprise all those who love Him.»

«I love You, Lord. But will You take me to my mother? » asks the oldest of the three boys.

«You do not know where she is. That man over there said that we can only hope...» says the second-born son.

«I do not know, but the Lord knows. He knew even where we were, whereas we do not even know where we were.»

«With the highwaymen... They wanted to kill us...» Terror appears again on the little face of the second son.

«The highwaymen were like demons. But He saved us because our angels called Him.»

«The angels saved also my mother. I know because I always dream of her.»
«You are a liar, Isaac. You cannot dream of her because you do not remember her.»

The little one weeps saying: «No. No. I dream of her. I do...»

«Don't call your brother a liar, Ruben. His soul can really see his mother, because the good Father Who is in Heaven can grant that the little orphan may dream of her and may know her partly, as He allows us to know Him, so that from such limited knowledge we may be willing to know Him perfectly, which is achieved by being always good. And now let us go. We have spoken of God, and the Sabbath has been sanctified.» He stands up and intones more psalms.

Upon hearing the chorus some people from Ephraim go towards them and they respectfully wait until the psalm is ended in order to greet Jesus and say to Him: «Did You prefer to come here instead of coming to us? Do You not love us?»
«None of you invited Me. So I came here with My apostles and these children.»
«That is true. But we thought that Your disciple had informed You of our wish.»
Jesus looks at John and Judas. And Judas replies: «I forgot to tell You yesterday; and today, with these children, I never thought of it.»

Jesus in the meantime leaves the islet and He crosses the tiny stream of water and goes towards the people of Ephraim. The apostles follow Him while the children delay unfasting the two remaining little boats, and as Peter urges them, they reply: «We want to keep them to remember the lesson.»

«And what about me? I lost mine. And I will not remember. And I will not go to Paradise » says the youngest one weeping.

«Wait! Don't weep. I'll make a little boat for you at once. Of course, you must remember the lesson as well. Eh! We ought all to have a little boat with a withe tied to its prow in order to remember. And we men more than you children! Well!» and Peter makes another little boat with its withe. He then takes the three children in his arms, in one armful, and jumps the stream going towards Jesus.
«Are these the ones? » asks Malachi of Ephraim.

«Yes, they are.»

«And are they from Shechem? »

«That is what the young shepherd said. He said that their relatives lived in the country.»

«Poor children! But if their relatives should not come, what would You do? »

«I would keep them with Me. But they will come.»

«Those highwaymen... Will they not come, too? »

«They will not come. Do not be afraid of them. Even if they came... I would be their plunderer, and they would not be your pillagers. I have already snatched four preys from them and I hope I have also snatched part of their souls from sin, at least in some of them.»

«We shall help You with these children. You will let us do that.»

«Yes, I will. But not because they come from your region, but because they are innocent, and love for innocent people leads one quickly to God.»

«But You are the only one who makes no distinction between innocents and innocents. Neither a Judaeon nor a Galilean would have picked up these little Samaritans. People do not love us. And they dislike not only us but also those who do not even yet know what a Samaritan or a Judaeon is. And that is cruel.»

«Yes, it is. But it will no longer be so when people follow My Law. See, Malachi? They are in the arms of Simon Peter, of My brother and of Simon Zealot. None of them are Samaritans or fathers. And yet not even you would press your own children to your heart as these disciples of Mine are pressing the orphans of Samaria. The Messianic idea is this: to re-unite everybody in love. This is the truth of the Messianic idea. One people only on the Earth under the sceptre of the Messiah. One people only in Heaven under the glance of one God only.»

They go away... speaking, towards the house of Mary of Jacob.

553. Jesus Explains to Peter the Mandate for Remitting Sins and Why Saints and Innocents Suffer.

15th January 1947.

Jesus is alone in a little room. He is thinking or praying sitting on a little bed. The tiny yellowish flame of a small oil lamp is quivering on a shelf. It

must be night-time because there is no noise in the house or in the street. Only the rustling of the stream outside the house seems to sound louder in the silence of the night.

Jesus raises His head and looks at the door. He listens. He stands up and goes to open it. He sees Peter outside. «Is it you? Come in. What do you want, Simon? Are you still up and you have to walk such a long way? » He has taken him by the hand and pulled him inside, closing the door noiselessly. He makes him sit on the bed beside Himself.

«I wanted to tell You, Master... Yes, I wanted to tell You that even today You have seen what I am worth. I am only capable of making poor children enjoy themselves, of comforting an old woman, of reconciling two shepherds who are quarelling over a ewe-lamb that has lost its milk. I am a poor man, so dull that I do not even understand what You explain to me. But that is another matter. Now I wanted to tell You that just because of that, You should keep me here. I am not anxious to go around when You do not come with us. And I am not good at anything... Content me, Lord.» Peter is speaking eagerly with his eyes fixed on the coarse chipped bricks of the floor.

«Look at Me, Simon » Jesus orders him. And, as Peter obeys, Jesus stares at him intensely asking: «Is that all? Is that the only reason for your being awake? The only reason why you are begging Me to keep you here? Be sincere, Simon. You are not grumbling if you tell your Master the other part of your thought. You must be able to tell the difference between an idle word and a useful one. A word is idle, and sin generally flourishes in idleness, when one speaks of other people's faults with someone who can do nothing about them. Then it is plainly lack of charity, even if what one says is true. As it is lack of charity to reproach someone more or less sharply without giving advice at the same time. And I am referring to just reproaches. The others are unfair and they are a sin against our neighbour. But when one sees one's neighbour commit sin, and one suffers because that person offends God and injures his soul, and one realises that one cannot estimate the gravity of someone else's sin, neither does one feel wise enough to speak words that may work a conversion, and then one applies to a just and wise person confiding one's anxiety, then one does not commit sin, because one's disclosure aims at putting an end to a scandal and at saving a soul. It is the same as if one had a relative suffering from a shameful disease. One will certainly try to conceal it from people, but one will go secretly to a doctor and say: "My relative is suffering from so and so and I do not know how to advise and cure him. Please come or tell me what I must do". Does one in that case lack love for one's relative? No. On the contrary one would lack love if one feigned not to notice the disease and allowed it to progress and bring about death, through a mistaken feeling of prudence and love. One day, and that day is not remote, you and your companions will have to listen to the secrets of hearts. Not as you listen to them now as men, but as priests, that is doctors, masters, and pastors of souls, as I am Doctor, Master and Pastor. You will have to listen, decide and give advice. Your judgement will have the same value as if God Himself had passed it...»

Peter frees himself from Jesus Who was holding him close to Himself and standing up he says: «That is not possible Lord. Never impose that on us. How can You expect us to judge like God, if we are not even able to judge like men? »

«Then you will be able, because the Spirit of God will hover over you and will penetrate you with its light. You will know how to judge taking into consideration the seven conditions of the facts proposed to you in order to have your advice or to be forgiven. Listen to Me carefully and try to remember. In due time the Spirit of God will remind you of My words. But at the same time try to remember with your own intelligence, as God give it to you so that you may use it without laziness and spiritual presumptions that lead one to expect and pretend everything from God. When you are Master, Doctor and Pastor in My place and My stead, and when a believer comes to weep at your feet over his perturbation brought about by his own or other people's deeds, you must always bear in mind the following seven questions:

Who: Who sinned?

What: What is the matter of the sin?

Where: In which place?

How: In which circumstances?

With what or with whom: The instrument or person that was the material for the

sin?

Why: Which incentives brought about the environment favourable to the sin?

When: In which conditions and reactions, and whether by accident or by unwholesome habit?

Because see, Simon, the same sin may have infinite nuances and grades according to all the circumstances that caused it and to the people who committed it. For instance... Let us take into consideration two of the most common sins: lust of the flesh and lust for riches.

A man has committed a sin of lewdness, or he thinks that he has committed such a sin. Because at times man mistakes temptation for sin, or he considers of the same degree the incentives brought about artificially by an unwholesome appetite, and considers also to be equal those thoughts that are the consequence of a painful disease or come to one's mind because the flesh and blood at times have sudden voices resounding inwardly before the mind has time to be wary of them and suffocate them. He comes to you and says: "I committed a sin of lewdness". An imperfect priest would say: "Anathema on you". But you, My Peter, must not say so. Because you are Jesus' Peter, you are the successor of the Mercy. So before condemning you must consider and touch the heart weeping before you, kindly and prudently, in order to ascertain all the aspects of the sin or supposed sin, and of the scruple.

I said: kindly and prudently. You must remember that besides being a Master and Pastor, you are a Doctor. A doctor does not irritate wounds. If there is gangrene he will cut it off, but he knows also how to uncover and treat a wound with a light hand when lacerated tissues are to be re-united, not removed. And you are to remember that in addition to being a Doctor and Pastor, you are a Master. A master adapts his words to the age of his pupils. And scandalous would be that teacher who should disclose animal laws to innocent children who were unacquainted with them and would thus acquire mischievous knowledge precociously. And in dealing with souls one must be prudent in asking questions. You must respect yourself and other people. It will be easy for you if in every soul you see a son of yours. A father is by nature the master, doctor and guide of his children. So love with fatherly love every person who comes to you upset by sin, or by fear of sin, and you will be able to judge without hurting or scandalising anybody. Do you follow Me? »

«Yes, I do, Master. I have understood You very well. I must be cautious and patient, I will have to convince people to disclose their wounds, but I shall have to examine them by myself, without attracting the attention of other people to them, and only when I should see that there is a real wound, I ought to say: "See? You have hurt yourself here by doing so and so". But if I see that a person is only afraid of being hurt, having seen ghosts, then... I should blow away the fog without giving, through useless zeal, explanations capable of throwing light on real sources of sin. Is that right? »

«Yes, quite right. So. If one says to you: "I have committed a sin of carnal lust", you must consider the person who is in front of you. It is true that sin can be committed at every age. But it is easier to find it in adults than in children, so the questions to ask or the answers to give a man or a boy will be different. Consequently, after the first question, comes the second one on the matter of the sin, then the third one on the place of the sin, then the fourth on the circumstances, then the fifth on the accomplice to the sin, then the sixth on the causes of the sin, and the seventh on the time and number of the sin.

In general you will find that in the case of adults living in the world a circumstance of true sin will appear to correspond to each question, whereas in the case of children by age or by spirit, for many questions you will have to say: "There is only the fear of sin here, but no real sin". Nay, at times you will see that instead of filth there is a lily that quivers with fear of being splashed with mud, and mistakes the drop of dew that descended on its calyx for a splash of mud. They are souls so eager for Heaven that fear, as a stain, also the shadow of a cloud that overshadows them for a moment, interposing between them and the sun, and then passes leaving no trace on the spotless corolla. They are souls so innocent and so anxious to remain such, that Satan frightens them with fanciful temptations or instigating the incentives of the flesh or the flesh itself, taking advantage of true diseases of the flesh. Those souls are to be comforted and supported, because they are not sinners, but martyrs. Always

bear that in mind.

And always remember to judge with the same method also those who commit the sin of greed for other people's riches or property. Because if it is a cursed sin to be greedy without need and without pity, robbing the poor, and acting against justice by harassing citizens, servants, or peoples, the sin of him who steals some bread to appease the hunger of his children and his own, after his neighbours refused to give him some, is by far less grave. Remember that if for a lustful man and a thief, the number, circumstances and gravity of the sin are to be taken into account when judging them, one must also consider what knowledge the sinner had of the sin when he was committing it. Because he who acts with full knowledge, sins more than he who acts out of ignorance. And he who acts with the free consent of his will sins more than he who was forced to sin. I solemnly tell you that there will be deeds that are apparently sinful, but are really martyrdom and they will be given the reward that is granted to those who suffered martyrdom. And above all remember that in each case, before condemning, you must bear in mind that you have been a man as well and that your Master, in Whom no one was ever able to find sin, never condemned anyone who had repented of having sinned.

Forgive seventy times seven, and even seventy times seventy, the sins of your brothers and children. Because to shut the doors of Salvation upon a sick man, only because he had a relapse, is to want to let him die. Have you understood? »
«Yes, I have. I have understood that very clearly...»

«Well, then, tell Me what you have in mind.»

«Yes! I will tell You, because I can see that You know everything, and I realise that I am not grumbling if I tell You to send Judas around in my place, because he suffers if he does not go. I am not telling You meaning that he is jealous or because I am scandalised, but to give peace to him and... to You. Because it must be really troublesome for You to have such a stormy wind near You all the time...»

«Has Judas complained again? »

«Well! He has! He said that every word of Yours hurts him. Also what You said to the children. He says that it is true that You were referring to him when You said that Eve went to the tree because she liked that thing that shone like a king's crown. Truly, I did not think of any comparison. But I am ignorant. Bartholomew and the Zealot, instead, said that Judas has been "touched on the rawest raw", because he is bewitched by everything that shines and allures one's vainglory. And they must be right because they are wise. Be good to Your poor apostles, Master! Make Judas happy and me as well. In any case! See? I am good only at amusing children... and at being a child in Your arms » and he presses against His Jesus, Whom he really loves with all his strength.

«No. I cannot please you. Do not insist. You, because you are what you are, will go to evangelize. He, because he is what he is, will stay here. My brother also mentioned it to Me, and although I love him so much, I replied "no" also to him. I would not yield even if My Mother should ask Me. It is not a punishment, but a medicine. And Judas must take it. If it does not help his spirit, it will help Mine, because I will not have to reproach Myself for omitting anything that might sanctify him.» Jesus is severe and authoritative in saying so.

Peter lets his arms droop and lowers his head with a sigh.

«Do not worry about it, Simon. We shall have an eternity to be together and love each other. But you had something else to tell Me...»

«It's late, Master, and You must sleep.»

«And you more than I, Simon, as you have to set out at dawn.»

«Oh! as far as I am concerned! I rest more staying here with You than I would in bed.»

«Speak up, then. You know that I sleep very little...»

«Well! I am a blockhead, I know and I say so without being ashamed. And if it depended on me, I would not care to be very learned, because I think that the greatest wisdom consists in loving, following and serving You wholeheartedly. But You send me here and there. And people ask me questions and I must reply to them. I think that what I ask You, other people may ask me. Because the thoughts of men are alike. Yesterday You said that innocent and holy people will always suffer, nay they will be the ones who will suffer on behalf of everybody. I find it difficult to understand that, even if You say that they will wish that themselves. And I think that as it is difficult for me, it may be so also for

other people. If they ask me, what shall I tell them? In this first journey a mother said to me: "It was not fair that my little girl should die with so much pain, because she was good and innocent". And as I did not know what to say, I repeated Job's words: "The Lord has given. The Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord". But I was not convinced myself. And I did not convince her. The next time I would like to know what to say...»

«It is just. Listen. It seems an injustice, but it is a great justice that the best should suffer on behalf of everybody. Now tell Me, Simon. What is the Earth? All the Earth? »

«The Earth? A great, a very great expanse, made of dust and water, of rocks, with trees, animals and human beings.»

