

The Balsam Garden

On the next day, the Holy Family continued their journey through a sandy, desolate wilderness. Famishing for water and exhausted by weariness, they sat down on one of the sand hills, and the Blessed Virgin sent up a cry to God. Suddenly, a stream of pure water gushed forth at her side. Joseph removed the sand hill that was over it, and a clear, beautiful, little fountain jetted up. He made a channel for it, and it flowed over quite a large space, disappearing again near its source. Here they refreshed themselves, and Mary bathed the Child Jesus, while Joseph gave drink to the ass and filled the water bottles. I saw all kinds of animals like turtles drinking at the gushing waters. They did not appear at all afraid of the Holy Family.



The soil over which the water had flowed soon began to clothe itself with verdure, and numbers of balsam trees afterward grew there. When the Holy Family returned from Egypt, those trees were large enough to furnish balsam for their refreshment. The place soon grew into a little settlement. Wherever the heathens planted these trees they withered. They thrived only when the Jews whom the Holy Family had known in this country went to live there. I think the wife of that robber whose boy had been cured of leprosy by the bath of the Child Jesus went there, too, for she soon escaped from the robbers. Her boy, however, remained with them some time longer. A balsam hedge surrounded the garden, and in its center were several large fruit trees. At a subsequent period, another large well was dug, out of which quantities of water were raised by means of a wheel turned by oxen. This water mingled with that of Mary's spring and watered the whole garden; unmixed, it would have proved injurious. I have seen that the oxen employed in turning the wheel could not by any means be forced to work from Saturday noon till early on Monday morning.