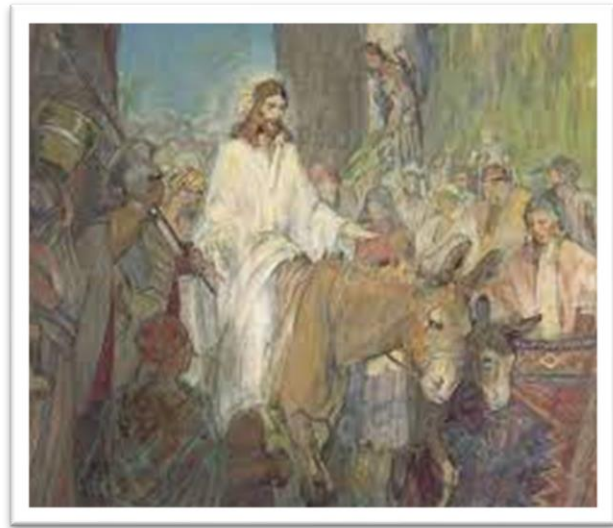


Jesus Leaves Aruma and Goes to Thanath-Silo and Aser-Machmethat

After Jesus had once more earnestly addressed the Pharisees, telling them that they had lost the spirit of their religion, that they now held only to empty forms and customs which, however, the devil had managed to fill with himself, as they might see if they looked around on the pagans, He left Aruma and went to the city Thanath-Silo, outside of which stood one of the inns



established by Lazarus. He instructed the men and women whom He found at work on the immense corn ricks in the field. He introduced into His discourse parables relating to agriculture and the various kinds of land. These people were slaves and followers of the Samaritan creed. That evening Jesus taught in the synagogue. It was the feast of the new moon, consequently the synagogue and other public buildings were hung with wreaths of fruit. A great many sick had assembled in front of the synagogue. They were mostly afflicted with paralysis, gout, or issue of blood, and some were possessed. Jesus blessed numbers of children, both sick and well. Many of those that were paralyzed in their hands and on one side owed their sickness in most cases to their labors in the field and to lying on the damp earth at night or in the daytime when in a profuse perspiration. I saw such cases in the fields outside of Gennabris, in Galilee.

Jesus went next day into the harvest field and cured many whom He found there. Some people brought out from the city baskets of provisions, and a great entertainment was spread in one of the tabernacles that still remained standing. Jesus afterward delivered a long discourse, in which He spoke against unnecessary and extravagant care for the preservation of life. He brought forward the example of the lilies. They do not spin, and yet they are clothed more beautifully than Solomon in all his glory. Jesus said many beautiful things to the same effect of the different animals and objects around. He also taught that they should not profane the Sabbath and feasts by working for gain. Works of mercy, such as delivering a man or a beast from danger, were allowable; but as for the harvest, they should commit the care of its fruits to God's providence and not on account of threatening weather gather them in on the Sabbath. Jesus' words on this subject were very beautiful and detailed. It was almost the same kind of a sermon as that

on the Mount, for He often repeated the words: "Blessed are these! Blessed are those!"

Such instructions were much needed by the people of this place, for they were extraordinarily covetous and greedy for gain in trade and agriculture. They were wholly engrossed in their calling, and their servants were overburdened. They were charged with the collection of the tithes from the surrounding country. The sums thus coming into their possession they used to hold back for a considerable time, in order to put them out at usury. The products of their fields they sold. The old people worked in wood, for which they often betook themselves to the neighboring forest. I saw them cutting in large numbers the wooden heels worn under the sandals. There were many fig orchards around the city. There were no Pharisees here. The people were rather coarse, but very proud of their descent from Abraham. The sons of Abraham, however, whom the Patriarch had settled here, had soon degenerated. They intermarried with the Sichemites, and when Jacob returned to that region the law of circumcision was already forgotten. Jacob had intended to fix his residence there, but was deterred from doing so by Dina's seduction. He knew the children of Abraham who dwelt in those parts, and sent them presents. Dina had gone to take a walk by the well of Salem. Some of the people in the fields, those to whom her father had sent presents, invited her to visit them. She was accompanied by her maids, but leaving them, she ventured alone into the fields, desirous of gratifying her curiosity. It was then that the Sichemite saw and ensnared her.

Wherever Jesus went, the sick were collected in crowds. We shall not be surprised at this when we remember that, as soon as His presence became known in any place, they were hurried thither from the huts and villages around the whole country.

