



THE STORY OF MARY MAGDALENE - FROM SINNER TO SAINT

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for the Maria Valtorta Readers' Group Australia
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CONTENTS

- Part 1 - Setting the Scene**
- Part 2 - First Encounters**
- Part 3 - The Turning Point**
- Part 4 - To Jesus through Mary**
- Part 5 - Facing the World again**
- Part 6 - Strength and Holiness**
- Part 7 - A Testing Time**
- Part 8 - At the Pinnacle**
- Part 9 - The Resurrection's Messenger**
- Part 10 - Climax to the Cycle of Love**

(Extracts from the Writings of Maria Valtorta)

The conversion of Mary Magdalene, out of whom "seven demons" had departed (Lk. 8:2), was a process rather than an event. It began only because she was prayed for, and because she wanted it. Jesus knew this, and He sowed His seeds of love, challenge and forgiveness. Mary responded, flew to the help of Jesus' Mother, and never turned back on her journey towards holiness. She demonstrated obedience to Jesus, and "hope beyond hope" in His promise to return after Lazarus' death. She pledged faith and "infinite love", and after the Virgin Mother, she was the first to whom Jesus appeared after His Resurrection. Jesus' teachings on Her conversion are a lesson for all evangelists, and the story of Mary Magdalene is a model of hope, and of forgiveness, for all sinners. The selected passages are taken from the five volumes of *The Poem of the Man-God*, and from *Maria's Notebooks 1944*).

[According to the decree of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, AAS 58, 1186, approved by Pope Paul VI on October 14th 1966, it is permitted to publish, without a Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur, works relating to private revelations, prophecies and miracles etc., provided that they contain nothing which contravenes faith and morals. The compiler wishes to affirm submission to the final and official judgement of the Church regarding the visions and dictations contained in these extracts.]

PART 1 - SETTING THE SCENE

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH MARY MAGDALENE

(Vol. 1, p. 519-26)

(It is the first year of Jesus' public life. Jesus and His disciples are sailing on the lake of Galilee. A few small leisure boats, with Mary Magdalene and some Romans aboard, cut across their course. The boats almost collide, because of a sudden gust of wind, and the Romans offer a flurry of insults to the Galileans. Peter and the other disciples respond in like manner, as the boats begin to go their separate ways...)

Jesus has not moved from His place. He has remained sitting, His mind far away, without a glance or a word to the boats or the passengers. Leaning on one elbow, He has continued to look at the far away shore, as if nothing was happening. Also, a flower is thrown at Him, I do not know by whom, certainly by a woman, because I can hear a woman laugh when it is being thrown. But He... does not stir. The flower almost hits His face, then falls on to boards and ends up under the feet of the furious Peter.

When the little boats are about to move away, I see the Magdalene stand up and follow the indication of one of her partners in vice, that is, she turns her beautiful eyes towards the serene face of Jesus, whose mind is so far away. How far from this world that face is! ...

« Say, Simon! » asks Judas Iscariot. « Since you are a Judaeon like me, tell me. That beautiful blonde in the Roman's lap, the one who stood up a few minutes ago, isn't she the sister of Lazarus of Bethany? »

« I don't know » is the sharp reply of Simon the Cananean. « I came back amongst the living only a short while ago, and she is a young woman... »

« You are not going to tell me that you do not know Lazarus of Bethany, I hope! I know very well that you are his friend and that you have been there also with the Master. »

« And if it were so? »

« And since it is so, I say that you must know also the sinner who is Lazarus' sister. Even the dead know her! People have been talking about her for the last ten years. She began to be light-headed as soon as she reached the age of puberty. But for over four years! You must be aware of the scandal, even if you were in the "valley of the dead". The whole of Jerusalem talked about her. And Lazarus shut himself up at Bethany... He did the right thing, after all. No one would have set foot in his magnificent house in Zion, where she also came and went. I mean: no holy living person. In the country... well! ... In any case she is always around, but never at home... She is

certainly at Magdala now... With a new lover... Are you not answering me? Can you give me the lie? »

« I am not giving you the lie. I am silent. »

« So, it is she! You have recognised her, too! »

« I saw her when she was a child and she was pure then. I have seen her again now... But I recognise her. Although lewd, she is the living image of her mother, a holy woman. »

« Well, then, why were you on the point of denying that she is your friend's sister? »

« We always endeavour to conceal our sores and those of the people we love. Particularly when one is honest. »

Judas gives a forced laugh.

« You are quite right, Simon. And you are honest » remarks Peter.

(The conversation continues for a little while, then Jesus orders the disciples to link the boats together, and says to them:)

« Listen. You may think that I do not pay attention to your conversation and that consequently I am a lazy teacher who does not look after his pupils. You must know that My soul does not leave you one moment. Have you ever seen a doctor who studies a patient affected by a disease not yet identified and presenting contrasting symptoms? He keeps an eye on him, after visiting him, he watches him both when he sleeps and is awake, in the morning and in the evening, when he speaks and when he is silent, because every symptom may help to identify the hidden disease and suggest a cure. I do the same with you. I hold you by means of invisible but most sensitive threads, which are grafted into Me, and they transmit to Me even the lightest vibrations of your ego. I allow you to believe that you are free, that you may reveal yourselves for what you are, which happens when a schoolboy or a maniac thinks he is not being watched by his overseer.

You are a group of people, but you form a nucleus, that is, one thing only. You are therefore a unit, which is formed as a body and which is to be studied in its individual features, which are more or less good, in order to shape it, amalgamate it, round it off, increase it in its polyhedric sides, and make it a perfect unit. That is why I study you. And I study you also when you are sleeping.

(Jesus asks them to meditate about their being chosen as disciples, and the responsibilities that brings to them – to be vigilant, faithful, honest, sincere, and chaste...)

Do not be intolerant. Since you are all sinners, behave to others as you would like others to behave to you (1): that is, with mercy and forgiveness.

Do not judge. Oh! do not judge! You have only been with Me for a short time, and yet you have seen how many times I, although innocent, have been wrongly judged and accused of non-existent sins. A bad judgement is an insult. And only true saints do not pay back in the offender's coin. Refrain therefore from offending so that you may not be offended. Thus, you will not fail in your duties either to charity, or to holy, dear, kind humility, which is Satan's enemy, together with chastity. Forgive, always forgive. Say: "I forgive, Father, that I may be forgiven by You of my numberless sins" (2).

Improve hourly, with patience, perseverance, heroism. Who told You that it is not painful to become good? Nay, I tell you: it is the greatest labour. But the reward is Heaven and it is therefore worthwhile getting exhausted in such labour.

And love. Oh! What words shall I use to persuade you to love? None is suitable to convert you to love, poor men, instigated by Satan! So I say: "Father, hasten the hour of purification. This land and this flock of Yours are dry and diseased. But there is a dew that can cleanse and soothe them. Open its fountain. Open Me, Father. Here I am burning with the desire to fulfill Your will, which is also Mine and of the Eternal Love. Father, Father, Father! Look at Your Lamb and be Its Sacrificer". »

Jesus is really inspired. Standing, His arms stretched out in the shape of a cross, His face raised towards the sky. In His linen tunic and with the blue lake behind Him, He seems a praying archangel.

The vision ends on this gesture of His. (1) Mt. 7:12, Lk. 6:31; (2) Mt. 6:12, Mk. 11:26, Lk. 11:4.

FORGIVE FIRST, THEN PRAY

(Vol. 1, p. 603)

(Jesus is taken by Simon the Zealot to the house of his friend and neighbour Lazarus, in Bethany. There Jesus is greeted by Lazarus, and He meets Lazarus' sister Martha, a swarthy, tall, plumpish and beautiful young woman. Martha asks Jesus if He is aware of the behaviour of her sister Mary Magdalene, and of Mary's immoral behaviour...)

« Pray for her, Master. I pray... but I cannot forgive completely and perhaps the Eternal Father rejects my prayer. »

« You are right: you must forgive to be forgiven and heard. I already pray for her. But give Me your forgiveness and Lazarus'. You, a good sister, can speak and achieve even more than I can. His wound is too fresh and sore for My hand to touch it even lightly, You can do it. Give Me your full holy forgiveness, and I will... »

« Forgive... We will not be able. Our mother died of grief through her ill deeds and... they were still slight compared with the present ones. I see my mother's torture... it is always present to me. And I see what Lazarus is suffering. »

« She is ill, Martha, and insane. Forgive her. »

« She is possessed, Master. »

« And what is diabolic possession but a disease of the spirit infected by Satan, to the extent of degenerating into a spiritual diabolic being? How can certain perversions in human beings be explained otherwise? Perversions that make man much worse than beasts in ferocity, more lewd than monkeys in lust, and so on, and make a hybrid, in which man, animal and demon are mingled. That is the explanation of what amazes us as an inexplicable monstrosity in so many creatures. Do not weep. Forgive. I see. Because My sight is sharper than the sight of the eye or of the heart. I see God. I see. I tell you: forgive, because she is ill. »

« Cure her, then! »

« I will cure her. Have faith. I will make you happy. But forgive and tell Lazarus to forgive. Forgive her. Love her. Be on familiar terms with her. Speak to her as if she were like you. Speak to her of Me... »

« How do You expect her to understand You, the Holy One? »

« She may not seem to understand. But My Name, even by Itself, is salvation. Get her to think of Me and to mention My Name. Oh! Satan runs away when a heart thinks of My Name. Smile, Martha, at this hope. Look at this rose. The rain of the past days had spoiled it, but look, the sun today has opened it, and it is even more beautiful because the drops of rain on the petals adorn it with diamonds. Your house will be like that... Tears and sorrow, now, and later... joy and glory. Go! Tell Lazarus, while I, in the peace of Your garden, will pray the Father for Mary and for you... »

THE SEEDS OF MARY MAGDALENE'S CONVERSION

(Vol. 1, p. 736-40)

(Some time later, Jesus is speaking to a crowd of people in the garden of the house of Simon the Zealot. He compares the world, which belongs to bad people who only appear to be happy, with paradise which belongs to the good. Lazarus and Martha see their sister Mary behind a hedge at the back of the crowd. Jesus holds Martha back and continues ...)

« What shall we say of those unhappy people? God gave them time to do penance, but they misuse it in order to sin. But God does not lose sight of them, even if He seems to. And the moment comes when, either because the love of God pierces their hard hearts, as a thunderbolt penetrates a rock, or because the total mass of crimes carries the wave of their filth right into their throats and nostrils - and they are disgusted, at last they are disgusted with that taste and that stench which are nauseating also to other people and fill their own hearts - the moment comes when they loathe it and a feeling - desiring good - roots in their hearts. Each soul then cries: "Who

will allow me to go back to former times, when I was a friend of God? When His light shone in my heart and I walked in its rays? When the amazed world was silent before my justice, and who saw me said I was blessed? The world craved for my smiles, and my words were received like the words of an angel, and the hearts of my relatives leapt with pride in their chests. And what am I now? I am an object of derision to young people, of horror to elderly people, I am the subject of their songs, and they spit scornfully in my face.”

Truly, that is how in certain moments the souls of sinners speak, the souls of the true Jobs, because there is no greater misery for man than to lose God’s friendship and His Kingdom for ever. And they must arouse pity. Only pity. They are poor souls, who out of idleness or rashness, have lost the eternal Spouse. “On my bed, at night, I sought him whom my heart loves. I sought but did not find him” (1). In fact, in the darkness, one cannot distinguish the spouse, and the soul, spurred by love, being thoughtless because, enveloped by a spiritual night, seeks and wants to find relief from its torture. And the soul thinks it can be found with any love. No. *Only one is the love of the soul: God.* Those souls, spurred on by the love of God, wander seeking love. It would be sufficient for them to wish to have light and they would have Love as their consort. They wander like sick people, groping for love, and they find all the loves, all the foul things that man has so called, but they do not find the Love, because the Love is not gold, pleasure, power, but God.

Poor souls! Had they been less lazy and had they risen at the first invitation of the eternal Spouse, of God Who says: “Follow Me”, of God Who says: “Open to Me”, they would not have opened the door, in the outburst of their awakened love, when the disappointed Bridegroom was already far and had disappeared... And they would not have desecrated the holy impulse of the need of love in a mire which disgusts even unclean animals, as it is so useless and strewn with trite troubles, which were not flowers but thorns, which torture but do not crown. Neither would they have known the sneering words of the patrol guards, of the whole world, which, like God, but for opposite reasons, does not lose sight of the sinner, but waylays him to mock at him and criticise him.

Poor souls, beaten, despoiled and wounded by the whole world! Only God does not join in such pitiless scornful stone throwing. But He lets His tears drop to cure the wounds and put an adamant dress on His creature. *Always His creature...* Only God... and the children of God with the Father. Let us bless the Lord. He wanted Me to come back here for the sake of sinners to say to you: “Forgive. Always forgive. Make every bad thing become a good one, and every offence a grace”. I do not only say to you “make”. I say: imitate My attitude. I love and bless My enemies, because through them I have been able to come back to you, My friends.

Peace be with you all. »

The women in the crowd wave veils, the men branches: then all slowly depart after greeting Jesus.

« Will they have seen my shameless sister? »

« No, Lazarus. She was well concealed behind the hedge. We were able to see her because we were up here, the others could not see her. »

« She had promised us... »

« Why was she not to come? Is she not a daughter of Abraham? I want you, My brothers, and you, My disciples, to swear that you will not let her understand anything. Leave her alone. Will she laugh at Me? Never mind. Will she weep? Leave her alone. Will she be staying? Leave her alone. Will she be wanting to run away? Leave her alone. The secret of the Redeemer and of redeemers is to be patient, good, persevering and to pray. Nothing else. Every gesture is too much in the case of certain diseases... Goodbye, My friends. I am staying here to pray. Each of you may go to his own task and may God be with you. »

(Later, Jesus explains His attitude to His disciple and future apostle, Simon the Zealot...)

« And they would have liked Me to work a miracle immediately for her. And I could have done it. But I do not want a forced resurrection in hearts. I will force death and it will give Me back its victims. Because I am the Master of death and of life. But I will not force a resurrection on spirits, because they are not made of matter, which is lifeless without a soul, whereas spirits are immortal

beings capable of rising of their own will. I give the first call and the first help, like one who opens a sepulchre in which a man still alive has been closed, and where he would die if he were to remain for a long time in that stifling darkness, and I let in air and light... then I wait. If the spirit is anxious to come out, it comes out. But if it does not want to come out, it grows darker and it goes to the bottom. But if it comes out! ... Oh! If it comes out, I solemnly tell you that no one will be greater than a risen spirit. Only absolute innocence is greater than a dead person that becomes alive by force of love and for the joy of God... My greatest triumphs!

Look at the sky, Simon. You see there, stars, little stars and planets of various sizes. They all live and shine for God Who made them, and for the sun that illuminates them. But they are not all equally bright and of the same size. It will be the same in My Heaven. All the redeemed will have life through Me, and will receive brightness from My light. But they will not be all equally bright and great. Some will be plain star-dust, like the dust that makes Galathea milky, and will be those countless ones, who received from Christ, or rather, have taken from Him the minimum indispensable not to be damned, and only through the infinite mercy of God, after a long Purgatory, will come to Heaven. Others will be brighter and better formed, the just who have united their own will, please note that I am saying will, not good will, to the will of Christ and have obeyed My words not to be damned. Then there will be the planets, those of good will, and they will be brightest! Their light will be like a pure diamond or a bright gem of different hues: the red of a ruby, the violet of an amethyst, the gold of a topaz, the white of a pearl: the lovers faithful unto death for love, the repentants for love, the people active for love, the people immaculate for love.

And there will be some of those planets, and they will be the glory of the Redeemer, that will glare like amethysts, rubies, topazes and pearls, because they will be *everything* for the sake of love. They will be heroic to the extent of forgiving themselves for not having loved before, repentant to become saturated with expiations as Esther was saturated with perfumes before presenting herself to Ahasuerus (2), untiring in doing in a short time, the short time left to them, what they did not do in the years they spent in sin, pure to the extent of heroism in forgetting, also in their bodies, besides in their souls and thoughts, that they had senses. They will be the ones who, through their multiform brightness, will attract the eyes of the believers, of the pure, of the repentant, of the martyrs, of the heroes, of the ascetics, of the sinners - and for each of those categories their brightness will be a word, a reply, an invitation, an assurance... »

(1) Song 3:1; (2) Esther 2:1-18.

PART 2 - THE FIRST ENCOUNTERS

JESUS THROWS OUT A CHALLENGE

(Vol. 2, p. 172-5)

(It is summer time, and Jesus is speaking to a large crowd in a mountainous place, near the Sea of Galilee ...)

The sermon has already started. I understand that it is the Sermon of the Mount. But the Beatitudes have already been proclaimed. I would say that the sermon is drawing towards the close because Jesus says: « Do that and you will receive a great reward. Because the Father Who is in Heaven is merciful to good people, and He knows how to give you one hundredfold to one. So I say to you... »

There is much excitement amongst the people who crowd round the path leading to the tableau. The people closest to Jesus turn their heads round. Everybody's attention is distracted. Jesus stops speaking and turns His eyes in the same direction as the others. He is serious and handsome in His dark blue tunic, His arms folded on His chest while the first rays of the sun, rising above the eastern peak of the hill, shine on His head.

« Make room, you plebeians » shouts the angry voice of a man. « Make room for the beauty who is passing... » and four dandies, smartly dressed, come forward, one of whom is certainly

Roman, because he is wearing a Roman toga; they are carrying Mary of Magdala, still a great sinner, triumphantly on their hands, crossed to form a seat.

And she smiles with her beautiful mouth, throwing back her head and her golden hair, which is all plaits and curls held by precious hair-pins and a pale gold leaf strewn with pearls, which encircles the upper part of her forehead like a diadem, from which small light curls hang down to veil her splendid eyes, made larger and more seductive by a refined make-up. The diadem disappears behind her ears, under the mass of plaits at the back of her snow-white completely bare neck. And her nakedness extends much farther than her neck. Her shoulders are bare down to her shoulder-blades and her breast is even more so. Her dress is held on her shoulders by two little gold chains. It is completely sleeveless. Her body is covered, so to say, by a veil the only purpose of which is to protect her skin from sunburn. The dress is of a very light fabric, and when she throws herself back, out of affection, against one or the other of her lovers, she seems to be doing so completely nude. I am under the impression that the Roman is the one she prefers, because she glances and smiles at him more frequently, and rests her head on his shoulder.

« The desire of the goddess has been satisfied » says the Roman. « Rome has acted as a mount for the new Venus. Over there, there is the Apollo you wanted to see. Seduce Him, therefore... But leave some crumbs of your charm also to us. »

Mary laughs, and with an agile provoking movement, she jumps to the ground, showing her small feet shod in white sandals with golden buckles, as well as a good length of her leg. Then her dress covers her whole body. It is in fact a very wide one of snow-white wool as thin as a veil, held tight at the waist, very low, near her sides, by a large belt made of supple gold bosses. And she stands on the green tableland, where there is a vast number of lilies of the valley and wild narcissi, like a flower of flesh, an impure flower which has opened there by witchcraft.

She is more beautiful than ever. Her tiny purple lips seem a carnation, opening on the whiteness of her perfect set of teeth. Her face and body would satisfy the most exacting painter or sculptor, both because of her complexion and her figure. With her broad breast, her perfectly sized sides, her naturally supple slender waist, as compared with her sides and breast, she does look like a goddess, as the Roman said, a goddess sculptured in a light pinkish marble, on the sides of which a fabric is draped and then hangs in the front in a mass of folds. Everything has been devised to please.

Jesus stares at her. And she defiantly resists His look while she smiles and twists lightly as the Roman tickles her, running on her bare shoulders and breast a lily picked among the grass. Mary, with affected indignation, lifts her veil saying: « Have respect for my innocence » which causes the four to burst into a guffaw.

Jesus continues staring at her. As soon as the noise of the laughter fades away, Jesus resumes speaking, as if the apparition of the woman had kindled the flame of the sermon, which was losing intensity in its conclusion, and *no longer looks at her*. He looks instead at His audience who seem embarrassed and scandalised at the event.

Jesus says: « I told you to be faithful to the Law, to be humble and merciful, to love not only your brothers by the flesh, but also those who are brothers because they were born, like you, of man. I told you that forgiveness is better than hostility, that compassion is better than stubbornness. But now I tell you that you must not condemn, unless you are free from the fault you wish to condemn. Do not behave like the Scribes and Pharisees, who are severe with everybody except themselves, who call impure what is exterior and can only contaminate what is exterior, and then they receive impurity in the very depths of their hearts.

God does not stay with the impure. Because impurity corrupts what is the property of God: souls, and in particular the souls of children who are angels spread over the earth. Woe to those who tear off their wings with the cruelty of devilish beasts, and throw those flowers of Heaven into the mire, by letting them taste the flavour of material things! Woe... It would be better if they died, struck by thunderbolts, rather than commit such sin!

Woe to you, rich and fast living people! Because it is amongst you that the greatest impurity thrives, and idleness and money are its bed and pillow! You are now sated. The food of concupiscence reaches your throats and chokes you. But you will be hungry (1). And your hunger will be terrible, insatiable and unappeasable for ever and ever. You are now rich. How much good

you could do with your wealth! Instead, you do so much harm both to yourselves and to other people. But you will experience a dreadful poverty, on a day that will have no end. You now laugh. You think you are triumphing. But your tears will fill the ponds of Gehenna. And they will never cease.

Where does adultery nestle? Where does the corruption of young girls hide? Who has two or three licentious beds, in addition to his own matrimonial one, on which he squanders his money and wastes the strength of a healthy body given to him by God, that he may work for *his* family, and not to wear himself out through filthy unions which place him below unclean beasts? You heard that it was said: "You shall not commit adultery" (2). But I tell you that he who looks at a woman lustfully, that she who wished to go with a man, has already committed adultery in his or her heart, *simply by that* (3). There is *no* reason which can justify fornication. *None*. Neither the abandonment nor the repudiation of a husband. Nor pity for the repudiated woman. You have one soul *only*. When it is joined to another soul by a pact of faithfulness, it must not lie. Otherwise the beautiful body for which you sin will go with you, o impure souls, into the inexhausted fire. Mutilate your body, rather than kill it for ever by damning it. Come to your moral senses, o rich men, verminous sinks of vice, so that you may not disgust Heaven... »

Mary, who at the beginning listened with a face which was a dream of allurements and irony, sneering now and again, at the end of the sermon becomes livid with rage. She realises that although Jesus does not look at her, He is speaking *to her*. She becomes more and more livid and rebellious, and at last can resist no longer. She spitefully envelops herself in her veil and followed by the glances of the crowds jeering at her, and by Jesus' voice which pursues her, she runs down the slope of the mountain, leaving strips of her dress on the thistles and dogrose bushes growing on the edges of the path, laughing out of anger and mockery...

