

THE LIFE OF MARY AFTER CHRIST'S ASCENSION

The Blessed Virgin Goes with John To the Neighborhood of Ephesus

About one year after the Crucifixion of Our Lord, Stephen was stoned, though no further persecution of the Apostles took place at that time. The rising settlement of new converts around Jerusalem, however, was dissolved, the Christians dispersed, and some were murdered. A few years later, a new storm arose against them. Then it was that the Blessed Virgin, who until that time



had dwelt in the small house near the Coenaculum and in Bethania, allowed herself to be conducted by John to the region of Ephesus, where the Christians had already made settlements. This happened a short time after the imprisonment of Lazarus and his sisters by the Jews and their setting out over the sea. John returned again to Jerusalem, where the other Apostles still were. James the Greater was one of the first of the Apostles who, after the division of the different countries had been made, left Jerusalem and started for Spain. I saw him on his departure in Bethlehem, where he concealed himself in the Crib Cave and then with his companions secretly wandering through the country, for there were spies in search of them with orders to prevent their leaving Palestine. But James had friends in Joppa, and he succeeded in embarking. He sailed first to Ephesus in order to visit Mary, and thence to Spain. Shortly before his death, he visited Mary and John a second time in their home at Ephesus. Here Mary told him that his death would soon take place in Jerusalem. She encouraged and consoled him. James took leave of her and his brother John, and started for Jerusalem. It was at this period that he was brought into contact with Hermogenes and his pupil, both of whom he converted by his miracles. James was several times apprehended and taken before the Synagogue. I saw that shortly before Easter, while he was preaching on a hill in an open square of Jerusalem, he was arrested. It

must have been about this time, for I saw the customary encampments around the city. James was not imprisoned long. He was sentenced to death in the same place of trial as Jesus. The whole place, however, had undergone a change. Those sites upon which Jesus had trodden were no longer in existence, and I have always thought that none other ever after trod the same. I saw James led out toward Mount Calvary. He continued his preaching all along the way, and thereby made many converts. When they bound his hands, he remarked: "Ye can bind my hands, but ye cannot bind the blessing, ye cannot bind my tongue!" A lame man was sitting by the roadside. He called to James, begging him to extend his hand and help him. James responded: "Come thou to me, and reach out thine hand to me!" The lame man arose, seized the fettered hands of the Apostle, and was cured. I saw also the man that had denounced him. He was named Josias. His heart smote him. He hurried to the Apostle and begged forgiveness. He declared himself for Christ and was likewise put to death. James asked him whether he desired Baptism, and when Josias answered yes, he embraced and kissed him, saying: "Thou wilt be baptized in thy blood!" I saw a woman running with her blind child to James on the place of execution, and imploring its restoration to sight.

James was at first stationed near Josias on an elevated place, and the sentence proclaimed aloud. Then he was laid on a large stone, his hands bound to it, his eyes blindfolded, and his head struck off. This took place in the twelfth year after Jesus' death, or between 46 and 47 after the Birth of Christ. I did not see James present at the death of the Blessed Virgin in Ephesus. There was another in his place, a relative of the Holy Family, and one of the first among the seventy-two disciples. Mary died in the year 48 after the Birth of Christ, thirteen years and two months after Christ's Ascension. This was shown me in numbers, not in writing. First, I saw IV, and then VIII, which denoted the year 48; lastly, I saw XIII, and two full months. The Blessed Virgin's dwelling was not in Ephesus itself, but from three to four hours distant. It stood on a height upon which several Christians from Judea, among them some of the holy women related to her, had taken up their abode. Between this height and Ephesus glided, with many a crooked curve, a little river. The height sloped obliquely toward Ephesus. From the southeast one beheld the city as if lying just before him, at the foot of a mountain, but on nearer approach, he found the latter stretching still further away. From Ephesus, before which I saw great avenues with yellow fruit strewing the ground, narrow footpaths led up to this wild, overgrown height, upon which, to the circumference of about an hour, stretched a very solitary but fertile plain covered with smooth-trunked, wide-spreading trees, and

containing clean rocky caves. These latter had, by means of light woodwork, been converted into hermitages by the early Christian settlers who had fled thither for refuge. These abodes, along with others that stood alone scattered here and there over the whole country, gave the region the appearance of a little village. From the top of this elevated plain, which was nearer to the sea than Ephesus, one could see both the city itself and the sea with its numerous islands. Not very far from the Christian settlement rose a castle whose occupant appeared to be a deposed king. John often visited him and finally converted him. At a later period, this place became a bishopric. Among the Christians settled here, I saw women, children, and some men. Not all of these people had intercourse with the Blessed Virgin. Only some holy women came now and then for a visit, or to render her some assistance, for they saw to her needs. The locality was very retired and seldom visited by anyone, for no highway ran through it. The people of Ephesus did not trouble themselves about the little colony, and so they lived as if forgotten. The soil was fruitful, and the settlers owned some gardens and orchards. The only animals I saw in this place were wild goats.

Before John brought the Blessed Virgin to this settlement, he had built for her a dwelling of stone very similar to her own at Nazareth. It stood among trees, and was divided into two apartments by the fireplace in the center. The fire was on the earth opposite the entrance, in a kind of furnace formed by the wall, which rose up on either side like steps to the roof of the house. In it was cut the flue, from which the smoke escaped through a tube that protruded above the flat roof.