Here in Thanath the Jews and Samaritans lived separate, the former being the more numerous. Jesus preached to the Samaritans also, though remaining the while on Jewish territory. His hearers were gathered on the boundary of their own quarter at the head of one of the streets. He also cured their sick. The Jews of Thanath were not so hostile toward them as were those of other places, since here they held not so rigorously to the Law, and especially to the observance of the Sabbath.

Jesus cured here in diverse ways. Some cures were effected at a distance by a glance and a word, some by a mere touch, some by imposition of hands; over some of the sick He breathed, others He blessed, and the eyes of some He moistened with saliva. Many of the sick happening to touch Him were cured, and others at a distance were cured without His even turning to them. Toward the close of His career, He seemed to be more rapid in His

movements than in the beginning. I thought that He made use of these different forms of healing to show that He was bound to no single one, but could produce a similar effect by the use of varied means. But He once said Him-self in the Gospel that one kind of devil was to be expelled in one way, another in a different way. He cured each in a manner analogous to his malady, his faith, and his natural temperament, as in our own time we behold Him chastising some sinners and converting others. He did not interrupt the order of nature, He merely loosened the bonds that bound the sufferer. He cut no knots, He untied them, and He did everything so easily for He possessed the key to all. Inasmuch as He had become the God-Man, He treated those that He cured in a human manner. I had already been told that Jesus had healed in these different forms in order to instruct the disciples how to act in similar cases. The various forms of blessings, consecrations, and Sacraments made use of by the Church, find their models in those then observed by Jesus.

Toward noon Jesus left the city accompanied by several persons. He proceeded along a tolerably broad highway toward the northeast. It led to Scythopolis with Doch upon the right and Thebez on the left at the eastern extremity of the mountain upon which Samaria was built. He descended toward the Jordan and into a valley through which a stream flowed to the river. Here He encountered a crowd of people, most of them Samaritan laborers who, eager to receive instruction, had hurried thither in advance of Him. He found them waiting for Him, and He stopped to address them. To the left of the valley and upon a height stood a little place consisting of one long row of houses. It was called Aser-Machmethat, and into it Jesus entered toward evening. Abelmahula may have been seven hours distant. Mary and the holy women passed by Aser on their journeys to Judea when they did not take the mountainous road past Samaria. The Blessed Virgin and Joseph took this route on their flight into Egypt. That same evening Jesus went to the well of Abraham and to the pleasure gardens outside of Aser-Machmethat, and there cured many sick. Among them were two Samaritans who had been brought thither. Jesus was very affectionately received by the people of this place. They were very good and each one coveted the honor of showing Him hospitality. But He put up outside the place with a family whose mode of life was patriarchal in its simplicity. The father was named Obed. Jesus and all the disciples were very lovingly entertained by him. The road through the country from Thanath-Silo to this place was far wider and better than that through Akrabis to Jericho. The latter was so very narrow, so uneven and rocky that beasts of burden could with difficulty traverse it with their loads of merchandise.

It was under the tree near Abraham's Well that, in the time of the Judges, the false prophetess carried on her sorcery and gave advice that always turned out disastrously. She used to perform all kinds of ceremonies there at night by the light of torches, calling up by her incantations singular figures of animals, etc. She was nailed to a board by the Madianites at Azo. This took place under the same tree beneath which Jacob buried the idols plundered from the Sichemites.

Joseph with the Blessed Virgin and Jesus had lain concealed a day and a night near that tree on their flight into Egypt, for Herod's persecution had been proclaimed and it was very unsafe to travel in these parts. I think too that, on the journey to Bethlehem when Mary was so chilled by the cold, it was near this tree she suddenly became warm.

Aser-Machmethat lay across a mountain ridge that descends toward the valley of the Jordan. The southern side of the mountain belonged to Ephraim; the northern, to Manasses. On the former stood Machmethat, on the latter Aser, the two forming but one city called Aser-Machmethat. The boundary ran between them. The synagogue was in Aser. The inhabitants of the two quarters were dissimilar in their customs, and had little communication. Machmethat, the quarter belonging to the tribe of Ephraim, extended up the mountain in one long line of houses; below in the valley was the little stream by which Jesus had instructed the Samaritans who had preceded Him thither. A little beyond this point and nearer to the entrance of the city was the beautiful well surrounded by baths and pleasure gardens. The well, access to which was by a flight of steps, consisted of a solid basin in whose terraced center rose the tree to which I have more than once alluded. From this reservoir the surrounding bathing cisterns were fed. It was here that Jesus cured the two Samaritan women.