(1) Lk. 6:24-6; (2) Ex. 20:14, Dt. 5:18; (3) Mt. 5:27-8;

ANOTHER ENCOUNTER WITH THE MAGDALENE

(Vol. 2, p. 221-3, 225-6)

(Jesus tells His apostles that they are going to the town of Magdala, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee between Tiberias and Capernaum. Peter is scandalised at the thought of entering an ill-famed area of the town, but Jesus tells him He came to save those people who are lost. They enter a street with luxurious houses and gardens ...)

A loud noise of crying people can be heard from a sumptuous house. It is the voices of women and children. The shrill voice of a woman shouts: « My son! My son! »

Jesus turns round and looks at His apostles. Judas steps forward. « No, not you » orders Jesus. « You, Matthew. Go and find out. »

Matthew goes and comes back: « A brawl, Master. A man is dying. A Jew. The man who wounded him, a Roman, has run away. His wife, mother and children have rushed to help him... But he is dying. »

« Let us go. »

« Master... Master... It happened in the house of a woman... who is not his wife. »

« Let us go. »

Through the wide open door they enter a large hall which opens on to a lovely garden. The house seems to be divided by this kind of covered peristyle, which is full of pots with green plants, statues and inlaid articles. It is a mixture of a hall and greenhouse. In a room, the door of which opens on to the hall, there are some women weeping. Jesus goes in confidently. But He does not pronounce His usual greeting.

Among the men present there is a merchant who obviously knows Jesus, because as soon as he sees Him, he says: « The Rabbi of Nazareth! » and greets Him respectfully.

« Joseph, what is the matter? »

« Master, a stab wound in his heart... He is dying. »

« Why? »

A grey-haired unkempt woman stands up - she was kneeling near the dying man holding his limp hand - and with distracted face and voice she shouts: « Because of her, because of her... She has turned him into a devil... Mother, wife, children no longer existed for him! Hell will have you, Satan! »

Jesus looks up and His eyes follow the trembling accusing hand and, in a corner, against the dark red wall, He sees Mary of Magdala, more immodest than ever, wearing, I would say, nothing on half of her body, because she is half naked from the waist upwards, draped in a kind of hexagonal net decorated with little round objects which look like tiny pearls. But as she is in a half-light, I cannot see her well.

Jesus lowers His eyes once again. Mary, lashed by His indifference, stands up, whereas before, she seemed somewhat depressed, and strikes a defiant pose.

« Woman » says Jesus to the mother. « Do not curse. Tell Me. Why was your son in this house? »

« I told You. Because she infatuated him. She did. »

« Silence. So, he was in sin, too, because he is an adulterer and an unworthy father of these innocent children. He therefore deserves his punishment. In this life and in the next one *there is no mercy for those who do not repent*. But I feel sorry for your grief and for these innocent children. Is your house far? »

« About one hundred yards. »

« Lift the man and take him there. »

« It is not possible, Master » says Joseph, the merchant. « He is breathing his last. »

« Do as I tell you. »

They place a board under the body of the dying man and the procession slowly moves out. They cross the street and go into a shady garden. The women go on crying loudly.

As soon as they enter the garden, Jesus addresses the mother. « Can you forgive? *If you forgive, God will forgive. We must be kind-hearted, to obtain grace*. He has sinned and will sin again. It would be better for him to die, because, if he lives, he will fall into sin again and he will have to answer also for his ingratitude to God Who has saved him. But you and these innocent ones (and He points at the wife and children) would give yourselves up to despair. I have come to save, not to lose. Man, I tell you: stand up and be cured. »

The man begins to recover. He opens his eyes, sees his mother, wife and children and lowers his head shamefully.

« Son, son » says the mother. « You were dead, if He had not saved you. Come to your senses. Don't be infatuated for a... »

Jesus interrupts the old woman. « Be quiet, woman. Have mercy, as mercy was granted to you. Your house has been sanctified by a miracle, *which is always the evidence of God's presence*. That is why I could not work it where there was sin. You, at least, must endeavour to keep it such, even if he will not. Take care of him now. It is fair that he should suffer a little. Be good, woman. And you. And you little ones. Goodbye. » Jesus has laid His hand on the heads of the two women and of the children.

He then goes out, passing in front of the Magdalene who followed the procession as far as the entrance of the house, where she remained leaning against a tree. Jesus slackens His pace as if He were waiting for His disciples, but I think He does so to give Mary a chance of making a gesture. But she does not.

The disciples reach Jesus, and Peter cannot help muttering between his teeth an epithet appropriate to Mary, who, wishing to strike an attitude, bursts into a laugh of a weak triumph. But Jesus heard Peter's word, and addresses him severely: « Peter. I do not insult. Do not insult. Pray for sinners. Nothing else. »

Mary stops her trilling laughter, lowers her head and runs away, like a gazelle, towards her house.

(Later, Jesus explains why He did not speak to Mary directly, as a Saviour might ...)

« No. All that is not needed. I already said so, many months ago, in regard to another sinner. Souls must react by themselves. I pass and sow the seed. The seed works in secret. A soul is to be respected in this work. If the first seed does not take root, another must be sown, and a third one... and one must give up only when there is definite proof that it is useless to sow. And one prays. Prayer is like dew on the clods of earth: it keeps them soft and nourishes them, so that the seed can sprout. Is that not what you do, woman, with your vegetables?

Now listen to the parable of how God works in the hearts of men to establish His Kingdom there. Because every heart is a small kingdom of God on the earth. Later, after death, all these small kingdoms will agglomerate into one, immeasurable, holy eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

The Kingdom of God is created in men's hearts by the Divine Sower. He comes to his field - man belongs to God, because every man is initially His - and sows His seed. He then goes to other fields, to other hearts. Days follow the nights and nights the days. The days bring sunshine and rain, in our case rays of divine love and effusion of divine Wisdom speaking to the spirit. The nights bring stars and restful silence: in our case enlightening calls of God and silence for the soul, so that it may collect its thoughts and meditate.

The seed, in this course of imperceptible but powerful influence, swells, splits, takes root, sprouts, grows. And all that happens without any help from man. The soil spontaneously produces grass from seeds, the herb becomes strong and supports the rising ear, the ear grows, swells, hardens, becomes golden and perfect when seeding. When it is ripe, the sower comes back and cuts it because the time of perfection has arrived for that seed. It cannot develop any further, and so it is harvested.

My word does the same work in hearts. I am referring to the hearts which receive the seed. But it is a slow process. One must not spoil everything by being hasty. How troublesome it is for the little seed to split and take root! Such work is painful also for a hard wild heart. It must open itself, allow people to search it, accept new things and nourish them laboriously, appear different - being covered with humble useful things, instead of the fascinating, pompous, useless, exuberant flourishing that covered it previously. It must be satisfied with working humbly for the benefit of the divine Thought, without drawing other people's admiring attention. It must exert all its talent to grow and burst into ear. It must bum with love to become corn. And after overcoming all fears of human opinion, which are so grievous, after toiling, suffering and becoming attached to its new dress, it must be deprived of it by a cruel cut. It must give everything to receive everything. It must be divested, to be clad again in Heaven with the stole of sainthood. *The life of a sinner who becomes a saint is the longest, most heroic and glorious fight.* I tell you.

You will realise from what I told you that it is fair that I should deal with Mary as I am doing. Did I behave differently with you, Matthew? »

« No, my Lord, You did not. »

« And tell Me the truth: what convinced you more, My patience or the bitter reproaches of the Pharisees? »

« Your patience, so much so that I am *here*. The Pharisees, by despising and anathematizing me, made me scornful, and out of contempt I did more harm than I had done so far. That is what happens. Sinners become more obstinate when they realise that they are treated as sinners. But when we are caressed instead of being insulted, we are dumbfounded and we weep... and when one weeps, the whole framework of sin collapses... »

PART 3 - THE TURNING POINT

A RAY OF HOPE

(Vol. 2, p. 476-7)

Jesus arrives quietly and unannounced at the house of Lazarus, to find him praying in a loud voice:)

« Do not disappoint me, my Lord. Corroborate the ray of hope which has begun to shine in my heart (1). Grant me what I have asked You for thousands of times with my tears, what I have asked for by my actions, by forgiving, by my whole self. Give me it in exchange for my life. Grant me it in the name of Your Jesus, Who has promised me that peace. Can He possibly tell lies? Must I think that His promise was nothing but vain words? That His power is inferior to the sinful abyss which my sister is? Tell me, my Lord, that I may resign myself for Your sake... »

« Yes, I tell you! » says Jesus.

Lazarus springs round and cries: « Oh! my Lord. When did You arrive? » and he bends to kiss Jesus' tunic.

« Only a few minutes ago. »

« All alone? »

« With Simon Zealot. But I came here alone. I know that You have a *great* thing to tell Me. So tell Me. »

« No. Answer first the questions which I ask God. According to Your answer, I will tell You. »

« Tell Me, do tell Me, your *great* thing. You can tell Me... » and Jesus smiles stretching out His arms invitingly.

« Most High God! It is true? So You know that it is true?! » and Lazarus goes towards Jesus' arms to confide his great thing.

« Mary asked Martha to go to Magdala. And Martha left full of anxiety as she feared some misfortune... And I was left here, with the same fear. But by the servant who accompanied her there, Martha has sent me a letter, which has filled me with hope. Look, I have it here, on my heart. I keep it here, because it is more valuable to me than a treasure. It is very short, only a few words, but I read them now and again, to make sure that they have really been written. Look... » and Lazarus takes from under his tunic a small roll tied with a violet ribbon and unfolds it. « See? Read it, read it. In a loud voice. If You read it, it will sound more certain to me. »

« "Lazarus, my brother. Peace and blessing to you. I arrived in a short time safe and sound. And my heart has no longer throbbed with fear of fresh misfortunes, because I saw that Mary, our Mary, is all right and... shall I tell you? She looks less disturbed than previously. She wept on my heart. She wept bitterly... And then, during the night, in the room where she had taken me, she asked me many things about the Master. That is all for the time being. But since I see Mary's face and I hear her words, I can say that hope has been raised in my heart. Pray, my dear brother, and hope. Oh! If it were true! I am remaining here a little longer because I feel that she wants me to be close to her, as if she wished to be defended from temptations. And that she wants to learn... What? What we already know. Jesus' infinite bounty... I see that she is pensive, very pensive indeed... Jesus ought to be here. Pray and hope. The Lord be with you". » Jesus folds the roll and hands it back.

« Master... »

« I will go. Is it possible for you to tell Martha to come and meet Me at Capernaum in a fortnight's time, at most? »

« Yes, I can do that. And what about me? »

« You will stay here. I will send Martha here as well. »

« Why? »

« Because redemptions are deeply modest. And nothing causes more shame than the eye of a parent or of a brother. I also say to you: "Pray, pray, pray". »

Lazarus weeps on Jesus' chest... Then, when he recovers, he tells of his anxiety, of his depression... « For almost a year I have been hoping... and despairing... How long is the time taken by resurrection! » he exclaims.

Jesus lets him speak... until Lazarus realises he is failing in his duty of a host, and he stands up to take Jesus into the house...

(1) Ps. 119:116.

JESUS RE-ASSURES MARTHA

(Vol. 2, p. 491-3)

(Later, at Capernaum, Martha tells Jesus that Mary is going through a personal crisis, with fits of despair and self-mutilation. Jesus says:)

« Do you remember, Martha, what I told you once? “Mary is ill”. You did not want to believe it. Now you can see it. You say that she is mad. She says herself that she is ill and suffers from a sinful fever. I say: she is ill because she is possessed by a demon. It is still a disease. And her incoherent behaviour, her fury, her tears, her affliction, her longing for Me are stages of her illness, which has come to a moment of crisis and has its most violent fluctuations. You are doing the right thing in being good to her and patient with her. You are right in speaking to her of Me. Do not be disgusted at mentioning My Name in her presence. Poor soul of My Mary! Her soul also was created by the Father, and it is in no way different from all other souls, from yours, from Lazarus’, from the souls of the apostles and disciples. Her soul also was included and foreseen to be amongst the souls for whom I became flesh, in order to be their Redeemer. In actual fact I have come more for her than for you, Lazarus, the apostles and disciples. Poor soul of My Mary, who is suffering so much! Of My poor Mary who has been poisoned with seven poisons besides the first universal poison! (1). Of My imprisoned Mary! But let her come to Me! Let her breathe the air I breathe, let her hear My voice and meet My glance! ... She calls herself: “Manure” ... Oh! My poor dear soul in whom the demon of pride is the weakest of the seven possessing her! Only because of that she will be saved! »

« And if she should find someone who may lead her astray once again, when she comes out? She is afraid of that herself... »

« And she will always be afraid of that, now that she has gone so far as to loathe vice. But be not afraid. When a soul already has the desire of coming to Good, and is held back only by the diabolic Enemy, who is aware that he is going to lose his prey, and by the personal enemy of one’s ego, which reasons in a human way and judges itself in a human way, ascribing to God its own judgement to prevent the soul from controlling the human ego, then that soul is already strong enough against the attacks of vice and of vicious people. It has found the Polar Star, and will no longer deviate. And do not say to her again: “You have not thought of God and You are instead thinking of Israel?” It is an implicit reproach. Do not do that. She has just come out of a fire. She is one big sore. Touch her lightly, only with balms of kindness, of forgiveness and hope... Leave her free to come. You must tell her when you are thinking of coming, but do not say to her: “Come with me”. On the contrary, if you understand that she wants to come, do not come yourself. Go back and wait for her at home. She will come back to you broken by Mercy. Because I must remove the wicked power that is holding her, and for a few hours she will look like a woman whose veins have been cut, or whose bones have been removed by a doctor. But later she will feel better. She will be dumbfounded. She will be in great need of caresses and silence. Assist her as if you were her second guardian angel: without letting her perceive your presence. And if you see her weeping, let her weep. And if you hear her asking herself questions, leave her alone. And if you see her smile, and then become serious, and then smile once more in a different way, with a different look, with a different countenance, do not ask her questions, do not make her feel uneasy. She is suffering more now, ascending, than she did, descending. And she must *ascend by herself*, as she descended by herself. She could not bear you to look at her when she was descending, because your eyes were full of reproach. And she cannot bear you to look at her now that her sense of shame has been aroused at last. Then she was strong, because Satan, her master, was with her, and a wicked strength supported her and she could challenge the world, and yet she could not bear to be seen by you in her sin. Now Satan is no longer her master. He is still a guest in her, but Mary’s will is holding him by the throat. And she has not Me yet. That is why she is too weak. She cannot even bear your caressing sisterly eyes watching her confession to her Saviour. All her energy is employed and consumed, in holding the septuple demon by the throat. For all the rest she is defenceless and unclothed. But I will reclothe her and fortify her. Go in peace, Martha. And tomorrow tell her tactfully that I shall be speaking near the torrent of the Fountain, here in Capernaum, after vesper. Go in peace. I bless you. » (1) Mk. 16:9, Lk. 8:2,

THE LOST SHEEP, AND A SOUL'S SALVATION

(Vol. 2, p. 501-10)

(Jesus has been telling a large crowd about the shepherd who has left the 99 sheep, and has searched for and has at last found his lost sheep (1) ...)

... Jesus has never turned round to look at the road behind Him and on which Mary of Magdala has arrived in the dim light of the evening. She is most elegant, but at least she is dressed, and she is wearing a dark veil which conceals her features and figure. But when Jesus continues His speech from the words: « I found you, my beloved one », Mary hides her hands under her veil and weeps, softly and continuously.

People cannot see her, because she is on this side of the embankment which runs along the road. Only the moon, now high in the sky, and Jesus' spirit, can see her...

(Jesus comments to Maria Valtorta, whom He calls His "little John", about Mary Magdalene's conversion. He refers to the above event, and then to the episode in Magdala, where the man was stabbed:)

« ... I reveal those pages of the past to you, to make you happy and to give a rule to those who must learn to bend over those women, who are lepers in their souls, and also to invite those poor wretches, who are suffocating in their sepulchres of vice, to come out of them.

God is good. He is good to everybody. He does not measure by means of human measures. He does not discriminate between mortal sins. Sin, whatever it may be, grieves Him. Repentance pleases Him and makes Him willing to forgive. Resistance to Grace makes Him inflexibly severe, because Justice cannot forgive the unrepentant *who will die as such, notwithstanding all the help given to them so that they might be converted*. But the main cause of forty per cent, if not fifty per cent, of non-conversions is the negligence of those responsible for conversions, that is, a mistaken false zeal protecting *real* selfishness and pride, whereby one is happy in one's refuge, without having to descend into dirt to save a heart from it. "I am pure, I deserve respect. I will not go where there is filth and where they may fail to respect me".

But has he who speaks thus not read the Gospel, where it is written that the Son of God came to call tax collectors and prostitutes besides the honest people (2), the only honest ones according to the old Law? Does he not think that pride is impurity of the mind, and lack of charity is impurity of the heart? Will you be despised? I was despised before you and more than you, and I was the Son of God. Will you have to wear your clean robe where there is filth? And did I not touch that filth with My hands to make it stand up and say to it: "Walk on this new way"? Do you not remember what I said to your first predecessors? "Whatever town or village you go into, ask for someone trustworthy and *stay* with him". So that the world may not grumble. *Because the world is inclined to see evil in everything*. But I added: "When you enter houses - 'houses' I said, not 'house' - salute them saying: 'Peace to this house'. And if the house deserves it, peace will descend upon it, if it does not, your peace will come back to you" (3). I said that to teach you that until there is a definite proof of unrepentance, you must have the same heart *for everybody*. And I completed My lesson by saying: "And if anyone does not welcome you and does not listen to your words, as you walk out of those houses or towns, shake the dust from your feet". Sin is but *dust*, and God makes good souls, who have constantly loved Him, like smooth crystal cubes: it is enough to blow or shake the dust, and it disappears without doing any harm.

Be *really* good. Be thoroughly united, with eternal Bounty in the middle of you, and no corruption will be able to foul you above the soles of your sandals which touch the ground. Souls are so high up! I mean the souls of those who are good and thoroughly united to God. Such souls are in Heaven. And no dust or filth can reach up there, not even when thrown angrily at the spirit of an apostle. They may strike your flesh, that is, they may wound you physically or morally, persecuting you or offending you, because Evil hates Good. And so what? Was I not offended and wounded? Did they perhaps carve those blows and foul words into My Spirit? Did they upset Me? No, they did

not. Like spittle on a mirror or a stone thrown against the juicy pulp of a fruit, they skidded without penetrating, or they penetrated only superficially, without damaging the kernel enclosed in the stone: on the contrary it fosters its germination, because it is easier to sprout from a cracked core than from a whole one. Through death corn germinates, and an apostle becomes active. Sometimes through physical death, or dying daily metaphorically, by crushing one's human ego. But that is not death: it is Life. The spirit triumphs over the death of humanity.

She (Mary Magdalene) came to Me to satisfy the passing fancy of an idle woman who did not know how to while away the time, and although her ears were almost deafened by the false homage of those who lulled her, singing to her sensuality in order to make her their slave, she heard the clear severe voice of Truth. *Of the Truth that is not afraid of being despised or not understood, and speaks looking at God.* And like festive bells ringing together, all the voices mingled in the Word: voices went to sing in the open blue sky, spreading over valleys and hills, plains and lakes, to commemorate the glory of the Lord and His festivity.

Do you not remember the solemn festivity that in peace time made the day of the Lord so joyful? The big bell, with its resonant clapper, gave the first peal in the name of divine Law, and seemed to be saying: "I am speaking in the name of God, Judge and King". The smaller bells then harmonised: "Who is good, merciful and patient" (4), and the smallest bell, in a silvery angelical voice added: "Whose Love urges men to forgive and be indulgent, to teach men that forgiveness is more useful than wrath, and compassion is greater than inflexibility".

Likewise, after recalling the Law, trampled on by the sinner, I made her hear the song of forgiveness. I shook the hope of forgiveness in the darkness of sin, like a green-blue silk scarf among dark shades, so that hope might put in its comforting words. Forgiveness! It is like dew on the parching thirst of sinners. Dew is not like hail, which strikes like a dart, bounces and without penetrating the soil, kills flowers. Dew descends so lightly that even the most delicate flower does not perceive it resting on its silk petals. But it drinks its refreshing moisture. Dew settles near roots, on parched clods of earth, and penetrates the soil... It is a moisture of tears, the tears of stars, the loving tears of mothers on their thirsty children, whom it nourishes together with their sweet bountiful milk. Oh! the mysteries of elements operating also when man rests or sins! Forgiveness is like such dew. It brings not only cleanliness, but also vital juices, taken not from elements, but from divine hearths.

And after the promise of forgiveness, Wisdom speaks, saying what is legal and what is not legal, and it reproaches and shakes, not out of harshness, but out of maternal anxiety to save. How often your hardness becomes more impenetrable and unyielding to Charity bending over you! ... How often you run away while Charity speaks to you! ... How often you scorn It! How often you hate It! ... If Charity dealt with you as you deal with It, woe to your souls! Instead, see, It is the Untiring Walker who comes looking for you. And It reaches you even if you hide in the darkest of dens.

