

Jesus Teaches in Gabara. Magdalen's First Conversion

On leaving Giskala, Jesus did not go to Bethulia, which was near, but leaving it on the left, He traversed the valley and the plain to the somewhat important city of Gabara. It lay at the western foot of the mountain on whose south-eastern slope was perched the Herodian eyrie Jetebatha. The distance between the city and the fortress, that is, if one went around the mountain, was one hour. This mountain, in which steps were hewn, arose like a steep wall behind Gabara, whose inhabitants were engaged in the manufacture of cotton fine as silk, which they wove into cloth and covers. They made of it also a kind of mattress, which they stretched and fastened on hooks. This formed the whole bed. Some others were engaged in salting and exporting fish.

While still in Giskala, Jesus had sent some of the disciples around to the neighboring places to say that He would deliver a great instruction on the mountain beyond Gabara. There came in consequence, from a circuit of several hours, large crowds of people, who encamped around the mountain. On the summit was an enclosed space in which was a teacher's chair long out of use.

Peter, Andrew, James, John, Nathanael Chased, and all the rest of the disciples had come, besides most of John's disciples and the sons of the Blessed Virgin's eldest sister. There were altogether about sixty disciples, friends, and relatives of Jesus here assembled. The more intimate of the disciples were greeted by Jesus with clasping of both hands and pressing cheek to cheek.

Crowds of heathens came from Cydessa, one hour westward of the neighboring city of Damna, from Adama and the country around Lake Merom. The people crowding hither brought with them provisions and sick of all kinds. Cydessa was a heathen city in the heart of Zabulon. It was in ruins in the time of Alexander the Great, who bestowed it upon a man from Tyre called Livias. The latter restored it, and led thither many of his pagan countrymen from Tyre. The first pagans that came to John's baptism were from Cydessa, which was very beautifully situated and commanded a view of



the luxuriantly fruitful country around.

Magdalen also wended her way to the mount of instruction near Gabara. Martha and Anna Cleophas had left Damna, where the holy women had an inn, and gone to Magdalum with the view of persuading Magdalen to attend the sermon that Jesus was about to deliver on the mountain beyond Gabara. Veronica, Johanna Chusa, Dina, and the Suphanite had meanwhile remained at Damna, distant three hours from Capharnaum and over one hour from Magdalum. Magdalen received her sister in a manner rather kind and showed her into an apartment not far from her room of state, but into this latter she did not take her. There was in Magdalen a mixture of true and false shame. She was partly ashamed of her simple, pious, and plainly dressed sister who went around with Jesus' followers so despised by her visitors and associates, and she was partly ashamed of herself before Martha. It was this feeling that prevented her taking the latter into the apartments that were the scenes of her follies and vices. Magdalen was somewhat broken in spirits, but she lacked the courage to disengage herself from her surroundings. She looked pale and languid. The man with whom she lived, on account of his low and vulgar sentiments, was utterly distasteful to her.

Martha treated her very prudently and affectionately. She said to her: "Dina and Mary, the Suphanite, whom you know, two amiable and clever women, invite you to be present with them at the instruction that Jesus is going to give on the mountain. It is so near, and they are so anxious for your company. You need not be ashamed of them before the people, for they are respectable, they dress with taste, and they have distinguished manners. You will behold a very wonderful spectacle: the crowds of people, the marvelous eloquence of the Prophet, the sick, the cures that He effects, the hardihood with which He addresses the Pharisees! Veronica, Mary Chusa, and Jesus' Mother, who wishes you so well—we all are convinced that you will thank us for the invitation. I think it will cheer you up a little. You appear to be quite forlorn here, you have no one around you who can appreciate your heart and your talents. Oh, if you would only pass some time with us in Bethania! We hear so many wonderful things, and we have so much good to do, and you have always been so full of compassion and kindness. You must at least come to Damna with me tomorrow morning. There you will find all the women of our party at the inn. You can have a private apartment and meet only those that you know," etc. In this strain Martha spoke to her sister, carefully avoiding anything that might wound her. Magdalen's sadness predisposed her to listen favorably to Martha's proposals. She did indeed raise a few difficulties, but at last yielded and promised Martha to accompany her to Damna. She took a repast with her and went several times during the

evening from her own apartments to see her. Martha and Anna Cleophas prayed together that night that God would render the coming journey fruitful in good for Magdalen.