«And then? »

«Then, nothing else... Unless You want me to say that it is the place of punishment and exile for man.»

«The Earth is an altar, Simon. A huge altar. It was to be the altar of everlasting praise to its Creator. But the Earth is full of sin. Therefore it must be the altar of endless expiation and sacrifice, on which the victims are consumed. The Earth, like the other worlds with which Creation is strewn, ought to sing psalms to God Who created it. Look! »

Jesus opens the wooden shutters, and through the wide open window comes in the cool of the night, the noise of the torrent, a moonbeam, and one can see the sky studded with stars.

«Look at those stars! They are singing the praises of God with their voices that are light and motion in the infinite spaces of the firmament. Their song, which rises from the blue fields of the sky to the Heaven of God, has lasted for thousands and thousands of years. We can imagine stars, planets and comets as sidereal creatures that like sidereal priests, levites, virgins and believers are to sing the praises of the Creator in an unlimited temple. Listen, Simon. Listen to the breeze rustling among the leaves and to the noise of the stream in the night. Also the Earth, like the sky, sings with the winds, with the water, with the voices of birds and animals. But if the luminous praise of the stars that people the sky is sufficient for the vault of heaven, the song of winds, waters and animals is not sufficient for the temple that is the Earth. Because on it there are not only winds, waters and animals unconsciously singing the praises of God, but there is also man, the perfect creature, superior to all beings living in time and in the world, gifted with matter, like the animals, minerals and plants, and with spirit, like the angels of Heaven, and like them destined, if faithful in the trial, to know and possess God, through grace at first, and in Paradise later. Man, the synthesis comprising all natures, has a mission that no other creature has and that should be for him a joy, besides being his duty: to love God. To give God a cult of love intelligently and voluntarily, repaying God for the love that He gave man by granting him life and Heaven in addition to life. To give an intelligent cult.

Consider this, Simon. What benefit does God get from Creation? What profit? None. Creation does not make God greater, it does not sanctify Him, it does not make Him rich. He is infinite. He would have been such even if Creation had never existed. But God-Love wanted to have love. And He created to have love. God can get only love from Creation, and that love, which is intelligent and free only in angels and in men, is the glory of God, the joy of angels, the religion for men. The day that the great altar of the Earth should omit the praises and entreaties of love, the Earth would cease existing. Because once love is extinguished also expiation would cease, and the wrath of God would destroy the Earth that had become an earthly hell. So the Earth must love in order to exist. And also: the Earth must be the Temple that loves and prays with the intelligence of men. But which victims are always offered in the Temple? The pure, spotless, faultless victims. Those are the only victims agreeable to the Lord. They are the early fruits. Because the best things are to be given to the Father of the family, and the first fruits of everything and choice things are to be given to God, the Father of the human family.

But I said that the Earth has a double duty of sacrifice: that of praise and that of expiation. Because Mankind that has spread over the Earth sinned in the First men, and continuously sins by adding to the sin of estrangement from God the other countless sins of its consent to the voices of the world, of the flesh and of Satan. A guilty, very guilty Mankind that, although it has likeness to

God, having its own intelligence and divine help, is more and more sinful. Stars obey, plants obey, elements obey, animals obey and they praise the Lord as best they can. Men do not obey and do not praise the Lord enough. Hence the necessity of victim-souls that may love and expiate on behalf of everybody. They are the children who, innocent and unaware, pay the bitter punishment of sorrow for those who can do nothing but sin. They are the saints who willingly sacrifice themselves for everybody.

Before long - a year or a century is always a short time as compared to eternity - no more sacrifices will be celebrated on the altar of the great Temple of the Earth, that is, of victim-men, consumed with the perpetual sacrifice: victims with the perfect Victim. Do not be upset, Simon, I am not saying that I will establish a cult like those of Molech, Baal and Ashtoreth. Men themselves will immolate us. Do you understand? They will immolate us. And we shall face death happily to expiate and love on behalf of everybody. And then the days will come when men will no longer immolate men. But there will always be pure victims that love consumes with the Great Victim in the perpetual Sacrifice. I mean the love of God and the love for God. Truly they will be the victims of the future days and of the future Temple. No longer lambs and kids, calves and doves, but the sacrifice of one's heart is what pleases God. David realised that. And in the new times, the times of the spirit and of love, only that sacrifice will be pleasant.

Consider, Simon, that if a God had to become incarnate to appease divine Justice for the great Sin, for the many sins of men, in the times of the truth, only the sacrifices of the spirits of men can appease the Lord. You are thinking: "Why then did He, the Most High, order men to immolate the offspring of animals and the fruits of plants to Him"? I will tell you: because, before I came, man was a stained holocaust and Love was not known. Now it will be known. And man, who will know Love, because I will give Grace back to him, and through it man will know Love, man will come out of his lethargy, he will remember, understand, live and he will replace kids and lambs, as a victim of love and expiation, on the model of the Lamb of God, his Master and Redeemer. Sorrow, so far a punishment, will turn into perfect love, and blessed are those who will embrace it out of perfect love.»

«But children...»

«You mean those who cannot yet offer themselves... And do you know when God speaks in them? The language of God is spiritual. A soul understands it and a soul has no age. Nay, I tell you that a child's soul, as it is without malice, with regard to its capacity of understanding God, is more adult than the soul of an old sinner. I tell you, Simon, that you will live so long as to see many children teach adults, and even yourself, the wisdom of heroic love. But in those little ones who die for natural reasons, God acts directly for motives of so high a love that I cannot explain to you, as they are part of the wisdom written in the books of Life, and that only in Heaven will be read by the blessed souls. I said read, but in actual fact it will suffice to look at God to know not only God, but also His infinite wisdom... We have let the moon set, Simon... It will soon be dawn and you have had no sleep...»

«It does not matter, Master. I have lost a few hours of sleep and I have gained so much wisdom. And I have been with You. But if You allow me, I will now go. Not to sleep. But to think of Your words again.»

He is already at the door and is about to go out, when he stops pensively and then says: «One more question, Master. Is it right for me to say to someone who suffers, that sorrow is not a punishment but a... grace, something like... like our vocation, beautiful even if toilsome, beautiful even if it may seem an unpleasant and sad thing to people who do not know? »

«Yes, you can say that, Simon. It is the truth. Sorrow is not a punishment, when one knows how to accept it and use it rightly. Sorrow is like a priesthood, Simon. A priesthood open to everybody. A priesthood that confers great power on the heart of God. It is a great merit. Sorrow that was born at the same time as sin can appease the Justice. Because God can use for good purposes also what Hatred created to give sorrow. I did not chose any other means to cancel the Sin. Because there is no means greater than this one.»

554. On a Sabbath at Ephraim Jesus Speaks in the Synagogue.
17th January 1947.

It must be another Sabbath because the apostles are once again all together in the house of Mary of Jacob.
The children are still with them, near Jesus, by the fireside. And just because of that Judas Iscariot says: «So a week has gone by and their relatives have not come » and he laughs shaking his head.
Jesus does not reply to him. He caresses the second-born son.
Judas asks Peter and James of Alphaeus: «And you say that you went along the two roads that take one to Shechem? »
«Yes, we did. But thinking it over, it was quite useless. Highwaymen certainly do not take busy roads, particularly now that Roman squads patrol them continuously » replies James of Alphaeus.
«Why did you go along them, then? » insists the Iscariot.
«Well!... It's the same to us to go here or there. So we took those.»
«And was nobody able to tell you anything? »
«We did not ask anybody.»
«And how were you expecting to know whether they had passed or not? Do people carry banners or leave traces when they go along a road? I don't think so. Because otherwise we would have been found at least by our friends. Instead not one of them has been here since we came » and he laughs sarcastically.
«We do not know why no one has come here. The Master knows. We don't. When people withdraw to a place unknown to everybody, as we did, without leaving any trace of their passage, no one can go to them unless one is informed of the place of their refuge. Now we do not know whether our Brother has told our friends » says James of Alphaeus patiently.
«Oh! Would you believe or make us believe that He did not tell at least Lazarus and Nike? »
Jesus does not say anything. He takes one of the children by the hand and goes out...
«I do not want to believe anything. But even if it is as you say, you and none of us can yet pass judgement on the reasons for our friends' absence...»
«Those reasons are easily understood! No one wishes to have trouble with the Sanhedrin, least of all who is rich and powerful. That's all! We are the only ones who are good at endangering our lives.»
«Be fair, Judas! The Master did not force any of us to stay with Him. Why did you stay, if the Sanhedrin frightens you? » remarks James of Alphaeus.
«And you can go away whenever you wish. You are not in chains...» says the other James, the son of Zebedee.
«No! Never! We are here, and we are staying here. All of us. Who wanted to go away, should have gone away before. Not now. I oppose that, if the Master does not » says Peter slowly but decidedly, striking the table with his fist.
«Why? Who are you that you want to give orders instead of the Master? » Judas asks him violently.
«A man who reasons not like God, as He does, but as a man.»
«Are you suspecting me? Do you think I am a traitor? » asks Judas excitedly.
«You have said it. Not because I think that you would do it deliberately; but you are so... thoughtless, Judas, so fickle! And you have too many friends. And you are too keen on standing out, in everything. Oh! you would not be able to keep quiet! You would speak, either to confute some wicked enemy, or to show that you are the Apostle. So you are here and you are staying here. This way you will do no harm and you will not feel any remorse.»
«God does not force the freedom of man, but you wish to do so? »
«Yes, I do. But after all, tell me. Is it raining on you? Have you not enough bread? Is the air harmful to you? Do the people offend you? None of all that. The house is solid, even if it is not a rich one, the air is good, we have never been short of food, the people honour you. So why are you so restless here, as if you were in jail? »
«"There are two nations that my soul detests, and the third one hated by me is not even a nation: the inhabitants of Mount Seir, the Philistines and the stupid people living at Shechem". I have replied to you with the words of the Wise Man. And I am right in thinking so. Consider whether these people love us! »
«H'm! To tell you the truth I don't think that the other peoples, yours and

mine, are much better. We were pelted with stones in Judaea and in Galilee, in Judaea even more than in Galilee, and in the Temple in Judaea more than in any other place. I cannot say that we have been ill-treated in the territory of the Philistines, or here, or anywhere else...»

«Anywhere else? We have not been anywhere else, fortunately. But even if we had had to go somewhere else I would not have come with you, neither will I come in future. I do not want to get more contaminated.»

«Contaminated That is not what worries you, Judas of Simon. You do not want to alienate those of the Temple. That is what troubles you » says calmly Simon Zealot, who has remained in the kitchen with Peter, James of Alphaeus and Philip. The others have gone out, one after the other together with the two boys and have joined the Master. A meritorious flight as it was made to avoid being uncharitable.

«No. Not because of that. But because I do not like to waste my time and give wisdom to fools. Look! What good has it served to take Ermasteus with us? He went away and has never come back. Joseph told us that he parted from him saying that he would come back for the feast of the Tabernacles. Have you seen him? A renegade...»

«I do not know why he has not come back and I cannot judge him. But I ask you: is he the only one who left the Master and has become His enemy? Are there no renegades among us Judaeans and among the Galileans? Can you prove that?»

«No. It's true. But I am ill at ease here. If they only knew that we are here! If they knew that we familiarise with the Samaritans to the extent of going to their synagogues on Sabbaths! He wants that... Woe to us if we were found out! The charge would be justified...»

«And you mean that the Master would be condemned. But He is already condemned. He has been condemned before people know. Nay He was condemned after He raised a Judaeans from the dead in Judaea. He is hated and accused of being a Samaritan and the friend of publicans and prostitutes. He has been... all the time. And you know better than anybody else whether He has been hated.»

«What do you mean, Nathanael? What do you mean? What have I got to do with that? What do I know more than you do? » He is very excited.

«You look like a mouse surrounded by enemies, my boy! But you are not a mouse, neither are we provided with clubs to capture and kill you. Why are you so frightened? If you are at peace with your conscience, why do you become upset over innocent words? What did Bartholmai say to make you so excited? Is it not true that no one more than we, His apostles, who sleep and live near Him, can be aware and witness that He does not love the Samaritan, the publican, the sinner, the prostitute, but He loves their souls, and He takes care of them alone, and only because of them He goes with Samaritans, publicans and prostitutes, and only the Most High knows what effort His Most Pure Son must make to approach what we men and sinners call "filth"? You do not understand and you do not know Jesus yet, my boy! You know Him less than the very Samaritans, Philistines, Phoenicians and any other peoples you may wish...» says Peter and he utters the last words sadly.

Judas does not speak any more and also the others become silent.

The old woman comes back in saying: «In the street there are some people from the town. They say that it is the Sabbath prayer time and that the Master has promised to speak...»

«I will go and tell Him, woman. You can tell those from Ephraim that we are coming » replies Peter and he goes out into the kitchen garden to inform Jesus.

«What are you going to do? Are you coming? If you do not want to come, go away, go out before He is grieved by your refusal » says the Zealot to Judas.

«I am coming with you. One cannot speak here! I seem to be the greatest sinner. Every word of mine is misunderstood.»

As Jesus enters the kitchen, they stop speaking.

They go out into the street and join the people from Ephraim and they go into town with them. They stop only when they are before the synagogue, at the door of which there is Malachi, who greets them and invites them to go in.

I do not notice any difference between the Samaritan place of prayer and those I have seen in other regions. There are always the usual lights, the usual lecterns or shelves with rolls, the seat of the head of the synagogue or of the person who teaches in his stead. If anything, the rolls are much fewer here than in the other synagogues.

«We have already said our prayers while waiting for You. If You wish to speak... Which roll do You want, Master? »

«I do not need any. In any case you would not have what I wish to explain » (1) replies Jesus, and He then turns towards the people and begins to speak:

«When the Hebrews were sent back to their country by Cyrus, the king of the Persians, so that they might rebuild Solomon's Temple that had been destroyed fifty years previously, the altar was rebuilt on its base, and the daily holocaust was offered on it morning and evening, as well as the extraordinary one on the first day of each month and those of the solemnities sacred to the Lord and the holocausts of voluntary offerings made by individuals. Later, after accomplishing what is essential and indispensable for the cult, in the second year after their return, they began to deal with what can be called the frame of the cult, its outward appearance, which is not guilty because it is done to honour the Eternal Father, but it is not indispensable. Because the cult of God is love for God, and love is perceived and consumed in one's heart, not by means of dressed stones, precious woods, gold and perfumes. All that is outward appearance that aims more at satisfying one's national or civic pride than at honouring the Lord.

God wants the Temple of the spirit. He is not satisfied with a Temple of walls and marbles that is devoid of spirits full of love. I solemnly tell you that the temple of a pure loving heart is the only one that God loves and in which He dwells with His light, and that foolish are the contests that divide regions and towns with regard to the beauty of their places of prayer. Why vie in the riches and ornaments of the houses in which God is invoked? Can the finite satisfy the

(1) Of all the Books of the Bible the Samaritans accepted only the five Books of the Pentateuch.