Why did I decide to go to that house? Why did I not work a miracle in it? To teach the apostles how to behave, *defying prejudices and criticism in order to fulfil their duty, which is so high as to be free from the trifling things of the world.*

Why did I say those words to Judas? The apostles were still *very much* men. All Christians are *very much men*, also the saints on the earth, although to a lesser degree. Some humanism survives also in perfect souls. But the apostles were not yet perfect. Their minds were pervaded with human reasoning. I lifted them up. But the weight of their humanity pulled them down again. To let them descend as little as possible, I had to put something on their ascending way, which could stop their descent, something on which they could stop to meditate and rest, and thus be able to ascend again to a higher level than previously. I had to bring forth something capable of convincing them that I was God, that is: introspection of their souls, victory over elements, miracles, transfiguration, resurrection, ubiquity. I was on the road to Emmaus (5) when I was in the Last Supper room (6), and the time of My ubiquity, when discussed by the apostles and disciples, was one of the reasons which affected them most strongly, freeing them from their ties, and urging them on to the way of Christ. Rather than to Judas, who was already brooding over death, I was speaking to the other eleven. I was compelled to make it very clear to them that I was God, not out of pride, but of necessity for their formation. I was God and Master. Those words define Me as such. I reveal Myself by means of an extra-human faculty, and I teach a virtue: we must not talk

evil things *not even in our hearts*. Because God sees, and God must see a pure heart to descend into it and dwell there.

Why *did I not work* the miracle in that house? To make everybody understand that the presence of God *calls for a pure environment*, out of respect for His sublime majesty. I did not work the miracle there, because I wanted to speak to her, not uttering words with My lips, but with a deeper word addressed to her sinful soul, and say: "See, poor wretch? You are so filthy that everything near you becomes foul. So foul, that God cannot act. *You are filthier than he is*. Because you are repeating Eve's sin (7), and are offering your fruit to many Adams, by tempting them and taking them away from their Duty. You are a minister of Satan". But why do I not want her to be called "Satan" by his dejected mother? *Because no reason can justify insult and hatred. The first essential condition to have God with us, is to bear no ill-will and to forgive.* The second condition is *to admit that we, or those who belong to us, are sinners as well. We must not see only other people's faults.* The third condition is *to remain grateful and faithful, after receiving grace, out of justice to the Eternal Father.* Woe to those who, after receiving grace, are worse than dogs and do not remember their Benefactor, whereas animals do!

I did not say one word to Mary Magdalene. I looked at her for a moment, as if she were a statue, then I left her. I went back to the "living ones" whom I wanted to save. I treated her with seeming carelessness, as if she were dead, like or more than a lifeless sculptured piece of marble. But I did not utter a word or make a gesture that did not aim mainly at her poor soul, which I wanted to redeem. And the last words: "I do not insult. Do not insult. Pray for sinners. Nothing else", like a garland of flowers the ends of which are joined together, are to be joined to the first words spoken upon the mountain: "Forgiveness is more useful than wrath, and compassion than inflexibility". And these have enclosed the poor wretch in a cool velvet circle, scented with goodness, making her feel how the loving service of God is different from the cruel slavery of Satan, how sweet is the heavenly perfume as compared to the stench of sin, and how relaxing it is to be loved *holily*, as compared to being possessed *satanically*.

See how moderate is the will of the Lord. He does not exact immediate conversions. He does not claim the absolute from a heart. He can wait and be satisfied. And while He waits for the lost woman to find her way, for the mad woman to find reason, He is satisfied with what the dejected mother can give her. I ask her only: "Can you forgive?" How many more questions I should have asked her to make her worthy of the miracle, if I had behaved according to human standards! But I measure your strength in a *divine way*. It was already a great success if the poor deranged mother could really forgive. And that is all I ask her, at that moment. After giving her son back to her, I say to her: "Be holy and make your house holy". But while the pangs of grief derange her mind, I ask her but to forgive the culprit. You must not exact everything from those who shortly before were in Darkness. That mother was to come later to full light, with her daughter-in-law and the children. For the time being, it was necessary to let the first dawning of Light reach her eyes blinded by tears: that is, forgiveness, the dawn of God's Day.

Of the people present only one - I am not referring to Judas, I am speaking of the people gathered there, not of My disciples - only one was not to come to the Light. There is always someone for whom the apostle toils in vain. But you must not lose heart because of such defeats. An apostle must not pretend to achieve *everything*. Struggling against him there are adverse powers, with many different names, and like tentacles of an octopus they grasp again the prey that he had snatched from them. But the apostle is still meritorious. Woe to the apostle who says: "I am not going there because I know that I shall not be able to convert anyone". He is an apostle of very little value. It is necessary to go, even if only one in a thousand will be saved. His apostolic day will be as fruitful because of that one, as it would be for a thousand, because he will have done everything in his power, and that is what God rewards. You must also consider that where the apostle is not able to convert, because the person to be converted is too firmly gripped by Satan and the power of the apostle is inadequate to the effort, God may intervene. And then? Who is greater than God?

Another thing that the apostle must absolutely practise is love. *Clear* love. Not only the secret love for the hearts of brethren. That is enough for good brethren. But the apostle is a worker of God, and he must not limit himself to prayer: he must act. Let him act with love, with great love.

Rigour paralyses the apostle's work and hinders the motion of souls towards the Light. So: not rigour, but love. Love is the incombustible fabric that protects you against the blaze of wicked passions. Love is the saturation of preserving essences which prevent human-satanic putrefaction from entering you. To conquer a soul, you must learn how to love. To conquer a soul, you must induce it to love: to love Good and disown its petty sinful loves.

I *wanted* Mary's soul. And as in your case, My little John, I did not confine Myself to speaking from the Teacher's desk. I stooped looking for her in the paths of sin. I pursued her and persecuted her by means of My love. A kind persecution! I-Purity followed her where she was Impurity. I was not afraid of any scandal, neither with regard to Myself nor to others. I could not be scandalised, because I was Mercy; and Mercy weeps over sins but is not scandalised by them. Woe to the shepherd who is scandalised and entrenches himself behind the screen of scandal to abandon a soul! Do you not know that souls are more inclined than bodies to rise again, and that the pitiful loving word saying: "Rise, sister, for your own good" often works a miracle? I was not afraid of other people's scandal. My behaviour was justified in the eyes of God, and was understood by good people. An evil-minded man fermenting with wickedness, which evaporates from a corrupt heart, *is of no importance*. Such man finds faults also in God, and considers only himself perfect. I therefore paid no attention to such people.

The three phases of the salvation of a soul are:

To be thoroughly and strictly honest in order to be able to speak without any fear of being silenced. To be able to speak to a whole crowd so that our apostolic word, addressed to the crowds gathering round our mystical boat, may travel farther and farther, like circles of waves, until it reaches the miry shore, where those who are not interested in knowing the Truth are lying in the mud. That is the first task in order to break the hard crust of the soil and prepare it to receive the seed. It is the hardest task both for him who performs it, and for him who receives it, because words, like a sharp ploughshare, must wound the listener in order to open his heart. And I solemnly tell you that the heart of a good apostle is hurt and bleeds, because of the grief in having to wound in order to open. But that grief also is prolific. Through the blood and the tears of an apostle, waste land becomes fertile.

The second quality: *It is necessary to act also where one*, less conscious of one's mission, *would flee*. The apostle must break his back in the effort to extirpate dandelion, couch-grass and thorns, in order to clear the soil and plough it, and then let the power of God and His bounty shine on it like the sun. And at the same time, like a judge and a doctor, he must be severe and merciful, and remain firm in the period of waiting to give the souls time to surmount their crises, to meditate and make up their minds.

Third phase: *As soon as a soul that has repented in silence, dares to come shyly* towards an apostle, weeping and thinking of its faults, fearing to be driven away, the apostle's heart must be *greater than the sea, more gentle than a mother's heart*, more loving than a bride's, and he *must open it completely* to allow waves of tenderness to flow from it. If you have God, Who is Charity, within you, you will easily find charitable words to be spoken to souls. God will speak in you, and on your behalf, and like honey dripping from a honeycomb, like balm flowing from a phial, love will reach parched sickened lips; it will reach wounded souls, and will be relief and medicine.

You doctor of souls, make sinners love you. Let them taste the flavour of Heavenly Charity, and let them become so eager for it, as to seek no other food. Let them feel in your kindness such a relief, as to seek it for all their wounds. Your charity must free them from all fear, because, as the epistle which you have read today says: "To fear is to expect punishment, and anyone who is afraid is still imperfect in love" (8). Neither is he perfect who causes people to be afraid. Do not say: "What have you done?" Do not say: "Go away". Do not say: "You cannot have relish for good love".

Say, instead, in My name: "Love and I will forgive you". Say: "Come, Jesus' arms are open". Say: "Enjoy this angelical Bread and this Word, and forget the pitch of Hell and Satan's sneers". Bear the weakness of other people. An apostle must bear his own and other people's weaknesses, with his own crosses and other people's. And while coming to Me, laden with wounded sheep, encourage the poor stray souls saying: "Everything is forgotten by now"; say: "Be not afraid of the Saviour. He came from Heaven for you, just for you. I am but a bridge to carry you to Him Who is

waiting for you, on the other side of the river of penitential absolution, to lead you to His holy pastures, which begin here, on the earth, and continue in Heaven, in everlasting nutritious delightful Beauty” ... »

(Early next morning, Jesus is about to leave Capernaum by boat, when Martha arrives with her servant Marcella, and tells Him what has happened ...)

« Oh! Master... Mary came home last night shortly after midnight. Oh! I was forgetting to tell You that while we were having lunch at midday, she said to me: “Would you mind lending me one of your dresses and a mantle? They may be a little short. But I will leave the dress loose and hold the mantle down...” I replied to her: “You may take whatever you wish, my dear sister”. My heart was throbbing, because shortly before, speaking to Marcella in the garden, I had said to her: “At vesper we must be at Capernaum, because the Master is speaking to the crowds this evening” and I saw Mary start and change colour. She became restless, moving about all alone, like a person in pain or in a flutter, on the point of making a decision... but does not know which way to decide. After lunch she went into my room and took the most dark and modest dress I had, she tried it on and asked the nurse to let the hem down, as it was too short. She tried to do it herself, but weeping she confessed: “I am no longer good at sewing. I have forgotten everything useful and good...” and she threw her arms round my neck saying: “Pray for me”. She went out about sunset... How much I prayed, that she might not meet anyone who would keep her from coming here, so that she might understand Your word and succeed in definitely strangling the monster enslaving her... Look: I put on Your belt, which I tied under my own, and when I felt my waist being oppressed by the hard stiff leather, to which it is not used, I would say: “He is stronger than anything”. Then Marcella and I came by wagon, as it is quicker. I do not know whether You saw us in the crowd... But what an aching pain in my heart at not seeing Mary! I would say to myself: “She must have changed her mind. She has gone back home. Or... she has run away as she could no longer stand my control, although she had asked for it”. I was listening to You and weeping under my veil. Your words seemed to be spoken just for her... and she did not hear them! That is what I was thinking as I did not see her. I went back home down-hearted. It is the truth. I disobeyed You because You had said to me: “If she comes, you stay at home and wait for her”. But think of my heart, Master! It was my sister coming to You! How could I not be there to see her near You? And then... You said to me: “She will be broken” and I wanted to be near her to support her at once...

I was kneeling in my room weeping and praying and it was after midnight when she came in. She came in so softly that I heard her only when she threw herself upon me, embracing me and saying: “Everything you say, my blessed sister, is true. Nay, it is much more so than you told me. His mercy is much greater. Oh! Martha! There is no further need for you to watch me! You will see that I am no longer cynical and miserable! You will no longer hear me say: ‘I do not want to think!’ Now I want to think. I know what to think of. Of Bounty Which became flesh. You were certainly praying for me, sister. And victory is already within your grasp: Your Mary, who no longer wants to sin and who is born to a new life. Here she is. Look at her straight in the face. Because she is a new Mary, whose face has been washed by tears of hope and repentance. You can kiss me, my pure sister. There is no trace of shameful love affairs on my face. He said that He loves my soul. Because He was speaking to my soul and about my soul. I was the lost sheep. He said, listen if I am right. You know how the Saviour speaks...” and she repeated Your parable perfectly. Mary is so intelligent! Much more intelligent than I am. And she remembers. So I heard You twice; and if those words were holy and adorable on Your lips, on hers they were holy, adorable and loving because they were spoken by my sister, who had been found and had come back to the family fold. We were sitting on a mat on the floor, embracing each other, as we were wont to do when we were little girls in my mother’s room, or near the loom where she wove or embroidered her wonderful cloths. And we remained thus, no longer divided by sin, and my mother also seemed to be present in her spirit. We wept without any grief, on the contrary, with so much peace! We kissed each other happily... And then Mary, who was tired after her long walk, and was exhausted with emotion and so many feelings, fell asleep in my arms, and with the help of the nurse I laid her on

my bed... and I left her there to come here... » and Martha, thoroughly happy, kisses Jesus' hands.

« I also will tell you what Mary said to you: "Victory is already in your grasp". Go and be happy. Go in peace. Let your behaviour be kind and prudent with your reborn sister. Goodbye, Martha. Let Lazarus know, as he is worried. »

« Yes, Master. But when will Mary come with us women disciples? »

Jesus smiles and says: « The Creator created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh (9). »

« I understand. I must be patient... »

« Yes, patient. Do not sigh. That is a virtue as well. Peace to you, women. We shall meet soon » and Jesus leaves them and goes towards the place where the boat is waiting near the shore...

(1) Mt. 18:11-14, Lk. 15:4-7; (2) Mt. 9:13, Mk. 2:17, Lk. 5:32; (3) Mt. 10:11-14, Mk. 6:10-11, Lk. 9:4-5, 10:10-11, 10:5-6; (4) Ps. 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; (5) Mk. 16:12-14, Lk. 24:13-35; (6) Jn. 20:19-23; (7) Gen. 3:6-7; (8) 1Jn. 4:18; (9) Gen. 2:2.

MARY MAGDALENE IN THE HOUSE OF THE PHARISEE

(Vol 2, p. 511-20)

[Maria Valtorta describes a vision she sees, of a banquet in the house of Simon, the Pharisee (1). (It is important to note that this was Maria's first sighting of Mary Magdalene, because the visions, as they were given to her, were not in their correct chronological order):]

I see the magnificent curtain covering the door-space being raised, and a young woman come in. She is beautiful, sumptuously dressed, and her hair is splendidly arranged. The artistically interlaced locks of her very thick blond hair form a beautiful ornament on her head. Her hair is so bright and abundant that she seems to be wearing a golden helmet, wrought in relief. If I should have to compare the dress she has on with the ones I have always seen the Blessed Virgin Mary wear, I would say that it is very peculiar and complicated. There are buckles on the shoulders, jewels to hold together the pleats at the top of the breast, little gold chains to outline the breast, and the belt is adorned with studs and gems. It is a provoking dress, which emphasises the features of her beautiful body. The veil on her head is so light that... it veils nothing: it is an additional charm and nothing else. Her sandals are very expensive ones, of red leather with gold buckles and strips interlaced round her ankles.

Everybody, except Jesus, turns round to look at her. John watches her for a moment, then looks at Jesus. The others stare at her with evident malicious avidity. But the woman does not look at them, neither does she pay attention to the whispering that has arisen at her entrance, or to the winking of the people present, with the exception of Jesus and His disciple. Jesus pretends He has seen nothing. He continues His conversation with the landlord.

The woman goes towards Jesus and kneels down at the feet of the Master. She lays on the floor a little vase, shaped like a pot-bellied amphora, takes off her veil after removing a long valuable pin, which fastened it to her hair, she removes rings from her fingers, and lays everything on the couch near Jesus' feet. She then takes His feet in her hands, first the right one and then the left one, unlaces His sandals and lays them on the floor. She then kisses His feet bursting into tears, she rests her forehead on them, caresses them, while tears stream down her face like drops of rain, shining in the light of the chandelier and wetting those adorable feet.

Jesus turns His head round very slightly and slowly, and His deep eyes rest for a moment on the woman's reclined head. An absolving glance. He then looks again at the centre of the hall, leaving her free in her outburst.

But the others do not: they scoff, wink and sneer. The Pharisee sits up for a moment to have a better view, and his eyes express desire, vexation and irony. He desires the woman, and that

feeling is evident. He is vexed because she has come in so freely, which may cause the others to think that she is a habitual guest in the house. And he is ironical with regard to Jesus...

But the woman is not aware of anything. She continues to shed torrents of tears noiselessly. She weeps, and now and again she sobs. She then lets her hair down, after removing the gold hairpins which held up her complicated hair dress, and she puts also the hairpins near the rings and the long veil-pin. Her golden locks roll down her back. She takes them with both hands, brings them in front of her and rubs them on Jesus' wet feet, until she sees that they are dry. She dips her fingers into the little vase and takes out a yellowish highly scented ointment. A sweet-smelling perfume, a mixture of lily and tuberose, spreads throughout the hall. The woman uses it profusely, she spreads it, kissing and caressing His feet at the same time.

Jesus looks at her now and again with so much loving pity. John, who looked round in amazement when she burst into tears, cannot detach his eyes from Jesus and the woman, and looks at them alternately.

The face of the Pharisee has become more and more sullen. I now hear the well known words of the Gospel, and I hear them uttered *in a tone and with a look*, which cause the old resentful man to lower his head.

I hear the words absolving the woman, who goes away leaving her jewels at Jesus' feet. She has tied her veil round her head, thus gathering together her dishevelled hair as best she can. Jesus, while saying to her: « Go in peace », lays His hand on her reclined head for a moment. A very gentle gesture.

Jesus now says to me:

« What made the Pharisee and his companions lower their heads, and is not mentioned in the Gospel, are the words that My spirit, in one glance, darted at him and drove into his arid avid soul. I answered him much more than has been reported, because none of the thoughts of those men was concealed from Me. And he understood My mute language, which was more meaningful and reproachful than My words were.

I said to him: "No. Do not make wicked insinuations to justify yourself to yourself. I am not affected by lewdness as you are. She does not come to Me attracted by sensuality. I am not you or like those who are like you. She comes to Me because My countenance and My word, which she heard by chance, have enlightened her soul, which lust had left in utter darkness. And she comes because she wants to overcome her sensuality, and she realises, poor creature, that she will never succeed by herself. She loves My spirit, nothing but My spirit, which she perceives is supernaturally good. After so much evil that she received from you all, who have taken advantage of her weakness for your own vices, rewarding her with your lashing scorn, she comes to Me, because she realises that she has found Goodness, Joy and Peace, which she sought in vain in the pomp and vanities of this wicked world. Cure the leprosy of your soul, o hypocritical Pharisee, that you may have the right view of things. Forsake pride of mind and lust of flesh. *Their leprosy is much more fetid than the leprosy of your bodies.* My touch can cure you of the latter, because you beg Me to cure you, *but I cannot cure you of the leprosy of your souls, because you do not wish to be cured, as you like it.* But she wants to recover. And thus, I cleanse her, and I free her from the chains of her slavery. The sinner is dead. She is still over there, in those ornaments that she is ashamed to offer Me that I may sanctify them, using them for the needs of My disciples and Mine and for the poor, whom I help by means of the surplus of other people, *because I, the Master of the universe, possess nothing now that I am the Saviour of man.* She is still here, in the perfume spread on My feet, the perfume that has been humiliated like her hair, on that part of My body that you disdained to refresh with the water of your well, notwithstanding I have walked so far to bring light to you also. The sinner is dead. And Mary is reborn, as beautiful as a modest girl, through her deep sorrow and her righteous love. She washed herself in her tears. And I solemnly tell you, o Pharisee, that between this young man who loves Me in the purity of his youth, and that woman who loves Me in the sincerity of repentance of a heart reborn to Grace, I make no difference. And to the Pure young man and the Repentant woman I entrust the task of understanding My thought as no one else can, as well as the task of rendering the last honours to My Body, and the first

greetings (I am not taking into account My Mother's special greetings) when I will rise from the dead". That is what I wanted to tell the Pharisee by means of My countenance.

But I will draw your attention to something else: *for your joy and the joy of many*. Also, at Bethany Mary repeated the gesture that marked the dawn of her redemption (2). There are personal gestures, which are repeated and are peculiar to a person like the person's style. They are unmistakable gestures. But, as it was fair, at Bethany the gesture was not humiliated so much, and it was more confidential in its reverent adoration.

Mary has gone a long way since that dawn of her redemption. A very long way. Love, like a high wind, has blown her high up and far ahead. Love has burnt her like a fire, destroying her impure flesh, and making a purified spirit her new master. And Mary, now different in her revived womanly dignity, as she is different in her clothing, which is now as simple as My Mother's, in her hair-style, her looks, her behaviour, her words, this new Mary has a new way to honour Me by means of the same gesture. She takes the last of her vases of perfume, which she kept for Me, and pours it on My feet and My head, *without shedding any tears, with a happy countenance due to love and the certainty that she had been forgiven and saved*. Mary can now touch My head and anoint Me. *Repentance and love have cleansed her by means of the fire of seraphim, and she is a seraph*.

Repeat that to yourself, Mary, My little "voice" and repeat it to souls. Go, tell the souls that dare not come to Me because they feel guilty. He who loves much is pardoned much. That is, He who loves Me. You, poor souls, do not know how much the Saviour loves you! Be not afraid of Me. Come. Confidently. Courageously. I open My Heart and My arms to you.

Always remember: *"I make no difference between him who loves Me with his spotless purity and him who loves Me in the sincere contrition of a heart reborn to Grace". I am the Saviour. Always remember that.*

Go in peace. I bless you. »

(In another dictation, Jesus says to Maria:)

« I always come when "a heart is anxious to understand". I am not a hard severe God. I am Living Mercy. And I come faster than thought to those who apply to Me. And I went immediately to poor Mary of Magdala, so immersed in sin, with My spirit, *as soon as I perceived that the desire to understand was rising in her. The desire to understand the light of God and her own state of darkness*. And I became her Light.

I was speaking to many that day, but in actual fact I was speaking only for her. I saw but her who had approached us, driven by the vehemence of her soul, which rebelled against the flesh enslaving it. I saw but her with her poor face in turmoil, her forced smile, which endeavoured to hide so much weeping of her heart, under the appearance of false confidence and joy, which were a challenge to the world and herself. I saw but her, more entangled in the bramble than the lost sheep of the parable, and she was drowning in the disgust of her own life, a disgust brought to the surface like those deep waves that bring up the water of the bottom.

I did not say great words, neither did I touch any specific subject concerning her, a well known sinner, as I did not wish to mortify her, compelling her to run away, to be ashamed or to come to Me. I left her in peace... I let My word and My look descend into her, fermenting there to turn the impulse of a moment into her glorious holy future. I spoke by means of one of the most gentle parables: a beam of light and kindness flashing just for her. And that evening, while I was setting foot in the house of the proud rich Pharisee, where My word could not fermentate into future glory because it was killed by Pharisaic pride, I already knew that she would come, after weeping bitterly in her room of vice, and that she had already decided on her future in the light of her tears.