A few days previously James the Greater, impelled by a feeling of intense compassion for Magdalen, had come to invite her to the preaching soon to take place at Gabara. She had received him at a neighboring house. James was in appearance very imposing. His speech was grave and full of wisdom, though at the same time most pleasing. He made a most favorable impression upon Magdalen, and she received him graciously whenever he was in that part of the country. James did not address to her words of reproof; on the contrary, his manner toward her was marked by esteem and kindness, and he invited her to be present at least once at Jesus' preaching. It would be impossible, he said, to see or hear one superior to Him. She had no need to trouble herself about the other auditors, and she might appear among them in her ordinary dress. Magdalen had received his invitation favorably, but she was still undecided as to whether she should or should not accept it, when Martha and Anna Cleophas arrived.

On the eve of the day appointed for the instruction, Magdalen with Martha and Anna Cleophas started from Magdalum to join the holy women at Damna. Magdalen rode on an ass, for she was not accustomed to walking. She was dressed elegantly, though not to such excess nor so extravagantly as at a later period when she was converted for the second time. She took a private apartment in the inn and spoke only with Dina and the Suphanite, who visited her by turns. I saw them together, an affable and well-bred confidence marking their intercourse. There was, however, on the part of the converted sinners, a shade of embarrassment similar to what might be experienced on a military officer's meeting a former comrade who had become a priest. This feeling soon gave way to tears and womanly expressions of mutual sympathy, and they went together to the inn at the foot of the mountain. The other holy women did not go to the instruction, in order not to annoy Magdalen by their presence. They had come to Damna with the intention of prevailing upon Jesus to remain there and not go to Capharnaum where Pharisees from various localities were again assembled. They, the Pharisees, had taken up their abode together, determined to make Capharnaum their headquarters for awhile, since it was the central point of all Jesus' journeyings. The young Pharisee from Samaria who was present the last time was not among this set; another had taken his place. At Nazareth also and in other places the Pharisees had formed similar unions against Jesus.

The holy women, and especially Mary, were very much troubled, for the

Pharisees had uttered loud threats. They sent a messenger to Jesus imploring Him not to go to Capharnaum after this instruction, but to join them in Damna; or He might turn to the right or to the left as seemed good to Him; or better perhaps would it be for Him to cross the lake and preach among the pagan cities where He would run no risk. Jesus replied by sending them word not to worry about Him, that He knew what was best for Him to do, and that He would see them again in Capharnaum.

The Mount of Instruction near Gabara. Magdalen

Magdalen and her companions reached the mountain in good time, and found crowds of people already encamped around it. The sick of all kinds were, according to the nature of their maladies, ranged together in different places under light canopies and arbors. High upon the mountain were the disciples, kindly ranging the people in order and rendering them every assistance. Around the teacher's chair was a low, semicircular wall, and over it an awning. The audience had here and there similar awnings erected. At a short distance from the teacher's chair, Magdalen and the other women had found a comfortable seat upon a little eminence.

About ten o'clock, Jesus ascended the mountain with His disciples, followed by the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees, and took the teacher's chair. The disciples were on one side, the Pharisees on the other, forming a circle around Him. Several times during His discourse, Jesus made a pause to allow His hearers to exchange places, the more distant coming forward, the nearest falling back, and He likewise repeated the same instructions several times. His auditors partook of refreshments in the intervals, and Jesus Himself once took a mouthful to eat and a little drink. This discourse of Jesus was one of the most powerful that He had yet delivered. He prayed before He began, and then told His hearers that they should not be scandalized at Him if He called God His Father, for whosoever does the will of the Father in Heaven, he is His son, and that He really accomplished the Father's will, He clearly proved. Hereupon He prayed aloud to His Father and then commenced His austere preaching of penance after the manner of the ancient Prophets. All that had happened from the time of the first Promise, all the figures and all the menaces, He introduced into His discourse and showed how, in the present and in the near future, they would be accomplished. He proved the coming of the Messiah from the fulfillment of the Prophecies. He spoke of John, the precursor and preparer of the ways, who had honestly fulfilled his mission, but whose hearers had remained obdurate. Then He enumerated their vices, their hypocrisy, their idolatry of sinful flesh; painted in strong colors the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians; and spoke with great warmth of the anger of God and the

approaching judgment, of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and of the diverse woes that hung over their country. He quoted many passages from the prophet Malachias, explaining and applying them to the Precursor, to the Messiah, to the pure oblation of bread and wine of the New Law (which I plainly understood to signify the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass), to the judgment awaiting the godless, to the second coming of the Messiah on the last day, and spoke of the confidence and consolation those that feared God would then experience. He added, moreover, that the grace taken from them would be given to the heathens.