The front room of the house was separated from the back by wicker screens placed on either side of the fireplace. Similar screens rested against the walls, right and left, the whole length of the house. They were used to form little apartments when needed, and could be easily put aside when the room was to be used as one. Mary's maidservant used one of them as a sleeping apartment, and the others were occupied by the holy women of the settlement when they happened to come on a visit of some length.

To the right and left on either side of the fireplace, light doors opened through the wicker partition into the two back rooms, whose end walls were rounded and very pleasing to the eye, covered as they were with neatly wrought woodwork. The roof was rounded on the sides, and the beams above it were bound with wainscoting and twisted work, and ornamented with some simple imitation of foliage. In the most remote space of the rounded end Mary had her oratory, before which hung a curtain. Here in a niche in the wall was a kind of closet which, like a certain kind of tabernacle, could be made to open and close by revolving. In it was a Crucifix about the

length of one's arm. The arms were set into the trunk in an obliquely raised direction like that of Christ. This most simply carved Crucifix was, I think, made by the Blessed Virgin herself and John. It was constructed of three different kinds of wood: the whitish trunk was cypress wood, one arm of a brownish color was cedar, the other, which was yellowish, was made from wood of the palm tree. The top piece that supported the inscription was of polished yellow olive wood. The foot of the Crucifix was set firmly in a stone like Christ's in the rock of Calvary. At its foot lay a strip of parchment on which were inscribed some words of the Saviour. The figure representing the Lord was formed simply of dark-colored lines cut into the cross. On either side of the Crucifix stood a pot of flowers. I saw also lying near the cross a little linen, of which I had the intuitive knowledge that it was the one with which the Blessed Virgin, after the taking down of the Sacred Body from the cross, had cleansed the wounds from blood; for as soon as I saw the little cloth, I had a vision of that exercise of her most sacred mother-love, in which she held the little linen in the same way as does the priest at the holy Mass when he is purifying the chalice. Mary had a similar Crucifix, though only half as large, in the alcove in which she slept.

On the right of the oratory and against the rounded wall, was the alcove of the Blessed Virgin. It was formed of two lightly woven screens of sapwood in its natural color. These stood at the head and the foot of the couch respectively; in front hung two curtains of tapestry that could be drawn and looped to either side. The couch was placed along the wall, which too was hung with tapestry. It was the length and breadth of a small bed, and consisted of a wooden frame about a foot and a half high. Over it a tester was stretched and fastened on the knobs of the four corners. The sides of the frame also were covered with tapestry, which hung down to the floor and was fringed with tassels. A round roll served as a pillow. The cover was of brownish checkered stuff. The ceiling of this little sleeping apartment was the loftiest in the house. It too was formed of wickerwork and, from the four corners to the center, ran up into a concave dome from which was suspended a branched lamp.

Here, on the last days before her death, I saw the Blessed Virgin lying entirely enveloped in a white sleeping sheet; even her arms were wound up in it. The veil over her head was thrown up in cross-folds, but when conversing with men, she lowered it. Even her hands were uncovered only when she was alone. During those last days, I did not see her taking anything excepting the juice of a grapelike fruit with yellow berries, which the maid pressed out for her into a little cup.

By the wall to the left of the oratory and directly opposite the alcove, a

recess was formed by means of wicker screens in which clothes and other things were kept. Besides some veils and girdles and the upper garment that Mary always wore when making the holy Way of the Cross, there hung in that recess two long robes, one white, the other sky-blue. The latter was a very delicate blue, and there was likewise a mantle of the same color. This was the robe in which Mary was married to Joseph. I saw too that Mary kept near her many of the garments of her Divine Son, among them His woven tunic.

From that recess to the alcove extended a curtain by which the oratory could be concealed. When at work, Mary used to sit before this curtain and just between the recess and the alcove.

In this most silent and solitary little dwelling, from which the abodes of the other settlers were distant about a quarter of an hour, lived the Blessed Virgin alone with her maid, who procured for her the little that she needed for her support. There was no man in the house, and only at times was Mary visited by John or some other travelling Apostle and disciple. Once I saw John entering the house, He was thin and looked older. He wore a long white garment girdled in folds, but which was now tucked up. He laid it aside on entering, and taking out another from under his mantle, put it on instead. There was an inscription in letters on this second one. He laid a maniple on his arm. The Blessed Virgin was in a little private room from which the maid conducted her to John. She was enveloped in a white robe and looked very weak, Her face was, as it were, transparent and white as snow. She appeared to be soaring upward on the wings of her ardent desires. Her whole life after her Son's Ascension into Heaven was stamped by an ever-increasing longing to be freed from earth. She retired with John to her oratory, pulled a band, or strap, upon which the tabernacle in the niche revolved and disclosed the Crucifix of the length of one's arm standing between two vases of natural flowers. After Mary and John had prayed long on their knees before the Crucifix, the latter arose and took from a metal box a roll of fine woolen stuff. Opening this, he took out a small piece of white bread, in shape four-cornered, that was carefully folded in white linen cloths. It was the Most Blessed Sacrament, which with some words he gave to Mary. He presented to her no cup.