Both the flesh and the thoughts of the men were inflamed with lust when they saw her enter. Everybody looked at her lustfully, except the two "pure ones" present at the banquet: John and I. They all thought that she came because of one of her usual caprices, a true diabolic possession, which drove her to extemporaneous affairs. *But Satan was already defeated*. And when they all noticed that she did not look at them, they enviously thought that she had come for Me. *Man always fouls also the purest things, when he is but flesh and blood. Only the pure have the right view, because there is no sin in them upsetting their thoughts*.

But there is no reason to be frightened because man does not understand, Mary. God understands. And that is enough for Heaven. The glory that comes from men does not add an ounce to the glory that is the destiny of the blessed souls in Paradise. Always remember that. Poor Mary of Magdala was always wrongly judged in her good deeds. But she was not wrongly judged in her bad deeds, because they were lustful mouthfuls offered to the insatiable hunger of lewd men. She was criticised and wrongly judged at Nain, in the house of the Pharisee and she was criticised and reproached at Bethany, in her own home.

But John, who says a great word, has the key to the last bit of criticism: "Judas... *because he was a thief*" (3). I say: "The Pharisee and his friends *because they were lewd*". See? Lust for sensuality, greed for money, raise their voices to criticise good deeds. Good people do not criticise. *Never*. They understand.

But, I would repeat it, the criticism of the world is of no importance. What matters is the judgement of God. »

(Later, Thomas asks Jesus:)

« Lord, is it true that Mary of Magdala asked You to forgive her, in the Pharisee's house? »

« It is true, Thomas. »

« And did You forgive her? » asks Philip.

« I did. »

« You did the wrong thing! » exclaims Bartholomew.

« Why? She was sincerely repentant and deserved to be forgiven. »

« But You should not have forgiven her in that house, publicly... » says the Iscariot reproachingly.

« But I do not understand where I was wrong. »

« This is the point: You know who the Pharisees are, how full their heads are of cavils, how they watch You, slander and hate You. One of them in Capernaum was Your friend and that was Simon. And You called a prostitute into his house to desecrate it and cause scandal to Your friend Simon. »

« I did not call her. She came. She was not a prostitute. She repented. That throws a different light on the matter. *If they were not overcome with nausea beforehand, when they approached her and desired her*, also in My presence, now that she is no longer just flesh, but a soul, they should not feel disgust seeing her enter the house to kneel at My feet and accuse herself weeping, humiliating herself in humble public confession represented by her tears. Simon the Pharisee had his house sanctified by a great miracle: "the resurrection of a soul". Five days ago in the square in Capernaum, he asked Me: "Is that the only miracle You worked?" and he replied himself: "Certainly not" showing his desire to see one. And I gave it to him. I chose him to be the witness, the middleman of this engagement of a soul with Grace. He ought to be proud of it. »

« Instead, he is scandalised. Perhaps You have lost a friend. »

« I found a soul. It is worth losing a man with his friendship, the poor friendship of a man, to give a soul the friendship of God. »

« It is useless. We cannot get You to consider matters from a human point of view. We are on the earth, Master! Remember that. And the laws and the ideas of the world are in force. You act according to the method of Heaven, You live in the Heaven You have in Your heart, You see everything in the light of Heaven. Poor Master of Mine! How divinely unsuited You are to live among us wicked people! » exclaims Judas embracing Him. The apostle, who is amazed and desolate at the same time, concludes: « And I am sorry because, through too much perfection, You make enemies of too many people. »

« Do not be sorry, Judas. It is written that it must be thus (4). But how do you know that Simon is offended? »

« He did not say that he is offended. But he made Thomas and me understand that it should not have happened. You should not have invited her to his house, which only honest people enter. »

« Well! With regard to the honesty of the people going to Simon's house, let us drop the subject » says Peter.

And Matthew adds: « I could say that the perspiration of prostitutes poured several times on the floors, on the table and beyond them in the house of Simon, the Pharisee. »

« But not publicly » retorts Judas.

« No. Hypocrisy concealed it. »

« So you can see that there is a difference. »

« There is also a difference between a prostitute who goes in to say: "I am giving up my disgraceful sinful life" and one who goes in to say: "Here I am to commit sin with you" »

« Matthew is right » they all say.

« Of course, he is right. But they do not reason the way we do. We must come to a compromise with them, and adjust ourselves to their ways to have them friendly. »

« *No, never, Judas. In truth, honesty, in moral behaviour there are neither adjustments nor compromises* » thunders Jesus. And He concludes: « In any case I know that I acted rightly and for a good purpose. And that is enough... »

(1) Lk. 7:37-50; (2) Mt. 26:6-13, Mk. 14:3-9. Jn. 12:3-8; (3) Jn. 12:6; (4) Is. 53:.

PART 4 - TO JESUS, THROUGH MARY

A FLIGHT TO THE MOTHER

(Vol. 2, p. 522-4)

(Some days later, Jesus returns to Capernaum to find Martha very upset. He asks her:)

« Are you still weeping? Are you not happy? »

Martha shakes her head.

« But why? »...

There is a long pause full of sobs. At last, she moans: « Mary has not come back for many nights. And we cannot find her. Neither I nor Marcella nor the nurse can find her... She went out after ordering the wagon to be ready for her. She was magnificently dressed... Oh! she would not put on my dress again! ... She was not half -nude - she has some such dresses as well - but it was still a very provoking one... And she took jewels and perfumes... and has not come back. She dismissed the servant when they reached the first houses in Capernaum saying: "I will come back in the company of other people". But she has not come back. She deceived us! Or she felt lonely, perhaps she was tempted... or something has happened to her... She has not come back... » And Martha falls on her knees, weeping, with her head reclined on her forearm, which is resting on a pile of empty sacks.

Jesus looks at her and like an *overlord* He says slowly and confidently: « Do not weep. Mary came to Me three evenings ago. She anointed My feet and left at My feet all her jewels. She thus consecrated herself, and for ever, and has become one of My disciples. Do not disparage her in your heart. She has excelled you. »

« But where is my sister then? » exclaims Martha looking up with a troubled face. « Why has she not come back home? Has she been assailed? Has she taken a boat and drowned herself? Or has a rejected lover carried her off? Oh! Mary! My Mary! I had found her and I have lost her at once! » Martha is really beside herself. She does not consider that those downstairs can hear her. Neither does she consider that Jesus can tell her where her sister is. She is in despair and does not ponder on anything.

Jesus takes her by the wrists and compels her to be still and to listen to Him, towering above her with His height and dominating her with His magnetic look. « That is enough! I want you to have faith in My words. I want you to be generous. Have you understood? » He does not let her go until Martha calms down a little. « Your sister has gone to savour her joy, and she has enveloped herself in holy solitude because she is full of the supersensitive modesty of redeemed souls. I told you in advance. She cannot bear the kind but inquisitive look of relatives on her new dress of a bride of Grace. And what I say is always true. You must believe Me. »

« Yes, my Lord, I do. But my Mary has been too long a prey to the demon, He has recaptured her at once, he... »

« He is avenging himself on you for the prey he has lost for ever. Am I therefore to see that you, the strong woman, are becoming his prey through a foolish dismay for no reason whatsoever? Am I to see that because of her, who now believes in Me, you are going to lose the beautiful faith that I always saw in you? Martha! Look at Me carefully. Listen to Me. Do not listen to Satan. Do you not know that when he is compelled to give up a prey, because God has defeated him, he busies himself at once to find other victims, because he is an untiring torturer of human beings and an indefatigable thief of God's rights? Do you not know that the recovery of a soul is consolidated by the torture of another good faithful soul that resists the demon's attacks? Do you not know that nothing of what exists and happens in creation is uncontrolled, but everything follows an eternal law of subordination and consequence, whereby the deed of one person has very wide natural and supernatural repercussions? You are weeping here, you are tormented here by a horrible doubt, but you remain faithful to your Christ also in this hour of darkness. Not far from you, but in a place unknown to you, Mary feels that her last doubt on the infinity of forgiveness received is being dissipated, and her weeping changes into smiles and her shadow into light. It is your torture that guided her where there is peace, where souls are regenerated near the immaculate Mother, Who is such Life that She was granted the privilege of giving birth to the Christ, Who is the Life. Your sister is with My Mother. Oh! she is not the first to furl sail in that peaceful harbour after the gentle ray of the living Star of Mary called her to Her loving bosom, out of silent but active love for Her Son! Your sister is at Nazareth. »

« But how did she go there if she does not know Your Mother, or Your house? ... By herself... At night... Thus... Without means... Wearing that dress... Such a long way... How? »

« How? As a tired swallow flies back to its native nest, crossing seas and mountains, through storms, fog and hostile winds. As swallows fly to hibernating places. Instinct guides them, warmth invites them, the sun calls them. She also went to the ray inviting her... to the universal Mother. And we will see her come back happily at dawn... coming out for ever from darkness, with a Mother beside her, Mine, never to be an orphan again. Can you believe that? »

« Yes, my Lord. »

Martha looks as if she were charmed. Jesus in fact has been the dominator. Tall, upright, and yet lightly bent over Martha who was kneeling, He has spoken slowly, but incisively, as if He wished to transfuse Himself into the perturbed disciple. I have seldom seen Him so powerful, to persuade by means of His word a person listening to Him. But at the end, what light, what smile is on His face! Martha's face mirrors it with a smile and a milder light.

« And now go and rest. With My peace. »

THE MAGDALENE AND THE MOTHER

(Vol. 2, pp. 525-8, 632-3)

(Jesus is at Capernaum with His apostles and Martha, when a fierce storm erupts. As fishermen are beaching their boats and women are gathering their children, Jesus says to Peter:)

« Simon, come with Me. Call also Martha's servant and My brother James. Get a large piece of canvas. A strong large piece. There are two women on the road and we must go and meet them. »

Peter looks at Him curiously, but he obeys without wasting any time. On the way, while they are running southwards through the village, Simon asks: « But who are they? »

« My Mother and Mary of Magdala. »

The shock is such that Peter stops for a moment as if he were nailed to the ground and he exclaims: « Your Mother and Mary of Magdala?!?! Together?!?! » He then resumes running, as neither Jesus nor James nor the servant have stopped. But he repeats: « Your Mother and Mary of Magdala! Together! ... Since when? »

« Since she is Mary of Jesus. Be quick, Simon, it is beginning to rain... »

Peter strives to keep up with his companions, who are taller and faster than he is. Clouds of dust now rise from the parched road, blown by a wind, which is becoming stronger and stronger every moment, ruffling the lake and raising breakers, which pound, roaring on the shore. When it is possible to see the lake, it looks like a huge cauldron, boiling furiously. Waves three- or four-feet high rise in all directions, clashing, merging, swelling, then parting in opposite directions, seeking other waves to plunge into: a foaming duel of wave crests, of swelling masses of water, of roaring billows reaching the shore and lashing the houses closest to it. When houses conceal the view of the lake, the latter discloses its presence with a roar, exceeding the howl of the wind that bends trees, tearing off foliage and fruit: a deafening roar exceeding the rumble of prolonged threatening thunders, preceded by flashes of lightning, which are becoming more and more frequent and powerful.

« I wonder how frightened those women must be » mumbles Peter panting.

« Not My Mother. I do not know about the other. But if we do not hurry, they will certainly get drenched. »

They have left Capernaum about one hundred yards behind, proceeding through clouds of dust and very heavy rain, a real downpour, which furrows obliquely the gloomy air so violently that the rain is pulverised, and thus blinds them and takes away their breath, when they see two women running and seeking shelter under a large tree.

« There they are. Let us run! »

Although Peter's love for Mary lends wings to his feet, short- legged as he is and not a very good runner, he arrives when Jesus and James have already covered the two women with a large piece of a sail.

« We cannot stop here. There is the danger of thunderbolts, and in a short while the road will be a torrent. Let us go, Master. At least as far as the nearest house » says Peter out of breath.

They set out with the women in the middle of them, holding the canvas over their heads and backs. The first word that Jesus addresses to Mary, who is still wearing the dress she had on the evening of the banquet in Simon's house, with a mantle of the Blessed Virgin on her shoulders, is: « Are you afraid, Mary? »

Mary Magdalene, whose head is lowered under her veil and whose hair has become thoroughly dishevelled, running in the rain, lowers her head even further, blushes and whispers: « No, my Lord. »

Also, Our Lady has lost some hairpins and She looks like a little girl with her plaits hanging down her back. She smiles at Her Son Who is beside Her and speaks to Him through that smile.

« You are soaking, Mary » says James of Alphaeus touching Our Lady's veil and mantle.

« It does not matter. We are not getting wet now. Is that right, Mary? He has rescued us also from the rain » says Mary kindly to the Magdalene, of whose painful embarrassment She is fully aware. Mary nods assent.

« Your sister will be happy to see you. She is at Capernaum. She was looking for you » says Jesus.

Mary looks up for a moment and stares at Jesus with her beautiful eyes, while Jesus speaks to her with the simplicity He uses with the other women disciples. But she does not say anything. She is stifled by too many emotions.

Jesus concludes: « I am glad I kept her. I will let you go after I have blessed you. »

His last words are lost in the sharp crash of a nearby thunderbolt. The Magdalene is fear-struck for a moment. She covers her face with her hands, bends her head bursting into tears.

« Don't be afraid! » says Peter encouraging her. « It is over now. You must never be afraid when you are with Jesus. »

Also James, who is beside the Magdalene, says to her: « Do not weep. The houses are not far now. »

« I am not crying for fear... I am weeping because He said to me that He will bless me... I... I... » but she can say no more.

The Blessed Virgin intervenes in order to calm her, saying: « Mary, you have already overcome your storm. Think no more about it. Now everything is serene and peaceful. Is that right, My Son? »

« Yes, Mother. It is all very true. Before long the sun will be shining, and everything will look more beautiful, cleaner and fresher than yesterday. It will be the same with you, Mary. »

And His Blessed Mother, pressing the Magdalene's hand, continues: « I shall repeat your words to Martha. I am glad that I can see her at once and tell her how her Mary is full of good will. »

Peter, paddling in the watery mud and bearing patiently with the deluge, comes out from under the canvas and runs towards a house to ask for shelter.

« No, Simon » says Jesus. « We all prefer to go home. Is that right? »

Everybody agrees and Peter goes back under the piece of sail.

Capernaum is like a desert. Wind, rain, thunder and lightning prevail there, together with hailstones, which are now striking houses and terraces sounding and bouncing. The lake is dreadfully impressive. The waves lash the houses near it, because the little beach has disappeared and the boats fastened near the houses seem to have sunk, so full they are of water which breakers keep pouring into them, while the water already in them overflows.

They run into the kitchen garden, which has become a huge puddle with rubbish floating on the muddy water, and then enter the kitchen where they are all gathered.

Martha gives a scream when she sees her sister held by the hand by Mary. She clasps her neck, but does not realise how wet she is, she kisses her and calls her: « Miri, Miri, my darling! » Perhaps that is the pet-name by which they called the Magdalene when she was a little girl.

Mary is weeping, with her head resting on her sister's shoulder, and covers Martha's dark dress with her thick golden hair, the only shining thing in the dark kitchen where a little fire of brushwood gives some light, while a little lamp hardly sheds any.

The apostles are dumbfounded, and so are the landlord and his wife, who look into the kitchen upon hearing Martha's scream, and after a moment of understandable curiosity they withdraw discreetly.

When her effusions of loves have somewhat calmed down, Martha notices Jesus and Mary, and realises that it is strange that they should be all together. She thus asks her sister, Our Lady and Jesus - I could not say whom she asks more insistently -: « But... how is it that you are all together? »

« The storm, Martha, was approaching. I went with Simon, James and your servant to meet the two pilgrims. »

Martha is so shocked that she does not consider the fact that Jesus was so certain in going to meet them, and does not ask: « But... did You know? ». The question, however, is asked by Thomas, who gets no reply because Martha says to her sister: « But why were you with Mary? »

The Magdalene lowers her head.

Our Lady comes to her rescue taking her by the hand and saying: « She came to Me as a pilgrim goes to a place where she can be told which road to take to reach her destination. And she said to Me: "Teach me what I must do to belong to Jesus". And since she is animated by thorough good will, she understood that wisdom at once! And I found that she was ready to be taken by the hand and led to You, My Son, and to you, good Martha, and to you, brother-disciples, and say to you: "Here is Your disciple and your sister, who will give but supernatural joys to her Lord and to her brothers". I ask you to believe Me and to love her as Jesus and I love her. »

The apostles then gather round her greeting their new sister. There is, of course, a certain amount of curiosity... But how could that be avoided?! After all... they are still men...

It is Peter's common sense that says: « That's all very well. You have assured her assistance and holy friendship. But we ought to consider that our Mother and sister are drenched to the skin... We are soaking, as well, to tell you the truth... But they are in a worse situation. Their hair is dripping water like willow trees after a storm, and their clothes are wet and muddy. Let us light a fire, and get dresses for them and prepare some warm food... »

Everybody becomes busy: Martha takes the two drenched travellers into the room, the fire is kindled, and the wet garments, veils and mantles are hung in front of it. I do not know what arrangements they are making in the room... I see that Martha, who has found once again her energy of a very good housekeeper, comes and goes solicitously, carrying basins and hot water, cups of hot milk, garments lent by the landlady...

(In a later episode, the Mother says to the Magdalene:)

« ... Remember that you wept on My breast your first happy tears. I am therefore your Mother because a baby weeps its first tears on its mother's breast. I am your Mother and will always be such. What may be burdensome for you to tell also the kindest sister, the most loving nurse, come and tell Me. I will always understand you. What you would not dare say to My Jesus, because it is still stained with humanity, which He does not want in you, come and tell Me. I will always be indulgent to you. And if you should like to inform Me also of your triumphs - but I would prefer you told Him, like sweet-smelling flowers, because He is your Saviour, not I - I will rejoice with you... »

SEARCHING THE NET OF FISH

(Vol. 2, p. 529-33)

(Upstairs, after the violent storm has become heavy rain, Jesus' Mother explains how She and the Magdalene left Her brother-in-law Alphaeus and his wife Mary at Nazareth:)

« ... We ran away like two little girls, did we not, Mary? Mary came late in the evening, when it was dark, and we left at dawn. I only said to Alphaeus: "Here is the key. I shall be back soon. Tell Mary". And I came away. »

« We shall go back together, Mother. As soon as the weather is settled and Mary has a dress, we shall all go together through Galilee, and we shall accompany our sisters to the safest road. So Porphirea, Susanna, and your wives and daughters, Philip and Bartholomew, will meet them. » His expression: « Will meet them », instead of saying: « will meet Mary » is really exquisite. And it is also a strong one. It demolishes every prejudice and mental reservation of the apostles concerning the Magdalene. His words *impose her*, overcoming their reluctance, her shame, everything.

Martha's face shines with joy. Mary Magdalene blushes and her countenance is imploring, grateful, upset; what can I say? ... The Most Holy Mother smiles kindly.

« Where shall we go first, Master? »

« To Bethsaida. Afterwards we shall go to Nazareth via Magdala, Tiberias and Cana. From Nazareth we shall proceed to Bethlehem in Galilee via Japhia and Shimron, and then to Sicaminon and Caesarea... » Jesus is interrupted by an outburst of weeping of the Magdalene. He raises His head, looks at her and then continues as nothing had happened: « At Caesarea you will find your wagon. That is *the instruction* I gave the servant and you will go to Bethany. We shall meet later, at the Feast of the Tabernacles. »

Mary Magdalene collects herself at once, she does not reply to her sister's questions, but she goes out of the room and probably withdraws to the kitchen for a little while.

« Jesus, Mary suffers on hearing that she has to come to certain towns. We must understand her... I am saying this more for the disciples than for You » remarks Martha humbly and worriedly.

« That is true, Martha. *But it must be so*. If she does not face the world at once and does not overcome public opinion, which is a dreadful torturer, her heroic conversion will be paralysed. She must do that at once and in our company. »

« While she is with us no one will say anything to her. I can assure you, Martha, also on behalf of all my companions » promises Peter.

« Of course! We shall treat her as a sister. That is what Mary said she is, and that is what she will be for us » confirms Thaddeus.

« After all!... We are all sinners, and the world did not spare us either. So, we can understand her struggle » says the Zealot.

« I understand her more than anyone else. It is very meritorious to live where we sinned. People know who we are!... It is a torture. But it is justice and glory to resist there. Precisely because the power of God is manifest in us, we spur others to turn, without even uttering words » says Matthew.

« You can see, Martha, that your sister is understood and loved by everybody. And she will be loved and understood more and more. She will be a reference mark for so many guilty and fearful

souls. She is a great strength also for good people. Because after shaking off the last fetters of her humanity, Mary will be a fire burning with love. She has only given a different course to the exuberance of her feelings. She has raised her powerful faculty to love, to a supernatural level. And she will work wonders there. I can assure you. She is still upset now. But you will see her become calmer and stronger in her new life as days go by. In Simon's house I said: "She is pardoned much because she loves much" (1). I now solemnly tell you that she will be forgiven everything, because she will love her God with all her strength, her soul, her thought, her blood, her flesh, to the extent of holocaust. »

« She is lucky to deserve such words! I wish I deserved them, too » sighs Andrew.

« You? But you deserve them already! Come here, my fisherman. I want to tell you a parable that seems to have been thought up just for you. »

« Just a moment, Master. I am going to call Mary. She is so anxious to become acquainted with Your doctrine! »

While Martha goes out the others arrange their seats so as to form a semicircle round Jesus. The two sisters come back and sit once again near the Blessed Virgin.

Jesus begins to speak (2): « Some fishermen took to the open sea and cast their net, and after due time they hauled it on board. They were doing their work with considerable difficulty according to the instructions of a master, who had entrusted them with the task of supplying his town with choice fish, and had said to them: "Do not bother to bring ashore unwholesome or inferior quality fish. Throw them back into the sea. Other fishermen will catch them and as they work for another master, they will take them to his town, because they consume there what is harmful and thus makes the town of my enemy more and more horrible. Nothing unhealthy is to enter my beautiful, bright, holy town".