Infinite, even if it were a finite ten times more beautiful than Solomons' Temple and all the royal palaces put together? God, the Infinite Who cannot be contained and honoured by any space or by any material magnificence, finds one place only worthy of honouring Him as befits Him, and He can be, nay He wants to be contained in the heart of man, because the spirit of a just man is a temple over which the Spirit of God hovers, among the perfumes of love; and it will soon be a temple in which the Spirit will really dwell, One and Trine, as It is in Heaven.

And it is written that as soon as the masons had laid the foundations of the Temple, the priests went with their ornaments and trumpets and the Levites with cymbals, according to David's orders. And they sang that "God is to be praised because He is good and His mercy is everlasting". And the people rejoiced. But many priests, heads of families, Levites, elderly people were shedding torrents of tears thinking of the previous Temple, and thus the sound of the people's weeping could not be distinguished from the shouts of joy, as they were so confused. And we also read that the peoples of nearby districts disturbed those who were building the Temple to avenge themselves on the builders who had rejected them when they had offered to build with them, as they also sought the God of Israel, the Only True God. And those disturbances interrupted the work until God was pleased to let them continue. That is what we read in the book of Ezra.

How many and what lessons does the passage that I mentioned give us? First of all the one already mentioned on the necessity that the cult is perceived by one's heart and not professed by stones or wood or also by clothes or cymbals and songs, which are devoid of the spirit. Then that the lack of reciprocal love is always the cause of delays and trouble, even when a good purpose is involved. Where there is no charity, God is not there either. It is useless to seek God unless we put ourselves in a suitable condition to find Him. God is found in charity. He or those who settle in charity find God also without having to make any painful search. And he who has God with him is successful in all his enterprises.

In the psalm that sprang from the heart of a wise man after meditating on the painful events that accompanied the reconstruction of the Temple and of the walls it is said: "If the Lord does not build the house, in vain the masons toil

at it. If the Lord does not guard the city and protect it, in vain the sentries watch".

Now how can God build the house, if He knows that its inhabitants do not have Him in their hearts, since they do not love their neighbours? And how will He protect the city and give strength to its defenders, if He cannot be in them as they are devoid of Him through their hatred for their neighbours? Has it helped you, peoples, to be divided by barriers of hatred? Has it made you greater? Richer? Happier? Neither hatred nor rancour is ever of any avail, he who is alone is never strong, he who does not love is never loved. And it is of no use, as the psalm says, to get up before daybreak to become great, rich and happy. Let every man rest to console himself in the sorrows of life, because sleep is a gift of God as is light and all the other things that man enjoys; let every man rest but let him have charity as his companion in his sleep and in his watch, and his work, his family and his business will thrive, and above all his spirit will prosper and conquer the royal crown of the children of the Most High and heirs to His Kingdom.

It is written that while the crowd was singing hosannas, some people were shedding torrents of tears because they were thinking of and regretting the past. But it was not possible to distinguish the different voices in the clamour of shouts.

Children of Samaria! And you, My apostles, children of Judaea and of Galilee! Also nowadays there are people who sing hosannas and people who weep while the new Temple of God is rising on eternal foundations. Also nowadays there are people who hinder the work and people who seek God where He cannot be found. Also nowadays some people want to build according to Cyrus' order and not according to God's, that is according to the order of the world and not according to the voices of the spirit. And also nowadays there are people who weep with foolish human regret over an inferior past, a past that was neither good nor wise, so much so that it roused the anger of God. Also nowadays we have all those situations, as if we were still in the obscurity of remote days and not in the days of Light.

Open your hearts to the Light, fill yourselves with the Light, so that at least you, to whom I-Light am speaking, may see. This is the new time in which everything is rebuilt. But woe to those who will refuse to enter it and will hinder those who are building the Temple of the new faith, of which I am the corner Stone and to which I will give My whole self to make mortar for the stones, so that the building may rise holy and strong, admirable for ages, as wide as the Earth that will be completely covered by its light. I say light, not shadow, because My Temple will be made of spirits, not of opaque matters. I shall be its stone with My Eternal Spirit, and all those who follow My word and the new faith will be incorporeal bright holy stones for it. And the light will spread over the Earth, the light of the new Temple, and will cover it with wisdom and holiness. And only those will be left out of it who with impure tears weep and regret the past, because it was for them the source of completely human profits and honours.

Open to the new time and to the new Temple, o men of Samaria! Everything is new in it, and the ancient separations and borders, of thought and spirit, no longer exist. Sing, because the exile out of the city of God is about to come to an end. Are you happy to be considered as exiles and lepers by the other peoples of Israel? Do you rejoice feeling that you are like people rejected by the bosom of God? Because that is what you feel, what your souls feel, your poor souls, which are closed in your bodies and are under the control of your arrogant thought that refuses to say to other men: "We erred, but like lost sheep we are now going back to the Fold". You do not want to say that to other men: and that is wrong. But at least say so to God. Even if you stifle the cries of your souls, God hears their groaning, as they are unhappy to be exiled from the house of the universal and most holy Father.

Listen to the words of the gradual psalm. You really are pilgrims who for ages have been going towards the high city, towards the true Jerusalem, the celestial one. From there, from Heaven, your souls descended to vivify a body, and they sigh to go back there. Why do you want to sacrifice your souls and disinherit them of the Kingdom? Which fault is theirs if they descended into bodies conceived in Samaria? They come from Only One Father. They have the same Creator as the souls of Judaea and Galilee, of Phoenicia and of the Decapolis. God is

the aim of every spirit. Every soul tends to that God, even if all kinds of idolatry, or baleful heresies, schisms, or lack of faith, keep it in the ignorance of the true God, an ignorance that would be absolute if the soul did not have an indelible embryonal remembrance of the Truth and did not yearn for it. Oh! make that remembrance and yearning grow greater. Open the doors to your souls. Let the Light enter! Let the Life enter! Let the Truth enter! Let the Way be open! Let everything gush in brightly and vitally, like the rays of sunlight and the waves and the winds of equinoxes, so that the plant may grow from its embryo and rise upwards, closer and closer to its Lord.

Come out from your exile! Sing with Me: "When the Lord brings captives home, their souls seem to dream with joy. Our mouths are filled with smiles and our lips with songs. We shall now say: 'The Lord has worked marvels for us' ". Yes, the Lord has done great things for you and you will be overflowing with delight. Oh! My Father! I pray to You for them as I pray for everybody. O Lord, let these prisoners of ours come back home, because, for You and for Me, they are prisoners in the chains of obstinate error. Lead them back, of Father, like a torrent that flows into the great river, lead them to the great sea of Your mercy and peace. My servants and I, shedding tears, are sowing Your truth in them. Father, grant that at the time of the great harvest, we, Your servants in teaching Your Truth, may reap the chosen corn of Your granaries with joy in these furrows, which now seem spread only with bramble and poison. Father! Father! Through our fatigue, and tears, and grief, and labours, and dead companions, who were and will be our companions in sowing, grant that we may come to You carrying, as sheaves, the choice part of this people, the souls reborn to Justice and Truth for Your glory. Amen.»

The silence, which was really impressive, so absolute as it was in such a large crowd that filled the synagogue and the square in front of it, is broken by a whispering that grows louder and louder and becomes a murmur... a cry... a hosanna. The crowds gesticulate, comment and applaud...

What a difference from the conclusion of the speeches in the Temple! Malachi says on behalf of everybody: «You only can tell the truth thus, without offending and mortifying anybody! You are really the Holy One of God! Pray for our peace. We have been hardened by ages of... beliefs and by ages of insults. And we must break this hard crust of ours. Bear with us.»

«Even more than that: I love you. Be of good will, and the crust will break by itself. May the Light come to you.»

He makes His way through the crowd and goes out followed by the apostles.

555.The Arrival of the Relatives of the Children with Many People of Shechem.

18th January 1947.

Jesus is all alone in the little island in the middle of the stream. The three children are playing on the bank on the other side of the stream and they are whispering in low voices in order not to disturb Jesus' meditation. Now and again the youngest one utters a cry of joy when he finds a beautifully coloured pebble or a fresh little flower, and the others tell him to be quiet saying: «Be quiet! Jesus is praying...» and their whispering is resumed when their little swarthy hands build sand blocks and cones that in their childish imagination are supposed to be houses and mountains.

The sun is shining high in the sky causing gems to swell on trees and buds to open in meadows. The green-grey leaves of the poplar tree are quivering in the breeze, and the birds up there, on the top, are engaged in love or rivarly skirmishes that at times end in a song, at times in a screech of pain.

Jesus is praying. Sitting on the grass, with a tuft of bog grass separating Him from the path along the bank, He is absorbed in His mental meditation. At times He looks up to watch the little ones playing over there on the grass. He then lowers His eyes again and becomes engrossed in His thoughts.

The shuffling of feet among the plants on the bank and the sudden arrival of John on the little island put to flight the birds that fly away from the top of the poplar putting an end to their carousel with screeches of fear.

John does not see Jesus at once, as He is concealed by the bog grass and he

shouts rather perplexedly: «Where are You, Master? »

Jesus stands up while the three children shout from the other bank: «He is there! Behind the tall grass.»

But John has already seen Jesus and goes to Him saying: «Master, the relatives have come. The children's relatives. And many people from Shechem are with them. They went to Malachi, and Malachi brought them to our house. I have come looking for You.»

«And where is Judas? »

«I do not know. He went out immediately after You came here, and he has not come back yet. He must be in town. Shall I look for him? »

«No, it is not necessary. Stay here with the children. I want to speak to the relatives first.»

«As You wish, Master.»

Jesus goes away, and John joins the children and begins to help them in the enterprise of building a bridge across an imaginary river made of long reed leaves placed on the sand to simulate water...

Jesus enters the house of Mary of Jacob, who is at the door waiting for Him and says to Him: «They have gone up to the terrace. I took them there to let them rest. But here is Judas coming from the village. I will wait for him and then I will prepare some food for the pilgrims who are very tired.»

Jesus also waits for Judas in the vestibule, which is rather dark compared to the light outside. Judas does not see Jesus at once and while going in he says to the woman arrogantly: «Where are those from Shechem? Have they already left? And the Master? Is no one calling Him? John...» He sees Jesus and changes tone saying: «Master! I ran here when I was told, just by sheer chance... Were You already at home? »

«John was here and he came looking for Me.»

«I... I should have been here as well. But at the fountain they asked me to explain certain things to them...»

Jesus does not reply. He speaks only to greet those who are waiting for Him, sitting some on the low walls of the terrace, some in the room that opens on to it, and they all stand up to pay their respects to Him as soon as they see Him. After greeting the group collectively, Jesus greets some of them calling them by their names, and they are so pleasantly surprised that they say: «Do You still remember our names? » They must be the people from Shechem.

And Jesus replies: «Your names, your faces and your souls. Did you come with the children's relatives? Are they the ones? »

«Yes, they are. They have come to take them and we joined them to thank You for Your pity for the little children of a woman from Samaria. You alone can do such things!... You are always the Holy One Who does nothing but holy things. We have always remembered You, too. And we came, because we heard that You were here. To see You and tell You that we are grateful to You for choosing us as Your shelter place and for loving us in the children of our blood. But listen to the relatives.»

Jesus, followed by Judas, turns His steps towards them greeting them once again and inviting them to speak.

«We, I do not know whether You know, are the brothers of the children's mother. And we were very angry at her, because she foolishly and against our advice wanted this unhappy marriage. Our father was weak with the only daughter of his numerous offspring, so much so that we got angry with him as well, and for several years we did not speak to him or see him. Later, knowing that the hand of God lay heavy on the woman and there was poverty in her house, because an impure marriage is not defended by divine blessings, we took our old father in our house again, so that his only grief might be the poverty in which the woman languished. Then she died and we were told. You had passed by recently and people spoke of You... And overcoming our indignation, we suggested to her husband, through these two men from Shechem, that we would take the children. They were, by half, of our blood. He said that he would rather see them all die a bad death than live on our bread. He would not give us the children and not even the corpse of our sister, that it might be buried according to our rites! So we swore hatred to him and to his seed. And hatred struck him like a curse, so that from a free man it made him a servant and from a servant... a dead body like a jackal in a stinking den. We would never had known, because for a long time everything had come to an end between us. And we had a terrible fright,

only that, when a week ago we saw those highwaymen appear on our threshing-floor. Then, when we heard why they had come, disdain, not grief, tormented us like poison, and we sent them away hurriedly offering them a good reward to make them friendly, and we were surprised to hear them say that they had already made their profit and did not want anything else.»

Judas suddenly breaks the dead silence of everybody with an ironical laugh and he shouts: «Their conversion! Complete! Really! »

Jesus looks at him severely, the others look at him seized with astonishment, and the man who was speaking, continues: «And what else could you expect from them? Is it not quite a lot that they came leading the young shepherd and daring danger, without accepting any reward? A miserable custom befits a miserable life. The prey taken from the foolish man who died like a tramp, was not a rich one! It wasn't rich at all! Hardly sufficient for those who had to stop plundering for at least ten days. And we were so astonished at their honesty, that we asked them which voice had spoken to them instilling so much pity into their hearts. So we learned that a rabbi had spoken to them... A rabbi! You only. Because no other rabbi in Israel could do what You did. And after they left we questioned the frightened shepherd boy in detail and we obtained a more accurate account of the events. At first we only knew that our sister's husband was dead and that the children were at Ephraim with a just man, and then that the just man, who was a rabbi, had spoken to them and we at once thought that it was You. And when we arrived at Shechem at dawn, we consulted with these people, because we had not yet made up our minds whether we should accept the children. But these people said to us: "What? Has the Rabbi of Nazareth loved the children in vain? Is that what you want? Because it is certainly Him, have no doubt. Nay, let us all go to Him, because the kindness of His heart towards the children of Samaria is great". And after settling our business, we came here. Where are the children? »

«Near the stream. Judas, go and tell them to come.»

Judas goes away.

«Master, it is a difficult meeting for us. They remind us of all our troubles, and we are still undecided whether we should accept them. They are the sons of the worst enemy we ever had...»

«They are the children of God. They are innocent. Death cancels the past and expiation obtains forgiveness, also from God. Do you want to be more severe than God? And more cruel than the highwaymen? And more obstinate than they? The highwaymen wanted to kill the young shepherd and keep the children: the former as a prudent measure of defence, the latter out of human pity for defenceless children. The Rabbi spoke to them, and they did not kill and they have agreed, to the extent of bringing the young shepherd to you. Shall I have to admit defeat in righteous hearts, when I defeated crime?...»

«The matter is... We are four brothers, and there are already thirty-seven children in our house...»