Then turning to the disciples, Jesus exhorted them to confidence and perseverance, and told them that He would send them to preach salvation to all nations. He warned them to hold neither to the Pharisees, the Sadducees, nor the Herodians, whom He painted in lively colors by comparisons as just as they were striking. This was peculiarly vexatious to the last named, since no one wanted to be publicly known as an Herodian. They who adhered to this sect did so mostly in secret.

When in the course of His instruction Jesus observed that if His hearers would not accept the salvation offered them, it would be worse for them than for Sodom and Gomorrha, some of the Pharisees, taking advantage of a pause, stepped up to Him with the question: "Then, will this mountain, this city, yes, even the whole country, be swallowed up along with us all? And could there happen something still worse?" Jesus answered: "The stones of Sodom were swallowed up, but not all the souls, for these latter knew not of the Promise, nor had they the Law and the prophets." He added some words that I understood of His own future descent into Limbo, and from which I gathered that many of those souls were saved. Then coming back to the Jews of His own time, He reminded them that they were a chosen race whom God had formed into one nation, that they had received instruction and warnings, the Promises and their realization, that if they rejected them and persevered in their incredulity, not the rocks, the mountains (for they obeyed the Lord), but their own stony hearts, their own souls, would be hurled into the abyss. And thus would their lot be more grievous than that of Sodom.

When Jesus had, thus vehemently urged the guilty to penance, when He had so severely pronounced judgment upon the obdurate, He became once more all love, invited all sinners to come to Him, and even shed over them tears of compassion. Then He implored His Father to touch their hearts that some, a few, yes, even one, though burdened with all kinds of guilt, might return to Him. Could He gain but one soul, He would share all with it, He would give all that He possessed, yes, He would even sacrifice His life to purchase it. He stretched out His arms toward them, exclaiming: "Come! Come to Me, ye

who are weary and laden with guilt! Come to Me, ye sinners! Do penance, believe, and share the Kingdom with Me!" Then turning to the Pharisees, to His enemies, He opened His arms to them also, beseeching all, at least one of them, to come to Him.

Magdalen had taken her seat among the other women with the self-confident air of a lady of the world, but her manner was assumed. She was inwardly confused and a prey to interior struggle. At first she gazed around upon the crowd, but when Jesus appeared and began to speak, her eyes and soul were riveted upon Him alone. His exhortations to penance, His lively pictures of vice, His threats of chastisement, affected her powerfully, and unable to suppress her emotions, she trembled and wept beneath her veil. When Jesus, Himself shedding tears full of loving compassion, cried out for sinners to come to Him, many of His hearers were transported with emotion. There was a movement in the circle and the crowd pressed around Him. Magdalen also, and following her example the other women likewise, took a step nearer. But when Jesus exclaimed: "Ah! If even soul would come to Me!" Magdalen was so moved that she wanted to fly to Him at once. She stepped forward; but her companions, fearing some disturbance, held her back, whispering: "Wait! Wait!" This movement of Magdalen attracted scarcely any notice among the bystanders, since the attention of all was riveted upon Jesus' words. Jesus, aware of Magdalen's agitation, uttered words of consolation meant only for her. He said: "If even one germ of penance, of contrition, of love, of faith, of hope has, in consequence of My words, fallen upon some poor, erring heart, it will bear fruit, it will be set down in favor of that poor sinner, it will live and increase. I Myself shall nourish it, shall cultivate it, shall present it to My Father." These words consoled Magdalen while they pierced her inmost soul, and she stepped back again among her companions.

It was now about six o'clock, and the sun had already sunk low behind the mountain. During His discourse Jesus was turned to the west, the point toward which the teacher's chair faced, and there was no one behind Him. And now He prayed, dismissed the multitude with His blessing, and commanded the disciples to buy food and distribute it to the poor and needy. Whoever had more than enough for himself was to give it or sell it for the benefit of the poor, who were to take home with them whatever they received over and above. Some of the disciples went immediately to execute their Master's commission. Most of those present gave willingly what they could spare, while others just as willingly took some indemnification for it. The disciples were well known in this part of the country, so the poor were well cared for, and they thanked the great charity of the Lord.

Meanwhile the other disciples accompanied Jesus to the sick, numbers of whom had been brought thither. The Pharisees, scandalized, impressed, astonished, enraged, went back to Gabara. Simon Zabulon, the chief of the synagogue, reminded Jesus of the invitation to sup in his house. Jesus replied that He would be there. The Pharisees murmured against Jesus and criticized Him the whole way down the mountain, finding fault with His doctrine and His manners. Each was ashamed to allow his neighbor to remark the favorable impression that had been made upon him, and so by the time they reached the city, they had again entrenched themselves in their own self-righteousness.

