

## The Holy Family Among Robbers

At some distance from the road by which they were travelling, a light glimmered through the dark-ness. It proceeded from a hut belonging to a gang of robbers, who had hung a light on a neighboring tree, thus to allure travelers. The road too, here and there, was broken by pits over which cords with little bells were stretched. The ringing of these bells gave notice to the robbers of the presence of luckless wayfarers. All on a sudden, I saw a man with about five comrades surrounding the Holy Family. All were actuated by wicked intentions. But when they looked at the Child, I saw a glittering ray like an arrow penetrating



the heart of the leader, who straightaway commanded his comrades to offer no injury to the strangers. Mary also saw the ray. The robber now took the Holy Family to his home, and told his wife how strangely his heart had been moved. The people were at first shy and shamefaced, something very unusual for them; still they approached, little by little, and gathered around the Holy Family, who had seated themselves in a corner on the ground. Some of the men went in and out, while the woman brought to Mary little rolls, fruits, honeycomb, and cups containing something to drink. The ass also was placed under shelter. The woman cleared out a small room for Mary and brought her a little tub of water in which to bathe the Child. She also dried the swathing bands for her at the fire. The husband was deeply impressed by the demeanor of the Holy Family, and especially the appearance of the Child. He said to his wife, "This Hebrew Child is no ordinary child. Beg the Lady to allow us to wash our leprous child in His bathing water. It may, perhaps, do it some good." The wife went to request the favor of the Blessed Virgin; but before she had time to speak, Mary bade her take the water she had used for Jesus' bath, wash the sick child in it, and it would become cleaner than it was before attacked by the disease. The boy was about three years old and stiff from leprosy. His mother carried him in and put him into the bath. Wherever the water touched him, the leprosy fell like scales to the bottom of the tub; the boy became clean and well. The mother was out of herself with joy; she wanted to embrace Mary and the Child Jesus. But Mary, stretching out her hand, warded her off; she would allow neither the Child nor herself to be touched by her. She told her to dig a hole deep down to a rock, and pour the water just used into it, that she might always have it for similar purposes.

Mary spoke with her long, and exacted from her a promise to embrace the first opportunity of escape from her present abode. The people were all delighted; they stood around the Holy Family gazing at them in wonder. During the night, other members of their band came to the hut, and to them the boy's cure was related. The robbers' reverential bearing toward the Holy Family was so much the more remarkable, since I saw that night many travelers, attracted to their hut by the light, immediately taken prisoner and carried deep into the forest to an immense cave that served for their special storehouse. It lay under a thicket, the entrance closely concealed. In it were clothes, carpets, meat, goats, sheep, and innumerable other stolen things, all in profusion. I saw also boys about seven or eight years old whom the robbers had kidnapped. They were cared for by an old woman who lived in the cave.

Mary slept none that night; she sat upon her couch on the floor perfectly still. At early dawn the Holy Family started again on their journey in spite of the robber and his wife, who wanted them to stay longer. They took with them a supply of provisions put up by their grateful host and hostess who also accompanied them a part of the way, that they might escape the snares. The robber and his wife took leave of the Holy Family with expressions of deep feeling, uttering these remarkable words: "Remember us wherever you go!" Upon hearing them, I had a vision in which I saw that the cured boy afterward turned out to be the Good Thief who on the cross said to Jesus: "Remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." The robber's wife, after some time, joined those that dwelt around the balsam garden. The Holy Family went from here further on into the desert. When they had again lost all trace of anything like a path, they were a second time surrounded by all kinds of animals, among them huge winged lizards and even serpents, which pointed out the way to them.

At a later period, when unable to advance through the sandy plain in which they were, I saw a very lovely miracle. On either side of the road sprouted up the plant Rose of Jericho, with its crisped branches, its tiny flowers in the center, and its straight root. On they went now right joyously, watching as far as the eye could see these plants springing up, and so across the whole plain. I saw that it was revealed to the Blessed Virgin that, at some future day the people of the country would gather these roses and sell them to travelers in exchange for bread. The name of this region sounded like Gaza, or Goze. I saw the Holy Family arrive at a town and district called Lepe or Lape, in which were numerous canals and ditches with high dams. I saw them crossing the water on a raft. Mary sat on a log, and the ass was standing in something like a trough, or tub. Two ugly, brown-complexioned, half-naked

men with flat noses and protruding lips, ferried them over. Our holy travelers came now to the house on the outskirts of the town; but the occupants were so rough and pitiless that, without saying a word, Mary and Joseph moved further on. I think this was the first pagan Egyptian city they had yet reached. They had made, up to this time, ten days' journey in the Jewish country and then in the wilderness.

I next saw the Holy Family on Egyptian territory, in a level, green country full of pasture grounds. In the trees were stationed idols like swathed dolls, or like fishes wrapped in broad bands upon which were figures or letters. Occasionally, I saw people fat, but short in stature, approaching these idols and venerating them. The Holy Family sought a little rest under the cattle shed, the cattle going out of their own accord to make room for them. They were in want of food, having neither bread nor water. Mary no longer had nourishment for her Child, and no one gave them anything. Every species of human misery was experienced by them during this flight.

At last, some shepherds drew near to water their cattle. They, too, would have gone away without giving them anything, had not Joseph's entreaties moved them to unlock the well and allow them to have a little water.

Again, I saw the Holy Family weary and exhausted in a forest, at whose egress stood a slender date tree, the fruit all clustered on top. Mary approached the tree, the Child Jesus on her arm, prayed and raised the Child up to it. Instantly the tree bowed down its top as if kneeling, so that Mary could gather all its fruit. It afterward remained in that position. I saw Mary dividing a quantity of the fruit among the naked children who had run after them from the last village.

At a quarter of an hour's distance from this tree, stood another unusually large one of the same kind, very high, and hollow like an old oak. In it the Holy Family lay concealed from the people that followed them. That evening I saw them taking shelter within the walls of a ruined place, where they stayed overnight.