Thus, after hauling the net on board, the fishermen began their selection work. It was a good catch, and the fish differed in appearance, size and colour. Some looked beautiful, but their flesh was full of bones and tasted unpleasant; their bellies were full of mud, worms and rotten seaweed, which accentuated the bad taste of the fish. Others instead were ugly looking like the sinister faces of criminals, or resembled nightmare monsters, but the fishermen knew that their flesh was exquisite. Others were so insignificant that no one paid any attention to them. The fishermen continued their work until the baskets were all full of choice fish and only cheap fish were left in the net. "That is enough. The baskets are full. Let us throw the rest into the sea" said many of the fishermen.

But one of them, who had spoken very little, whilst the others had either exalted or derided every fish they happened to handle, went on searching in the net, and among the cheap fish he found two or three that he placed on top of the baskets. "What are you doing?" the others asked him. "The baskets are full of beautiful fish. You are now spoiling them by placing that poor fish on top of them. You seem to consider them as the most beautiful of the lot". "Leave me alone. I know this kind of fish and I know how delicious it is".

That is the parable, which ends with the blessing of the master for the patient, skilful, silent fisherman who was able to select the best fish in the great mass of them. Listen now to its application.

The master of the beautiful, bright holy town is the Lord. The city is the Kingdom of Heaven. The fishermen: My disciples. The fish of the sea: mankind, where every kind of people are present. The good fish: the saints.

The master of the dreadful town is Satan. The horrible town: Hell. His fishermen: the world, flesh, wicked passions embodied in Satan's servants, both spiritual, that is demons, and human, that is men, who corrupt their fellow men. The bad fish: mankind unworthy of the Kingdom of Heaven: damned souls.

Among the fishermen of souls for the City of God, there will always be those who emulate the skill of the patient fisherman, who perseveres in his search just in those strata of mankind, where his less patient companions pick only what appears to be good at first sight. And unfortunately, there will be also some fishermen, who, being too absent-minded and talkative - attention and silence are required for the selection work in order to hear the voices of souls and supernatural indications - will not see the good fish and will lose them. And there will be some who, through

excessive intolerance, will reject souls because their exterior aspect is not perfect, whilst they are excellent with regard to the rest.

What does it matter, if one of the fish you catch for Me shows signs of past struggles and mutilations due to many causes, if they do not injure his spirit? What does it matter to you, if one of them was wounded in freeing himself from the Enemy and presents himself with such wounds, if his interior clearly shows his will to belong to God? Tried souls are reliable souls. More reliable than those souls that are like children protected by swaddling clothes, cradles and mothers, and sleep peacefully after being fed, or smile happily, but who later on in life, when they become of age and can reason and have to face the vicissitudes of life, may be the cause of unpleasant surprises because of their moral deviations.

I wish to remind you of the parable of the prodigal son (3). And you will hear many more because I will always endeavour to teach you right judgement in examining consciences, and in selecting the best method to guide consciences, *which are individual, and therefore each has its own special way of feeling and reacting to temptations and to your teaching. Do not think that it is easy to select souls.* Far from it! *It takes a spiritual eye shining with divine light, and it takes an intellect infused with divine Wisdom, and possession of virtues in heroic degree, first of all charity. It is necessary to be able to concentrate on meditation, because each soul is an obscure text to be read and meditated. And continuous union with God is required, forgetting all selfish interests. One must live for souls and for God, and be able to overcome prejudices, resentments, aversion. It is necessary to be as kind as a father and as hard as a warrior. Kind to give advice and to encourage. Hard to be able to say: "That is not allowed and you shall not do it". Or: "It is right to do that and you shall do it".* Because - and you must consider this carefully - many souls will be thrown into the ponds of hell. But not only the souls of sinners. There will be also the souls of evangelical fishermen: of those who will have failed in their ministry, contributing thus to the loss of many souls.

The day will come, the last day of the earth, the first of the completed and eternal Jerusalem, when the angels, like the fishermen of the parable, will separate the just from the wicked, and at the inexorable command of the Judge, the good will pass into Heaven, and the wicked into the eternal fire. And then the truth will be made known concerning the fishermen and the fish, hypocrisy will collapse, and the people of God will appear as they are, with their leaders and those saved by the leaders. We shall then see that many, who were outwardly insignificant and ill-treated, are the brightest ones in Heaven, and that the quiet patient fishermen are the ones who have done most, and now shine with as many gems as the souls they saved.

I have told you the parable and explained it. »

(1) Lk. 7:47; (2) Mt. 13:47-50; (3) Lk. 15:11-32.

A CHILD'S PRAYER

(Vol. 2, p. 535-7)

(Persuaded by His Mother, Jesus has allowed Peter and his wife Porphirea to adopt the orphan boy, Marjiam. It is early morning and calm after the rainstorm, as Jesus, His Mother, Martha, Mary Magdalene and some of the apostles embark from Peter's boat at Bethsaida - close to Capernaum. They go to Peter's house, where the Magdalene meets Porphirea and Marjiam for the first time.)

... Marjiam looks at the Magdalene curiously. Many thoughts must be crossing his mind. At last he says: « But... you were not at Bethany... »

« No, I was not. But I shall always be there from now on » says the Magdalene blushing and smiling faintly. She caresses the boy saying: « Even if we have just met, do you love me? »

« Yes, because you are good. You have wept, have you not? That is why you are good. And your name is Mary, isn't it? Also my mother's name was Mary and she was good. Every woman, whose name is Mary, is good. But » he concludes, not to offend Porphirea and Martha, « but also many of those with other names are good. What was your mother's name? »

« Eucheria... and she was so good » and two large tears stream down the face of Mary of Magdala.

« Are you weeping because she is dead? » asks the boy, and he caresses her beautiful hands, which she has crossed on her dark dress, which is obviously one of Martha's, adapted for her, because its hem has been let down. And he adds: « You must not weep. You know, we are not alone. Our mothers are always near us. Jesus says so. And they are like guardian angels. Jesus says that also. And if we are good, they will come and meet us when we die, and we go up to God in our mother's arms. It is true, you know? He said so! »

Mary Magdala clasps her little consoler in her arms and kisses him, saying: « Then pray that I may become good. »

« But are you not already? Only those who are good go with Jesus... And if one is not completely good, one becomes good, in order to become a disciple of Jesus. Because you cannot teach what you do not know. We cannot say: "Forgive" if we do not forgive first (1). Neither can we say: "You must love your neighbour" if we do not love him first (2). Do you know Jesus' prayer? »

« No, I don't. »

« Of course, you have been with Him only a short time. It is so beautiful, you know? It mentions all these things. Listen how beautiful it is. » And Marjiam slowly says the « Our Father (3) » with deep sentiment and faith.

« How well you know it! » says Mary of Magdala admiringly.

« My mother taught me it by night, and Jesus' Mother by day. If you wish so, I will teach you it. Do you wish to come with me? The sheep are bleating. They are hungry. I am going to take them to the pasture. Come with me. I will teach you how to pray, and you will become thoroughly good » and he takes her by the hand.

« But I do not know whether the Master wants... »

« Go, by all means, Mary. You have an innocent child as a friend, and some little lambs... You may go, tranquilly... »

Mary of Magdala goes out with the boy, and she can be seen going away preceded by the three sheep. Jesus is looking on... and the others, too.

« My poor sister! » exclaims Martha.

« Do not pity her. She is a flower straightening its stem after a storm. Can you hear her?... She is laughing... Innocence is always a consolation. »

(1) Mt. 6:12, Mk. 11:26, Lk. 11:4; (2) Lev. 19:18; (3) Mt. 6:9-13, Lk. 11:1-4.

PART 5 - FACING THE WORLD AGAIN

GOING BACK TO MAGDALA

(Vol. 2, p. 537-42)

(Maria Valtorta describes the vision she sees ...)

The boat is sailing along the coast from Capernaum to Magdala.

Mary of Magdala is, for the first time, in her wonted posture of a convert: she is sat on the bottom boards at the feet of Jesus, Who, instead, is sitting sternly on a little bench. The Magdalene's face is today quite different from what it looked like yesterday; it is not yet the radiant countenance of the Magdalene running to meet her Jesus every time He goes to Bethany, but it is already free from fear and terror, and her eyes, which were as downcast as they had previously been impudent, are now serious but confident, and in her dignified gravity there is now and again a sparkle of delight, when she listens to Jesus speaking to the apostles, or to His Mother and Martha...

(During the ensuing conversation, Philip asks Jesus what future there might be for his young daughter. Jesus replies:)

« In bringing the lilies of a virginal love into the garden of Christ. There will be so many such virgins in future centuries! ... So many! ... Scented flowerbeds to counterbalance the sinks of vice. Praying souls counterbalancing blasphemers and atheists. They assist mankind in all its misfortunes, and are the joy of God. »

Mary of Magdala moves her lips to ask a question, and in doing so she still blushes, but she looks freer and easier than in past days: « And we... the ruins that You are building up, what shall we become? »

« What your virgin sisters are... »

« Oh! It cannot be! We have trampled on too much mud and... and... it is not possible. »

« Mary, Mary! Jesus never forgives by halves. He told you that He had forgiven you. And so it is. You, and all those who sinned like you and whom My love forgives and weds, will smell sweet, will pray, love, and comfort. As you are aware of evil and capable of curing it wherever it is, your souls are martyrs in the eyes of God. You are therefore as dear as virgins. »

« Martyrs? In what, Master? »

« Against yourselves and recollections of your past, and through thirst for love and expiation. »

« Must I believe that? » The Magdalene looks at everybody in the boat, asking them to confirm her rising hope.

« Ask Simon. I spoke of you and of sinners in general, in a starry night in your garden. And all your brothers can tell you whether My voice has sung the wonders of Mercy and of conversion, for all those who have been redeemed. »

« Also, the boy has spoken to me about it, in his angelical voice. I came back from his lesson with a refreshed soul. He made me understand You better than my sister did, so much so that I felt more confident in having to face Magdala. Now, after what You told me, I feel my strength growing. I scandalised the world. But I swear to You, my Lord, that the world looking at me now will understand what Your power is like. »

Jesus lays His hand on her head for a moment, while the Most Holy Virgin smiles at her, as only She can smile: heavenly...

(They arrive at Magdala and enter the town ...)

The simple or... malicious curiosity of the Magdala people must be a torture for the Magdalene. But she bears it heroically, following the Master Who is walking ahead, among His disciples, while the women are behind them. There is much whispering and irony. All those who formerly feigned to respect Mary, for fear of reprisals, while she was the overbearing mistress of Magdala, now that they see her humble and chaste and realise she has parted for good from her powerful friends, they take the liberty of insulting and reviling her.

Martha, who is suffering as much as she is, asks her: « Do you wish to go home? »

« No, I am not leaving the Master. And I am not inviting Him to my house until it is purified, and every trace of the past has been removed. »

« But you are suffering, sister! »

« I deserved it. » And she must be really suffering. Her flushed face is beaded with sweat, not due to the warm weather.

They cross the whole of Magdala, going towards the poor quarters, as far as the house where they stopped the last time. The woman is dumbfounded when, looking up from her washboard to see who is greeting her, she finds Jesus facing her, along with the well known lady of Magdala, who is no longer pompously dressed and adorned with jewels. On the contrary, she is wearing a light linen veil, a periwinkle violet dress, which is high-necked and certainly does not belong to her, because it is too tight and has been adapted for her. She is enveloped in a heavy mantle, which must be a torture in that warm weather.

« Will you allow Me to remain in your house and speak to those who are following Me? » That is, to the whole of Magdala, because the whole population has followed the apostolic group.

« Why ask me, my Lord? My house is Yours. » And she busies herself bringing seats and benches for the women and the apostles. When passing near the Magdalene she bows like a slave.

« Peace to you, sister » replies the Magdalene. And the poor woman is so shocked that she drops the bench she was carrying. But she does not say one word. The scene makes me think that Mary of Magdala probably treated her subjects rather haughtily. The poor woman is utterly astonished when she is asked how the children are, where they are, and whether her husband has had good hauls.

« They are well... They are at school or with my mother. The little one is sleeping in his cradle. My husband has had good catches of fish, and will bring you the tithes due to you... »

« That is no longer necessary. Use them for the children. Can I see the baby? »

« Come... »

(Jesus tells the parable of the woman and the lost coin (1), and concludes:)

« Every soul is a treasure, and Satan, who hates God, provokes false movements to make poor souls fall. There are some who in falling, stop near the purse, that is they do not go too far from the Law of God, Who gathers them and protects them by means of His commandments. Some go farther away, that is, they go farther away from God and His Law. Some, finally, roll as far as the sweepings, dirt and mud. And they would end up by burning in the eternal fire, as rubbish is burnt in suitable places. The Master knows, and He looks untiringly for lost coins. He looks for them everywhere, with love. They are His treasures. And He never tires, and He loathes nothing. He rummages, searches, shifts, sweeps until He finds what He is looking for. And once He has found it, He washes the recovered souls with His forgiveness, and calls all His friends - the whole Paradise and all the good people of the earth - and says to them: "Rejoice with Me because I have found what was lost, and it is now more beautiful than beforehand, because My forgiveness has made it new."

I solemnly tell you, there is much rejoicing among the angels of God and the good people of the earth over a repentant sinner. And I solemnly tell you that there is nothing more beautiful than tears of repentance. I solemnly tell you that only demons cannot rejoice over such a conversion, which is a triumph of God. And I tell you that the way a man welcomes the conversion of a sinner, is the measure of his own goodness, and his union with God.

Peace be with you. »

The crowds understand the lesson and look at the Magdalene, who has come to sit on the threshold, holding the baby in her arms, perhaps to strike a posture. The crowds disperse slowly...

(1) Lk. 15:8-10).

PART 6 - GROWING IN STRENGTH AND HOLINESS

LEADING OTHERS TO JESUS

(Vol. 2, p. 550, Vol. 3, p. 422-3))

(In a visit to Tiberias with Jesus and His disciples, Mary Magdalene has been subjected to ridicule from some of her old companions. She is defended, however, by Crispus, an old Roman who is not worried about being scorned, and who follows Jesus out of the town to hear Him speak. Jesus talks to Crispus about truth and good will, and when it is time for Crispus to leave, he says to Jesus:)

« I will leave Tiberias this evening, I am going away from this country. I will retire to the coast of Lucania with my servant. I have a house there. You have given me much. I realise that You cannot give more to the old Epicurean. But what You have given me is enough to enable me to build up my mind. And... pray Your God for old Crispus. He was Your only listener in Tiberias. Pray that I may hear You again, before Libitina clasps me, so that, through the capability which I think I will be able to create within me, I may understand You and the Truth better. Hail, Master. » And he salutes in the Roman way.

When he passes near the women who are sitting a little aside, he bows to Mary of Magdala and says: « Thank you, Mary. It was a good thing that I knew you. You have given the searched-for

treasure to your old feast companion. If I arrive where you already are, I will owe you that. Goodbye. » And He goes away.

The Magdalene presses her hands against her heart and her face shows wonder and radiance. Then she drags herself on her knees before Jesus. « Oh! Lord! So it is true that I may lead people to Good? Oh! My Lord. That is too kind of You! » And bending until her face touches the grass, she kisses Jesus' feet, and wets them once again with tears: the tears of gratitude of the great lover of Magdala.

(Some time later, as the Magdalene is growing into her role as a disciple, Jesus tells His apostles of meeting a very sick man who once was a companion of hers. He says:)

« That man wanted to be alone with Me, to be able to speak freely. He did not speak at once about his health... but about his soul. He said: "I am about to die, but actually I am not so ill as I made people believe in order to have You here quickly. I need to be forgiven by You to be cured. But that is all I need. If You do not want to cure me, I will resign myself. I deserved it. But save my soul" and he confessed his many sins. A nauseating chain of sins... » says Jesus, but His face shines with joy.

« And You are smiling, Master! I am surprised! » remarks Bartholomew.

« Yes, Bartholomew. I am smiling because they no longer exist, and because with his sins I learned also the name of his redeemer. The apostle was a woman in this case. »

« Your Mother! » many of them say. Some say: « Johanna of Chuza! As he often went to Tiberias, perhaps he knows her. » Jesus shakes His head. So, they ask Him: « Who was it, then? »

« Mary of Lazarus » replies Jesus.

« Did she come here? Why did she not come to see any of us? »

« She did not come. She wrote to her old partner in sin. I read her letters. They all supplicate him for one thing: to listen to her, to redeem himself, as she redeemed herself, to follow her in Virtue, as he had followed her in sin, and with heart-rending words they beg him to relieve Mary's soul of the remorse of seducing his soul. And she converted him. So much so, that he retired to the country to overcome the temptations of town. His disease, which was more remorse of his soul than physical trouble, completed his preparation for Grace. That is all. Are you happy now? Do you understand now why I am smiling? »

« Yes, Master » they all reply...

OUR LADY TEACHES THE MAGDALENE

(Vol. 2, p. 579-81)

(Jesus is travelling with His apostles and women disciples through Galilee, near Mt. Carmel and the sea. One day after resting, some of the party separate. The Virgin Mother and Mary Magdalene are walking to join the apostles John and Simon the Zealot ...)

To reach the two apostles they have to pass near the thicket where Jesus has retired to pray.

« Prayer is My Son's rest » whispers Mary.

The Magdalene replies to Her: « I think that it is also essential for Him to be alone in order to keep His wonderful control, which the world puts to hard tests. Do You know, Mother? I have done what You told me. Every night I seclude myself for a more or less long time to restore within me the calm, which many things upset. And I feel much stronger afterwards. »

« At present you feel strong, later you will feel happy. Believe Me, Mary, both in peace and in struggle, in joy and in sorrow, our spirit needs to dive into the ocean of meditation, to rebuild what the world and events demolish, and to achieve fresh strength to climb higher and higher. In Israel we use and misuse vocal prayer. I do not mean that it is useless or displeasing to God. But I say that meditation, mental elevation to God is always much more useful to the soul, because by contemplating His divine perfection and our misery, or the misery of so many poor souls, not to criticise them but to be

indulgent to them and understand them, and to be grateful to God Who has supported us keeping us away from sin, or has forgiven us, so that we would not be left in sin, by meditating thus, we are really successful in praying, that is in loving. Because prayer, to be really such, must be love. Otherwise, it is mumbling of lips from which the soul is absent. »

« But is it lawful to speak to God when one's lips are still dirty with so many profane words? In my hours of meditation, which I do as You, my most sweet apostle, taught me, I do violence to my heart, which would like to say to God: "I love You" ... »

« No! Why? »

« Because I feel I would be making a sacrilegious offer by offering my heart... »

« Do not do that, My dear daughter. First of all, your heart has been reconsecrated by the Son's forgiveness, and the Father sees only that forgiveness. But even if Jesus had not yet forgiven you, and in an ignored solitude, which could be both material and moral, you should shout to God: "I love You. Father, forgive me my miseries. I am sorry for them because they grieve You", believe Me, Mary, God the Father would absolve you Himself and your cry of love would be dear to Him. Give yourself up to love. Do not do violence to it. Nay, let it become as violent as a blaze. A fire consumes everything that is material, but it does not destroy one molecule of air. Because air is incorporeal. On the contrary, it purifies it from the tiny debris blown by winds, and makes it lighter. Love does the same to souls. It may consume man's matter quicker, if God allows that, but it will not destroy his spirit. It will, instead, increase its vitality and will make it pure and agile to be able to ascend to God. See John over there? He is only a boy. And yet he is an eagle. He is the strongest of all the apostles. Because he has understood the secret of strength, of spiritual formation: loving meditation. »

« But he is pure. I... He is a boy. I... »

« Look at the Zealot, then. He is not a boy. He has lived, struggled, hated. He admits it frankly. But he has learned to meditate. And he, too, believe Me, is well high up. See? They look for each other, those two. Because they feel they are alike. They have reached the same perfect age of the spirit, and by the same means: mental prayer. Through it, the boy has become virile in his spirit, and the man, already old and tired, has recovered a strong virility. And do you know another one, who without being an apostle will make much progress, nay, *has already made* much progress, because of his natural inclination to meditation, which has become a spiritual necessity for him, since he is a friend of Jesus'? Your brother. »

« My Lazarus? ... Oh! Mother! Since You know so many things because God shows them to You, tell me, how will Lazarus treat me, the first time we meet? Before he was disdainfully silent. But he did it because I would not bear being criticised. I have been very cruel to my brother and sister... I now realise it. Now that he knows that he can speak, what will he say to me? I am afraid of his frank reproach. Oh! he will certainly remind me of all the grief of which I was the cause. I would like to fly to Lazarus. But I am afraid of him. I used to go there, and not even the memories of my dead mother, her tears, which were still warm on the things she had used, tears she had shed for me, through my fault, would upset me. My heart was cynical, shameless, deaf to every voice, except to "evil". But now I no longer have the wicked strength of Evil, and I tremble... What will Lazarus do to me? »

« He will open his arms to you and will call you, more with his heart than with his lips, "my darling sister". He is so formed in God that he can but behave thus. Be not afraid. He will not say one word about your past. It is just as if I could see him, he is there at Bethany, and his days of waiting are very long for him. He is waiting for you, to clasp you to his heart, to sate his brotherly love. All you have to do is love him as he loves you, to enjoy the happiness of being born of the same womb. »

« I would love him even if he reproached me. I deserve it. »

« But he will love you only. Nothing else. »

SUFFERING AND STRENGTH

(Vol. 2, p. 621-2)

(One morning, after Jesus and His party have travelled further and extensively through Galilee, Jesus says to the women disciples:)

« ... Sisters, your toilsome journey will end tomorrow at Caesarea. And we shall have a rest, too. Your wagon will be certainly waiting for you. We will part... Why are you weeping, Mary? Am I supposed to see all the Maries weep today? » says Jesus to the Magdalene.

« She is sorry to leave You » says her sister excusing her.

« That does not mean that we shall not be meeting again and soon. »

Mary shakes her head. That is not the reason why she is weeping.