Magdalen and her companions followed Jesus. The former went among the people and took her place near the sick women as if to render them assistance. She was very much impressed, and the misery that she witnessed moved her still more. Jesus turned first to the men, among whom for a long time He healed diseases of all kinds. The hymns of thanksgiving from the cured and their attendants as they moved away, rang on the breeze. When He approached the sick females, the crowd that pressed around Him and the need that He and His disciples had of space forced Magdalen and the holy women to fall back a little. Nevertheless, Magdalen sought by every opportunity, by every break in the crowd, to draw near to Him, but Jesus constantly turned away from her.

He healed some women afflicted with a flow of blood. But how express the feelings of Magdalen, so delicate, so effeminate, whose eyes were quite unused to the sight of human suffering! What memories, what gratitude swelled the heart of Mary Suphan when six women, bound three and three, were forcibly led to Jesus by strong servant maids who dragged them along with cords, or long linen bands! They were possessed in the most frightful manner by unclean spirits, and they were the first possessed women that I saw brought publicly to Jesus. Some were from beyond the Lake of Genesareth, some from Samaria, and among them were several pagans. They had been bound together only upon reaching this place. Ordinarily they were perfectly quiet and gentle, they offered no violence to one another. But anon, they became quite furious, screaming and hurling themselves here and there. Their custodians bound them and kept them at a distance during Jesus' discourse, and now when all was nearly over, they brought them forward. As the afflicted creatures drew near to Jesus and the disciples, they began to offer vehement resistance. Satan was tormenting them horribly. They uttered the most awful cries and fell into violent contortions. Jesus turned toward them and commanded them to be silent, to be at peace. They instantly stood still and motionless; then He went up to them, ordered them

to be unbound, commanded them to kneel down, prayed, and laid His hands upon them. Under the touch of His hand they sank into a few moments' unconsciousness, during which the wicked spirits went out of them in the form of a dark vapor. Then their attendants lifted them up, and veiled and in tears, they stood before Jesus, inclining low and giving thanks. He warned them to amend their lives, to purify themselves and do penance, lest their misfortune might come upon them more frightfully than before.

It was dusk before Jesus and the disciples, preceded and followed by crowds of people, started at last down the mountain for Gabara. Magdalen, obeying only her impulse without regard to appearances, followed close after Jesus in the crowd of disciples, and her four companions, unwilling to separate from her, did the same. She tried to keep as close to Jesus as she possibly could, though such conduct was quite unusual in females. Some of the disciples called Jesus' attention to the fact, remarking at the same time what I have just observed. But Jesus, turning around to them, replied: "Let them alone! It is not your affair!" And so He entered the city. When He reached the hall in which Simon Zabulon had prepared the feast, He found the forecourt filled with the sick and the poor who had crowded thither on His approach, and who were loudly calling upon Him for help. Jesus at once turned to them, exhorting, consoling, and healing them. Meanwhile Simon Zabulon, with some other Pharisees, made his appearance. He begged Jesus to come in to the feast, for they were awaiting Him. "Thou hast," he continued, "already done enough for today. Let these people wait till another time, and let the poor go off at once." But Jesus replied: "These are My guests. I have invited them, and I must first see to their entertainment. When thou didst invite Me to thy feast, thou didst invite them also. I shall not go into thy feast until they are helped, and then even I will go in only with them." Then the Pharisees had to go and prepare tables around the court for the cured and the poor. Jesus cured all, and the disciples led those that wished to remain to the tables prepared for them, and lamps were lighted in the court.

Magdalen and the women had followed Jesus hither. They stood in one of the halls of the court adjoining the entertainment hall. Jesus, followed by some of the disciples, went to the table in the latter and from its sumptuous dishes sent various meats to the tables of the poor. The disciples were the bearers of these gifts; they likewise served and ate with the poor. Jesus continued His instructions during the entertainment. The Pharisees were in animated discussion with Him when Magdalen, who with her companions had approached the entrance, all on a sudden darted into the hall. Inclining humbly, her head veiled, in her hand a little white flask closed with a tiny bunch of aromatic herbs instead of a stopper, she glided quickly into the

