

Jesus Teaching in Azanoth. Second Conversion of Magdalen

About an hour to the south of the inn at Dothain lay the little town of Azanoth. It was built on an eminence upon which was a teacher's chair and, in earlier times, it had often been the scene of the Prophets' preaching. Through the activity of the disciples, the report had been spread throughout the whole region that Jesus was about to deliver a great instruction in that place, and in consequence of this report, multitudes were gathered there from all Galilee. Martha, attended by her maid, had journeyed to Magdalen in the hope of inducing her to be present at the instruction, but she was received very haughtily by her sister, with whom things had come to the worst. She was, on Martha's arrival, engaged at her toilet, and sent word that she could not speak to her then. Martha awaited her sister's appearance with unspeakable patience, occupying herself



meanwhile in prayer. At last the unhappy Magdalen presented herself, her manner haughty, excited, and defiant. She was ashamed of Martha's simple attire. She feared that some of her guests might see her, consequently she requested her to go away as soon as possible. But Martha begging to be allowed to rest in some corner of the house, she and her maid were conducted to a room in one of the side buildings where, either through design or forgetfulness, they were allowed to remain without food or drink.

It was then afternoon. Meanwhile Magdalen adorned herself for the banquet, at which she was seated on a richly decorated chair, while Martha and her maid were in prayer. After the revelry, Magdalen went at last to Martha, taking with her something on a little blue-edged plate and something to drink. She addressed Martha angrily and disdainfully, her whole demeanor expressive of pride, insolence, uneasiness, and interior agitation. Martha, full of humility and affection, invited Magdalen to go with her once more to the great instruction Jesus was going to deliver in the neighborhood. All Magdalen's female friends, Martha urged, those whom she had lately met, would be there and very glad to see her.

She herself (Magdalen) had already testified to the esteem in which she held Jesus, and she should now gratify Lazarus and herself (Martha) by going once more to hear Him preach. She would not soon again have the opportunity of hearing the wonderful Prophet and at the same time of seeing all her friends in her own neighborhood. She had shown by her anointing of Jesus at the banquet at Gabara that she knew how to honor greatness and majesty. She should now again salute Him whom she had once so nobly and fearlessly honored in public, etc., etc. It would be impossible to say how lovingly Martha spoke to her erring sister, or how patiently she endured her shamefully contemptuous manner. At last Magdalen replied: "I shall go, but not with you! You can go on ahead, for I will not be seen with one so miserably clothed. I shall dress according to my position, and I shall go with my own friends." At these words, the two sisters separated, for it was very late.

Next morning Magdalen sent for Martha to come to her room while she was making her toilet. Martha went, patient as usual and secretly praying that Magdalen might go with her and be converted. Magdalen, clothed in a fine woolen garment, was sitting on a low stool, while two of her maids were busily engaged washing her feet and arms and perfuming them with fragrant water. Her hair was divided into three parts above the ears and at the back of the head, after which it was combed, brushed, oiled, and braided. Over her fine woolen undergarment was put a green robe embroidered with large yellow flowers, and over that again a mantle with folds. Her headdress was a kind of crimped cap that rose high on the forehead. Both her hair and her cap were interwoven with numberless pearls, and in her ears were long pendants. Her sleeves were wide above the elbow, but narrow below and fastened with broad, glittering bracelets. Her robe was plaited.

Her under-bodice was open on the breast and laced with shining cords. During the toilet, Magdalen held in her hand a round, polished mirror. She wore an ornament on her breast. It was covered with gold, and encrusted with cut stones and pearls. Over the narrow-sleeved under dress she wore an upper one with a long flowing train and short, wide sleeves. It was made of changeable violet silk, and embroidered with large flowers, some in gold, others in different colors. The braids of her hair were ornamented with roses made of raw silk, and strings of pearls, interwoven with some kind of stiff transparent stuff that stood out in points. Very little of the hair could be seen through its load of ornamentation. It was rolled high around the face. Over this headdress, Magdalen wore a rich hood of fine, transparent material.

It fell on the high headdress in front, shaded the cheeks, and hung low on the shoulders behind.

