

The Family of Lazarus

The father of Lazarus was named Zarah, or Zerah, and was of very noble Egyptian descent. He had dwelt in Syria, on the confines of Arabia, where he held a position under the Syrian king; but for services rendered in war, he received from the Roman emperor property near Jerusalem and in Galilee. He was like a prince, and was very rich. He had acquired still greater wealth by his wife

Jezebel, a Jewess of the sect of the Pharisees. He became a Jew, and was pious and strict according to the Pharisaical laws. He owned part of the city on Mount Zion, on the side upon which the brook near the height on which the Temple stands, flows through the ravine. But the greater part of this property, he had bequeathed to the Temple, retaining, however, in his family some ancient privilege on its account. This property was on the road by which the Apostles went up to the Cenacle, but the Cenacle itself formed no longer a part of it. Zarah's castle in Bethania was very large. It had numerous gardens, terraces, and fountains, and was surrounded by double ditches. The prophecies of Anna and Simeon were known to the family of Zarah, who were waiting for the Messiah. Even in Jesus' youth, they were acquainted with the Holy Family, just as pious, noble people are wont to be with their humble, devout neighbors.



The parents of Lazarus had in all fifteen children, of whom six died young. Of the nine that survived, only four were living at the time of Christ's teaching. These four were: Lazarus; Martha, about two years younger; Mary, looked upon as a simpleton, two years younger than Martha; and Mary Magdalen, five years younger than the simpleton. The simpleton is not named in Scripture, not reckoned among the Lazarus family; but she is known to God. She was always put aside in her family, and lived altogether unknown. Magdalen, the youngest child, was very beautiful and, even in her early years, tall and well-developed like a girl of more advanced age. She was full of frivolity and seductive art. Her parents died when she was only seven years old. She had no great love for them even from her earliest age, on account of their severe fasts. Even as a child, she was vain beyond expression, given to petty thefts, proud, self-willed, and a lover of pleasure.

She was never faithful, but clung to whatever flattered her the most. She was, therefore, extravagant in her pity when her sensitive compassion was aroused, and kind and condescending to all that appealed to her senses by some external show. Her mother had had some share in Magdalen's faulty education, and that sympathetic softness the child had inherited from her. Magdalen was spoiled by her mother and her nurse. They showed her off everywhere, caused her cleverness and pretty little ways to be admired, and sat much with her dressed up at the window. That window-sitting was the chief cause of her ruin. I saw her at the window and on the terraces of the house upon a magnificent seat of carpets and cushions, where she could be seen in all her splendor from the street. She used to steal sweetmeats, and take them to other children in the garden of the castle. Even in her ninth year she was engaged in love affairs.

With her developing talents and beauty, increased also the talk and admiration they excited. She had crowds of companions. She was taught, and she wrote love verses on little rolls of parchment. I saw her while so engaged counting on her fingers. She sent these verses around, and exchanged them with her lovers. Her fame spread on all sides, and she was exceedingly admired.

But I never saw that she either really loved or was loved. It was all, on her part at least, vanity, frivolity, self-adoration, and confidence in her own beauty. I saw her a scandal to her brother and sisters whom she despised and of whom she was ashamed on account of their simple life.

When the patrimony was divided, the castle of Magdalum fell by lot to Magdalen. It was a very beautiful building. Magdalen had often gone there with her family when she was a very young child, and she had always entertained a special preference for it. She was only about eleven years old when, with a large household of servants, men and maids, she retired thither and set up a splendid establishment for herself.

Magdalum was a fortified place, consisting of several castles, public buildings, and large squares of groves and gardens. It was eight hours east of Nazareth, about three from Capharnaum, one and a half from Bethsaida toward the south, and about a mile from the Lake of Genesareth. It was built on a slope of the mountain and extended down into the valley which stretches off toward the lake and around its shores. One of those castles belonged to Herod. He possessed a still larger one in the fertile region of Genesareth. Some of his soldiers were stationed in Magdalum, and they

contributed their share to the general demoralization. The officers were on intimate terms with Magdalen. There were, besides the troops, about two hundred people in Magdalum, chiefly officials, master builders, and servants. There was no synagogue in the place; the people went to the one at Bethsaida.

The castle of Magdalum was the highest and most magnificent of all; from its roof one could see across the Sea of Galilee to the opposite shore. Five roads led to Magdalum, and on everyone at one half-hour's distance from the well-fortified place, stood a tower built over an arch. It was like a watchtower whence could be seen far into the distance. These towers had no connection with one another; they rose out of a country covered with gardens, fields, and meadows. Magdalen had men servants and maids, fields and herds, but a very disorderly household; all went to rack and ruin.

Through the wild ravine at the head of which Magdalum lay far up on the height, flowed a little stream to the lake. Around its banks was a quantity of game, for from the three deserts contiguous to the valley the wild beasts came down to drink. Herod used to hunt here. He had also near his castle in the country of Genesareth a park filled with game.

The country of Genesareth began between Tiberias and Tarichea, about four hours' distance from Capharnaum; it extended from the sea three hours inland and to the south around Tarichea to the mouth of the Jordan. The rising valley with the baths near Bethulia, artificially formed from a brook nearby, lay contiguous to this region, and was watered by streams flowing to the sea. This brook formed in its course several artificial lakes and waterfalls in different parts of the beautiful district which consisted entirely of gardens, villas, castles, parks, walks, orchards, and vineyards. The whole year round found it teeming with blossoms and fruits. The rich ones of the land, and especially of Jerusalem, had here their villas and gardens. Every portion was under cultivation, or laid off in pleasure grounds, groves, and verdant labyrinths, and adorned with walks winding around pyramidal hillocks. There were no large villages in this part of the country. The permanent residents were mostly gardeners and custodians of the property, also shepherds whose herds consisted of fine sheep and goats. There were besides all kinds of rare animals and birds under their care. No street ran through Magdalum, but two roads from the sea and from the Jordan met here.