

Jesus in Iscariot and Dothan. Cure of Issachar

Next morning Jesus left the inn with the disciples and journeyed eastward to Iscariot, distant not quite an hour. On the swampy ground of a deep ravine stood a row of houses, about twenty-five, near a stream of water black and full of reeds. Here and there it was dammed so as to form pools for tanning. Very frequently this water



failed, and then they had to let in other sources. The cattle for slaughter belonging to Meroz were pastured around these parts. When needed in Meroz, they were slaughtered here, then flayed, and the hide handed over to the tanners of Iscariot. The ravine in which the little place lay was directly to the north of Machmethat. The tanner's trade, on account of the odors attending it, was held in detestation by the Jews. Although for tanning the hides of the slaughtered cattle pagan slaves and others of the most despised races were needed, yet in Meroz they dwelt apart from the other inhabitants. In Iscariot no calling was carried on but tanning, and it seemed to me that most of the houses of this place belonged to old Simeon, the uncle of Judas.

Judas was very dear and quite useful to his old uncle in his leather trade. Sometimes he dispatched him with asses to purchase raw hides, sometimes with prepared leather to the seaport towns, for he was a clever and cunning broker and commission merchant. Still he was not at this time a villain, and had he overcome himself in little things, he would not have fallen so low. The Blessed Virgin very often warned him, but he was extremely vacillating. He was susceptible of very vehement, though not lasting repentance. His head was always running on the establishment of an earthly kingdom, and when he found that not likely to be fulfilled, he began to appropriate the money entrusted to his care. He was therefore greatly vexed that the worth of Magdalen's ointment had not passed as alms through his hands. It was at the last Feast of Tabernacles in Jesus' lifetime that Judas began to go to the bad. When he betrayed Jesus for money, he never dreamed of His being put to death. He thought his Master would soon be released; his only desire was to make a little money.

Judas was, here in Iscariot, very obliging and ready to serve; he was perfectly at home. His uncle, the tanner Simeon, a very busy and active man, received Jesus and the disciples at some distance from the place, washed their feet, and offered the customary refreshments. Jesus and the disciples visited his house where were his family, consisting of his wife, his children, and his servants.

Jesus paid a visit to the opposite side of the place where, in the midst of a field, was a kind of pleasure garden in which the tabernacles were still standing. All the inhabitants of the place were here assembled. Jesus taught upon the parable of the sower and the different kinds of soil. He exhorted the people to let the instructions they had heard from Him on the mountain near Meroz find good soil in their hearts.

Jesus afterward, with the disciples and Simeon's family, took a little repast standing. During it old Simeon begged Him to admit Judas his nephew, whom he praised in many ways, to a participation in His teachings and His Kingdom. Jesus responded in pretty much the same terms as He had used toward Judas himself: "Everyone may have a share therein, provided he is resolved not to relinquish his portion to another." Jesus performed no cures here, for the sick had already been healed on the mountain.

Jesus and the disciples went from Iscariot back toward the west almost as far as the inn. Then turning to the north, they traversed the valley having the mountain upon which Jesus had taught to the left, turned somewhat northwestwardly, then again to the north, and journeyed along a low mountain terrace toward Dothan, which could be seen lying low in the eastern vale of the plain of Esdrelon. To the east rose the mountains above, and to the west lay the valley below it.

Jesus was accompanied by three troops of men who, having been present at His instructions on the mountain, were now returning in bands to their homes for the Sabbath. When one party left Him, another came up to bear Him company. It was almost three hours from the inn to Dothan, a place as large as Munster. I had a vision in which I saw that it was here that the soldiers sent by Jeroboam to seize Eliseus were struck blind. Dothan had five gates and as many principal streets; it was traversed likewise by two highways. One of the latter led from Galilee down to Samaria and Judea; the other came from the opposite side of the Jordan and ran through the valley of Apeca and Ptolomais on the sea. Trade in wood was carried on in Dothan. On the mountain chain around here and near Samaria there was still much wood; but across the Jordan near Hebron, and at the Dead Sea, the mountains are quite bare. I saw in the neighborhood of Dothan much work going on under tents in the preparation of wood. All sorts of beams for the

different parts of ships were put into shape, and long, thin slats were prepared for wicker partitions. Outside the gates on the highways that crossed each other in Dothan were several inns.

Jesus went with the disciples to the synagogue, where a crowd was already assembled, among them many Pharisees and Doctors. They must have had some intimation of Jesus' coming, for they were so polite as to receive Him in the court outside the synagogue, wash His feet, and present to Him the customary refectation. Then they conducted Him in and handed Him the roll of the Law. The sermon was on the death of Sara, Abraham's second marriage with Ketura, and the Dedication of Solomon's Temple.