center of the apartment, went behind Jesus, and poured the contents of her little flask over His head. Then catching up the long end of her veil, she folded it, and with both hands passed it lightly once over Jesus' head, as if wishing to smooth His hair and to arrest the overflow of the ointment. The whole affair occupied but a few instants, and after it Magdalen retired some steps. The discussion carried on so hotly at the moment suddenly ceased. A hush fell upon the company, and they gazed upon Jesus and the woman. The air was redolent with the fragrance of the ointment. Jesus was silent. Some of the guests put their heads together, glanced indignantly at Magdalen, and exchanged whispers. Simon Zabulon especially appeared scandalized. At last Jesus said to him: "Simon, I know well of what thou art thinking! Thou thinkest it improper that I should allow this woman to anoint My head. Thou art thinking that she is a sinner, but thou art wrong. She, out of love, has fulfilled what thou didst leave undone. Thou hast not shown Me the honor due to guests." Then He turned to Magdalen, who was still standing there, and said: "Go in peace! Much has been forgiven thee." At these words Magdalen rejoined her companions, and they left the house together. Then Jesus spoke of her to the guests. He called her a good woman full of compassion. He censured the criticizing of others, public accusations, and remarks upon the exterior fault of others while the speakers often hid in their own hearts much greater, though secret evils. Jesus continued speaking and teaching for a considerable time, and then returned with His followers to the inn.

Magdalen was deeply touched and impressed by all she had seen and heard. She was interiorly vanquished. And because she was possessed of a certain impetuous spirit of self-sacrifice, a certain greatness of soul, she longed to do something to honor Jesus and to testify to Him her emotion. She had noticed with chagrin that neither before nor during the meal had He, the most wonderful, the holiest of teachers, He, the most compassionate, the most miraculous Helper of mankind, received from these Pharisees any mark of honor, any of those polite attentions usually extended to guests, and therefore she felt herself impelled to do what she had done. The words of Jesus, "If even one would be moved to come to Me!" still lingered in her memory. The little flask, which was about a hand in height, she generally carried with her as do the grand ladies of our own day. Magdalen's dress was white, embroidered with large red flowers and tiny green leaves. The sleeves were wide, gathered in and fastened by bracelets. The robe was cut wide and hung loose in the back. It was open in front to just above the knee, where it was caught by straps, or cords. The bodice, both back and front, was ornamented with cords and jewels. It passed over the shoulders like a

scapular and was fastened at the sides; under it was another colored tunic. The veil that she usually wound about her neck she had, on entering the banquet hall, opened wide and thrown over her whole person. Magdalen was taller than all the other women, robust, but yet graceful. She had very beautiful, tapering fingers, a small, delicate foot, a wealth of beautiful long hair, and there was something imposing in all her movements.

When Magdalen returned to the inn with her companions, Martha took her to another about an hour distant and near the baths of Bethulia. There she found Mary and the holy women awaiting her coming, Mary conversed with her. Magdalen gave an account of Jesus' discourse, while the two other women related the circumstances of Magdalen's anointing and Jesus' words to her. All insisted on Magdalen's remaining and going back with them, at least for awhile, to Bethania. But she replied that she must return to Magdalum to make some arrangements in her household, a resolution very distasteful to her pious friends. She could not, however, cease talking of the impressions she had received and of the majesty, force, sweetness, and miracles of Jesus. She felt that she must follow Him, that her own life was an unworthy one, and that she ought to join her sister and friends. She became very thoughtful, she wept from time to time, and her heart grew lighter. Nevertheless, she could not be induced to remain, so she returned to Magdalum with her maid. Martha accompanied her a part of the way, and then joined the holy women who were going back to Capharnaum.

Magdalen was taller and more beautiful than the other women. Dina, however, was much more active and dexterous, very cheerful, ever ready to oblige, like a lively, affectionate girl, and she was moreover very humble. But the Blessed Virgin surpassed them all in her marvelous beauty. Although in external loveliness she may have had her equal, and may have even been excelled by Magdalen in certain striking features, yet she far outshone them all in her indescribable air of simplicity, modesty, earnestness, sweetness, and gentleness. She was so very pure, so free from all earthly impressions that in her one saw only the reflex image of God in His creature. No one's bearing resembled hers, except that of her Son. Her countenance surpassed that of all women in its unspeakable purity, innocence, gravity, wisdom, peace, and sweet, devout loveliness. Her whole appearance was noble, and yet she was like a simple, innocent child. She was very grave, very quiet, and often pensive, but never did her sadness destroy the beauty of her countenance, for her tears flowed softly down her placid face.

Magdalen was soon again in her old track. She received the visits of men who spoke in the usual disparaging way of Jesus, His journeys, His doctrine, and of all who followed Him. They ridiculed what they heard of Magdalen's visit to

Gabara, and looked upon it as a very unlikely story. As for the rest, they declared that they found Magdalen more beautiful and charming than ever. It was by such speeches that Magdalen allowed herself to be infatuated and her good impressions dissipated. She soon sank deeper than before, and her relapse into sin gave the devil greater power over her. He attacked her more vigorously when he saw that he might possibly lose her. She became possessed, and often fell into cramps and convulsions.