«And where thirty-seven little sparrows find food, because the Father in Heaven makes them find grains, will forty not find any? Will the power of the Father not be able to provide food for three, nay, four more children of His? Is there a limit to His divine Providence? Will the Infinite God be frightened to fecundate your seeds, your plants and your sheep more than at present, so that bread and oil and wine and wool and meat be sufficient for your children and for four more poor boys who are now all alone? »

«They are three, Master! »

«They are four. The young shepherd is an orphan as well. If God should appear to you here, would you be able to maintain that your bread is so measured that you cannot feed an orphan? Pity for an orphan is prescribed by the Pentateuch...»

«No, we would not, Lord. That is true. We shall not be inferior to the highwaymen. We will give bread, clothes and lodging also to the young shepherd. And out of love for You.»

«Out of love. Out of all the love. For God, for His Messiah, for your sister, for your neighbour. That is the homage and the forgiveness to be paid to your blood! Not a cold sepulchre for her dust. Forgiveness is peace. Peace for the spirit of man, who sinned. But it would only be false and entirely exterior forgiveness, and no peace for the spirit of the dead woman, who is your sister and the children's mother, if to the just expiation of God you add to torment her, the knowledge that her sons, although innocent, are expiating her sin.»

God's mercy is infinite. But add your own to give peace to the dead woman.»

«Oh! We will do that! We will! Our hearts would not have submitted to anybody, but they yield to You, o Rabbi, as You passed one day among us, sowing a seed that did not and will not die.»

«Amen! Here are the children...» and Jesus points at them on the bank of the stream, coming towards the house, and He calls them.

And they leave the hands of the apostles and run shouting: «Jesus! Jesus! » They go in, they climb the steps, they are on the terrace and they stop frightened by the presence of so many strangers looking at them.

«Come, Ruben, and you, Elisha, and you, Isaac. These men are the brothers of your mother and they have come to get you and join you to their sons. See how good the Lord is? Just like Mary of Jacob's pigeon, that we saw the day before yesterday feed a young one that was not its own, but of its dead brother. He has gathered you and gives you to these people so that they may take care of you and you will thus be no longer orphans. Come on! Greet your relatives.»

«The Lord be with you, gentlemen » says the oldest one shyly, looking at the ground, and the two younger ones repeat his words.

«This one is very much like his mother, and this one also, but this other one (the oldest) is his father's double » remarks one of the relatives.

«My friend, I do not think that you are so unfair as to love differently because of a resemblance of faces » says Jesus.

«Oh! no. Certainly not. I was watching him... and thinking... I would not like him to have the same heart as his father.»

«He is still a tender child, and his simple words disclose that his love for his mother is by far deeper than any other love.»

«She kept them much better than we expected. Their clothes and shoes are decent. Perhaps she made her fortune...»

«My brothers and I have new garments because Jesus clothed us. We had neither shoes nor mantle, we were exactly like the shepherd » says the second-born who is not so timid as the first-born.

«We will compensate You for everything, Master » replies one of the relatives and he adds: «Joachim of Shechem had the offerings of the town, but we will add some more money...»

«No, I do not want any money. I want a promise: that you will love these children whom I snatched from the highwaymen. The offerings... Malachi, take them for the poor who are known to you and give some to Mary of Jacob, because her house is really poor.»

«As you wish. If they are good we will love them.»

«We will be good, lord. We know that we must be so to find our mother and go up the river, as far as the bosom of Abraham, and that we must not take away the ropes of our boats from the hands of God in order not to be carried away by the current of the demon » says Ruben all in one breath.

«But what is the boy saying? »

«A parable I told them. I told it to comfort their hearts and to guide their spirits. And the children have understood it and they apply it to each of their actions. Familiarise with them while I speak to these people from Shechem...»

«Master, one more word. What amazed us in the highwaymen was their request to tell the Rabbi, Who had the children, to forgive them, if it had taken them a long time to come, considering that not every road is open to them and that the presence of a boy among them prevented them from marching long distances through wild gorges.»

«Did you hear that, Judas? » says Jesus to Judas who does not reply.

Then Jesus moves to one side with the people from Shechem, who wring the promise from Him of a visit, even a short one, before the summer heat. And in the meantime they inform Jesus of events of the town, and they tell Him that those who were cured by Him, in their bodies or souls, do remember Him.

Judas and John in the meantime are busy getting the children to fraternise with their relatives...

Jesus is walking along a solitary road. The children's relatives are ahead of Him, the people from Shechem are beside Him. They are in a wild area. No town is in sight. The children have been put on the backs of some donkeys and their relatives are holding the reins and watching them. The donkeys without any rider, as the people of Shechem have preferred to go on foot to be near Jesus, are going ahead of the men, in a herd and are braying, now and again, for joy of going back to their stables, without any load, on a wonderful day, between banks covered with fresh grass into which they dip their nostrils now and again to enjoy a mouthful of it, and then they caracole with joyful amble and join their companions laden with riders. Which makes the children laugh.

Jesus is speaking to the people of Shechem or is listening to what they say. The Samaritans are obviously proud to have the Master with them and they are dreaming more than is convenient. So that they say to Jesus, pointing at the high mountains on the left of people going northwards: «See? Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim have a bad reputation. But, at least as far as You are concerned, they are much better than Zion. And they would be completely so, if You wanted that, by choosing them as Your dwelling place. Zion is always the den of the Jebusites. And the present ones are more hostile to You than the ancient ones were to David. By making use of violence David captured the citadel; but as You do not make use of violence, You will never reign there. Never. Stay with us, Lord, and we will honour You.»

Jesus replies: «Tell Me: would you have loved Me if I had tried to conquer you through violence? »

«Not... really. We love You because You are all love.»

«So it is through love that I reign in your hearts? »

«Yes, it is, Master. But it is so because we have accepted Your love. But those in Jerusalem do not love You.»

«That is true. They do not love Me. But since you are all expert in trading, tell Me: when you want to sell, buy and make a profit, do you lose heart because in certain places people do not love you, or do you do your business just the same, as you are only anxious to make good purchases and good sales, without worrying whether the money you have earned is devoid of the love of those who sold to you or bought of you? »

«We are only anxious to do good business. It does not matter if it lacks the love of those who deal with us. Once the business is done, there is no more connection. Only the profit remains, the rest... is of no importance.»

«Well, I do the same. Since I came to look after the interests of My Father, I must take care of them only. Then if I find love or derision or harshness where I look after them, it does not worry Me. In a trading town one does not make a profit, purchases or sales with everybody. But even if you deal with one person only and you make a good profit you say that your journey was not a useless one and you go back again and again. Because what you achieve with one person only the first time, you achieve with three people the second time, with seven the fourth time, with ten and ten thereafter. Is it not so? I act for the conquests for Heaven, as you do for your business. I insist, I persevere, I find that the little, in number, or the great are sufficient, because even only one soul saved is a great thing, the great reward obtained through My work. Every time that I go somewhere and I overcome what may be the reaction of the Man, so that as King of the spirit I may conquer only one subject, I do not say that My going there was useless or that I suffered or worked in vain. But I say that mockery, insults, accusations were holy, loving and desirable. I would not be a good conqueror if I stopped before the obstacles of granitic fortresses.»

«But it would take You ages to defeat them. You... are a man. You will not live for ages. Why waste Your time where You are not wanted? »

«I shall live much less. Nay, I shall soon be no longer among you, I shall no longer see dawns and sunsets like milestones of days that rise and of days that end, but I shall only contemplate them as the beauties of creation and for them I will praise the Creator Who made them and Who is My Father; I shall no longer see trees blossom and corn ripen, neither shall I need the fruits of the earth to keep alive, because when I go back to My Kingdom, I will feed on love. And yet I will demolish the many fortresses closed in the hearts of men. Look at that stone up there, under that spring, on the slope of the mountain. The spring is a very scanty one, I would say that the water does not flow, but it drips: a drop that has been falling for ages on that rock protruding from the side of the

mountain. And the stone is a very hard one. It is not crumbly limestone or soft alabaster, it is very hard basalt. And yet see how at the centre of the convex rock, and despite its shape, a tiny sheet of water has formed, not any larger than the calyx of a water-lily, but sufficient to reflect the blue sky and quench the thirst of birds. Did man perhaps make that cavity on the convex rock to place a blue gem on the dark rock and a refreshing cup for birds? No. Man took no part in it. In the many centuries during which men have passed before this rock that a drop of water has been hollowing out for ages with unrelenting rhythmical erosive action, we are perhaps the first to notice this dark basalt with its liquid turquoise in its centre, we admire its beauty and we praise the Eternal Father Who wanted it to delight our eyes and to refresh the birds that nest in the vicinity. But tell Me. Was it perhaps the first drop that leaked under the basaltic ledge above the rock and fell from that height on this block, was it that drop that excavated the cup which reflects the sky, the sun, clouds and stars? No. Millions and millions of drops have followed one another, leaking through like tears up there, sparkling as they descended to strike the rock and dying on it with the note of a harp, and excavated the hard material for so tiny a depth that is immeasurable. And thus for ages, marking the time like a sand-glass, so many drops an hour, so many during a watch, so many between dawn and sunset, and between night and daybreak, so many a day, so many from Sabbath to Sabbath, so many from new moon to new moon, so many from Nisan to Nisan, and from one century to the next one. The rock resisted, the drop persisted. Man, who is proud and thus impatient and lazy, would have thrown away mallet and gouge after the first strokes saying: "It cannot be scooped out". The drop excavated it. It was what it had to do. What it was created for. And it groaned, one drop after the other, for ages, until it hollowed out the rock. And afterwards it did not stop, saying: "Now the sky will see to nourishing the cup, which I excavated, with dews and rain, with frost and snow". But it continued to drop and by itself it fills the tiny cup during the warm summer months, during the rigours of winter, while pelting or drizzling rains wrinkle the sheet of water but cannot embellish or widen or deepen it, because it is already full, useful and beautiful. The spring knows that its daughters, the drops, go to die in the little basin, but does not hold them back. On the contrary it urges them towards their sacrifice, and to avoid them being left alone and becoming sad, it sends new sisters after them, so that the dying ones are not lonely and they see themselves perpetuated in the others. Likewise, being the first to strike the solid fortresses of hardened hearts thousands of times and being perpetuated in My successors, whom I will send until the end of time, I will open a way into them and My Law will enter like a sun wherever there are human creatures. If they refuse the Light and close the ways opened with unexhausted work, My successors and I will not be guilty in the eyes of our Father. If that spring of water had followed a different course, seeing the hardness of the rock, and had fallen in drops farther away, where the soil is covered with grass, tell Me, would we have that shining gem, and would the birds have that clear refreshment?

»

«No, it would not have even been seen, Master »; «At most... some grass, thicker also in summer, would have indicated the spot where the spring dripped »; «Or also... less grass than elsewhere, as its roots rotted in the perpetual dampness»; «And slush. Nothing else. Thus a useless trickle.»

«You are right. Useless, or at least worthless. I also would accomplish an imperfect task, if I were to prefer only those places where hearts are willing to accept Me out of justice or fondness. Because I would work but without any fatigue, nay, with great satisfaction of My ego, with a complaisant compromise between duty and pleasure. It is not toilsome to work where one is surrounded by love and where love makes souls ductile to work on. But if there is no fatigue there is no merit, neither is there much profit because few conquests are made if one limits oneself to those who are already in justice. I would not be Myself if I did not try to redeem all men first to the Truth and then to Grace.»

«And do You think that You will succeed? What else can You do in addition to what You have already done to persuade Your enemies to accept Your word? What, if not even the resurrection of the man in Bethany has served to make the Jews say that You are the Messiah of God? »

«I have still something greater to do, something much greater than that.»

«When, Lord? »

«When the moon of Nisan will be full. Pay attention then.»

«Will there be a sign in the sky? They say that when You were born the sky made it known by means of lights, songs and unusual stars.»

«It is true. To tell men that the Light had come to the world. Then, in Nisan, there will be signs in the sky and on the earth, and it will seem to be the end of the world, because of the darkness and the shaking and the roaring of thunder in the firmament and of the earthquakes in the opened bowels of the Earth. But it will not be the end. On the contrary, it will be the beginning. Previously, when I came, Heaven gave birth to the Saviour for men, and as it was a deed of God, peace was the companion of the event. At Nisan the Earth, of its own free-will, will give birth to the Redeemer for itself, and as it will be a deed of men, peace will not be its companion. But there will be a dreadful convulsion. And in the horror of the hour of the century and of hell, the Earth will tear its bosom under the burning arrows of divine wrath, and will shout its will, too inebriated to understand its purport, too strongly possessed by Satan to stop it. Like a mad woman in labour, it will think it is destroying the fruit believed to be cursed, and will not understand that it is instead rising it thus to places where neither sorrow nor snares will reach it. The tree, the new tree, will then spread out its branches all over the Earth, for ever and ever, and He Who is speaking to you will be acknowledged, either with love or with hatred, as the true Son of God and the Messiah of the Lord. And woe to those who will recognise Him without admitting it and without being converted to Me.»

«Where will that happen, Lord? »

«In Jerusalem. It is the city of the Lord.»

«So we shall not be there because in the month of Nisan we have to stay here for Passover. We are faithful to our Temple.»

«It would be better if you were faithful to the living Temple that is neither on the Moria nor on the Gerizim, but being divine, is universal. But I can wait for your hour, when you will love God and His Messiah in spirit and truth.»

«We believe that You are the Christ. That is why we love You.»

«To love is to leave the past and enter My present time. You do not love me perfectly yet.»

The Samaritans look at one another stealthily without speaking. Then one of them says: «For Your sake, to come to You, we would do it. But even if we wanted, we cannot enter where there are Judaeans. You know that. They do not want us...»

«And you do not want them. But be at peace. Before long there will no longer be two regions, two Temples, two opposed opinions, but one people only, one Temple only, one faith only for all those eager for the Truth. But I will leave now. The children by now have been comforted and their attention has been distracted; and long is My way back to Ephraim to arrive there before it gets dark. Do not become excited. Your behaviour might attract the attention of the little ones, and it is better if they do not notice My departure. Go on, I am stopping here. May the Lord guide you along the paths of the Earth and on those of His Way. Go.»

Jesus draws close to the mountain and lets them go away. The last thing that is noticed, of the caravan going back to Shechem, is a child's joyful laughter that spreads along the silent mountain way.

557. Pilgrims Arrive in Ephraim from the Decapolis. Manaen's Secret Mission.

22nd January 1947.

The news that Jesus is in Ephraim, either because the citizens themselves have boasted about it, or for some other reason unknown to me, must have spread because many people come now looking for Jesus: mostly sick people, some distressed people and also some who wish to see Him. I realise that because I hear the Iscariot say to a group of pilgrims who have come from the Decapolis: «The Master is not here. But John and I are here and it is the same thing. So tell us what you want and we will please you.»

«But you will never be able to teach what He teaches » says one protesting.