The Sabbath instructions over, Jesus went to an inn outside the city. There He found Nathanael the bridegroom, two sons of Cleophas and His Mother's eldest sister, and a couple of the other disciples who had come hither for the Sabbath. There were now about seventeen disciples with Him. The people from the house on Lazarus' estate near Ginaea, where Jesus stopped recently when He went to Ataroth, were also here to celebrate the Sabbath.

Dothan was a beautiful, well-built old city, very agreeably situated. In the rear, though at a considerable distance, arose a mountain chain, and in front it looked out upon the delightful plain of Esdrelon. The mountains of this region are not so steep and rugged. Peak rises above peak, and the roads are better. The houses were of the old style, like those in David's time. Many had little turrets on the corners of the flat roofs capped by large domes, or cupolas, in which an observer could sit and view the surrounding locality. It was from such a cupola that David saw Bethsabee. There were also on the roofs galleries of roses and even of trees.

Jesus entered many of the fore courts of the dwellings, where He found sick whom He cured. The occupants standing at their doors implored Him to come in, which He did accompanied by two of the disciples. They also in different places begged the disciples to intercede for them, which they accordingly did. Jesus went likewise to the place in which the lepers abode, separated from all others, and there He healed the sufferers. There were many lepers in this city. It may have been on account of their frequent communication with strangers for trading purposes, for besides the trade in wood, the inhabitants of Dothan carried on other branches of industry. They imported carpets, raw silk, and similar goods which they unpacked and again exported.

I saw goods like the above at the house of the sick man whom Jesus was entreated by Nathanael to visit. Nathanael lived at his house. It was a very elegant looking dwelling surrounded by courtyards and open colonnades, and situated not far from the synagogue. The occupant was a wealthy man of

about fifty years named Issachar, who was suffering from dropsy. Notwithstanding his miserable condition, Issachar had a few days previously to the coming of Jesus espoused a young woman named Salome, aged twenty-five years. This union was according to legal prescription analogous to that of Ruth and Booz—it gave Salome the right to inherit Issachar's property. The evil tongues of the city, especially the Pharisees, found great fault with this marriage, which at once became the general talk. But Issachar and Salome put their trust in Jesus, for at His last visit to this part of the country, they had recommended their affairs to Him.

The family had been long acquainted with Jesus, even during the lifetime of Salome's parents, for Mary and Joseph when journeying from Nazareth to visit Elizabeth had found hospitality with them. This happened shortly before the Paschal solemnity. Joseph went with Zachary from Hebron to Jerusalem for the feast, after which he returned to Hebron and then went home leaving Mary there. Thus had Jesus, while still in His Mother's womb, received hospitality in this house, to which He now came thirty-one years later as the Saviour of mankind, to discharge in the person of their sick son the debt of gratitude He owed to the goodness of the parents.

Salome was the child of this house and the widow of Issachar's brother, Issachar himself being the widower of Salome's sister. The house and all the property were to revert to Salome, for neither she nor Issachar had had children by the previous union. They were childless and the only descendants of an illustrious race. They had espoused each other trusting to the merciful healing power of Jesus. Salome was allied to Joseph's family. She was originally from Bethlehem, and Joseph's father was accustomed to call her grandfather by the title of brother, although he was not really his brother. They had a descendant of the family of David among their forefathers who, I think, was also a king. His name sounds like Ela. It was through respect to this ancient friendship that Mary and Joseph were there entertained. Issachar was of the tribe of Levi.

Upon His entrance into the house Jesus was met by Salome, her maids, and the other servants of the household. Salome cast herself at Jesus' feet and begged her husband's cure. Jesus went with her into the chamber of the sick man, who lay covered up on his couch, for he was dropsical as well as paralyzed on one side. Jesus saluted him and spoke to him words full of kindness. The sick man was very much touched and gratefully acknowledged the salutation, though he could not rise. Then Jesus prayed, touched the sufferer, and gave him His hand. Instantly the sick man arose, threw another garment around him, and left his bed, when he and his wife cast themselves at Jesus' feet. The Lord addressed them a few words of exhortation, blessed

them, promised them posterity, and then led them out of the chamber to their assembled household, who were all filled with joy. The miraculous cure was kept a secret all that day.