Obed's house was on his large estate outside of Machmethat. He was a kind of chief, or head magistrate of the place. The inhabitants of this quarter were for the most part related to one another, and several of the families were either those of Obed's own children or those of his other relatives. In his character of eldest and chief, Obed managed their business, directed their agricultural and pastoral affairs. His wife, with her housekeeping and the female portion of the family, occupied a separate part of the house. She was still quite a vigorous old Jewess. She had a kind of school, and taught the young girls of the other families all sorts of handiwork, Charity, wise counsels, and industry reigned throughout the whole house. Obed had eighteen children, some of whom were still unmarried. Two of his daughters had wedded husbands from Aser, the quarter belonging to Manasses. This was a cause of regret to Obed, as I learned from his conversation with Jesus,

for the people of Aser were not the best in the world and their customs were very different from those of their sister city.

Next morning Jesus preached near the well to an audience of about four hundred people, all ranged around on the grass of the terraced declivity. He spoke in significant terms of the approach of the Kingdom, of His own mission, of penance, and of Baptism. He also prepared some for the last-named ceremony, among whom were Obed's children. After that, accompanied by Obed, He went to some dwellings in the fields where He consoled and instructed the servants and aged persons who had had to remain at home while the others repaired to His sermon. Obed conversed long with Jesus of Abraham and Jacob, who had once sojourned in this region, and of Dina's misfortune. The inhabitants of Machmethat looked upon themselves as descendants from Judah. Holofernes, the Median adventurer, had at his invasion quite ruined this place, and after that the ancestors of these people settled here with the firm determination to live together according to their ancient, pious customs. This they had done down to the present. Obed followed the ancient usages of the pious Hebrews, and revered Job in an especial manner. He amply provided for his sons and daughters on their settlement in life, and at every marriage in his family he gave large offerings to the poor and to the Temple.

Jesus blessed numbers of children everywhere presented to Him by their mothers.

That afternoon there was a grand entertainment given in the open space around Obed's house and in the courtyard under the tabernacles which were still standing everywhere. Almost all the inhabitants of Machmethat took part in it, especially the poor of the whole region. Jesus went around to all the tables, blessing and teaching and lovingly helping to the various dishes. He related many parables. The women were seated in a separate tabernacle. Afterward Jesus visited and cured some sick in their homes, and again blessed many little ones presented to Him by their mothers, who stood ranged in a row. There were a great many children present, especially around Obed's wife, for she had many pupils. Obed had a little son of about seven years, and with him Jesus exchanged many words. The boy lived in the field at the house of one of his elder brothers. He was an exceedingly pious child, and often knelt out in the field at night to pray. This did not please the elder brother, and Obed himself felt a little anxiety about the boy. But Jesus' words restored peace to their anxious hearts. After His death, the boy joined the disciples.

In the war of the Machabees, Machmethat remained true and rendered much help to the Jews. Judas Maccabeus himself sojourned here at different

times. Obed took Job for his model in all things, and led in the bosom of his large family a life altogether patriarchal.

When Jesus went into the other part of the city, the quarter belonging to the tribe of Manasses, He found near the synagogue some Pharisees (not the best disposed toward Himself) and many arrogant citizens. They were friends and supporters of those that collected the taxes and imposts for the Romans, which they afterward put out at usury. Jesus taught, and then cured the sick. The Pharisees and proud citizens treated Jesus with coldness and indifference. They were displeased at His having visited the simple, rustic people of Machmethat before honoring their own city with His presence. They had no love for Him. And yet, they were ambitious for His first visit as a learned Doctor to be to themselves, rather than to their unsophisticated neighbors, upon whom they looked down.

Jesus, accompanied by a crowd of people, went back to the well outside Machmethat and began preparations for the ceremony of Baptism. Many confessed their sins in general terms, while many others, going in private to Jesus, made them known in detail, and asked for penance and pardon. Saturnin and Judas Barsabas performed the ceremony of Baptism, the other disciples acting as sponsors. It took place in an immense bathing cistern. After the Baptism, Jesus returned to Aser for the Sabbath. He preached from 18:23, of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrhah, and then taking up the miracles recorded of Eliseus, He spoke in strong language on the necessity of penance. His words were not pleasing to the Pharisees, for He reproached them with their contempt for the publicans while they themselves were secretly practicing usury, though hiding the fact under their sanctimonious exterior.