«We are His representatives and are just like Him, man. Always bear that in mind. But if you really want to hear the Master come back before the Sabbath and

go away after it. The Master now is a true Master. He no longer speaks in all the streets, in woods or rocky mountains like a stray, and at all hours like a servant. He speaks on the Sabbath here, as befits Him. And He is right, considering what He gained by wearing Himself out with fatigue and love! »
«But it is not our fault if the Judaeans...»

«Everybody! Everybody! Both Judaeans and non Judaeans! You are all alike and will always be so. He has given you everything. You have given Him nothing. He gives. You do not give; not even the mite that one gives a beggar.»

«But we have an offering for Him. Here it is, if you do not believe us.»

John who has been silent all the time, but with evident embarrassment, looking at Judas with eyes that implore and reproach, or rather admonish him, can no longer be silent. And when Judas is already stretching out his hand to take the offering, he lays his hand on his companion's arm to hold him back and says to him: «No, Judas. Don't. You know the Master's order » and he addresses the pilgrims saying: «Judas has explained himself badly and you have misunderstood him. That is not what my companion meant. It is only an offering of sincere faith, of loyal love that we, I, my companions, you, everybody must give for what the Master gives us. When we travelled around Palestine, He accepted your offerings because they were necessary for our journeys and because we met with many beggars, or we became acquainted with concealed miseries. Now, here, we need nothing - may Providence be praised for that - and we do not meet with beggars. Keep your offering and give it to distressed people in Jesus' name. That is the desire of our Lord and Master, and the order He gives to those among us who go evangelizing through the various towns. If you have sick people with you or anyone really needs to speak to the Master, tell us. And I will look for Him where He withdraws to pray, as His spirit is eager to collect its thoughts in the Lord.»

Judas grumbles something between his teeth but he does not contradict openly. He sits beside the fireplace in which the fire has been lit, as if he wished to take no further interest in the matter.

«Actually... we are not in need of anything special. But We heard that He was here and we crossed the river to come and see Him. But if we have done wrong...»

«No, brothers. It is not wrong to love Him and look for Him also by going to a lot of trouble and fatigue. And your good will will be rewarded. I will go and tell the Lord that you are here and He will certainly come. And if He should not come I will bring you His blessing.» And John goes out into the kitchen garden to go and look for the Master.

«Never mind! I will go » says Judas imperiously and he stands up and runs out. John looks at him go away and does not make any objection. He goes back into the kitchen where the pilgrims are thronged. But almost at once he suggests: «Shall we go and meet the Master? »

«But if He did not want...»

«Oh! Please do not attach importance to a misunderstanding. You are certainly aware of the reasons why we are here. It is other people who compel the Master to take these measures of restraint, it is not according to His will or His heart. He is always as fond of you all as ever.»

«We know that. On the first days after the ban was announced publicly everybody was looking for Him beyond the Jordan and wherever they thought He might be. At Bethabara, at Bethany, at Pella and at Ramoth-Gilead and also farther away. And we know that the same happened in Judaea and in Galilee. The houses of His friends were closely watched because... if many are His friends and disciples, many are also those who are not such, and who think they serve the Most High by persecuting the Master. Then searches suddenly stopped and the rumor spread that He was here.»

«But who told you? »

«His disciples.»

«My companions? Where? »

«No. None of them. They were different, new ones, because we never saw them with the Master or with the old disciples. In fact we were surprised that He should send people unknown to us to tell us where He was, then we thought that He might have done it because the new people were not known to the Judaeans as His disciples.»

«I do not know what the Master will say to you. But I think that as from now on you should listen only to the familiar disciples. Be prudent. Everybody in this

country knows what happened to the Baptist...»

«Do you think that...»

«If John, who was hated only by one woman, was captured and killed, what will happen to Jesus, Who is hated both by the Royal Palace and the Temple, as well as by Pharisees, scribes, priests and Herodians? So be on the alert, so that later you may not have to repent... But here He comes. Let us go and meet Him...»

It is the dead of night. A moonless but starry night. I could not say what time it is as I cannot see the position or the phase of the moon. I can only see that it is a clear night. The whole of Ephraim has disappeared in the black veil of the night. The torrent also is only a noise, nothing else. Its foaming and sparkling have completely disappeared under the green vault of the trees on its banks as they hinder the faint light of the stars.

A night bird is moaning somewhere. Then it becomes silent because of the rustling noise of broken branches and reeds, a noise that comes nearer and nearer the house following the torrent and coming from the mountain side. Then a tall strong figure comes up from the bank on to the path that climbs towards the house. It stops for a moment as if it wanted to find its bearings. It grazes the wall groping with its hands. It finds the door. It touches it lightly and goes on. Still groping it turns the corner of the house, and proceeds as far as the little gate of the kitchen garden. It feels it, opens it, pushes it and goes in. It now skims the walls along the kitchen garden. It is perplexed at the kitchen door. It then proceeds as far as the outside staircase, it climbs it gropingly and sits on the last step, a dark shade in the shadow. But over there, to the east, the colour of the night sky - a dark velarium that is recognised for what it is only through the stars studding it - is beginning to change its shade, that is, it takes a hue that the eye can perceive as such: a slate-grey that looks like thick smoky fog and is nothing but the first light of dawn coming forth. And it is the new daily miracle of light slowly coming back.

The person that was crouched on the step, a heap covered with a dark mantle, moves, stretches its arms, raises its head drawing its mantle behind it. It is Manaen. Dressed like an ordinary man in a heavy brown tunic and mantle of the same colour. A rough cloth, as workers or pilgrims wear, without ornaments, buckles or belts. An interlaced woollen cord tightens the garment at his waist. He stands up and stretches himself. He looks at the sky, where the advancing light enables the surroundings to be seen.

A door downstairs opens squeaking. Manaen leans out without making any noise to see who is coming out of the house. It is Jesus, Who cautiously closes the door again and moves towards the staircase. Manaen withdraws a little and clears his throat to attract the attention of Jesus, Who looks up, stopping half-way up the staircase.

«It is I, Master, Manaen. Come quickly because I must speak to You. I have been waiting for You...» whispers Manaen and he bows to greet Jesus.

Jesus climbs the last steps: «Peace to you. When did you come? How? Why?» He asks.

«I think I set foot here immediately after the cock's crowing. But I was in the bushes, down there at the bottom, at the second watch.»

«All night in the open air! »

«It could not be done any other way. I had to speak to You by myself. I had to know which way to come, which was the house, without being seen. So I came by day and I hid in the wood up there. I saw life calm down in town. I saw Judas and John go into the house. Nay, John passed very close to me with his load of firewood, but he did not see me because I was well concealed in the thick of the wood. While there was sufficient light to see, I saw an old woman go in and come out of the house, and the fire blaze in the kitchen, and I saw You descend from here in the deepening twilight. Then the house was closed. Then I came here in the light of the new moon and I studied the road. I also entered the kitchen garden. The little gate is more useless than no gate at all. I heard your voices. But I had to speak to You alone. I went away to come back here at the third watch and be here. I know that You usually get up before daybreak to pray. And I was hoping that You would do the same today. I praise the Most High that it is so.»

«But why had you to see Me with so much trouble? »

«Master, Joseph and Nicodemus want to speak to You and they are thinking of doing it in such a way as to elude everybody's surveillance. They made other attempts, but Beelzebub must be helping Your enemies very much. In each occasion they had to give up coming, because their houses and that of Nike were continuously watched. Actually the woman was to come before me. She is a strong woman and she had set out by herself towards mount Adummim. But they followed her and stopped her at the Bloody slope (1), and in order not to reveal Your abode and to justify the foodstuffs she had on her mount, she said: "I am going up to one of my brothers who is in a grotto in the mountains. If you wish to come, as you teach the doctrine of God, you will accomplish a holy deed, because he is ill and in need of God". And with her daring she convinced them to go away. But she did not dare to come here any more and she really went to see one who she says lives in a grotto and was entrusted to her by You.»

«That is true. But then, how was Nike able to let the others know? »

«By going to Bethany. Lazarus is not there. But his sisters are. Mary is there. And is Mary a woman to be frightened of anything? She dressed herself perhaps more sumptuously than Judith did to go to the king, and she went to the Temple publicly with Sarah and Naomi and then to her mansion in Zion. And from there she sent Naomi to Joseph with the necessary information. And while... the Jews cunningly went or sent people to her house to... honour her, and everybody could see her, the mistress of the house, old Naomi wearing modest clothes went to Bezetha to inform the Elder. It was then agreed that I should come, as I am the nomad who does not rouse suspicion if I am seen riding at full gallop from one of Herod's dwelling places to another, to tell You that on Friday night Joseph and Nicodemus, the former coming from Arimathea, the latter from Ramah, will meet before sunset at Gofenà and will wait for You there. I know the place and the road and I will come here in the evening to take You there. You can trust me. But trust me only, Master. Joseph begs You not to let anybody know that we are meeting. In everybody's interest.»

«Yours also, Manaen? »

«Lord... I am I. But I have no wealth or family interests to protect as Joseph has.»

«And that confirms My statement that material riches are always a burden... But you can tell Joseph that no one will be informed of our meeting.»

«I can go, then, Master. The sun has risen and Your disciples may get up. »

«You may go, and God be with you. I will come with you to show you the spot where we shall meet on Friday night...»

(1) A spot on Mount Adummim was called «Bloody slope » because of the crimes committed there by highwaymen.

They go downstairs without making any noise and they go out of the kitchen garden and descend at once to the banks of the torrent.

558. The Secret Meeting with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.
23rd January 1947.

The road taken by Manaen to lead Jesus to the place where He is expected is really a difficult one. A mountain road, narrow, covered with stones, running through maquis and woods. A very bright moonlight, in the first phase of the moon, can hardly penetrate the tangle of branches and at times it disappears completely, and Manaen makes up for the lack of light with torches that he has prepared and brought with him carrying them baldricwise like weapons under his mantle. He leads the way, Jesus follows him and they proceed in silence in the dead of the night. Two or three times a wild animal running in the wood simulates the noise of steps, which makes Manaen stop suspiciously. But apart from that nothing else disturbs their journey, which is toilsome by itself. «Look, Master. That is Gofenà over there. Now let us go round here. I shall count three hundred steps and we shall be at the grottoes where they have been waiting for us since sunset. Did You find the journey a long one? And yet we have taken short cuts that I think have complied with the legal distance.» Jesus makes a gesture meaning: «We could not do it any other way.»

Manaen does not speak any more, intent as he is on counting his steps. They are now in a barren rocky corridor, like an ascending cavern, between the two mountain faces that almost touch each other. One would say that it is a fracture brought about by a cataclysm, so strange it looks. A huge knife-wound in the mountain rock, splitting one third of it from its summit. High above, beyond the sheer mountain faces, beyond the tossing branches of the trees that have grown on the edge of the huge cut, the stars are shining, but the moon gives no light down here, in this abyss. The smoky light of the torch awakes birds of prey, that cheep flapping their wings on the edges of their nests among the fissures. Manaen says: «Here we are! » and he utters a cry similar to the wailing of a big owl, towards a cleft in the rocky slope.

Moving from the other end a reddish light comes forth along another rocky corridor, the upper part of which is closed like a lobby. Joseph appears: «The Master? » he asks not seeing Jesus Who is a little behind.

«I am here, Joseph. Peace to you.»

«Peace to You. Come! Come. We lit a fire to see snakes and scorpions and to warm the place. I will show You the way.»

He turns round and along the undulations of the path in the bowels of the mountain he leads them towards a place lit up by flames. Near a fire there is Nicodemus who is throwing branches and junipers on it.

«Peace to you, too, Nicodemus. Here I am with you. Speak.»

«Master, has anybody noticed Your coming? »

«Who on earth could, Nicodemus? »

«Are Your disciples not with You? »

«John and Judas of Simon are with Me. The others are evangelizing from the day after the Sabbath to sunset on Fridays. But I left the house before midday telling them not to wait for Me before dawn on the day after the Sabbath. I am too accustomed by now to being absent for several hours to rouse suspicion in anybody. So you need not worry. We have plenty time to talk without worrying about being caught. The place here... is propitious.»

«Yes. Nests of snakes and vultures... and of highwaymen in the good season, when these mountains are full of herds. But nowadays highwaymen prefer other places from which to descend suddenly on folds and caravan tracks. We are sorry that we dragged You so far. But we shall be able to depart from here taking different roads, without attracting anybody's attention. Because, Master, the attention of the Sanhedrin is directed wherever they suspect that You are loved.»

«Well, I disagree with Joseph with regard to that. I think that we now see ghosts where there are none. I also think that the situation has calmed very much these last days...» says Nicodemus.

«You are wrong, my friend. I tell you. It has calmed down because there is no spur to look for the Master, because now they know where He is. That is why He is being watched, and we are not. And that is why I begged Him not to tell anybody that we were going to meet. So that no one might be ready... for anything » says Joseph.

«I don't think that the people of Ephraim...» remarks Manaen.

«Neither the people of Ephraim or anybody else from Samaria. For the only purpose of doing the opposite of what we do on the other side...»

«No, Joseph, not for that. But because they do not have in their hearts the evil serpent that you have. They are not afraid of being despoiled of any prerogative. They have no sectarian or caste interests to defend. They have nothing but an instinctive need to feel that they are loved and forgiven by Him Whom their ancestors offended and Whom they continue to offend by remaining outside the perfect Religion. Outside because, as they are as proud as you are, neither part can lay aside the hatred dividing them and stretch their hands in the name of the Only Father. Even if they had so much good will, you would demolish it. Because you cannot forgive. You cannot say, trampling on all foolishness: "The past is dead because the Prince of the future Century has risen and He gathers us all under His Sign". I have in fact come and I gather. But you! Oh! for you, also what I considered worthy of being gathered is always anathema! »

«You are severe with us, Master.»