Issachar invited Jesus and all His followers to stay that night at his house and, after the exercises of the synagogue, to dine with him. Jesus accepted the invitation, and then went to preach in the synagogue. Toward the end of His discourse the Pharisees and Sadducees began to strive against Him. From the explanation of Abraham's marriage with Ketura, He had come to speak of marriage itself. The Pharisees broached that of Issachar and Salome. They declared it insane in a man so sick and old to marry a young woman. Jesus replied that the couple had married in obedience to the Law, and He asked how could they, who held so strictly to the same, blame them. They answered by asking how He could look upon such a union as prescribed by the Law, since so old and sick a man could hope for no blessing on his marriage, consequently such an affair was no other than a scandal. Jesus responded: "His faith has preserved to him the fruit of wedlock. Do ye set limits to the almighty power of God? Has not the sick man married in obedience to the Law? In trusting in God and believing that He will help him, he has done excellently well. But this is not the cause of your indignation. Ye hoped that this family would die out for want of heirs, and then ye would get their property into your own hands." Then He cited the example of many devout old people whose faith had been rewarded with posterity, and said many other things upon the subject of matrimony. The Pharisees were furious, but had not a word in reply.

The Sabbath over, Jesus left the synagogue and, accompanied by the disciples, went to Issachar's, where a grand banquet had been prepared for Him. Jesus, the disciples related to Him, and Issachar himself sat at one table, while Salome, the wife, came and went doing the honors of the same. The other disciples ate in a side hall. Previously to sitting down Jesus had healed several sick. It was dusk, and the miracles were performed by torchlight outside the synagogue and near Issachar's dwelling, where the sick had gathered. I saw among the disciples Judas Iscariot, Bartholomew, and Thomas, also an own brother and a stepbrother of the last named. Thomas had two stepbrothers. They had come thither for the Sabbath from Apeca, seven hours distant, and they put up at Issachar's, Thomas being well-known to him on account of his commercial pursuits. Though he had acquaintances among the disciples, he had never yet spoken to Jesus, for he was anything but obtrusive. James the Less also had come from Capharnaum for the Sabbath, likewise Nathanael, the son of the widow Anna, eldest daughter of Cleophas, who was now living with Martha. Nathanael was the youngest of

her sons engaged at Zebedee's fishery. He was about twenty years old, gentle and amiable, with something of the appearance of John. He had been reared in the house of his grandfather, and was nicknamed "Little Cleophas," in order to distinguish him from the other Nathanaels. I learned that on this Sabbath when I heard Jesus say: "Call little Cleophas to Me!"

The entertainment consisted of birds, fish, honey, and bread. There were in this city numbers of pigeons, turtledoves, and colored birds which ran like hens around the houses, and often took flight to the beautiful plain of Jezrael. During the meal, Issachar spoke of Mary. He recalled the fact of her having been in that house in her youth, and said that his wife's parents had often related the circumstance, telling how young and beautiful and pious she was. He expressed the hope that God, who had cured him through Joseph's Son (he guessed not his Saviour's origin), would likewise give him posterity. All the disciples found hospitality at this house. There were large, open porticos around it on which beds were prepared for them, separated from one another by movable partitions. Of the Dothanites, some were very good, and some very bad. On account of the antique style of its houses, Dothain compared with the other cities in its neighborhood as Cologne with our other German towns.

Next morning when Jesus and the disciples went to walk outside the city, Thomas approached and begged Jesus to admit him to the number of His disciples. He promised to follow Him and fulfill all His commands for, as he said, by His preaching and by the miracles he had witnessed, he was convinced of the truth of what John and all the disciples of his acquaintance had said about Him. He begged, also, to be allowed a part in His Kingdom. Jesus replied that he was no stranger to Him and that He knew that he, Thomas, would come to Him. But Thomas would not subscribe to that, He asserted that he had never before thought of taking such a step, for he was no friend of novelty, and had only now determined upon it since he was convinced of His truth by His miracles. Jesus responded: "Thou speakest like Nathanael. Thou dost esteem thyself wise, and yet thou talkest foolishly. Shall not the gardener know the trees of his garden? The vinedresser, his vines? Shall he set out a vineyard, and not know the servants whom he sends into it?" Then He related a similitude of the cultivation of figs upon thorns. Two of John's disciples who had been sent to Jesus by the Baptist had an interview here with Jesus and then returned to Machaerus. They had been present at the sermon on the mountain near Meroz and had witnessed the miracles there performed. They belonged to the disciples that had followed their master to the place of his imprisonment and had received his instructions outside his prison. They were warmly attached to him. As they

had never witnessed any of Jesus' actions, John had sent them to Him that they might be convinced of the truth of what he himself had told them of Him. He commissioned them to beg Jesus in his name to declare openly and precisely who He was and to establish His Kingdom on earth. These disciples told Jesus that they were now convinced of all that John had announced of Him, and they inquired whether He would not soon go to free John from prison. John, they said, hoped to be released through Him, and they themselves were longing for Him to establish His Kingdom and set their master at liberty. They thought that would be a more profitable miracle than even His curing the sick. Jesus replied that He knew that John was longing and hoping soon to be freed from imprisonment, and that he should indeed be released, but that He should go to Machaerus and deliver John who had prepared His ways, John himself never even dreamed. Jesus ended by commanding them to announce to John all that they had seen and say to him that He would fulfill His mission.

