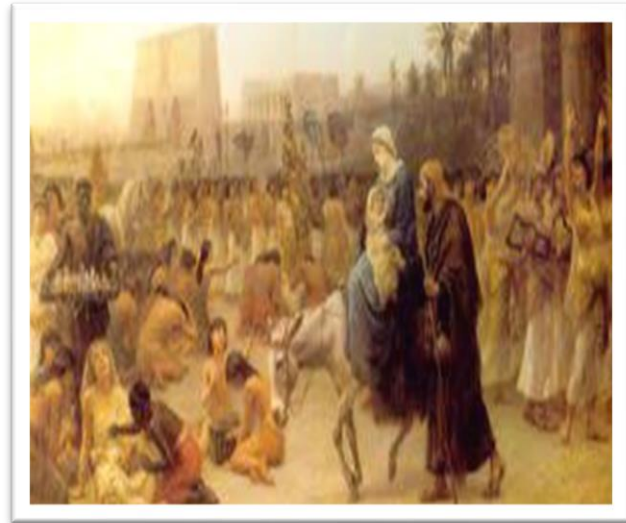


The Holy Family Reach Heliopolis

I saw the Holy Family on their way to Heliopolis. From their last night lodgings they were accompanied thither by a good man who, I think, was one of the workmen on that canal over which they had been ferried. They now crossed a long and very high bridge over a wide river (the Nile), which appeared to have several branches, and came to a place before the city gate which was surrounded by a kind of promenade. Here on a tapering pedestal, stood a great idol with the head of an ox, and in its arms something like the figure of a swathed child. The idol was encompassed by a circle of benches, or tables of stone upon which the worshippers laid their sacrifices. Not far off was a very large tree, under which the Holy Family sat down to rest.



They had scarcely seated themselves when the earth began to quake, the idol tottered, and tilted over. A hue and cry instantly arose from the people, and many of the workmen on the canal in the neighborhood came rushing up. But the good man who had accompanied the Holy Family started with them for the city. They were already at the opposite side of the idol place when the terrified crowd, with menacing and abusive words, angrily surrounded them. Suddenly the earth heaved, the huge tree fell, its roots breaking up out of the ground, and there arose a lake of muddy water into which the idol splashed. It sank so deep that one could scarcely see its horns, and some of the most wicked of the bystanders sank with it. The Holy Family now entered the city unmolested, and put up near an idolatrous temple, a large stone building containing many rooms. Some of the idols in the temples of the city were likewise overturned.

Heliopolis is also called On. Aseneth, wife of the Egyptian Joseph, resided here with the pagan priest Putiphar, and here also Dionysius the Areopagite studied. The city extends to a great distance around the many-branched river. One sees it from afar lying high above the general level. The river flows through it under the arches that support some of the buildings. Great logs lie in some parts of the river branches, placed there to enable the inhabitants to cross. I saw the ruins of enormous buildings, huge masses of heavy masonry, towers half standing, and even temples almost entire. I saw, too, pillars like towers, around the outside of which one could mount to the top.

The Holy Family dwelt under a low colonnade, in which there were other dwellings besides their own. The supporting pillars were rather low, some round, some square, and above ran a highway for the accommodation of vehicles and pedestrians. Opposite this colonnade was a pagan temple with two courts. Joseph put up before their little abode a screen of light woodwork. There was room for the ass, also. The screen, or light wall that Joseph put up, was of the same kind as he was accustomed to make. I remarked behind a similar screen and set up against the wall, an altar consisting of a small table covered with red and over that a white, transparent cloth; on it stood a lamp.

I saw St. Joseph working at home, and often also abroad. He made long rods with round knobs at the ends, little three-legged stools with a handle by which to grasp them, and a certain kind of basket. He made, also, a great many light, wicker partitions, and little, light towers, some hexagonal, others octagonal. They were formed of long, thin boards, tapering toward the top and ending in a knob. They had an entrance, and were large enough to allow a man to sit inside as in a sentry box; they had steps outside, up which one could mount. I saw little towers like these standing here and there before the pagan temples, also on the flat roofs of the houses. People used to sit in them; perhaps they were watch houses, or maybe they were intended as screens from the sun.

I saw the Blessed Virgin weaving tapestry and doing another kind of work.

For the latter she used a staff on the top of which a knot was fastened. I cannot say whether she was spinning or not. I often saw people visiting her and the little Infant Jesus. The Child lay on the ground by Mary's side, in a kind of cradle like a little boat. Sometimes I saw it raised on a frame like a sawing-jack. There were not many Jews in Heliopolis, and I saw them going about with a downcast look as if they had no right to live there.

North of Heliopolis, between it and the Nile, which there divides into several branches, lay the little territory of Goshen, and in it a little place cut up by canals, among which dwelt numbers of Jews whose religious ideas were very much confused. Several of them became acquainted with the Holy Family, and Mary did all kinds of feminine work for them, receiving as payment bread and other provisions. The Jews in the Land of Goshen had a temple, which they compared with the Temple of Solomon; but it was very different. Not far from his dwelling, Joseph built an oratory where the resident Jews, who possessed no such place of their own, used to assemble with the Holy Family for prayer. It was surmounted by a light cupola which could be thrown open, thus enabling the worshippers to stand under the open sky. In the center of the hall stood an altar, or table of sacrifice, covered, as usual, with

red and white; on it lay rolls of parchment. The priest, or teacher, was a very old man. The men and women were not so separated from one another at prayer as in Palestine; the men stood on one side, the women on the other. The Holy Family dwelt a little more than a year at Heliopolis. They had much to suffer from the Egyptians who hated and persecuted them, on account of their overturned idols; and as the houses were all solidly built, Joseph could not find work at his trade. They left Heliopolis, therefore, but not before they had learned from an angel of the slaughter of the Bethlehemite babes. Both Mary and Joseph were deeply grieved, and the Child Jesus, who was now able to walk, being a year-and-a-half old, shed tears the whole day.