«I am just. Can you perhaps say that you do not reproach Me, in your hearts, for some of My deeds? Can you say that you approve of My mercy being the same for Judaeans and Galileans as for Samaritans and Gentiles, nay, even greater for the

latter and for big sinners, just because they are in greater need of it? Can you say that you would not expect gestures of violent majesty from Me in order to manifest My supernatural origin, and above all, mind you, and above all, to manifest My mission of Messiah according to your idea of the Messiah? Speak the real truth: apart from the joy of your hearts for the resurrection of your friend, would you not have preferred to such joy that I should have arrived in Bethany as a handsome cruel warrior, as our ancestors were with the Amorites and the Bashanites, and as Joshua was with the people of Ai and of Jericho, or better still: making stones and walls collapse on My enemies with My voice, as Joshua's trumpets did with the walls of Jericho, or drawing huge stones on My enemies from Heaven as it happened on the descent of Beth-horon still in the days of Joshua or, as in more recent times, calling celestial knights galloping through the air, in cloth of gold, troops of lancers fully armed, squadrons of cavalry in order of battle, attacks and charges this way and that, a flourish of shields and armies with helmets brandishing swords and hurling missiles to terrorise My enemies? Yes, that is what you would have preferred because, although you love Me very much, your love is still impure, and it is kindled, in wishing what is not holy, by your thoughts of Israelites, by your old thoughts. What is in Gamaliel as well as in the last man in Israel, what is in the High Priest, in the Tetrarch, in the peasant, in the shepherd, in the nomad, in the man of the Diaspora. The fixed idea of the Messiah conqueror. The nightmare of those who are afraid of being crushed by Him. The hope of those who love the Fatherland with the violence of human love. The eagerness of those who are oppressed under foreign powers, in foreign countries. It is not your fault. The pure concept, as had been given by God with regard to what I am, has been covered, throughout centuries, with layers of useless scum. And only few know how to take the Messianic idea back to its initial purity, and they do so through their own sufferings. And now, as the time is close when the sign, which Gamaliel is expecting, and the whole of Israel with him, is to be given, and now that the time of My perfect manifestation is drawing closer, Satan is working to deteriorate your love and to adulterate your thoughts. His hour is now coming. I tell you. And, in that hour of darkness, also those who at present can see or are only a little blind, will be completely blind. Only few, very few people will recognise the Messiah in the demolished Man. Only few will recognise Him as the true Messiah, exactly because He will be demolished as the prophets saw Him. For the sake of My friends, I would like them to be able to see Me and know Me, while it is still daytime, so that they may recognise Me and see Me also when I am disfigured and in the darkness of the hour of the world... But tell Me now what you wanted to tell Me. Time passes quickly and it will soon be dawn. I am saying this for your sake, because I am not afraid of any dangerous encounter.»

«Well. We wanted to tell You that someone must have said where You are and that someone is certainly not I or Nicodemus, or Manaen, or Lazarus, or his sisters, or Nike. To whom else have You spoken of the place You chose for Your shelter? »

«To nobody, Joseph.»

«Are You sure? »

«Most definitely.»

«And did You tell Your disciples not to mention it? »

«Before departing I did not speak to them of the place. When we arrived in Ephraim I told them to go and evangelize and to act in My stead. And I am sure of their obedience.»

«And... Are You alone in Ephraim? »

«No. I am with John and Judas of Simon. I have already told you. He, Judas, as I can read his thoughts, cannot have done any harm to Me, through his heedlessness, because he never left the town, and in these days no pilgrims from other places pass through it.»

«Then... it is really Beelzebub that has spoken. Because at the Sanhedrin they know that You are there.»

«So? What are their reactions to My behaviour? »

«Several, Master. And very different. Some say that it is logical. Since they banned You from the holy places, You had no option but to take shelter in Samaria. Others instead maintain that this proves what You are: a Samaritan in Your soul, even more than by race, and that that is enough to condemn You. And they all exult at having been successful in reducing You to silence and at being able to point You out to the crowds as a friend of the Samaritans. They are

saying: "We have already won the battle. The rest will be child's play". But we beg You, do not allow that to happen.»

«It will not happen. Let them speak. Those who love Me will not be upset by appearances. Allow the wind to drop completely. It is a wind of the earth. Then the wind of Heaven will blow, the velarium will open and the glory of God will appear. Have you anything else to tell Me? »

«No, nothing concerning You. Be on the alert, be careful, do not leave the place where You are now. And we will keep You informed...»

«No. It is not necessary. Stay where you are. I shall soon have the women disciples with Me and, yes, tell Eliza and Nike to join the other women disciples, if they so wish. Tell the two sisters as well. As My place is now known, those who are not afraid of the Sanhedrin can now come for our reciprocal comfort.»

«The two sisters cannot come until Lazarus comes back. He left with much pomp, and everybody in Jerusalem knew that he was going to his remote estates, but it is not known when he will come back. But his servant has already come back from Nazareth and he said - and we must tell You also this - he said that Your Mother will be here with the other women disciples before the end of this moon. She is well and so is Mary of Alphaeus. The servant saw them. But they are delaying a little because Johanna wants to come with them, but she cannot until the end of this moon. And then... well, if You will allow us, we would like to help You... as faithful friends even if... imperfect as You say.»

«No. The disciples who go around evangelizing, every Friday evening bring what is necessary for them and for us who remain in Ephraim. Nothing else is required. A workman lives on his wages. That is fair. The rest would be superfluous. Give it to some poor wretch. That is what I told also those in Ephraim and My apostles. My instructions are that when they come back they must not have one farthing left over and that on their way they must give away all the offerings, keeping for us only what is necessary for our very frugal food for one week.»

«Why, Master? »

«To teach them detachment from riches and the superiority of the spirit over the worries of the morrow. And for that and for other good reasons of Mine as a Master, I ask you not to insist.»

«As You wish. But we are sorry that we cannot help You.»

«The day will come when you will do that... Is that not the first light of dawn?» He says looking eastwards, that is to the side opposite to the one He came, and pointing at a timid gleam that becomes visible on remote backgrounds.

«It is. We must part. I am going back to Gofenà where I left my horse, and Nicodemus will go down on this other side towards Beeroth, and from there to Ramah, when the Sabbath is over.»

«And what about you, Manaen? »

«Oh! Without hiding myself I will go along the main roads towards Jericho, where Herod is now. My horse is in the house of some poor people who for a mite do not loathe anything, not even a Samaritan, as they believe me to be. But I am staying with You just now. In my bag I have food for two.»

«Well, let us say goodbye. We shall meet again at Passover.»

«No! You are not going to put Yourself to that test! » say Joseph and Nicodemus.

«Don't do that, Master! »

«You are really bad friends, because you are advising Me to commit sin and to be cowardly. Would you then be able to love Me, considering what I had done? Tell Me. Be sincere. Where should I go and worship the Lord at the Passover of the Unleavened Bread? Perhaps on Mount Gerizim? Or should I not appear before the Lord in the Temple in Jerusalem, as every male must do at the three great yearly festivities? Do you not remember that they are already accusing Me of not respecting the Sabbath, although - and Manaen can witness this - even today, to satisfy your request, I departed in the evening from a place that conciliated your desire with the sabbatic law? »

«We also stopped at Gofenà for that reason... We will offer a sacrifice to expiate an involuntary transgression brought about by a motive that could not be derogated from. But You, Master!... They will see You at once...»

«Even if they should not see Me, I will try to make them see Me.»

«You want to ruin Yourself! It is the same as if You committed suicide...»

«No. Your minds are enveloped in darkness. It is not the same as if I wanted to

kill Myself, it is only obedience to the voice of My Father Who says to Me: "Go. It is Your hour". I have always endeavoured to reconcile the Law with necessities, also on the day that I had to flee from Bethany and take refuge at Ephraim because it was not My hour to be caught. The Lamb of Salvation can only be sacrificed at the Passover of the Unleavened Bread. And if I behaved thus for the Law, do you want Me to do otherwise with regard to the order of My Father? Go, you may go! Do not grieve thus. And why did I come, if it was not that I should be proclaimed the King of all peoples? Because that is the meaning of "Messiah", is it not? Yes, that is what it means. And "Redeemer" also means that. The only trouble is that the meaning of these two words does not correspond to what you fancy. But I bless you, imploring a celestial ray to descend upon you with My blessing. Because I love you and you love Me. Because I would like your justice to be entirely bright. Because you are not wicked, but you, too, are "Old Israel", and you do not have the heroic will to despoil yourselves of the past and become new. Goodbye, Joseph. Be just. Just like him who was My guardian for so many years and who was capable of every renovation to serve the Lord his God. If he were here, among us, oh! how he would teach you to serve the Lord perfectly, to be just, just, just. But it is right that he should already be in Abraham's bosom!... In order not to see the injustice of Israel. Holy servant of God!... A new Abraham, with a broken heart, but with perfect will, he would not have advised Me to be cowardly, but he would have spoken the words that he used to utter when anything painful weighed heavily on us: "Let us raise our spirits. We shall meet the yes of God and we shall forget that it is men who grieve us. And let us do whatever is burdensome, as if the Most High presented it to us. In this way we shall sanctify also the least things, and God will love us". Oh! He would have said so also to comfort Me to suffer the deepest sorrows... He would have comforted us... Oh! My Mother!...»

Jesus releases Joseph whom He had clasped in His arms and He lowers His head remaining silent, undoubtedly contemplating His imminent martyrdom and that of His poor Mother... He then raises His head and embraces Nicodemus saying: «The first time you came to Me as a secret disciple, I told you that to enter the Kingdom of God and to have the Kingdom of God in you it is necessary for your spirits to be born again and for you to love the Light more than the world loves it. Today, and this is perhaps the last time we shall meet secretly, I repeat the same words to you. Be born again in your spirit, Nicodemus, to be able to love the Light, which I am, and I may dwell in you as King and Saviour. Go now. And God be with you.»

The two members of the Sanhedrin go away in the opposite direction to the one in which Jesus came. When the noise of their steps has faded away, Manaean, who had gone to the entrance of the grotto to see them go away, comes back and with an expressive countenance he says: «And for once they will be the ones who infringe the Sabbath law! And they will have no peace until they settle their debt with the Eternal Father by sacrificing an animal! Would it not be better for them to sacrifice their tranquillity by declaring themselves "Your disciples" openly? Would that not be more pleasing to the Most High? »

«It would certainly be. But do not judge them. They are doughs that rise slowly. But at the right moment, when many, who think they are better than they are, collapse, they will rise against the whole world.»

«Are You referring to me, Lord? Please take my life, but do not let me deny You.»

«You will not deny Me. But there are constituents in you, different from theirs, and they will help you to be faithful.»

«Yes, I am... the Herodian. That is: I was the Herodian. Because as I turned my back on the Council, so I turned my back on the party, when I saw it was vile and unfair towards You just like the others. To be a Herodian!... To the other castes it means being little less than a heathen. I do not mean that we are saints. That is true. For an impure purpose we committed impurity. I am speaking as if I were still the Herodian I was before being Your disciple. According to human opinion, therefore, we are twice impure, because we are the allies of the Romans, and because we did it for our own profit. But tell me, Master, as You always speak the truth and never refrain from it for fear of losing a friend. Between us who have entered into an alliance with Rome to... have fleeting personal triumphs and the Pharisees, the Chief Priests, the scribes, the Sadducees, who enter into an alliance with Satan to crush You, which are more

impure? I, see? Now that I have realised that the party of the Herodians is siding with Your enemies, I left it. I am not telling You to be praised by You, but to tell You what I think. And they, I mean the Pharisees and priests, the scribes and Sadducees, are convinced of getting a profit out of this sudden alliance of the Herodians with them! The wretches! They do not know that the Herodians do it to gain more merits, and thus greater protection from the Romans, and later... once the cause and the reason joining them are defined and finished, they will demolish those with whom they now form an alliance. And they trifle with each other like that. Everything is based on deceit. And that disgusts me so much that I have made myself completely independent. You... You are a great frightening ghost. For everybody! And You are also the pretence for the foul game of the various parties' interests. The religious motive? The sacred indignation for the "blasphemer", as they call You? It's nothing but lies! The only motive is neither the defence of Religion, nor the sacred zeal for the Most High, but their greedy, insatiable interests. They make me sick like filthy things. And I would like... Yes, I would like the few who are not corrupt to be more daring. Ah! A double life is troublesome to me now! I would like to follow You alone. But I can serve You better thus than if I followed You. It's a burden to me... But You say that it will soon be... What... But will You really be sacrificed as the Lamb? But is it not figurative language? The life of Israel is woven with symbols and figures...»

«And you would like it to be so for Me... But Mine is not a figure.»

«Is it not? Are You really sure? I could... Many of us could repeat ancient gestures and have You anointed Messiah, and defend You. One word would suffice and the defenders of the holy wise Pontiff would rise in thousands and thousands. I do not mean an earthly king, as I now know that Your Kingdom is entirely spiritual. But as we shall never again be humanly free and strong, let at least Your holiness support and heal corrupt Israel. No one, as You are aware, loves the present priesthood and those supporting it. Do You want that, Lord? Tell me, and I will do it.»

«You have already gone a long way with your thought, Manaen. But you are still as far from your goal as the Earth is from the sun. I will be Priest, and for ever, immortal Pontiff in an organism that I will enliven to the end of time. But I shall not be anointed with the oil of delight, neither shall I be proclaimed and defended by the gestures of violence brought about by a handful of believers to throw our Fatherland into a wild schism and make it more enslaved than it ever was. And do you think that the hand of a man can anoint the Christ? I solemnly tell you that it cannot. The true Authority that will anoint Me Pontiff and Messiah is that of Him Who sent Me. No other person, who is not God, could anoint God as King of kings and Lord of lords, for ever.»

«So, nothing!?! There is nothing we can do!?! How grieved I am! »

«Everything, by loving Me. It is everything. By loving not the person whose name is Jesus, but what Jesus is. By loving Me with your humanity and your spirit, as I love you with Spirit and Humanity, in order to be with Me beyond Humanity. Look how beautiful is, dawn. The quiet light of the stars did not shine in here. But the triumphant light of the sun does. The same will happen in the hearts of those who succeed in loving Me with justice. Come outside, in the silence of the mountain, clear of the hoarse human voices of interests. Look over there at those eagles, how with wide flights they soar away in search of prey. Can we see that prey? No, we cannot, but they can. Because the eyes of an eagle are more powerful than ours and from above where they rove, they can see a wide horizon and can choose. I do the same. I see what you cannot see, and from above where it hovers, My spirit can choose My sweet preys. Not to tear them to pieces as vultures and eagles do, but to take them with Me. We shall be so happy there, in the Kingdom of My Father, we who loved each other!...»

And Jesus, Who while speaking has gone outside to sit in the sun at the entrance of the grotto, embraces Manaen, who was beside Him, and He smiles silently at I do not know which vision...

Jesus is alone. He is still in the grotto. A fire is lit to give light and warmth, and a strong smell of resins and leafy branches spreads in the cavern amid crackling and sparks. Jesus has withdrawn to the end, in a recess where dry branches have been thrown and He is meditating. The flames waver now and again, they abate and brighten up successively because of gusts of wind blowing through the woods and howling upon entering the cavern that resounds like a bugle-horn. It is not a steady wind. It drops, then it rises like long sea waves. When it whistles louder, ashes and dry leaves are blown towards the narrow rocky corridor through which Jesus has come into the larger part of the grotto, and the flames bend lapping the floor on that side, then, when the gush of the wind drops, they rise again, still sparkling, and they resume shining straight upwards. Jesus pays no attention to them. He is meditating. The sound of the wind is joined by the fall of rain that patters, at first lightly then heavily, on the leafy boughs of the underwood. A real downpour soon changes the paths on the slopes into little roaring torrents. The noise of the water is now the prevailing one as the wind has slowly dropped. The very faint light of the stormy twilight, and that of the fire, which is reddish but does no longer blaze, for want of fuel, scarcely light up the cavern and the corners are in darkness. Jesus, dressed in dark robes as He is, can no longer be seen; only when He lifts His head, which is bent on His raised knees, it is possible to see a faint gleam against the dark wall.