The Zealot explains: « She is afraid she will not be able to be good without being near You. She is afraid of... of being tempted too strongly, when You are not near her to keep the demon away. She was telling me a little while ago. »

« Do not be afraid for that. I never withdraw the grace I have granted. Do you want to sin? No? Then do not worry. Be watchful, of course, but be not afraid. »

« Lord... I am weeping because at Caesarea... Caesarea is full of my sins. I can see them all now... My human nature will have much to suffer... »

« I am glad of that. The more you suffer, the better. Because afterwards you will no longer suffer such useless pains. Mary of Theophilus, I remind you that you are the daughter of a strong man, that you are a strong soul, and I want to make you most strong. I can bear with the weakness of the other women disciples, because they have always been meek and shy, including your sister. But I will not put up with it in your case. I will work you with fire and on the anvil. Because your character is to be dealt with thus, in order not to spoil the miracle of your will and Mine. Let that be known to you, and to all those who among the people present or absent may think that, as I have loved you so much, I may become weak with you. I allow you to weep for repentance and for love. But nothing else. Is that clear? » Jesus is imposing and severe.

Mary of Magdala endeavours to swallow tears and sobs, and she goes down on her knees, kisses Jesus' feet, and endeavouring to steady her voice she says: « Yes, my Lord. I will do what You want. »

« Get up then and be calm. »

JUDAS ISCARIOT

(Vol. 3, pp. 152, 533)

(Mary Magdalene tells Jesus of her apprehension about being with Judas. She would rather be with Simon the Zealot, who is a great friend of her family. Jesus tells her He needs Simon for an important mission, and Mary replies:)

« Your brothers then, or John, whose heart is as innocent as a dove. Anyone of them, except him. My Lord, do not look at me so severely... Who has fed on lust, perceives it when it is near... I am not afraid of it. I can hold at bay someone who is much more than Judas. And I am terrified at not being forgiven, and it is my ego, and it is Satan who wanders round me, and it is the world... But if Mary of Theophilus is not afraid of anybody, Mary of Jesus is disgusted at the vice which had subdued her, and she... Lord... The man who craves for sensuality disgusts me... »

(At another time, in the presence of Jesus, Lazarus, Simon the Zealot and others, the Magdalene has become more explicit. The Zealot says that although he has been with Judas for two years, he still does not understand him...)

Mary of Magdala stands up with the majesty of a queen, and in her beautiful voice she proclaims: « I have understood him more than anybody else: he is abomination placed close to Perfection. And there is nothing else to be said » and she goes out...

POWERFUL IN EVIL - TO POWERFUL IN GOOD

(Vol. 3, pp. 25-6, 499-501)

(Some time later, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem with His apostles and some children. He tells some of them to put up tents in the Field of the Galileans ...)

... Lazarus arrives from the Bethany road with Maximinus, his inseparable companion. Jesus is facing the opposite direction and cannot see him. But the Iscariot does, and he informs the Master, who leaves the children and goes towards His friend, smiling. Maximinus stops a few steps behind, to leave the two completely free in their first approach. And Lazarus covers the last few yards, as fast as he can, walking more painfully than ever, with a smile which trembles with pain on his lips, and shines with tears in his eyes. Jesus opens His arms and Lazarus falls on to His heart, bursting into tears.

« What, My dear friend? Are you still weeping? » asks Jesus, kissing his temple. He is so much taller than Lazarus, from His shoulders upwards, and looks even taller, as Lazarus is bent in his embrace of love and respect.

At last Lazarus looks up and says: « Yes, I am weeping. Last year I gave You the pearls of my sad tears, it is therefore fair that I give You the pearls of my tears of joy. Oh! Master, my Master! I think that there is nothing more humble and holy than good tears... And I give them to You, to say: "Thank You" for my Mary who is now a kind, happy, serene, pure good girl... Oh, much better than when she was a little girl. And I, I who felt that I was much above her, in my pride of an Israelite faithful to the Law, now I feel I am so tiny, so... nothing, as compared to her, who is no longer a woman, but a flame. A sanctifying flame. I... I cannot understand where she finds the wisdom, the words, the actions, which edify the whole household. I look at her as one looks at a mystery. But how could so much fire, such a jewel, be hidden under so much rottenness, and be there comfortably? Neither I nor Martha can ascend where she ascends. But how can she, if her wings were broken by vice? I do not understand... »

« And there is no need for you to understand. It is enough that I understand. But I tell you that Mary has turned the powerful energy of her being towards Good. She has bent her character towards Perfection. And since her character is of powerful absolutism, she thrusts herself unreservedly on that way. She makes use of her experience in evil, to be as powerful in good as she was in evil, and using the same method of giving herself entirely, as she did in evil, she has given herself entirely to God. She has understood the law of "love God with your whole being, with your body, your soul and with all your strength" (1). If Israel were made of Maries, if the world were made of Maries, we would have the Kingdom on God on the earth, as it will be in the most high Heaven. »

« Oh! Master! And it is Mary of Magdala who deserves such words! »

« It is Mary of Lazarus. The great friend, the sister of My great friend... »

(Some time late, Jesus and His apostles are experiencing very stormy weather, as they approach the River Jordan, which is rising fast. They notice two people on horses, cautiously crossing the river...)

« But is that not a woman? » says Jesus looking at the two people who have already crossed the river on horseback and are now standing on the path.

« A woman? » Peter and the others cannot see or tell whether the person in dark clothes, who has dismounted and is now waiting, is a man or a woman.

« Yes. It is a woman. It's... Mary. Look now that she in the moonbeam. »

« You are lucky that you can see. Blessed be your eyes! »

« It is Mary. What will she be wanting? » and Jesus shouts: « Mary! »

« Rabboni! Is it You? Praised be God that I have found You! » and Mary runs as fast as a gazelle towards Jesus. I do not know how she does not stumble on the uneven road. She drops her heavy mantle and is now coming forward with her veil and light mantle held tight against her dark dress.

When she reaches Jesus, she drops at His feet without worrying about the mud. She is panting, but happy. She repeats: « Glory be to God Who made me find You! »

« Why, Mary? What is happening? Were you not at Bethany? »

« I was at Bethany with Your Mother and the women, as You told us... But I came to meet You... Lazarus was not able to come, because he is suffering too much... So, I came with a servant... »

« You are about, all alone, with a boy and in this weather? »

« Oh! Rabboni! You are not going to tell me that You think that I was afraid. I was not afraid to do so much evil... I am not afraid now to do something good. »

« So? Why did you come? »

« To tell You not to cross over... They are waiting for You on the other side to injure You... I found out... I was told by one of the Herodians who once... who once loved me... Whether he told me out of love, still, or out of hatred, I do not know... I know that the other day he saw me through the gate and he said to me: "You silly Mary, are you waiting for *your* Master? You are doing the right thing, because it will be the last time, in fact as soon as He crosses the river and comes into Judaea, He will be captured. Look at Him carefully and then run away because it is not wise to be near Him, now... Then... You can imagine how anxiously... I inquired... You know... I know many people... and even if they say that I am mad or possessed... they still speak to me... And I found out that it is true. Then I took two horses and I came, without saying anything to Your Mother, not to worry Her... Go back at once, Master. If they find out that You are here, beyond the Jordan, they will come here. Herod also is looking for You... and You are too close to Machaerus now. Go away, for pity's sake, Master!... »

« Do not weep, Mary... »

« I am afraid, Master! »

« What! You afraid? No, you have been so brave as to cross the river in flood by night!... »

« But that is a river, whereas *those* are men and they are Your enemies and they hate You... I am afraid of their hatred for You... Because I love You, Master. »

« Do not be afraid. They will not get Me as yet. It is not My hour. Even if they placed many formations of soldiers along all the roads, they would not capture Me. It is not My hour. But I will do as you wish. I will go back... »

Judas grumbles something between his teeth and Jesus replies: « Yes, Judas. Exactly as you say. But *just* in the first part of your sentence. I am listening to her, of course I am. But not because she is a woman, as you are insinuating, but because she is the one who has made most progress in love. Mary, go home, while you can. I will go back and cross over... wherever I can, and I will go to Galilee. Come with My Mother and the other women to Cana, to Susanna's house. I will tell you there what there is to be done. Go in peace and may you be blessed. God is with you. »

Jesus lays His hand on her head, blessing her. Mary takes Jesus' hands, kisses them, stands up and then goes back. Jesus watches her go away. He sees her pick her heavy mantle and put it on; she then reaches her horse, mounts it and goes to the ford and crosses over...

(1) Dt. 6:5.

TEARS AND FORGIVENESS

(Vol. 3, p. 570)

(Jesus has given the young girl Anastasica to His old disciple Eliza as a daughter. He notices that the Magdalene is weeping, and asks why. She says:)

« I am weeping because I shall never have the purity of virgins, and my soul will weep for ever, without ever being sated... because I have sinned... »

« My forgiveness and your tears make you purer than they are. Come here and weep no more. Leave tears to those who have something of which they are ashamed... »

“MARY HAS CHOSEN THE BETTER PART”

(Vol. 3, p. 620-2)

(Jesus visits Bethany at another time, and is sitting at a pond with Mary Magdalene at His feet
(1). *He compares a pure soul with water that is limpid, still, and clear...)*

« ... Watch: if I only stir its bottom with this rush, it becomes muddy. Waste and mud come to the surface. From clear it becomes yellowish, and no one would drink it any more. But if I remove the rush, it settles, and little by little it becomes once again limpid and beautiful. The rush: sin. The same applies to souls. It is repentance, believe Me, that cleanses... »

Martha arrives panting: « Are you still here, Mary? And I am so busy!... Time is flying. The guests will soon be here and there is so much to be done. The maids are busy baking bread, the servants playing and cooking. I am preparing drinks and dishes, and I am laying the tables. But the fruit is still to be picked, and the honey and mint water is to be prepared... »

Mary does not pay much attention to her sister's complaints. Smiling blissfully, she continues to look at Jesus, without moving from her position.

Martha begs Jesus' help: « Master, look how hot I am. Do You think that I should be the only one to be so busy? Tell her to help me. » Martha is really annoyed.

Jesus looks at her, smiling half kindly and half ironically, or rather jokingly.

Martha becomes rather impatient: « I really mean it. Look how idle she is while I am so busy. And she sees... »

Jesus becomes serious: « It is not idleness, Martha. It is love. It was idleness *previously*. And you wept so bitterly because of that worthless idleness. Your tears lent wings to My efforts to save her and bring her back to your honest love. Do you want to forbid her to love her Saviour? Would you prefer her to be far from here, so that she would not see you work, but would be far also from Me? Martha, Martha! Have I to say that she (and Jesus lays His hand on her head) who has come from so far, has excelled you in love? Have I to say that she, who did not know *one* word of love, is now learned in the science of love? Leave her to her peace! She was so ill! She is now convalescent, and she is recovering by drinking what fortifies her. She was tormented so violently... Now that she has come out of her nightmare, she looks around and within herself, and finds herself *new*, and discovers a *new* world. Let her become certain. With her “new ego”, she has to forget her past and conquer what is eternal... And the latter will not be conquered only through work, but also through adoration. He who gives a piece of bread to an apostle and a prophet, will receive his reward. But double reward will be given to him who will forget to feed himself in order to love Me, because his soul will be greater than his body, a soul that will cry even louder than human needs, also when the latter are lawful and right. You worry and fret about too many things, Martha. She is concerned with one only. That which is sufficient for her soul, and above all for her and your Lord. Forget useless things. Imitate your sister. Mary has chosen the better part, which will never be taken from her. When all virtues become superfluous, because they are no longer necessary to the citizens of the Kingdom, Charity alone will remain. It will last for ever. Alone and supreme. That is what Mary has chosen and has taken as her shield and pilgrim's staff. Through it, as if she were flying with angelical wings, she will come to My Heaven. »

Martha, who feels mortified, lowers her head and goes away.

« My sister loves You very much, and is anxious to honour You... » says Mary to excuse her.

« I know, and she will be rewarded for that. But she needs to be purified of her human way of thinking, as this water was purified. Look how limpid it has become again, while we were speaking. Martha will be purified by the words I spoke to her. You... through the sincerity of your repentance. »

« No, through Your forgiveness, Master. My repenting was not sufficient to wash my great sin... »

« It was and will be sufficient, for the sisters who will imitate you. It will be sufficient for *all* the poor whose souls are diseased.

Sincere repentance is a purifying filter; love, then, preserves from further defilement. Thus, those who through life become adults and sinners, will be able to become as innocent as children

again, and enter My Kingdom like them. Let us go home now. So that Martha may not be left too long in her grief. Let us go and smile at her as Friend and sister. »

(1) Lk. 10:38-42.

DEMONS, AND FREE WILL

(Vol. 4, p. 37)

(Jesus, having just expelled a demon from a man, explains to His apostles why this particular demon offered much resistance:)

« Listen to Me. Some people give themselves to Satan by opening a door to *one* capital vice. Some give themselves twice, some three times, some seven times. When one has opened his spirit to the seven vices, then a complete spirit enters him. Satan, the black prince, enters. »

« How could that man, still young, be possessed by Satan? »

« Oh! My friends! Do you know along which path Satan comes? Generally, three are the beaten paths, and *one is never missing*. Three: sensuality, money, pride of the spirit. Sensuality is the one which is always present. Courier of the other concupiscences it passes, spreading its poison, and everything flourishes with satanic flowering. That is why I say to you: "Be the masters of your flesh". Let that control be the beginning of everything else, as that slavery is the beginning of everything else. The man enslaved by lust, becomes thief, swindler, cruel, murderer, in order to serve his mistress. The very thirst for power is also related to the flesh. Do you not think so? It is so. Meditate on that and you will see whether I am mistaken. It was through the flesh that Satan entered man, and through the flesh he goes back into man, and he is happy if he can do so. He, one and sevenfold, enters with the proliferation of his legions of minor demons. »

« You said that Mary of Magdala had seven demons (1). You said so, and they were certainly demons of lust. And yet You freed her very easily. »

« Yes, Judas. That is true. »

« So? »

« So, according to you, My theory is wrong. No, My friend. That woman *wanted*, by that time, *to be freed from her possession*. *She wanted*. Will power is everything. »

(1) Mk. 16:9, Lk. 8:2.

PART 7 - A TESTING TIME FOR THE MAGDALENE

"HOPE BEYOND HOPE"

(Vol. 4, pp. 451, 658-60, 793-4, Vol. 5, p. 10-11)

(Jesus comes to visit Lazarus, who is dying. Martha and Mary Magdalene, both experiencing deep sorrow, ask Jesus if He will cure their brother. Jesus replies:)

« I say to you: have unlimited faith in the Lord. Persevere in having it despite innuendoes and events, and you will see great things when your hearts no longer have any reason to hope to see them. What does Lazarus say? »

« He echoes Your words. He says to us: "Do not doubt God's kindness and power, no matter what may happen. He will intervene on your and on my behalf, and on behalf of many, of all those who, like me and you, will remain faithful to the Lord". And when he is fit to do so, he explains the Scriptures to us, he does not read anything else nowadays, and he speaks to us of You, and he says that he will die in a happy period of time because the era of peace and forgiveness has begun. But You will hear him... because he says also other things which make us weep even more than we do for our brother... » says Martha.

« Come, Lord. Every minute that passes is stolen from Lazarus' hope. He used to count the hours and would say: "He will certainly be in Jerusalem for the feast and He will come... We know many things which we do not tell Lazarus in order not to grieve him, and we did not have so much

hope, because we thought that You would not come to avoid those who are looking for You... Martha was fully convinced of that. I was not so sure... because if I were You, I would face my enemies. I am not a woman who is afraid of men. And now I am not even afraid of God. For I know how good He is to repentant souls... » says Mary and she casts a loving glance at Him.

« Are you not afraid of anything, Mary? » asks Jesus.

« Of sin... and of myself... I am always afraid of falling again into evil. I think that Satan must have a mortal hatred of me. »

« You are right. You are one of the souls most hated by Satan. But you are also one of the most loved by God. Bear that in mind. »

« Oh! I do. And that remembrance is my strength! I remember what You said in Simon's house. You said: "Many sins are forgiven her because she has loved much" (1), and You said to me: "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace". You said "your sins". Not many. All of them. And so I think that You loved me, my God, without limit. Now if my poor faith of those days, the faith of a soul laden with faults, achieved so much from You, will my present faith not be able to defend me from Evil? »

« Yes, Mary. Be vigilant and watch over yourself. It is humility and prudence. But have faith in the Lord. He is with you. »

(Some time later Jesus visits Bethany again, with His apostles, and greets the two sisters...)

Pale, humble, emaciated, their eyes, once so bright, tired, without rings or bracelets, wearing two dark grey dresses, they look more like maidservants than mistresses. They kneel down at a distance from Jesus, offering Him nothing but tears. Resigned, silent tears flowing from an internal source and unable to stop.

Jesus approaches them. Martha stretches out her hands whispering: « Move away, Lord. We are really afraid by now that we have infringed the law on leprosy (2). But we cannot, o God, we cannot have such an ordinance against our Lazarus! But please do not come near us, as we are unclean as we touch nothing but sores. We alone. Because we have kept everybody else away, and everything is placed on the threshold for us, and we take it and wash and burn things in the room next to our brother's. See our hands? They are corroded by the caustic lime which we use for the vases we have to hand back to the servants. We think that by doing so we are less guilty » and she weeps.

Mary of Magdala, who has been silent so far, moans in her turn: « We should call the priest. But... I, I am the more guilty one because I oppose that and I say that it is not the dreadful cursed disease in Israel. It is not, it is not! But so many hate us and so much, that they would say it is. Your apostle Simon was declared a leper for much less! (3) »

« You are neither priest nor doctor, Mary » says Martha sobbing.

« I am not. But you know what I have done to be certain of what I am saying. Lord, I went and covered the whole valley of Hinnom, all Siloam, all the sepulchres near En Rogel. I went dressed as a maidservant, veiled, in the first light of dawn, loaded with foodstuffs, medicated waters, bandages and clothes. And I gave, I gave everything. I said that it was a vow I had made for him whom I loved. And it was true. I only asked to see the sores of the lepers. They must have thought that I was mad... Who ever wishes to see those horrors?! But after laying my offering at the edges of the crags, I asked to see. And they were above me, I was farther down; they were amazed, I was disgusted; they wept, and I wept; and I looked and looked! I looked at bodies covered with scales, with crusts, with sores, I looked at corroded faces, at white hair stiffer than bristles, at eyes exuding pus, at cheeks through which I could see teeth, at skulls on living bodies, at hands which had become claws of monsters, at feet resembling knobby branches... stench, horror, rotteness. Oh! if I sinned worshipping flesh, if I took delight in my senses of sight, smell, hearing, touch, in what was beautiful, scented, harmonious, soft and smooth, oh! I can assure you that my senses have been purified in the mortification of such sights! My eyes forgot the enticing handsomeness of man on contemplating those monsters, my ears expiated the past enjoyment of manly voices on hearing those harsh ones, no longer sounding like human voices, my body shuddered, my smell revolted... and all remainders of the cult of myself died, because I saw what we shall be after

death... But I brought back with me this certitude: that Lazarus is not a leper. His voice is not injured, his hair and the hairy parts of his body are intact, and his sores are different. No, he is not a leper! And Martha distresses me because she will not believe, because she does not comfort Lazarus by dissuading him from believing that he is unclean. See? He does not want to see You, now that he knows that You are here, lest he should infect You. The foolish fears of my sister are depriving him also of Your comfort!... »

Her passionate nature makes her angry. But when she sees that her sister bursts into tears weeping desolately, her impetuosity abates at once and she embraces and kisses Martha, saying: « Oh! Martha! Forgive me! Grief is making me unfair! It's my love for you and Lazarus that wants to convince you! My poor sister! What poor women we are! »

« Now, now, do not weep so! You are in need of peace and reciprocal compassion, for your own sake and for his. Lazarus, in any case, is not leprous, I tell you. »...

And He is the first to set out towards the house beckoning to His apostles not to follow Him.

Mary runs ahead, she opens a door, runs along a corridor, opens another door which leads into a small internal yard, and after a few steps she enters a semi-dark room encumbered with basins, small vases, amphorae, bandages... A mixed odour of spices and putrefaction is perceived. There is a door opposite the first one and Mary opens it shouting in a voice that endeavours to be bright and joyful: « Here is the Master. He has come to tell you that I am right, my dear brother. Cheer up and smile because our love and peace is coming in! » and she bends over her brother, lifts him on the pillows, kisses him, heedless of the smell that in spite of palliatives exhales from the ulcerated body, and she is still bent tidying him, when Jesus' kind greeting resounds in the room, which, enveloped in a faint light, seems to brighten up because of the divine presence.

« Master, You are not afraid... I am... »

« You are ill! Nothing else. Lazarus, the rules have been laid down, so comprehensive and severe, out of an understandable sense of prudence. It is better to be exceedingly prudent than imprudent in certain cases, such as catching diseases. But you are not infectious, My poor dear friend, you are not unclean. And in fact, I do not think that I lack prudence towards My brothers if I embrace you and kiss you thus » and He kisses him taking his emaciated body in His arms....

(At yet another visit, Jesus says to the two sisters:)

« You know Who I am. I know who you are. You know that I love you. I know that you love Me. You are aware of My power. I am aware of your faith in Me. You also know, and you in particular, Mary, that *the more one loves the more one achieves. To be able to hope and to believe above all limits and above all realities that disprove faith and hope is to love.* Well, for the sake of that, I tell you *to hope and believe against all contrary realities.* Do you understand Me? I say: hope and believe against every contrary reality. I can only stop for a few hours. As the Man, the Most High knows how much I would like to stop here with you, to assist and comfort him, to assist and comfort you. But as the Son of God, I know that I must go, that I must depart... That I must not be here when... you will be wanting Me more than the air you breathe. One day, very soon, you will understand these reasons that now may seem cruel to you. They are divine reasons. Sorrowful to Me Man, as they are to you. Sorrowful *now*. Because now you cannot embrace and contemplate their beauty and wisdom. Neither can I reveal them to you. When everything is accomplished, then you will understand and rejoice... Listen. When Lazarus is... dead. Do not weep thus! Then send for Me *at once*. And in the meantime, make the arrangements for the funeral *inviting a large number of people*, as becomes Lazarus and your household. He is a great Hebrew. Few people appreciate him for what he is. But he exceeds many in the eyes of God... I will let you know where I am, so that you can always find Me. »

« But why not be here at least at that moment? We are resigning ourselves to his death, yes... But You... But You... But You... » Martha sobs not being able to say anything else, stifling her tears in her dress... Mary instead gazes at Jesus, as if she were hypnotised and does not weep.

« Obey, believe, hope always say yes to God Lazarus is calling you Go. I will come in a moment And if I should not have the opportunity to speak to you aside, remember what I told you. »

And while they go in hastily, Jesus sits down on a stone bench and prays...