I do not know whether John was aware that Jesus was to be crucified and that His Kingdom was not to be an earthly one. I think that he thought Jesus, after converting and freeing the people, would establish a holy Kingdom upon earth.

Toward noon Jesus and the disciples returned to the city and to Issachar's, where many people were already assembled. The mistress and domestics were busy preparing the noonday meal. Back of the house was a charming spot in the center of which was a beautiful fountain surrounded by summerhouses. The fountain was regarded as sacred, for it had been blessed by Eliseus. There was a handsome chair nearby for the preacher's use and around it an enclosed space with shade trees, in which quite a number might assemble for instructions. Several times in the year, especially at Pentecost, public instructions were given here. There were besides, in the region of the fountain, places with long, stone stalls or narrow terraces, where caravans and the crowds going to Jerusalem at the Paschal time could rest and take refreshments. Issachar's house stood near enough to command a view of the fountain and its surroundings. The arrangements of the resting place and the customs observed there were also superintended from Issachar's, where a kind of freight business was carried on. The caravans unloaded and unpacked their goods here for Issachar to forward to other places, and very frequently the merchants and their servants received hospitality at his house, although it was not a public inn. Issachar's business was like that of the father of the bride of Cana in Galilee. The beautiful fountain had one inconvenience. It was so deep that the water could be pumped only with great fatigue. When pumped up, it ran into basins standing around.

There were crowds assembled around the fountain on the invitation of Jesus and Issachar. Jesus, from the teacher's chair, delivered a discourse to the people on the fulfillment of the Promise, the nearness of the Kingdom, on penance and conversion, and of the way to implore the mercy of God and to receive His graces and miracles. He alluded to Eliseus, who had formerly taught in this same place. The Syrians sent to take him prisoner were struck with blindness. Then Eliseus conducted them to Samaria into the hands of their enemies, but far from allowing them to be put to death, he entertained them hospitably, restored their sight, and sent them back to their king. Jesus applied this to the Son of Man and the persecution He endured from the Pharisees. He spoke also for a long time of prayer and good works, related the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, and told His hearers that they ought to adorn and perfume themselves on their fast days instead of parading their piety before the people. The inhabitants of this place, who were very much oppressed by the Pharisees and Sadducees, were greatly encouraged by Jesus' teaching. But the Pharisees and Sadducees, on the contrary, were enraged upon seeing the joyous multitude and hearing the words of Jesus. Their rage increased when they beheld Issachar in perfect health going around among the people, joyfully helping the disciples and his own servants to distribute food to them as they seated themselves along the stone benches. This sight so exasperated them that they stormed violently against Jesus. It looked as if they were about to take Him into custody. They began again to rail at His curing on the Sabbath. Jesus bade them listen to Him calmly. He placed them in a circle around Him and, making use of His customary argument, said to the chief among them: "If on the Sabbath you should happen to fall into the well here, would you not wish to be drawn out at once?" And so He continued to speak until they slunk back, covered with confusion. After this Jesus left the city with several of His disciples, and descended into the valley that runs from south to northwest of Dothan. Issachar had distributed large alms in Dothan, and sent also to the inn of the little community asses with various necessaries. The provisions and beverages provided by the disciples and which had become somewhat stale, he caused to be exchanged for better. He gave to each of them a cup like those used at Cana, and a flat jug, or pitcher, made of white material with a ring by which it could hang. The stoppers were a kind of sponge tightly compressed. The jugs contained a refreshing drink made of balm. He gave likewise to each disciple a sum of money for alms and other necessities. Judas Iscariot and many other disciples returned from Dothan to their own homes. Jesus kept with Him only nine, among whom were Thomas, James the Less, Jude Barsabas, Simon Thaddeus, little Cleophas (Nathanael),

Manahem, and Saturnin.

After Jesus' departure, the Pharisees recommenced their mockery and insults. They said to the people: "One can easily see who He is. He has allowed Himself to be sumptuously entertained by Issachar. His disciples are a set of lazy vagrants whom He supports and feasts at the expense of others. If He did right, He would stay at home and support His poor Mother. His father was a poor carpenter. But that respectable calling does not suit Him, and so He goes wandering around disturbing the whole country."

While Issachar was distributing his alms, he constantly repeated: "Help yourselves freely! Take freely! It is not mine. It belongs to the Father in Heaven. Thank Him, for it is only lent to me!"