After He had again taught in the synagogue at Aser, His subjects being Abraham and Eliseus, He cured many sick, some of them demoniacs and others possessed by the spirit of melancholy. That afternoon a dinner was given in the public house. The Pharisees had issued invitations; but ignoring that fact, Jesus invited many poor people, as also the inhabitants of Machmethat, and ordered the disciples to defray all expenses. While at table He had a warm discussion with the Pharisees, whereupon He related the parable of the unjust debtor who desired the remission of his own debts, though oppressing others on account of theirs. Jesus applied the parable to themselves. They extorted taxes from the poor and at the same time deceived the Romans by pocketing the proceeds and declaring the people unable to pay; or again, by levying high taxes, only a third part of which was delivered over to the Romans. The Pharisees tried to justify themselves, but Jesus silenced them with the words: "Render unto Caesar that which is

Caesar's, and to God that which is God's." In their fury they exclaimed: "What's that to Him?"

A fast day commemorative of the putting out of Sedecias' eyes by Nabuchodonosor having begun, Jesus preached in the fields among the shepherds, also at Abraham's Well. He spoke of the Kingdom of God, declaring that it would pass from the Jews to the Gentiles, the latter of whom would even attain preeminence over the former. Obed afterward remarked to Jesus that if He preached to the Gentiles in that strain, they might possibly become proud. Jesus replied very graciously, and explained that it was just on account of their humility that they should reach the first place. He warned Obed and his people against the feeling of conscious rectitude and self-complacency to which they were predisposed. They in a measure distinguished themselves from their neighbors, and on account of their well regulated life, their temperance, and the fruits of salvation amassed thereby, they esteemed themselves good and pleasing in the sight of God. Such sentiments might very easily end in pride. To guard against such a consequence, Jesus related the parable of the day laborers. He instructed the women also in their own separate pleasure garden, in which was a beautiful bower. To them He related the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins. While so engaged, Jesus stood, and they sat around Him in a terraced circle, one above another. They sat on the ground with one knee slightly raised, and on it resting their hands. All the women on such occasions wore long mantles or veils that covered them completely; the rich had fine, transparent ones, while those of the poor were of coarse, thick stuff. At first these veils were worn closed, but during the sermon they were opened for the sake of comfort.

About thirty men were here baptized. Most of them were servants and people from a distance who had come hither after John's imprisonment. Jesus took a walk with the people through the vineyards, the fruits of which were ripening for the second time that year.

Jesus left Machmethat with five disciples (the two disciples of John had gone back to Machaerus) and descended the road by which He had come. The little stream in the valley to the south of Aser-Machmethat had its source in the fountain at which Jesus had given Baptism by means of the disciples. He proceeded about three hours westward along the valley at the southern foot of the mountain upon which Thebez and Samaria lay. He gave instructions to the shepherds whom He met along the way, and toward noon reached the field that Jacob had destined for the special inheritance of Joseph. (48:22). It lay in a valley to the south of Samaria and extended from east to west, one hour long and a half broad. A brook flowed westward through that valley.

From the vineyards on the heights around could be seen Sichern a couple of hours to the south. It had everything to make it desirable: vineyards, pasture lands, grain, orchards and water, besides the necessary buildings, all in good order. The landlord of this property was leaseholder, for it now belonged to Herod. It was the house at which the Blessed Virgin and the holy women awaited the coming of Jesus from Sichern, and in which He cured the boy. The people here were very good. They assembled in crowds to hear Jesus' instructions, after which they tendered to Him a dinner in the open air which He graciously accepted. This special patrimony of Joseph was not the field near Sichern which Jacob had purchased from Hemor. It was another property upon which the Amorrhites had a footing along with the rightful occupants. They were dwelling on it at the time of purchase, and Jacob was obliged to drive them off. He did not relish their proximity, fearing lest his own people would intermarry among them. A kind of single combat or amicable contention took place between the two parties. It had been agreed upon that the one who broke his opponent's sword, or shield, or struck it out of his hand, should take possession of the land, the other having to retire. They decided the question in another way also, namely, by shooting at a certain boundary with the bow and arrow. Jacob and the Amorrhite leader took their places opposite each other, each attended by a certain number of his own followers standing in the rear. The struggle began. Jacob conquered his adversary, and the latter had to remove. After the contest they made a treaty. All this took place soon after the purchase of the field. Jacob dwelt eleven years near Sichern.

From this place Jesus again ascended the mountain northwestwardly to Meroz, a city on the southern side of a mountain on whose northern side stood Ataroth. Meroz was built on a higher elevation than Samaria, as well as Thebez off to the north and Aser-Machmethat to the east.