Outside the grotto, on the path there is the noise of steps and of anxious words, as if they were uttered by someone who is tired and weary. Then in the empty space at the entrance, a dark shadow is outlined dripping water on all sides. The man, because it is a man with a heavy dark beard, utters an «oh! » of relief and throws his drenched headgear on the floor, he shakes his mantle and says to himself: «H'm! Samuel, you can give it a good shaking! It seems to have dropped into a fulling-mill! And my sandals? Boats! Boats sunk in a river! I am drenched to the skin! Look how my hair is dripping! I look like a broken roof gutter leaking through a thousand holes. It's a good start! Is perhaps Beelzebub on His side defending Him? H'm! It's a beautiful stake... but...» He sits on a stone near the fire, in which, as the flame is dead, there are reddish embers forming the strange designs that are the last life of burnt out wood, and he tries to rekindle it by blowing on it. He takes off his sandals and tries to dry his muddy feet with the drier parts of the edge of his mantle. But it is the same as if he were drying himself with water. His effort serves only to remove the mud from his feet and put it on the mantle. He continues to speak to himself: «Cursed be they, He and everybody! And I lost also my bag. Of course! It's a good job I have not lost my life... "It's the safest road" they said. Certainly! But they don't take it! If I had not seen this fire! Who will have lit it? Some poor wretch like me. But where will he be now? There is a hole over there... Perhaps another grotto... They won't be highwaymen, will they? But... what a fool I am! What can they take off me if I have not got even a farthing? But it does not matter. This fire is worth more than a treasure. I wish I had some more branches to rekindle it! I would take my clothes off and dry them. Ho! I say! This is all I have until I go back!...»

«If you want more branches, My friend, there are some here » says Jesus without moving from His place.

The man, whose back was turned towards Jesus, starts at the sudden voice and jumps to his feet turning round. He looks frightened. «Who are you? » he asks, opening his eyes wide trying to see.

«A wayfarer like you. I lit the fire and I am glad it served to guide you.» Jesus approaches him with a bundle of sticks in His arms and He throws them near the fire saying: «Rekindle the flame before everything is covered with ash. I have neither flint nor tinder-box because the man from whom I borrowed them went away after sunset.» Jesus speaks in a friendly way, but He does not come forward so that the fire may illuminate Him. On the contrary, He goes back to His corner and remains well enveloped in His mantle.

The man, in the meantime, bends to blow hard on some leaves he has thrown on the fire and he remains thus, busy, until the flame rises. He laughs throwing thicker and thicker branches that rekindle the fire. Jesus, sitting in His place, watches Him.

«I should now take my clothes off and let them dry. I prefer to be nude rather than be wet. But I cannot even do that. A slope slid down and I found myself

under a fall of earth and water. Ah! I am settled now! Look! I have torn my tunic. Cursed journey! I wish I had infringed the Sabbath! I didn't! I stopped until sunset. Later... And what shall I do now? To save myself I let my bag go and now it will be down at the bottom of the valley or it will be entangled in some bush I wonder where...»

«Here is My tunic. It is dry and warm. My mantle is enough for Me. Take it. I am in good health. Be not afraid.»

«And You are good. A good friend. How can I thank You? »

«By loving Me as if I were your brother.»

«By loving You as is You were my brother! But You do not know who I am. And if I were wicked, would you wish to have my love? »

«I would, to make you good.»

The man, who is young, about the same age as Jesus, lowers his head, meditating. He is holding Jesus' garment in his hands, but he cannot see it. He is pensive. And he automatically slips it on over his bare skin because he has stripped himself completely, also of his vest.

Jesus, Who had gone back to His corner asks him: «When did you have some food? »

«At the sixth hour. I was to have a meal when I arrived in the village, down in the valley. But I lost my way, my bag and my money.»

«I have still some remnants of food here. I was to eat them tomorrow. Take them. Fasting is no burden to Me.»

«But... if You have to walk, You will need some strength...»

«Oh! I am not going far. Only as far as Ephraim...»

«Ephraim?! Are You a Samaritan? »

«Does that irritate you? I am not a Samaritan.»

«In fact... Your accent is Galilean. Who are You? Why do You not uncover Your face? Have You to hide Yourself because You are guilty? I will not denounce You.»

«I am a wayfarer. I have already told you. My Name would mean nothing to you, or it would mean too much. In any case, what is a name? When I give you a garment for your frozen body, some food to appease your hunger, and above all My pity for your heart, do you need to know My Name to feel the comfort of dry clothes, of food and love? But if you wish to give Me a name, call Me "Pity". There is nothing disgraceful compelling Me to hide Myself. But not because of that you would give up denouncing Me. Because in your heart there is a bad thought. And bad thoughts yield fruits of evil deeds.»

The man starts and approaches Jesus. But only Jesus' eyes can be seen and they are almost veiled by His lowered eyelids.

«Take the food, My friend. There is nothing else to be done.»

The man goes back to the fire and begins to eat slowly, without speaking. He is pensive. Jesus is all curled up in His little corner. The man refreshes himself slowly. The warmth of the flames, the bread and roasted meat given to him by Jesus, make him happy. He stands up, he stretches himself, he lays the cord, which he used as a belt, from a rock splinter to a rusty hook, goodness knows who fixed it there and how long ago, and hangs his tunic, mantle, headgear to dry on it, he shakes his sandals and puts them near the fire, which he tends generously.

Jesus seems to be dozing. The man also sits down and is pensive. He then turns round to look at the Unknown Man. He asks: «Are You sleeping? »

Jesus replies: «No. I am thinking and praying.»

«For whom? »

«For all the unhappy people. Of every kind. And they are so many! »

«Are You a penitent? »

«I am a penitent. The Earth is in great need of repentance so that the weak living on it may be given strength to reject Satan.»

«You are right. You speak like a rabbi. I am a good judge because I am a saphorim. I am a disciple of rabbi Jonathan ben Uziel. His dearest disciple. And now, if the Most High helps me, I shall become even dearer to him. My name will be exalted all over Israel.»

Jesus does not reply.

The other man, after a few moments, stands up and sits near Jesus. With one hand he smooths his hair that is almost dry and tidies his beard saying: «Listen. You said that You are going to Ephraim. Are You going there just by chance, or do You live there? »

«I live in Ephraim.»
«But You are not a Samaritan, so You said! »
«I repeat it. I am not a Samaritan.»
«And who can live there if not... Listen: they say that the cursed outlawed Rabbi of Nazareth has taken shelter at Ephraim. Is it true? »
«It is true. Jesus, the Christ of the Lord, is there.»
«He is not the Christ of the Lord! He is a liar! He is a blasphemer! He is a demon! He is the cause of all our troubles. And no avenger of all the people rises to overthrow Him! » he exclaims with fanatic hatred.
«Has He perhaps done any harm to you, since you speak of Him with so much hatred in your voice? »
«Not to me. I saw Him just once at the feast of the Tabernacles, and in such a tumult, that I would find it difficult to recognise Him. Because, while it is true that I am a disciple of the great rabbi Jonathan ben Uziel, I have been at the Temple definitively only for a short time. Previously... I was not able for many reasons, and only when the rabbi was at home I used to sit at his feet to drink in justice and doctrine. But You... You asked me whether I hate Him, and I perceived a hidden reproach in Your words. Are You perhaps a follower of the Nazarene? »
«No, I am not. But hatred is condemned by anybody who is just.»
«Hatred is holy when it is against an enemy of God and of the Fatherland. The Nazarene Rabbi is such. And it is holy to fight Him and hate Him.»
«To fight the man or the idea that He represents and the doctrine that He proclaims? »
«Everything! Everything! You cannot fight one thing if you spare the other. In man there is his doctrine and his idea. You either overthrow everything, or it serves no purpose. When you embrace an idea, you embrace the man who represents it and his doctrine at the same time. I know because I experience that with my master. His ideas are mine. His wishes are my law.»
«In fact a good disciples behaves thus. But one must be able to tell whether the master is good, and follow only a good master. Because it is not lawful to lose one's soul for the love of a man.»
«Jonathan ben Uziel is good.»
«No. He is not.»
«What are You saying? And are You telling me? While we are here all alone and I could kill You to avenge my master? I am strong, You know? »
«I am not afraid. I am not afraid of violence. And I am not afraid as I know also that if you strike Me, I will not react.»
«Ah! I see! You are a disciple of the Rabbi, an "apostle". That is how He calls His most faithful disciples. And You are going to join Him. Perhaps the man who was with You was another one like You. And You are waiting for someone like You.»
«Yes, I am waiting for someone.»
«For the Rabbi, perhaps? »
«There is no need for Me to wait for Him. He does not need My word to be cured of His disease. His soul is not diseased, neither is His body. I am waiting for a poor soul that is poisoned and raving. To cure it.»
«You are an apostle! We know in fact that He sends them to evangelize as He is afraid to go Himself, since He was condemned by the Sanhedrin. That is why You follow His doctrine! It is His doctrine not to react against those who offend.»
«It is His doctrine because He teaches love, forgiveness, justice, meekness. He loves both enemies and friends. Because He sees everything in God.»
«Oh! If He should meet me, if, as I hope, I will meet Him, I don't think He will love me! It would be foolish of Him! But I cannot tell You, as You are His apostle. And I regret what I have already told You. You will inform Him.»
«There is no need. But I solemnly tell you that He will love you, nay, He loves you, notwithstanding that you are going to Ephraim to ensnare Him and hand Him over to the Sanhedrin, who have promised a large reward to whoever will do that.»
«Are You... a prophet or have You the python spirit? Has He transmitted His power to You? So You are cursed as well? And I accepted Your bread, your garment, You have been friendly to me! It is written: "You shall not raise your hand against your benefactor". You have done that! Because, if You knew that I... Perhaps to prevent me from acting? But if I spare You, because You have

given me bread and salt, fire and clothes, and I would sin against justice by harming You, I will not spare Your Rabbi. Because I do not know Him, and He has not done me any good, but He has done me evil.»

«Oh! poor wretch! Do you not realise that you are raving? How can one whom you do not know have done evil to you? How can you respect the Sabbath, if you do not respect the precept not to kill?...»

«I do not kill.»

«Materially, you do not. But there is no difference between him who kills and him who hands the victim over to the killer. You respect the word of a man who says that you must not harm your benefactor, but you do not respect the word of God, and with a snare, for a handful of money, for a little honour, the filthy honour of being able to betray an innocent person, you are getting ready to commit a crime!...»

«I am not doing it just for the sake of money and honour. But to do something pleasing to Jehovah and beneficial to our Fatherland. I am repeating the gestures of Jael and Judith.» He is more fanatic than ever.

«Sisara and Holofernes were enemies of our Fatherland. They were invaders. They were cruel. But what is the Rabbi of Nazareth? What does He invade? What does He usurp? He is poor and He does not seek riches. He is humble and does not want honours. He is good. To everybody. Thousands of people have been assisted by Him. Why do you all hate Him? Why do you hate Him? It is not lawful to injure your neighbour. You serve the Sanhedrin. But will the Sanhedrin judge you in future life, or will God judge you? And how will He judge you? I do not mean: how will He judge you as killer of the Christ, but I mean: how will He judge you as killer of an innocent. You do not believe that the Rabbi of Nazareth is the Christ, and consequently, because of your belief that He is not, you will not be charged with that crime. God is just and He does not consider guilty an action accomplished without full knowledge. So He will not judge you for killing the Christ, because, as far as you are concerned, Jesus of Nazareth is not the Christ. But He will accuse you of killing an innocent. Because you know that He is innocent. They have poisoned you and by means of words of hatred they have intoxicated you, but not to the extent that you do not understand that He is innocent. His works speak in His favour. Your fear, and your masters are more frightened than their disciples, dreads and sees what does not exist. You are afraid that He may supplant you. Be not afraid. He stretches out His arms towards you saying: "Brothers"! He does not send soldiers against you. He does not curse you. He would only like to save you, both the great ones and their disciples, as He wishes to save the last person in Israel. And He wishes to save you, more than the least person in Israel, more than the child who does not yet know what are hatred and love. Because you are in greater need than ignorant people and children, because you know, and you knowingly sin. Can your conscience of a man, if you clear it of the ideas they have instilled into it, if you cleanse it of the poison that makes you rave, can it tell you that He is guilty? Tell Me. Be sincere. Have you ever seen Him infringe the Law, or advise people to infringe it? Have you ever seen Him being quarrelsome, greedy, lustful, hard-hearted, have you heard Him utter slander? Speak up! Have you seen Him being disrespectful towards the Sanhedrin? He is living like an outlaw, in order to obey the verdict of the Sanhedrin. He could utter a cry and the whole of Palestine would follow Him to march against the few who hate Him. He, instead, advises peace and forgiveness to His disciples. As He gives back life to dead people, sight to the blind, motion to the paralysed, hearing to the deaf, freedom to demoniacs, as neither Heaven nor Hell are insensible to His will, He could strike you by His divine lightning and thus get rid of His enemies. He, instead, prays for you and cures your relatives, He cures your hearts, He gives you bread, clothes, fire. Because I am Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, Whom you are looking for to have the price promised to who hands Him over to the Sanhedrin, and the honour of being the liberator of Israel. I am Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. Here I am. Take Me. As Master and as Son of God I free you from the obligation of not raising your hand and I absolve you of the sin of raising it against your benefactor.»

Jesus has stood up removing His mantle from His head, and He stretches out His hands as if they were to be caught and tied. But tall as He is - and He seems even more slender as He is left with only His short close-fitting vest on, with His dark mantle hanging from His shoulders, holding Himself upright, His eyes,

fixed at the face of His persecutor, in the mobile reflection of the flames that illuminate highlights in His flowing hair and make the large pupils of His eyes shine within the sapphire circles of the irises - so majestic, so frank and fearless, He commands more respect than if He were surrounded by an army of defenders.

The man is fascinated... paralysed with astonishment. Only after some time he is able to whisper: «You! You! You! » He does not seem to be able to say anything else.

Jesus insists: «So, take Me! Take that useless cord that you put up to hold a dirty torn tunic, and tie My hands. I will follow you as a lamb follows a butcher. And I will not hate you for taking Me to die. I told you. It is the purpose that justifies an action and changes its nature. As far as you are concerned, I am the ruin of Israel and you think that by killing Me you will save Israel. You believe that I am guilty of all crimes and therefore you are serving justice by suppressing a criminal. So you are not more guilty than the executioner who carries out the order he received. Do you wish to sacrifice Me here, on the spot? Over there, at My feet, there is the knife with which I sliced your bread. Take it. From a blade that served for the love for My neighbour, it can be changed into the knife of the sacrificer. My flesh is not harder than the roasted lamb that My friend had left Me to appease My hunger and that I gave you, to satisfy the hunger of My enemy. But you are afraid of the Roman patrols. They arrest the murderers of an innocent. And they do not allow justice to be administered by us. Because we are the subjects and they are the rulers. That is why you dare not kill Me and then go to those who sent you, with the slaughtered Lamb on your shoulders, like goods that make one earn money.