Martha took leave of her sister, and went to the inn near Damna, in order to tell Mary and the holy women the success she had had in her efforts to persuade Magdalen to be present at the instruction about to be given in Azanoth. With the Blessed Virgin about a dozen women had come to Damna, among them Anna Cleophas, Susanna Alpheus, Susanna of Jerusalem, Veronica, Johanna Chusa, Mary Marcus, Dina, Maroni, and the Suphanite. Jesus, accompanied by six Apostles and a number of the disciples, started from the inn at Dothain for Azanoth. On the way, He met the holy women coming from Damna. Lazarus was among Jesus' companions on this occasion.

After Martha's departure, Magdalen was very much tormented by the devil, who wanted to pre-vent her going to Jesus' instruction. She would have followed his suggestions, were it not for some of her guests who had agreed to go with her to Azanoth, to witness what they called a great show. Magdalen and her frivolous, sinful companions rode on asses to the inn of the holy women near the Baths of Bethulia. Magdalen's splendid seat, along with cushions and rugs for the others, followed packed on asses.

Next morning Magdalen, again arrayed in her most wanton attire and surrounded by her companions, made her appearance at the place of instruction, which was about an hour from the inn at which she was stopping. With noise and bustle, loud talk and bold staring about, they took their places under an open tent far in front of the holy women. There were some men of their own stamp in their party. They sat upon cushions and rugs and upholstered chairs, all in full view, Magdalen in front. Their coming gave rise to general whispering and murmurs of disapprobation, for they were even more detested and despised in these quarters than in Gabara. The Pharisees especially, who knew of her first remarkable conversion at Gabara and of her subsequent relapse into her former disorders, were scandalized and expressed their indignation at her daring to appear in such an assembly.

Jesus, after healing many sick, began His long and severe discourse. The details of His sermon, I cannot now recall, but I know that He cried woe upon Capharnaum, Bethsaida, and Corozain. He said also that the Queen of Saba had come from the South to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but here was One greater than Solomon. And 10, the wonder! Children that had never yet

spoken, babes in their mothers' arms, cried out from time to time during the instruction: "Jesus of Nazareth! Holiest of Prophets! Son of David! Son of God!" Which words caused many of the hearers, and among them Magdalen, to tremble with fear. Making allusion to Magdalen, Jesus said that when the devil has been driven out and the house has been swept, he returns with six other demons, and rages worse than before. These words terrified Magdalen. After Jesus had in this way touched the hearts of many, He turned successively to all sides and commanded the demon to go out of all that sighed for deliverance from his thralldom, but that those who wished to remain bound to the devil should depart and take him along with them. At this command, the possessed cried out from all parts of the circle: "Jesus, Thou Son of God!"—and here and there people sank to the ground unconscious.

Magdalen also, from her splendid seat upon which she had attracted all eyes, fell in violent convulsions. Her companions in sin applied perfumes as restoratives, and wanted to carry her away. Desiring to remain under the empire of the evil one, they were themselves glad to profit by the opportunity to retire from the scene. But just then some persons near her cried out: "Stop, Master! Stop! This woman is dying." Jesus interrupted His discourse to reply: "Place her on her chair! The death she is now dying is a good death, and one that will vivify her!" After some time another word of Jesus pierced her to the heart, and she again fell into convulsions, during which dark forms escaped from her. A crowd gathered round her in alarm, while her own immediate party tried once again to bring her to herself.

She was soon able to resume her seat on her beautiful chair, and then she tried to look as if she had suffered only an ordinary fainting spell. She had now become the object of general attention, especially as many other possessed back in the crowd had, like her, fallen in convulsions, and afterward rose up freed from the evil one. But when for the third time Magdalen fell down in violent convulsions, the excitement increased, and Martha hurried forward to her. When she recovered consciousness, she acted like one bereft of her senses. She wept passionately, and wanted to go to where the holy women were sitting. The frivolous companions with whom she had come hither held her back forcibly, declaring that she should not play the fool, and they at last succeeded in getting her down the mountain. Lazarus, Martha, and others who had followed her, now went forward and led her to the inn of the holy women. The crowd of worldlings who had accompanied Magdalen had already made their way off.

