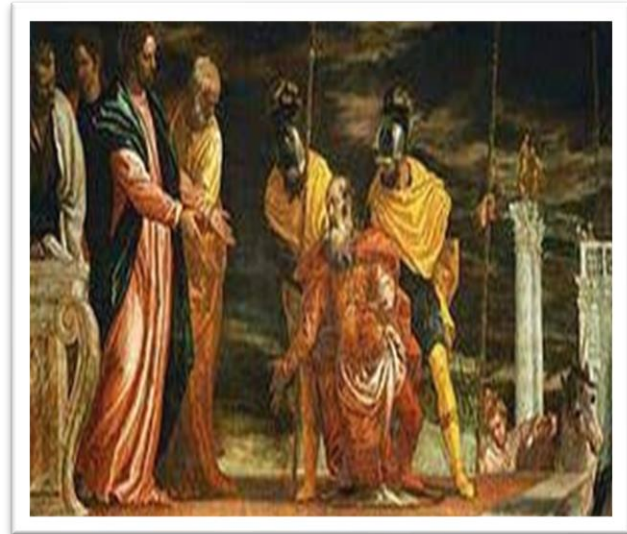


Cure of the Son of a Pagan Officer

It would be difficult to describe the fruitfulness of the region around Giskala. The people were now gathering the second crop of grapes, different kinds of fruits, aromatic shrubs, and cotton. A kind of reed grew in these parts, the lower leaves of which were large, the upper ones small. From it distilled a sweet juice like resin. Here, too, were seen those trees whose fruit was used for the decoration of the tabernacles. The fruit was called the apples of the Patriarchs, from the fact of their having been brought hither from the warm eastern countries by the Patriarchs. These trees were trained against walls forming an espalier, although their trunk was often more than a foot in diameter. Here also were found many plants producing cotton, whole fields of sweet-scented shrubs, and the aromatic herb from which nard is made. Figs, olives, and grapes were in abundance, while magnificent melons lay in countless numbers in the fields, the roads to which were lined with palms and date trees. In the midst of this luxuriance of nature were great herds of cattle grazing in the most beautiful meadows covered with grass and herbs. I saw likewise large trees with great, thick nuts, the wood of which was exceedingly tough and solid. As Jesus was walking through the fields and gardens into which the people were fast gathering, groups collected around Him here and there. He instructed them in parables taken from their ordinary circumstances and occupations. The pagan children mingled familiarly with those of their Jewish neighbors in harvest time, but they were somewhat differently clothed. In the house in which Paul was born there lived at this period an officer in command of the pagan soldiers of the citadel. He was called Achias. He had a sick son seven years old, to whom he had given the name of Jephthe after the Jewish hero. Achias was a good man. He sighed for help from Jesus, but none of the inhabitants of Giskala would intercede for him with the Lord. The disciples were all engaged: some busy around their Master, others scattered among the harvesters to whom they were telling of Jesus and repeating His instructions, while some others had already been dispatched as messengers to Capharnaum and into the neighboring districts. The townspeople had no liking for the officer, whom they did not care to have so near them. They would have been glad had he fixed his abode elsewhere. They were, besides,



not very friendly in disposition, and even showed very little enthusiasm over Jesus Himself. They went carelessly on with their work, listening to His words, but taking no lively, active interest. The anxious father therefore made bold to follow Jesus, but at a distance. At last he approached Him, stepped before Him, bowing, and said: "Master, reject not Thy servant! Have pity on my little son lying sick at home!" Jesus replied: "It behooveth to break bread to the children of the household before giving it to the stranger who stands without." Achias responded: "Lord, I believe the Promise. I believe that Thou hast said that such as believe in Thee are not strangers but Thy children. Lord, have pity on my son!" Then said Jesus: "Thy faith hath saved thee!" and followed by some of the disciples, He went into the house in which Paul was born and in which Achias now resided.

It was rather more elegant than the generality of Jewish dwellings, though its arrangements were pretty much of the same style. There was a courtyard in front, from which one entered a broad hall, on either side of which were sleeping apartments, or spaces, cut off from the main portion by movable screens. In the center of the house arose the fireplace. Around it lay large rooms and halls, provided with broad stone benches near the walls, upon which lay rugs and cushions. The windows were high up in the building. Achias conducted Jesus into the interior of the house, and some of the servants carried to Him the boy in his bed. The wife of Achias followed veiled. She bowed timidly, and stood somewhat behind the rest in anxious expectation. Achias was radiant with joy. He called in all his domestics who, full of curiosity, were standing at a distance. The boy was a beautiful child of about six years. He had on a long woolen gown and a striped fur around his neck and crossed on the breast. He was dumb and paralyzed, wholly unable to move. But he looked intelligent and affectionate, and cast upon Jesus a most touching glance.

Jesus addressed to the parents and all present some words on the vocation of the Gentiles, the nearness of the Kingdom, of penance, and of the entrance into the Father's house by Baptism. Then He prayed, took the boy from his little bed up in His arms, laid him on His breast, bowed low over him, put His fingers under his tongue, set him down on the floor, and led him to the officer who, with the mother trembling for joy, rushed forward with heartfelt tears to meet and embrace their child. The little fellow, likewise stretching out his arms toward his parents, cried: "O father! O mother! I can walk, I can again speak!" Then Jesus said: "Take the boy! Ye know not what a treasure has been given to you in him. He is now restored to you, but he will one day be redemanded of you!" The parents led the child again to Jesus and in tears threw themselves with him at His feet, uttering thanks. Jesus blessed

the boy and spoke to him most kindly. The officer begged Jesus to step with him into an adjoining apartment and take some refreshment. This He did along with the disciples. They partook, standing, of bread, honey, small fruits, and some kind of beverage. Jesus again spoke with Achias, telling him that he should go to Capharnaum and there receive Baptism, and that he might join Zorobabel. Achias and his domestics did this later on. The boy Jephthe afterward became a very zealous disciple of St. Thomas.

The soldiers of Giskala, in quality of guards, assisted at the Crucifixion of Christ. They were on similar occasions employed as police.

Jesus bade farewell to the home of the happy Achias. He spoke with His disciples of the child and of the fruits of salvation he was destined to reap. He told them also that from that same house one had already gone out who would accomplish great things in His Kingdom.