Well: leave My corpse here and go and inform your masters. Because you are not a disciple, you are a slave, so much have you renounced the sovereign freedom of thought and will that God Himself leaves to men. And you serve your masters servilely, to the extent of committing a crime. But you are not guilty. You are "poisoned". You are the poisoned soul that I was waiting for. Come on, then! The night and the place are propitious to crime. I am wrong: to the redemption of Israel! Oh! poor boy! You are speaking prophetic words without being aware of it! My death will really be redemption, and not of Israel only, but of all Mankind. And I have come to be sacrificed. And I am longing to be sacrificed, so that I may be the Saviour. Of everybody. You, the saphorim of learned Jonathan ben Uziel, certainly know Isaiah. Here is the Man of sorrows in front of you. And if I do not seem to be such, if I do not seem to be the man whom also David saw, with My bones laid bare and disjointed, if I am not like the leper seen by Isaiah, it is because you do not see My heart. I am one big sore. Your indifference, your hatred, your hardness and injustice have wounded and broken Me completely. And did I not hide My face, while you were despising Me for what I really am: the Word of God, the Christ? But I am the man accustomed to suffering! And do you not consider Me as a man struck by God? And do I not sacrifice Myself because I want to do so to cure you through My sacrifice? So! Strike Me! Look: I am not afraid and you must not be afraid. I, because I am the Innocent and I do not fear the judgement of God, and also because by offering My neck to your knife, I have God's will fulfilled, anticipating My hour a little for your welfare. Also when I was born I anticipated the time for your sake, to give you peace before the time. But you have turned My anxiety of love into a weapon of denial... Be not afraid! I do not invoke the punishment of Cain on you or the lightning of God. I pray for you. I love you. Nothing else. Am I too tall for your hand of a man? Well, it is true! Man in fact could not strike God if God of His own will did not put Himself into the hands of man. Well, I kneel down before you. The Son of man is before you, at your feet. So, strike Me! » Jesus in fact kneels down, and offers the knife, holding it by the blade, to His persecutor, who withdraws whispering: «No! No! »

«Come on! A moment of courage... and you will be more famous than Jael and Judith! Look! I am praying for you. Isaiah says so: "...and He prayed for sinners". Are you not coming yet? Why are you going away? Ah! perhaps you are afraid you may not see how a God dies. Well, I will come there, near the fire. There is always a fire at sacrifices. It is part of them. Here you are. Now you can see Me well.» He has knelt down near the fire.

«Don't look at me! Don't look at me! Oh! where shall I run not to see Your eyes staring at me? » shouts the man.

«Whom? Whom do you not wish to see? »

«You... and my crime. Really, it is my crime that is in front of me! Where shall I run, where? » The man is terrorised...

«On My heart, son! Here, in My arms nightmares and fears disappear. There is peace here. Come! Do come! Make Me happy! » Jesus has stood up and is stretching out His arms. The fire is between them. Jesus shines in the reflection of the flames.

The man falls on his knees, covering his face and shouting: «Have mercy on me, God! Have mercy on me! Cancel my sin! I wanted to strike Your Christ! Mercy! Ah! there can be no mercy for such a crime! I am damned! » He weeps with his face on the ground, sobbing, and he moans: «Mercy » and he swears: «The cursed ones! »...

Jesus walks round the fire and goes towards him, He bends, He touches his head saying: «Do not curse those who led you astray. They obtained the greatest gift for you: that I should speak to you. Thus. And that I should hold you thus in My arms.»

He has taken him by his shoulders and has lifted him up, and sitting on the ground He draws him to His heart, and the man leans on His knees shedding tears that are less phrenetic, but so purifying! Jesus caresses his dark hair to calm him.

The man at last raises his head and with changed countenance he moans: «Your forgiveness! »

Jesus bends and kisses his forehead. "The man throws his arms round His neck and with his head resting on Jesus' shoulders he weeps and begins to speak; he would like to tell Him how they had worked on him to make him commit the crime. But Jesus stops him saying: «Be quiet! Be quiet! I am aware of everything. When you came in I knew you, both for what you were and for what you wanted to do. I could have gone away from there and eluded you. I remained to save you. And you are saved. The past is dead. Do not recall it.»

«But... are You so confident? And if I should sin again? »

«No, you will not sin again. I know. You are cured.»

«Yes, I am. But they are so astute. Don't send me back to them.»

«And where can you go and not find them? »

«With You. To Ephraim. If You can read my heart, You will see that I am not laying a snare for You, but I am only begging You to protect me.»

«I know. Come. But I warn you that Judas of Kerioth, who sold himself to the Sanhedrin and is the betrayer of the Christ, is there.»

«Divine Mercy! You know also that?! » He is utterly amazed.

«I know everything. He thinks that I do not know. But I know everything. And I know also that you are so converted that you will not speak to Judas or to anybody else about this. But bear in mind this: if Judas can betray his Master, what will he be able to do to harm you? »

The man is pensive, for a long time. He then says: «It does not matter! If You do not reject me, I am staying with You. At least for some time. Until Passover. Until You join Your disciples. I will join them. Oh! if it is true that You have forgiven me, do not drive me away! »

«I will not drive you away. We shall now go over there, on those leaves and wait for daybreak, and at dawn we shall go to Ephraim. We shall say that we met by chance and that you have come to stay with us. It is the truth.»

«Yes. It is the truth. At dawn my clothes will be dry and I will give Your garment back to You...»

«No. Leave those clothes there. A symbol. The man who divests himself of his past and puts on a new uniform. The mother of Samuel, the ancient one, sang in her joy: "The Lord gives death and life, He brings down to Sheol and draws up". You died and are reborn. You are coming from the place of the dead to true Life. Leave the clothes that have been affected by the contact with the sepulchres full of filth. And live! Live for your true glory: to serve God with justice and possess Him for ever.»

They sit in the recess where the leaves are piled up and they soon fall silent, because the man, tired as he is, falls asleep with his head resting on the shoulder of Jesus, Who is still praying.

...It is a beautiful morning in spring, when they arrive at the house of Mary of Jacob, following the path along the torrent, which is becoming clear after the downpour and is singing more loudly with its increased waters, and is shining in

the sun between its banks polished by the rain.

Peter, who is at the entrance, utters a cry and runs to meet them, hurrying to embrace Jesus, Who is all enveloped in His mantle, and he says: «Oh! my blessed Master! What a sad Sabbath You made me spend! I could not make up my mind to go away without seeing You. I would have been upset the whole week if I had to leave with uncertainty in my heart and without Your farewell! »

Jesus kisses him without removing His mantle. Peter is so engaged in contemplating his Master that he does not notice the stranger who is with Him. In the meantime the others have come and Judas of Kerioth utters a cry: «You, Samuel! »

«It is I. The Kingdom of God is open to everybody in Israel. I have come to it» the man replies without hesitation.

Judas has a strange sly laugh, but he does not say anything.

Everybody's attention is focused on the newcomer, and Peter asks: «Who is he? » «A new disciple. We met by chance. That is: God made us meet, and as I accepted him as one sent to Me by My Father, so I tell you to do the same. And as it is a great feast when one comes to take part in the Kingdom of Heaven, lay down your bags and mantles, you who were about to leave, and let us be all together until tomorrow. And now let Me go, Simon, because I gave My tunic to him and the morning air is nipping Me while I am standing here.»

«Ah! I thought it was! But You will be taken ill, if You do that! »

«I did not want... But He insisted » says the man apologetically.

«Yes. He was swept away by an overflowing large stream and only his will saved him. So to ensure that nothing should remind him of that painful moment, and to enable him to come to us in a clean state, I made him leave his dirty torn tunic where we met, and I made him put on Mine » says Jesus and He looks at Judas of Kerioth who repeats his strange sly laugh, as he did at the beginning and when Jesus said that a great feast is made when one comes to take part in the Kingdom of Heaven. He then goes quickly into the house to dress Himself.

The others approach the newcomer expressing their greetings of peace.

560. What People Say at Nazareth.

6th February 1947.

«And I tell you that you are all foolish if you believe such things. More foolish and ignorant than wethers that do not even know the rules of instinct, mutilated as they are. Some men are going around towns saying anathema of the Master, while others bring orders that, by the living God, cannot be given by Him! You do not know Him. I do. And I cannot believe that He has changed so much! Let them go about! Are you saying that they are His disciples? And who has ever seen them with Him? Are you saying that some rabbis and Pharisees have mentioned His sins? And who has seen His sins? Have you ever heard Him speak about anything obscene? Have you ever seen Him commit sin? So? And can you believe that God would let Him work such great deeds, if He were a sinner? You are foolish, I tell you, foolish slow-witted and ignorant like country bumpkins who for the first time see a mountbank at a market and believe what he says. That's what you are like. Consider whether those who are wise and open-minded allow themselves to be seduced by the words of false disciples, who are the true enemies of the Innocent, of our Jesus, Whom you do not deserve to have as a son of our town! Consider whether Johanna of Chuza, I mean the wife of Herod's superintendent, Johanna, the princess, leaves Mary! Consider whether... Am I doing the right thing in telling you? Of course! I am doing the right thing because I am not speaking just for the sake of speaking, but to convince you all. Last month, did you see that beautiful wagon that came to our village and stopped outside Mary's house? Do you remember? The one whose tilt was as beautiful as a house? Well, do you know who was in it and who came out of it to prostrate himself at Mary's feet? Lazarus of Theophilus, Lazarus of Bethany, do you understand that? The son of the chief magistrate of Syria, of the noble Theophilus, the husband of Eucheria of the tribe of Judah and of the family of David! Jesus' great friend. The richest and most learned man in Israel, both with regard to our history and to that of the whole world. The friend of the Romans. The benefactor of the poor. And above all the man who was raised from

the dead after being in his sepulchre for four days. Did he leave Jesus to believe the Sanhedrin? You say that he did so because Jesus raised him from the dead? No. No, because he knows who is the Christ, Who is Jesus. And do you know what he came to tell Mary? To tell Her to be ready because he will take Her back to Judaea. See? As if he, Lazarus, were Mary's servant! I know because I was there when he came in and greeted Her prostrating himself on the floor, on the poor bricks in the little room, dressed as he was like Solomon, a man accustomed to carpets, he was there, on the floor, kissing the hem of Our Lady's dress saying: "Hail, Mary, Mother of my Lord. I, Your servant, the last of Your servants, have come to speak to You of Him and to place myself at Your disposal". See? I was so moved... that when he greeted me as well calling me: "brother in the Lord", I was not able to speak one word. But Lazarus understood, because he is intelligent. And he slept in Joseph's bed and sent his servants ahead to Sephoris to wait for him. Because he was going to his estates at Antioch. And he told the women to be ready, because at the end of this month he will come and pick them up to spare them the fatigue of the journey. And Johanna will join the caravan with her wagon to take the women disciples of Capernaum and Bethsaida. And does all that mean nothing to you? »

At last good Alphaeus of Sarah can take breath amid the group standing in the middle of the square. And Aser and Ishmael and also Jesus' two cousins, Simon and Joseph - Simon more openly, Joseph more reticently - help him by approving what he said.

Joseph says: «Jesus is not an illegitimate son. If He needs to notify anything, He has relatives here who are willing to become His ambassadors. And He has faithful and powerful disciples, like Lazarus. Lazarus has not mentioned what the others say.»

«And we are His disciples as well. Before we were ass-drivers and as stupid as our asses. But now we are His disciples and we also are capable of saying: "Do this or do that" » says Ishmael.

«But the sentence hanging at the door of the synagogue was brought by a messenger of the Sanhedrin and it bears the stamp of the Temple » some say objecting.

«That is true. So? Since all over Israel we have the reputation of being able to judge the Sanhedrin for what it really is, and we are consequently despised as rogues, are we going to believe that the Temple is wise only with regard to this? So do we no longer know what scribes, Pharisees and chiefs of Priests are? » replies Alphaeus.

«That is true. Alphaeus is right. I have decided to go down to Jerusalem and hear from true friends what is the situation. And I am going tomorrow » says Joseph of Alphaeus.

«And will you stay there? »

«No, I will come back. And I will go back again for Passover. I cannot be away from home for a long time. It is a difficult task I am undertaking, but it is my duty to do so. I am the head of the family and I am responsible for Jesus being in Judaea. I insisted that He should go there... Man errs in judging. I thought that it was a good thing for Him. Instead... May God forgive me! But I must at least follow the consequences of my advice at close quarters, in order to comfort my Brother » says Joseph of Alphaeus in his slow haughty way of speaking.

«That is not what you used to say. But you have been allured as well by the friendship of the mighty ones. Your eyes are clouded by vanity » says a Nazarene.

«The friendship of might people does not allure me, Eliakim. But my Brother's behaviour convinces me. If I made a mistake and I now mend my ways, I prove to be a just man. Because to err is human, but to be stubborn is beastlike.»

«And do you think that Lazarus will really come? Oh! we want to see him! A man that comes back from death, what is he like? He must be dazed, somehow... frightened. What does he say of his stay among the dead? » many ask Alphaeus of Sarah.

«He is just like you and me. Cheerful, lively, tranquil. He does not speak of the other world, as if he did not remember. But he remembers his agony.»

«Why did you not tell us that he was here? »

«Of course! To let you invade the house! I withdrew myself. Some delicacy is necessary, isn't it? »

«But when he comes back will it not be possible for us to see him? Let us know. You will certainly be the caretaker of Mary's house, as usual.»

«Certainly! It's a grace to be near Her. But I will not inform anybody. You will have to do it yourselves. A wagon is easily seen, and Nazareth is not Antioch or Jerusalem so that such a large wagon may pass by unnoticed. Mount guard... and help yourselves. But that is something vain. Ensure at least that His town may not have the reputation of being foolish by believing the words of our Jesus' enemies. Don't believe them! Don't believe those who say that He is Satan or those who provoke you to rise in His name. You would repent one day. Then if the rest of Galilee fall into the trap and believe what is not true, so much the worse for them. Goodbye. I am going because it is getting dark...» And he goes away happily, having defended Jesus.

The others remain to discuss. But although they are divided into two fields and the more numerous is unfortunately the one of those who swallow everything, the proposal of Jesus' few friends prevails in the end, and they decide not to become excited and accept false charges or invitations to rise until the other towns in Galilee do so, as «at present they are more cunning than Nazareth and laugh in the false ambassadors' faces » says Aser, the disciple.