Before going down to His inn, Jesus healed many blind and sick. Later on, He taught again in the school, and Magdalen was present. She was not yet quite cured, but profoundly impressed, and no longer so wantonly arrayed. She had laid aside her superfluous finery, some of which was made of a fine scalloped material like pointed lace, and so perishable that it could be worn only once. She was now veiled. Jesus in His instruction appeared again to speak for her special benefit and, when He fixed upon her His penetrating glance, she fell once more into unconsciousness and another evil spirit went out of her. Her maids bore her from the synagogue to where she was received by Martha and Mary, who took her back to the inn.

She was now like one distracted. She cried and wept. She ran through the public streets saying to all she met that she was a wicked creature, a sinner, the refuse of humanity. The holy women had the greatest trouble to quiet her. She tore her garments, disarranged her hair, and hid her face in the folds of her veil.

When Jesus returned to His inn with the disciples and some of the Pharisees, and while they were taking some refreshments standing, Magdalen escaped from the holy women, ran with streaming hair and uttering loud lamentations, made her way through the crowd, cast herself at Jesus' feet, weeping and moaning, and asked if she might still hope for salvation. The Pharisees and disciples, scandalized at the sight, said to Jesus that He should no longer suffer this reprobate woman to create disturbance everywhere, that He should send her away once for all. But Jesus replied: "Permit her to weep and lament! Ye know not what is passing in her"—and He turned to her with words of consolation. He told her to repent from her heart, to believe and to hope, for that she should soon find peace. Then He bade her depart with confidence. Martha, who had followed with her maids, took her again to her inn. Magdalen did nothing but wring her hands and lament. She was not yet quite freed from the power of the evil one, who tortured and tormented her with the most frightful remorse and despair. There was no rest for her—she thought herself forever lost.

Upon her request, Lazarus went to Magdalum in order to take charge of her property, and to dissolve the ties she had there formed. She owned near Azanoth and in the surrounding country fields and vineyards which Lazarus, on account of her extravagance, had previously sequestered.

To escape the great crowd that had gathered here, Jesus went that night with His disciples into the neighborhood of Damna, where there was an inn, as well as a lovely eminence upon which stood a chair for teaching. Next morning when the holy women came thither accompanied by Magdalen, they found Jesus already encompassed by people seeking His aid. When His departure became known, the crowds awaiting Him at Azanoth, as well as new visitors, came streaming to Damna, and fresh bands continued to arrive during the whole instruction.

Magdalen, crushed and miserable, now sat among the holy women. Jesus inveighed severely against the sin of impurity, and said that it was that vice that had called down fire upon Sodom and Gomorrha. But He spoke of the mercy of God also and of the present time of pardon, almost conjuring His hearers to accept the grace offered them. Thrice during this discourse did Jesus rest His glance upon Magdalen, and each time I saw her sinking down and dark vapors issuing from her. The third time, the holy women carried her away. She was pale, weak, annihilated as it were, and scarcely recognizable.

Her tears flowed incessantly. She was completely transformed, and passionately sighed to confess her sins to Jesus and receive pardon. The instruction over, Jesus went to a retired place, whither Mary herself and Martha led Magdalen to Him. She fell on her face weeping at His feet, her hair flowing loosely around her. Jesus comforted her. When Mary and Martha had withdrawn, she cried for pardon, confessed her numerous transgressions, and asked over and over: "Lord, is there still salvation for me?" Jesus forgave her sins, and she implored Him to save her from another relapse. He promised so to do, gave her His blessing, and spoke to her of the virtue of purity, also of His Mother, who was pure without stain. He praised Mary highly in terms I had never before heard from His lips, and commanded Magdalen to unite herself closely to her and to seek from her advice and consolation. When Jesus and Magdalen rejoined the holy women, Jesus said to them: "She has been a great sinner, but for all future time, she will be the model of penitents."

Magdalen, through her passionate emotion, her grief and her tears, was no longer like a human being, but like a shadow tottering from weakness. She was, however, calm, though still weeping silent tears that exhausted her. The holy women comforted her with many marks of affection, while she in turn

craved pardon of each. As they had to set out for Naim and Magdalen was too weak to accompany them, Martha, Anna Cleophas, and Mary the Suphanite went with her to Damna, in order to rest that night and follow the others next morning. The holy women went through Cana to Naim. Jesus and the disciples went across through the valley of the Baths of Bethulia, four or five hours farther on, to Gathepher, a large city that lay on a height between Cana and Sephoris. They passed the night outside the city at an inn that was near a cave called "John's Cave."