

Jesus in Nazareth. The Three Youths. The Feast of Purim

From Sephoris Jesus took a byway around some country houses to Nazareth about two hours distant, teaching and consoling as He went. Among the disciples now with Him were two or three youths, sons of Essenian widows. Arrived at Nazareth, He put up with some acquaintances, and without being remarked visited



several good people. The Pharisees, with an outward show of respect but inwardly full of malice, called upon Jesus to ask Him what He now purposed doing and why He did not stay with His Mother, which questions He answered gravely and sharply. Preparations were going on all around for the fast day observed in remembrance of Esther, also for that of the Feast of Purim immediately to follow. Jesus taught very zealously in the synagogue. That night I again saw Jesus praying with outstretched arms, and again appearing on the Sea of Galilee to bear help in a storm. This time the distress was much greater, and many more vessels were in danger. I saw Jesus laying His hand on the helm without the helmsman's seeing Him. The three rich youths of Nazareth who had once before vainly proffered their petition to Him to be received as disciples came to Him again, reiterating their request. They almost knelt to Him, but He sent them away after pointing out certain conditions that had to be fulfilled before He would allow them to join His disciples. Jesus knew well that their views were wholly terrestrial, and that they could not understand Him. They wanted to follow Him because they saw in Him a philosopher, a learned Rabbi. After a time spent in His school, they could, as they thought, shine with a more brilliant reputation and do honor to their city Nazareth. They were besides somewhat vexed at seeing Him giving the preference to the poor sons of Nazareth rather than to themselves.

Until far into the night I saw Jesus with the old Essenian, Eliud of Nazareth. The holy man looked as if he would soon die of old age. He was no longer able for much, indeed he was almost bedridden. Jesus leaned on His arm at the bedside and talked with him. Eliud was entirely absorbed in God.

At the commencement of the Feast of Purim, a musical instrument, which stood on three feet, was again played on the roof of the synagogue. It was hollow with pipes running through it, the ends extending both above and below. By pushing the pipes in and out, the music was produced. Children also were playing on harps and flutes. Today in commemoration of Esther, the women and young maidens enjoyed certain rights and privileges in the synagogue. They were not separated from the men, they could even approach where the priests were. There was a pro-cession in the synagogue of children dressed fancifully, some in white, others in red. Then a maiden entered wearing around her neck an ornament somewhat frightful looking. It was a blood-red circle around her throat, as if she had been beheaded, and from it hung on her white garments, numerous knots of blood-red threads like so many streaks of blood from the wounded neck. She wore a magnificent mantle borne by train-bearers, and appeared to be enacting the principal part in some drama. Children and maidens followed her. She wore a high, pointed ornament on the forepart of her head and a long veil. In her hand she carried something, whether a sword or a scepter, I do not know. She was tall, and a maiden of great beauty. I do not know for certain what distinguished character she represented. It might, I think, have been Esther, or again, Judith, though not that Judith who slew Holofernes, for there was with her a maiden, who carried a beautiful basket containing presents for the chief priest. She presented to him many precious little shields, such as the priests wore sometimes on the forehead or the breast. In one corner of the synagogue, concealed by a curtain, lay upon a bed of state the effigy of a man, whose head the maiden struck off and took to the chief priest. Then, making use of the privilege granted to females on that day, she rebuked the priests for the principal faults they had committed during the year. That done, she withdrew. This privilege to rebuke the priests belonged to the women on certain other feasts also.

In the synagogue they read in turn from separate rolls the Book of Esther, Jesus also taking His turn to read. The Jews, especially the children, had little wooden tablets with hammers. When they pulled a string, the hammer struck a name inscribed on the tablet, while at the same time holders uttered some words. They did this as often as the name of Aman was pronounced. There were also great banquets. Jesus was present at that given to the priests in the grand public hall. The adornments of this feast were similar to those of the Feast of Tabernacles. There were numbers of wreaths, roses as large as one's head, pyramids made up entirely of flowers, and quantities of fruit. A whole lamb was on the table, and I gazed in wonder at the magnificence of the plates, glasses, and dishes. There was one kind of dish

many-colored and transparent, like precious stones. They looked as if formed of interwoven threads of colored glass. There was today a great exchange of gifts, consisting principally of jewels and handsome articles of apparel, such as robes, maniples, veils for the head, and sashes trimmed with tassels. Jesus, too, was presented with a holiday robe trimmed in like manner. But He would not keep it; He passed it to another. Many others likewise bestowed their presents on the poor, who were very bountifully remembered that day. After the banquet, Jesus and His disciples walked with the priests to the pleasure gardens, and the beautifully adorned teaching places near Nazareth. They had with them three rolls of writings, and I saw again the Book of Esther, out of which they read in turn. Crowds of youths and maidens followed them, but the latter listened to the discourse only at a distance. I saw also on that day men going around and taking up a tax. From Nazareth Jesus and His disciples went to Apheca about four hours distant, but returned to Nazareth for the following Sabbath and visited the dying Eliud. The priests of Nazareth could not comprehend where Jesus, in so short an absence, had come by so much knowledge. They could find nothing reprehensible in His teaching, though many were secretly envious of Him. They escorted Him part of the way when He left Nazareth with His disciples.