(A large and imposing group of Pharisees and others have come to the house of Lazarus, to "pay their respects" to the dying man and to his two sisters. Martha and Mary are courteous to them, however the visitors taunt them about Jesus not being there. Mary, returning from Lazarus' room with the Pharisee Helkai, discovers that the visitors are scheming to try and find out where Jesus is. She says:)

« No! It is not necessary. The Master - you are speaking of Him, are you not? The Master said that we must hope beyond hope, and in God only. And we will do that » says Mary in a thundering voice, as she comes back with Helkai, who departs from her at once and goes towards three Pharisees, bending down to speak to them.

« But he is dying, according to what I hear! » says Doras, who is one of the three.

« So what? Let him die! I will not obstruct God's decree. and I will not disobey the Rabbi. »

« And what do you expect after his death, foolish woman? » says the Herodian mockingly.

« What? Life! » Her voice is a cry of absolute faith.

« Life? Ha! Ha! Be sincere. You know that He has no power against *real* death, and in your foolish love for Him, you do not want that to become known. »

« Go out, all of you! It would be for Martha to tell you. But she is afraid of you. I am only afraid of offending God, who has forgiven me. And I am telling you in Martha's stead. Go out, all of you. There is no room in this house for those who hate Jesus Christ. Out! Go to your gloomy dens! All out! Or I will get the servants to drive you out like a herd of unclean beggars. »

She is imposing in her wrath. The Judaeans slink away in the most cowardly way, in front of the woman. It is true that that woman looks like an enraged archangel...

As they leave the hall and cross the threshold, passing in front of Mary, she glares at them, creating for each an immaterial Caudine Fork, under which the pride of the defeated Judaeans is compelled to stoop. The hall is at last cleared out.

Martha collapses on the carpet bursting into tears.

« Why are you weeping, sister? I do not see why you should... »

« Oh! you offended them... and they offended you; they offended us... and now they will avenge themselves... »

« Be silent, silly woman! On whom do you expect them to avenge themselves? On Lazarus? They must decide first, and before they do that... No one revenges oneself on a man who is done for! On us? Are we in need of their bread to live? They will not touch our property. The shadow of Rome is cast over it. On what then? And even if they were able to do that, are we not both young and strong? Shall we not be able to work? Is Jesus not poor? Was our Jesus not a workman? Shall we not be more like Him, if we are poor and workers? You ought to be proud in becoming so! Hope for it! Ask God to grant it! »

« But what they said to you... »

« Ah! What they said to me! *It's the truth*. And I repeat it to myself. I was unclean. I am now the ewe-lamb of the Shepherd! And the past is dead... »

(1) Lk. 7:47-50; (2) Lev. 13: and 14:; (3) Mt. 26:6, Mk. 14:3.

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS (1)

(Vol. 5, p. 50-61)

(Shortly before the death of Lazarus, and without Mary Magdalene knowing, Martha sent a servant to ask Jesus to come to her dying brother. Jesus delays His journey, and arrives after Lazarus has been dead for four days. He meets Martha, who bursts into tears at His feet, and asks Jesus why He did not come sooner. Jesus says:)

« Your brother will rise again. Stand up, Martha. »

Martha stands up, stooping out of respect before Jesus to Whom she replies: « I know, Master. He will rise again at the resurrection on the last day (2). »

« I am the Resurrection and Life. Whoever believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. And whoever believes and lives in Me will never die. Do you believe all that? » Jesus, Who had previously spoken in a rather low voice, addressing Martha only, raises His voice when saying these sentences in which He proclaims His power of God, and its perfect timbre resounds like a golden blare in the vast garden. The people present quiver with an emotion resembling fear. Then some sneer shaking their heads.

Martha, into whom Jesus seems to wish to instill a stronger and stronger hope by holding His hand on her shoulder, raises her lowered head. She raises it towards Jesus staring with her sad eyes at the Christ's bright ones and pressing her hands against her breast with a different anxiety she replies: « Yes, I do, my Lord. I believe all that. I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, that You have come to the world and that You can do everything You want. I believe. I am now going to tell Mary » and she disappears quickly into the house.

Jesus remains where He was. That is, He takes a few steps forward and approaches the flower-bed that surrounds the basin of the fountain. The flower-bed is strewn on one side with the diamond drops of the very fine droplets of water of the jet, blown to that side by a light breeze, like silver down, and Jesus seems to be lost in contemplating the fish wriggle in the limpid water and play describing silver commas and golden reflections in the crystalline water shining in the sunshine.

The Judaeans are watching Him. They have involuntarily divided into clearly distinct groups. On one side, in front of Jesus, all those who are hostile to Him, usually separated from one another by sectarian spirit, but now concordant in opposing Jesus. Beside Him, behind the apostles who have been joined by James of Zebedee, there are Joseph, Nicodemus and others who are well-disposed to Him. Farther away there is Gamaliel, still in the same place and attitude, and all alone, because his son and disciples have parted from him and joined the two main groups to be closer to Jesus.

With her usual cry: « Rabboni! » Mary runs out of the house with her arms stretched out towards Jesus and throws herself at His feet, which she kisses sobbing deeply. Several Judaeans who were in the house with her and who have followed her, weep with her with doubtful sincerity. Also Maximinus, Marcella, Sara, Naomi have followed Mary, as well as all the servants and their wailing is loud and high-pitched. I think that there is no one left in the house. When Martha sees Mary cry thus, she cries copiously, too.

« Peace to you, Mary. Stand up! Look at Me! Why weep thus, like one who has no hope? » Jesus stoops to say these words in a low voice, His eyes staring at Mary's, who on her knees, relaxing on her heels, stretches her hands towards Him imploringly and is unable to speak, so deep is her sobbing: « Did I not tell you to hope beyond what is credible in order to see the glory of God? Has your Master perhaps changed, that you are so depressed? »

But Mary does not listen to the words that aim at preparing her for too great a joy after so much anguish, and being able to speak at last, she shouts: « Oh! Lord! Why did You not come sooner? Why did You go away from us? You knew that Lazarus was ill! If You had been here my brother would not have died. Why did You not come? I still had to prove to him that I loved him. He should have lived. I had to show him that I persevered in honesty. I afflicted my brother so much! And now! And now that I could have made him happy, he has been taken away from me! You could have left him with me. You could have given poor Mary the joy of comforting him after grieving him so deeply. Oh! Jesus! Jesus! My Master! My Saviour! My hope! » and she collapses again, her forehead on Jesus' feet, which are washed once again by her tears, and she moans: « Why have you done that, Lord?! Also, on account of those who hate You and are now rejoicing at what has happened... Why have You done that, Jesus?! » But there is no reproach in Mary's tone as there was in Martha's, there is only the anguish of a woman, who is grieved not only as a sister but also as a disciple who feels that the opinion of her Master is diminished in the hearts of many people.

Jesus, who has bent very low to hear those words whispered with her face near the ground, stands up and says in a loud voice: « Mary, do not weep! Also your Master is suffering for the death of His faithful friend... *for having had to let him die...* »

Oh! How sneering and radiant with hateful joy are the faces of the enemies of Christ! They feel that He is defeated and rejoice, whilst His friends are becoming sadder and sadder.

Jesus says in an even louder voice: « But I tell you: do not weep. Stand up! Look at Me! Do you think that I, who loved you so much, have done this without a reason? Can you believe that I have grieved you thus in vain? Come. Let us go to Lazarus. Where have you put him? »

(Jesus is taken to Lazarus' tomb, and to the astonishment of the crowd, He orders the stone at its entrance to be removed. He prays to the Father, becomes transfigured, and shouts "Lazarus! Come out!"...)

Mary, who has never moved away from the Master, falls on her knees at the entrance of the sepulchre, one hand on her breast to check her throbbing heart, the other holding the edge of Jesus' mantle unconsciously and convulsively, and one realises that she is trembling because the mantle is shaken lightly by the hand holding it.

Something white seems to emerge from the deep end of the sepulchre. At first, it is just a short convex line, then it becomes oval-shaped, then wider and longer lines appear. And the dead body, enveloped in its bandages, comes slowly forward, becoming more visible, more mysterious and more awful.

Jesus draws back, imperceptibly, but continuously, as the other moves forward. Thus, the distance between the two is always the same.

Mary is compelled to drop the edge of the mantle, but she does not move from where she is. Joy, emotion, everything, nail her to the place where she is.

An « oh! » is uttered more and more clearly by the lips previously closed by the anxiety of suspense: from a whisper hardly distinguishable it changes into a voice, from a voice into a powerful cry.

Lazarus is by now on the threshold of the sepulchre and he remains there rigid and silent, like a plaster statue just rough-hewed, thus shapeless, a long thing, thin at the head and legs, thicker at the trunk, as macabre as death itself, ghost-like in the white bandages against the dark background of the sepulchre. As the sun shines on him, putrid matter can be seen dripping already here and there from the bandages.

Jesus shouts out in a loud voice: « Unbind him and let him go. Give him clothes and food. »

« Master!... » says Martha, and perhaps she would like to say more, but Jesus stares at her subduing her with His bright eyes and He says: « Here! At once! Bring a garment. Dress him in the presence of all the people and give him something to eat. » He orders and never turns round to look at those who are behind and around Him. He looks only at Lazarus, at Mary who is near her resurrected brother, heedless of the disgust caused to everybody by the putrid bandages, and at Martha who is panting as if she felt her heart break and does not know whether she should shout for joy or weep...

(With sticks, the servants remove the bandages, dripping with putrid matter. Lazarus is washed, and the people are amazed to see his body healed, with only scars left to indicate parts of his legs that were affected by gangrene. He eats some food with a healthy appetite. Later, to a weeping Magdalene, Jesus says:

« Do not weep, Mary. God has forgiven you and has forgotten. Lazarus' soul has also forgiven and forgotten, *it wanted to forget*. The man has not been able to forget everything. And when the flesh overwhelmed the weakened will with its last pangs, the man spoke. »

« I am not indignant at it, Lord. It helped me to love You more and to love Lazarus more. But it was from that moment that I also wished to have You here... because it was too distressing to think that Lazarus should die without peace through my fault... and later, when I heard the Judaeans deride You... when I saw that You were not coming even after his death, not even after I had obeyed You hoping beyond what is credible, hoping till the moment when the sepulchre was opened to receive him, then my spirit suffered. Lord, if I had anything to expiate, and I certainly had it, I did expiate... »

« Poor Mary! I know your heart. You deserved the miracle and let that confirm you in hoping and believing. »

« My Master, I will *always* hope and believe now. I will never doubt again, Lord. I will live on faith. You have enabled me to believe what is unbelievable. »

« And what about you, Martha? Have you learned? No. Not yet. You are My Martha. But you are not yet My perfect worshipper. Why do you act and you do not contemplate? It is holier. See? Your strength, as it is too inclined towards earthly things, yielded to the ascertainment of earthly matters that at time seem without remedy. In actual fact earthly matters are without remedy, unless God intervenes. That is why human creatures must be able to believe and contemplate, and love to the utmost power of their whole being, with thought, soul, flesh, blood; I repeat: *with all the strength* of man. I want you to be strong, Martha. I want you to be perfect. You did not obey because you did not believe and hope completely, and you did not believe and hope because you did not love absolutely. But I absolve you. I forgive you, Martha. I raised Lazarus today. I will now give you a stronger heart. I gave him life. I will instil into you the strength to love, believe and hope perfectly. Be happy now and in peace. Forgive those who offended you in the past days... »

« Lord, I have sinned against that. Not long ago I said to old Hananiah, who had sneered at You in previous days: "Who has triumphed? You or God? Your mockery or my faith? Christ is the Living Being and the Truth. I knew that His glory would shine more brightly. And you, old man, make yourself a new soul, if you do not want to know what death is. »

« You spoke the truth, but do not contend with the wicked, Mary. And forgive. Forgive if you want to imitate Me... »

(1) Jn. 11:20-44; (2) Mt. 25:31-46.

A PLEDGE OF INFINITE LOVE

(Vol. 5, p. 83-5)

(After the raising of Lazarus, Mary Magdalene hears him promise that he will be a good servant to a perfect Master. Jesus later asks Mary:)

« And what about you, Mary, will you become a good servant of your Lord? »

« You only know, Rabboni. I... only know that I was a big sinner. »

Jesus smiles: « Have you seen Lazarus? He, too, was seriously ill, and yet do you not think that he is quite well? »

« It is so, Rabboni. You have cured him. What You do is always complete. Lazarus has never been so strong and cheerful as he has been since he came out of the sepulchre. »

« You are right, Mary. What I do is *always complete*. Thus also your redemption *is complete*, because I worked it. »

« That is true, my beloved Saviour and Redeemer, my King and God. It is true. And, if You want it, I also shall be a good servant of my Lord. As for me, I want it, Lord. I do not know whether you do. »

« I want it, Mary. A good servant of Mine. Today more than yesterday. Tomorrow more than today. Until I will say to you: "Enough, Mary. It is time for you to rest". »

« Agreed, Lord. I would like You to call me, then. As You called my brother out of the sepulchre. Oh! call me out of this life! »

« No, not out of this life. *I will call you to the Life, to the true Life*. I will call you out of the sepulchre that is the flesh and the Earth. I will call you to the wedding of your soul with your Lord. »

« My wedding! You love virgins, Lord... »

« I love those who love Me, Mary. »

« You are divinely good, Rabboni! That is why I could not set my mind at rest, when I heard people say that You were bad because You were not coming. Everything seemed to be collapsing around me. How hard it was to say to myself: "No. You must not accept this evidence. What seems to you to be obvious is only a dream. The real fact is the power, the goodness, the divinity of your Lord". Ah! How much I suffered! So much grief for Lazarus' death and for his words... Did he say anything to You? Does he not remember? Tell me the truth... »

« I never lie, Mary. He is afraid that he may have spoken and said what had grieved his life. But I reassured him, without lying, and he is now tranquil. »

« Thank You, Lord. Those words... have done me good. Yes. Just like the cure of a doctor who lays bare the roots of a disease and burns them. They finished destroying the old Mary. I still had too high an opinion of myself. Now... I measure the bottom of my abjection, and I know that I must go a *long* way to climb out of it. But I will do it, if You help me. »

« I will help you, Mary. I will help you also when I have gone away. »

« How, my Lord? »

« By increasing Your love in an immeasurable way. There is no other way for you. »

« Too mild when compared with what I have to expiate! Everybody is saved through love. Everybody obtains Heaven. But what is sufficient for the pure, the just, is not sufficient for the great sinner. »

« There is no other way for you, Mary. Because, whatever way you may take, it will still be love. Love, if you help people in My name. Love, if you evangelize. Love, if you live in isolation. Love, if you martyrize yourself. Love, if you will make people martyrize you. You can but love, Mary. It is your nature. Flames can but burn, whether they creep on the ground, burning straw, or they arise like a bright embrace around a trunk, a house or an altar to ascend towards the sky. Everyone has his nature. *The wisdom of the masters of the spirit rests in the ability to exploit the inclinations of men, directing them along the way where they can develop profitably.* Such a law exists also among plants and animals, and it would be silly to pretend that a fruit-tree should yield flowers only, or should bear other fruit than its natural ones, or that an animal should fulfil the functions typical of another species. Could you pretend that a bee, destined to make honey, should become a little bird that sings among the leafy branches of a hedge? Or that this little branch of an almond-tree that I am holding in My hands, with all the tree from which I picked it, instead of yielding almonds should exude sweet-smelling resins from its bark? A bee works, a bird sings, an almond-tree bears fruit, a resiniferous plant secretes resins. And each fulfils its task. Souls do the same. Your task is to love. »

« Then inflame me, Lord. Grant me it as a grace. »

« Is the power of love that you possess not sufficient for you? »

« It's too little, Lord. It could have served to love men. Not to love You Who are the infinite Lord. »

« And just because I am such, a limitless love would be required... »

« Yes, my Lord. That is what I want: that You give me a limitless love. »

« Mary, the Most High Who knows what love is, said to man: "You shall love Me with all your strength" (1). He does not exact more than that. Because He is aware that it is already a martyrdom to love with all one's strength... »

« It does not matter, my Lord. Give me an infinite love, that I may love You as You deserve to be loved, that I may love You as I have not loved anybody else. »

« You are asking Me for a suffering that is like a fire that burns and consumes, Mary. It burns and consumes slowly... Think about it. »

« I have been thinking about it for such a long time, my Lord. But I dared not ask You. Now I know how much You love me. Just now I am aware of how much You love me, and I dare to ask You. Give me that infinite love, Lord. »

Jesus looks at her. She is in front of Him, still thin after so many long hours of watch and so much grief, wearing a modest dress and with her hair arranged in a simple way, like a girl without malice, her pale face full of eagerness, her imploring eyes already shining with love, looking more like a seraph than a woman. She is really the contemplator, asking for the martyrdom of absolute contemplation.

Jesus says one word only, after looking at her carefully, as if He wanted to weigh her will: « Yes. »

« Ah! my Lord! What a grace to die out of love for You! » she says falling on her knees and kissing Jesus' feet.

« Stand up, Mary. Take these flowers. They are those of your spiritual wedding. Be as sweet as the fruit of the almond-tree, as pure as its flower and as bright as the oil that is extracted from its

fruit, when it is lit, and as sweet smelling as this oil, when sated with essences it is spread in banquets or on the heads of kings, scented with your virtues. Then you will really spread on your Lord the balm that He will appreciate infinitely. »

Mary takes the flowers but she does not stand up, and in advance of her balms of love, she kisses and sheds tears on the feet of her Master...

(1) Dt. 6:5.

PART 8 - AT THE PINNACLE OF FAITH AND LOVE

A PLEDGE OF FAITH

(Vol. 5, p. 330-2)

(Shortly before His Passion and Death, Jesus calls His women disciples to say goodbye. One of them, Johanna, speaks of unity and of faith in Jesus, Who replies:)

« Diamonds form slowly, Johanna. Ages of hidden fire are required... One must not be in a hurry, never... And one must never lose heart, Johanna... »

« And when a diamond becomes... ashes again? »

« It is an indication that it was not yet a perfect diamond. Patience and fire are still required. One has to start all over again, hoping in the Lord. What appears to be a failure the first time, often becomes a triumph the second time. »

« Or the third or the fourth time, and even more. I was a failure many times, but at last You triumphed, Rabboni! » says Mary of Magdala in her harmonious voice from the end of the hall.

« Mary is happy every time she can humble herself by remembering her past... » says with a sigh Martha, who would like that remembrance cancelled in every heart.

« Truly, sister, it is so! I am happy remembering my past. But not to humble myself, as you say, but to rise higher, urged by the memory of the evil done, and by gratitude to Him Who saved me. And also so that whoever hesitates for himself, or for some person dear to him, may pluck up courage, and arrive at that faith that my Master says would be able to shift mountains (1). »

« And you have it! You blessed woman! You do not know what fear is... » says with a sigh Johanna, who is so meek and timid, and she appears to be even more so, if one compares her with the Magdalene.

« No, I do not know what fear is. It has never been in my human nature. Now that I belong to my Saviour, I am not even aware of it in my spiritual nature. Everything has served to increase my faith. Can one who was revived as I was, and who saw one's brother rise from the dead (2), be in doubt about anything? Nothing will ever make me doubt again. »

« As long as God is with you, that is, the Rabbi is with you... But He says that He will soon leave us. What will our faith then be? That is, your faith, because I have not yet gone beyond human frontiers... » says Plautina.

« His material presence or absence will not impair my faith. I will not be afraid. I am not being proud. I know myself. If the threats of the Sanhedrin should come true... I will not be afraid... »

« You will not be afraid of what? That the Just One is just? I shall not be afraid of that either. We believe that of many wise people whose wisdom we enjoy, I should say that we nourish ourselves with the life of their thought, ages after their death. But if you... » says Plautina insistently.

« I will not even fear for His death. Life cannot die. Lazarus, who was a poor man, rose from the dead... »

« He did not rise by himself, but because the Master evoked his spirit from the beyond. A deed that only the Master can accomplish. But who will evoke the Master's spirit, if the Master is killed? »

« Who? He. That is, God. God made Himself by Himself, God can raise Himself by Himself. »

« God... yes... according to your faith God made Himself by Himself. It is already difficult for us to admit that, as we know that one god descends from another through divine love. »

« Through obscene unreal love affairs, you should say » says Mary of Magdala rashly, interrupting her.

« As you wish... » says Plautina in a conciliatory tone, and is about to end her sentence, but Mary of Magdala precedes her once again and says: « But the Man, you mean, cannot raise Himself by Himself. But as He made Himself Man by Himself, because nothing is impossible to the Saint of Saints, so He will, by Himself, order Himself to rise from the dead. You cannot understand. You do not know the figures of our history of Israel. He and His wonders are in them.

And everything will take place as it was stated. I believe in advance, Lord. I believe everything. That You are the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin, that You are the Lamb of salvation, that You are the Most Holy Messiah, that You are the universal Redeemer and King, that Your Kingdom will have no end or boundary (3), and finally that death will not prevail over You, because life and death were created by God and are subject to Him like all other things. I believe. And if deep will be my sorrow at seeing You disregarded and despised, greater will be my faith in Your eternal Being. I believe. I believe in everything that has been said about You. I believe in everything You say. I believed also with regard to Lazarus, I was the only one who obeyed and believed, the only one who reacted against those men and those situations that wanted to persuade me not to believe. Only at the end, towards the end of the trial, I became confused... But the trial had lasted so long... and I thought that not even You, blessed Master, could approach the goal after so many days from his death... Now... I would not doubt any more even if, instead of days, a sepulchre were to be opened to give back its prey after it had been in its belly for months. Oh! my Lord! I know who You are! Filth has recognised the Star! (4) » Mary has squatted at His feet, on the marble floor, no longer vehement, but meek, with an expression of adoration on her face raised towards Jesus.

« Who am I? »

« He Who is (5). That is what You are. The other part, the human person, is the garment, the necessary garment that has been put on Your brightness and Your holiness, so that it might come among us to save us. But You are God, my God. » And she throws herself on the floor kissing Jesus' feet, and she seems to be unable to remove her lips from the toes protruding from the long linen tunic.

« Stand up, Mary. Always hold on fast to your faith. And raise it like a star in stormy hours, so that hearts may stare at it and may hope, at least that... »

(1) Mt. 17:20, 21:21, Mk. 11:22-3; (2) Jn. 11:20-44; (3) Is. 9:6-7, Jer. 23:5-6, Zech. 9:9-10, Mt. 6:10, Lk. 11:12; (4) Num. 24:17; (5) Ex. 3:14.

A SECOND ANOINTING

(Vol. 5, p. 363-6) (1)

(It is now the evening of the Sabbath, before Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Jesus, His apostles and many of His disciples are sharing supper in a hall in the house of Lazarus. Mary Magdalene has left the room...)

Mary Magdalene comes back in. She is holding in her hands a thin-necked amphora, ending in a little bill, as pretty as the neck of a bird. The alabaster is of a precious rosy yellow hue, like the complexion of some blondes. The apostles look at her thinking, perhaps, that she is bringing some rare delicacy. But Mary does not go to the centre, inside the U of the table where her sister is. She goes behind the seat-beds, and stops between that of Jesus and Lazarus and that of the two Jameses.

She uncorks the alabaster vase and places her hand under the little bill, to receive a few drops of a viscous liquid that flows slowly from the open amphora. A strong smell of tuberose and other essences, a very intense pleasant scent, spreads in the hall. But Mary is not satisfied with the little quantity of perfume that flows. She stoops, and with a sharp blow, she breaks the neck of the amphora against the corner of Jesus' little bed. The thin neck falls on the floor, shedding scented

drops on the marble pavement. The amphora now has a wide aperture, through which plenty of unguent flows in thick gushes.

Mary places herself behind Jesus and spreads the thick oil on her Jesus' hair, she sprinkles all His locks with it, she stretches them, and then puts them in order with the comb taken from her own hair, tidying them on the adored head. Jesus' fair-red hair shines now like dark gold and is very bright after the unction. The light of the chandelier, lit by the servants, is reflected on Jesus' fair hair like a beautiful copper-coloured bronze helmet. The scent is exhilarating. Through the nostrils it rises to the head and, spread as it is without restraint, it is so intense, that it is almost as exciting as sternutatory powder.

Lazarus, with his head turned round, smiles, watching how carefully Mary anoints and arranges Jesus' locks so that His hair may look tidy after the scented massage, while she does not worry about her plaits, which, no longer supported by the wide comb that helps the hairpins to hold them in place, are falling lower and lower on her neck, and are about to loosen completely on her shoulders. Martha also looks at her, smiling. The others are talking to one another in low voices, with different expressions on their faces.

But Mary is not yet satisfied. There is still plenty of ointment in the broken vase, and Jesus' hair, although thick, is already saturated with it. Mary then repeats the loving gesture of an evening of long ago. She kneels down at the foot of the bed, she unties the buckles of Jesus' sandals and takes them off, and dipping the long fingers of her beautiful hand into the vase, she takes as much ointment as she can, and spreads it on His bare feet, toe by toe, then on the soles and heels, then up, on the malleoli, which she uncovers by throwing back His linen tunic, and lastly on the insteps, she delays on the metatarsi, which will be pierced by the dreadful nails, she insists until she finds no more balm in the hollow vase. Then she shatters it on the floor, and with her hands now free, she removes her big hairpins, she quickly looses her heavy plaits, and with that golden, bright, soft, flowing bundle of hair, she removes the excess of ointment from Jesus' feet that are dripping balm.

Judas, who so far has been silent, watching with lewd envious eyes the beautiful woman and the Master Whose head and feet she was anointing, raises his voice, *the only voice of open reproach*; some of the others, not all of them, had murmured something or had made gestures of surprised but also calm disapproval. But Judas, who has stood up to have a better view of the ointment spread on Jesus' feet, says with ill grace: « What a useless heathen waste! Why do that? And then we expect the Chiefs of the Sanhedrin not to speak of sin! Those are deeds of a lustful courtesan, and they do not become the new life you are leading, woman. They are too strong a recollection of your past! »

The insult is such that everybody is dumbfounded. It is such that everybody stirs, some sit up on the beds, some jump to their feet, everyone looks at Judas, as if he had suddenly become insane.

Martha flares up. Lazarus springs to his feet striking the table with his fist and says: « In my house... », then he looks at Jesus and controls himself.

« Yes. Are you all looking at me? You have all murmured in your hearts. But now that I echoed your words and I openly said what you thought, you are all ready to say that I am wrong. I will repeat what I said. I do not mean that Mary is the Master's lover. But I say that certain actions do not become Him or her. It is an imprudent action. And an unjust one. Yes. Why such waste? If she wanted to destroy the memories of her past, she could have given that vase and ointment to me. It was at least a pound of pure nard! And of high value. I could have sold it for at least three hundred denarii, as that is the price for a nard of that quality. And I could have sold the vase, which was beautiful and precious. I would have given the money to the poor who crowd round us. We never have enough. And those asking for alms tomorrow in Jerusalem will be numberless. »

« That is true » say the others assenting. « You could have used a little for the Master and the rest... »

Mary of Magdala seems to be deaf. She continues wiping Jesus' feet with her loose hair that now, at its end, is also heavy with the ointment and darker than on the top of her head. Jesus' feet are smooth and soft in their shade of old ivory, as if they were covered with fresh skin. And Mary puts the sandals on the Christ's feet again, kissing each foot before and after putting the sandal on, deaf to everything that is not her love for Jesus.

Jesus defends her, laying His hand on her head bent in the last kiss, and saying: « Leave her alone. Why are you annoying and upsetting her? You do not realise what she has done. Mary has accomplished an action that is rightful and good with regard to Me. The poor will always be among you. I am about to go away. You will always have them, but you will soon not have Me any longer. You will always be able to give alms to the poor. Shortly to Me, to the Son of man among men, it will no longer be possible to give any honour, through the will of men, and because the hour has come. Love is light to her. She feels that I am about to die, and she wanted to anticipate the burial anointing for My body. I tell you solemnly, that wherever the Good News is proclaimed, this prophetic action of love of hers will be remembered. All over the world. Throughout ages. I wish God would turn every human being into another Mary, who does not value things, who entertains no attachment for anything, who does not cherish the least memory of the past, but destroys and treads on everything that is flesh and world, and breaks and spreads herself, as she did with the nard and the alabaster, on her Lord and out of love for Him. Do not weep, Mary. In this hour I repeat to you the words I spoke to Simon the Pharisee and to your sister Martha: “You are forgiven everything, because you have loved *completely*” (2). You have chosen the better part (3). And it will not be taken away from you. Go in peace, My kind little sheep found again (4). Go in peace. The pastures of love shall be your food for ever. Stand up. Kiss also My hands that have absolved and blessed you... How many people these hands of Mine have absolved, blessed, cured, assisted! And yet I tell you, that the people whom I have assisted, are preparing torture for these hands... »

There is deathlike silence in the air, sultry with the intense scent. Mary, her loose hair clothing her shoulders and veiling her face, kisses the right hand that Jesus offers her, and cannot detach her lips from it...

Martha, deeply moved, approaches her and gathers her loose hair which she braids, caressing her, and then she wipes the tears on her cheeks, endeavouring to dry them...

No one feels like eating any more... Christ's words make them pensive...

(1) Mt. 26:6-13, Mk. 14:3-9, Jn. 12:3-8; (2) Lk. 7:47; (3) Lk. 10:42; (4) Mt. 18:11-14, Lk. 15:4-7.

ONLY THE MAGDALENE

(Vol. 5, p. 374-5)

(Jesus, alone with Lazarus, tells His friend He is about to be betrayed, and by whom, and will suffer exceedingly. Lazarus exclaims:)

« Oh! Master! You are weeping?! I know that You wept also in front of my sepulchre, because You loved me. But now... You are weeping again. You are frozen. Your hands are already as cold as those of a corpse. You are suffering... You are suffering too much!... »

« I am the Man, Lazarus. I am not only the God. I have the sensitiveness and affections of men. And My soul is distressed, thinking of My Mother... And yet, I tell you, My torture of enduring to have My Traitor close to Me has become *so monstrous*, as well as having to bear the satanic hatred of a whole world, and the deafness of those who, if they do not hate, cannot love actively either, because to love actively is to succeed in being what the loved person wants and teaches, whereas here!... Yes, many love Me. But they have remained “what they were”. They did not assume another *ego* for My sake. Do you know who was able, among My most intimate ones, to change nature in order to become of Christ, as Christ wants? *One only*: your sister Mary. She started from *complete* perverted animality, to arrive at an angelical spirituality. And she achieved that only through the power of love. »

« You redeemed her. »

« I redeemed them *all* with My word. But *she alone* changed completely, through active love... »

THE CRUCIFIXION AND BURIAL

(Vol. 5, pp. 612, 640-1)

(Jesus has been betrayed by Judas, abandoned by most of the apostles, tortured and crucified. Nailed to the Cross, He is subjected to abuse and curses by some Pharisees, one of whom shouts to Jesus:)

« "I entrust You to the God of Sinai" (1) did You say? Now the God of Sinai is preparing You for the eternal fire. Why don't You call Jonah so that he may repay Your kindness? »

Another one says: « Don't ruin the cross with the strokes Of Your head. It is to be used for Your followers. A whole legion of them will die on Your cross, I swear it on Jehovah. And Lazarus will be the first one I'll put there. We shall see whether You free him from death, now. »

« Yes. Let us go to Lazarus. Let us nail him on the other side of the cross » and parrot-like they speak slowly as Jesus did, saying: « Lazarus, My friend, come out! (2) Unbind him and let him go. »

« No! He used to say to Martha and Mary, His women: "I am the Resurrection and Life"(3) Ha! Ha! Ha! The Resurrection cannot drive death back, and the Life is dying! »

« There is Mary with Martha over there. Let us ask them where Lazarus is and let us look for him. » And they come forward, towards the women, asking arrogantly: « Where is Lazarus? At his mansion? »

And while the other women, struck with terror, run behind the shepherds, Mary Magdalene comes forward, and finding in her grief the ancient boldness of her days of sin, she says: « Go. You will already find the soldiers of Rome in the mansion, with five-hundred-armed men of my land, and they will castrate you like old billy goats destined to feed the slaves of millstones. »

« Impudent! Is that how you speak to priests? »

« Sacrilegious! Filthy! Cursed! Turn round! On your backs, I can see them, you have tongues of infernal flames. »

Mary's assertion sounds so certain that the cowards, who are really struck with terror, turn round; but if they have no flames on their shoulders, they have the sharp-pointed Roman lances at their backs. In fact Longinus has given an order, and the fifty soldiers, who were resting, have come into action and they prick the buttocks of the first Judaeans they find. The latter run away shouting and the soldiers stop to block the entrances to the two roads and protect the open space. The Judaeans curse, but Rome is the stronger.

The Magdalene lowers her veil again - she had raised it to speak to the revilers - and goes back to her place. The other women join her...

(Jesus dies on the Cross, His Body is laid in the tomb, and Mary Magdalene and the other disciples try to persuade the Mother of Jesus to return to the house of the Last Supper. But the Mother is distraught ...)

« Nothing! Nothing! I do not want any food! I want My Child! I will appease My hunger with My grief, I will quench My thirst with My tears... Here... Can you hear how that horned howl is weeping? It is weeping with Me, and before long, nightingales will be weeping. And tomorrow, in the sunshine, wood-larks and blackcaps and all the birds He loved will weep, and doves will come with Me to knock at this stone and say: "Rise, my love, and come! Love, Who are in the large fissure of the rock, in the hiding-place of the ravine, let me see Your face, let me hear Your voice" (4). Ah! What am I saying! They also, the wicked killers, have called Him with the word of the Canticle! Yes, come, daughters of Jerusalem, to see your King with the diadem, with which His Fatherland crowned Him on the day of His wedding with Death, on the day of His triumph as Redeemer! (5) »

« Look, Mary! The guards of the Temple are coming. Let us go away, so that they may not scorn You. »

« The guards? Scorn? No. They are cowardly. Yes, cowardly. And if I, dreadful in My grief, should march against them, they would flee like Satan before God. But I remember that I am Mary... and I will not strike as I would be entitled to. I will be good... and they will not even see Me.

And if they see Me and ask Me: "What do You want?", I will say to them: "The charity of being allowed to breathe the balmy air coming out from this fissure". I will say: "In the name of your mothers". Everybody has a mother... also the pitiful robber said so... »

« But these men are worse than robbers. They will insult You. »

« Oh!... And is there still an insult of which I am not aware, after today's? »

It is the Magdalene who finds a reason capable of bending the Sorrowful Mother to obedience. « You are good, You are holy, and You believe, and You are strong. But what are we?... You are aware of it! The majority have run away. Those who have remained are trembling. The doubt, which is already in us, would overwhelm us. You are the Mother. You have not only duties and rights on Your Son, but also duties and rights on what belongs to Your Son. You must come back with us, among us, to gather us together, to reassure us, to infuse Your faith into us. You said so, after Your just reproach for our timidity and misbelief: "It will be easier for Him to rise, if He is free from these useless bandages". I say to You: "If we succeed in being united in the faith in His Resurrection, He will rise earlier (6). We will evoke Him with our love..." Mother, Mother of my Saviour, come back with us, since You are the love of God, to give us this love of Yours! Do You want poor Mary of Magdala to get lost again, after He saved her with so much pity? »

« No. I would be reproached for that. You are right. I must go back... and look for the apostles... the disciples... the relatives everybody... And say... say: have faith. Say: He forgives you... »

(1) Ex. 20:18-20; (2) Jn. 11:43; (3) Jn. 11:25; (4) Song 2:10,14; (6) Hos. 6:2, Jonah 1: to 3, Mt. 12:38-40, 16:21, 27:63, Mk. 9:31-2, Lk. 9:22, Jn. 2:19-22, 1Cor. 15:3-4.

THE SPIRIT AND LOVE OF THE MAGDALENE

(Vol. 5, p. 662-5)

(That night, the women disciples are discussing the need to get spices and ointments, for the anointing of Jesus' Body early on the morning after the Sabbath. The Magdalene remembers an old disused mansion ...)

« In the mansion there are many small vases of essences, and there is some fine incense. I will go and get them. » And Mary Magdalene stands up from her seat and puts on her mantle.

Martha shouts: « You shall not go. »

« I will go. »

« You are mad! They will get you! »

« Your sister is right. Don't go! »

« Oh! what useless howling females you are! Jesus really had a fine group of followers! Have you already used up your reserve of courage? With regard to me, the more I use the more I get. »

« I will go with her. I am a man. »

« And I am your mother and I forbid you. »

« Be good, Mary Salome, and you, too, John. I will go by myself. I am not afraid. I know what it is like, going round the streets at night. I have done that thousands of times for sinful reasons... and should I be afraid now that I am going to serve the Son of God? »

« But there is a revolt in town today. You heard what the man said. »

« He is faint-hearted. And you are like him. I am going. »

« And if the soldiers find you? »

« I will say: "I am the daughter of Theophilus, the Syrian, a faithful servant of Caesar". And they will let me go. In any case... A man before a beautiful young woman is a more harmless plaything than a stalk of straw. I know, much to my shame... »

« But how do you expect to find perfumes in the mansion if no one has lived in it for years? »

« Do you think so? Oh! Martha! Do you not remember that Israel forced you to leave it, because it was one of my meeting-places with my lovers? I kept everything there, that served to make them even more crazy about me. When I was saved by my Saviour, in a place known only to me, I concealed the alabasters and incenses that I used for my orgies of love. And I swore that only the tears shed on my sins, and the adoration of the Most Holy Jesus, would be the scented waters and

the burning incenses of repentant Mary. And that I would use those signs of a profane cult of senses and of the flesh, only to sanctify them on Him, and to anoint Him. This is the hour. I am going. Remain here. And be calm. The angel of God will come with me, and no harm will befall me. Goodbye. I will bring you news. And do not say anything to Her... You would increase Her worries... » And Mary of Magdala goes out, sure of herself, and imposing...

More time passes, while they weep and wait. Then Mary Magdalene comes back triumphantly, laden with bags full of small precious vases.

« See, nothing has happened to me. Here are oils of all kinds, and nard, and olibanum, and benzoin. There is no myrrh and no aloe... I did not want any bitterness... I am drinking it all now... In the meantime we will mix these, and tomorrow we will get... oh! if we pay, Isaac will give them also on a Sabbath... We will get myrrh and aloe. »

« Did anyone see you? »

« No one. There is not even a bat around. »

« And the soldiers? »

« The soldiers? I think they must be snoring in their pallets. »

« What about the seditions... the arrests... »

« The fear of that man saw them... »

« Who is in the mansion? »

« Levi and his wife. As peaceful as children. The armed men have fled... ha! ha! fine brave men we have, honestly!... They ran away as soon as they heard of the death sentence. I tell you the truth: Rome is hard and uses the scourge... But by it she makes people fear her and serve her. And she has men, not cowards... Oh! yes! He used to say: "My followers will experience the same destiny as Mine". H'm! If many Romans become followers of Jesus, that may be true. But if there are to be martyrs among the Israelites! He will remain alone... Here. This is my sack. And this one is Johanna's, who... yes. We are not only cowards, but also liars. Johanna is only depressed. She and Eliza felt ill on Golgotha. One is a mother whose son died, and, as she heard the death-rattles of Jesus, she was badly upset. The other is delicate and not used to so much walking and exposure to the sun. But there are no wounds and no agonies. She certainly weeps, as we do. Nothing else. She regrets that she was taken away. She will come tomorrow. And she sends these spices. The ones she had. As ordered by Plautina, Valeria had remained with her, and now she has gone with the slaves to Claudia's house, because they have much incense. When she comes, because she, too, by the grace of Heaven, is not an ever-trembling coward, don't start shouting as if you felt the dagger at your throats. Come on. Get up. Let us take the mortars and work. Weeping is of no avail. Or at least weep and work. Our balm will be mixed with our tears. And He will feel them upon Himself... He will feel our love. » And she bites her lips, not to weep, and to give strength to the others, who are really depressed.

They work eagerly...

(A little later, the Magdalene says to John:)

« We must not let them see that we are weeping. Because, otherwise, the women over there will not be able to do anything. And we have to do... »

« ... and we have to believe » concludes John.

« Yes. We must believe. If one were not able to believe, it would be despair. I believe. And you? »

« I, too... »

« You say so badly. You do not love enough yet. *If you loved with your whole self, it would not be possible for you not to believe.* Love is light and voice. Also against the darkness of denial and the silence of death it says: "I believe". » Wonderful is the Magdalene, so great and imposing, authoritative in her confession of faith! Her heart must be torn to pieces. And her eyes inflamed by tears confirm that. But her spirit is undefeated.

John looks at her full of admiration and whispers: « You are strong! »

« Always. I was so much, that I dared to defy the world. And I was, then, without God. Now that I have Him, I feel I know how to defy also hell. You, who are good, should be stronger than I am.

Because sin disheartens, you know? More than consumption. But you are innocent... That is why He loved you so much... »

THE MORNING OF THE RESURRECTION

(Vol. 5, p. 690-95)

(It is early on Sunday morning, and while the women are preparing the ointments, Peter and John are tidying up and talking loudly in the Supper Room ...)

... Mary Magdalene, attracted by their shouts, comes in. « Do not shout like that. Mary can hear you. She is so exhausted! She has no strength left, and everything hurts Her. Your useless unseemly shouts renew Her torture of what you have been... »

« See? See, John? A woman can order me to be quiet. And she is right. Because we, the males sacred to the Lord (1), have only been able to lie or to run away. The women have been brave. You, a little more than a woman, so young and pure you are, were able to remain. We, the strong ones, the males, have fled. Oh! how the world must despise me! Tell me, tell me, woman! You are right! Put your foot on my lips that lied (2). On the sole of your sandal there is perhaps a little of His Blood. And only that Blood, mixed with the mud of the road, can give the denier a little forgiveness, a little peace. I must get accustomed to the scorn of the world! What am I? Tell me: what am I? »

« You are full of pride » replies calmly the Magdalene. « Sorrow? Also. But you must believe that out of ten parts of your sorrow, five, I do not want to offend you by saying six, five are of your sorrow of being one who can be despised. And I will really scorn you if you continue only to moan and get into a frenzy, just like a foolish woman! What is done is done. And no unseemly shouting can repair it or cancel it. It only serves to draw attention and beg for undeserved pity. Be manly in your repentance. Do not shout. Act. I... you know who I was... But, when I realised that I was more despicable than vomit, I did not fall into fits of convulsions. I acted. In public. Without being indulgent towards myself, and without asking for indulgence. Did the world despise me? It was right. I had deserved it. The world said: "A new whim of the prostitute"? And it called blasphemy my recourse to Jesus? It was right. The world remembered my previous behaviour that justified such remarks. So? The world had to convince itself that the sinner Mary no longer existed. By means of facts, I convinced the world. Do the same and be quiet. »

« You are severe, Mary » objects John.

« More with myself than with other people. But I admit it. I do not have the light hand of the Mother. She is Love. I... oh! !! I lashed my feelings with the whip of my will. And I will do so even more. *Do you think that I have forgiven myself for being lustful?* No, I have not. But I only say so to myself. And I will always repeat it to myself. I shall die consumed with this secret regret of having been my own corrupter, with this inconsolable sorrow of having profaned myself, and not having been able to give Him but a trampled-on heart... See... I have worked more than all the others at the balms... And with greater courage than the others I will uncover Him...

Oh! God! what will He be like now! (Mary of Magdala grows pale at the very thought of it). And I will cover Him with fresh balms, removing those which are certainly all tainted on His countless wounds... I will do so, because the other women will look like convulsuli after a downpour... But it grieves me to have to do it with these hands of mine accustomed to caressing lustfully, and to have to approach His Holiness with this stained body of mine... I should like... I should like to have the hand of the Virgin Mother to accomplish this last unction... »

Mary is now weeping silently, without sobbing. How different she is from the theatrical Mary always shown to us! She is weeping noiselessly, as she did on the day of her forgiveness in the house of the Pharisee.

« Are you saying that... the women will be afraid? » Peter asks her.

« Not afraid... But they will be upset seeing His Body, which is certainly already rotten... swollen... black. And then, and this is certain, they will be afraid of the guards. »

« Do you want me to come? With John? »

« Ha! Certainly not! We women are *all* going. Because, as we were *all up there*, so it is fair that we should *all* be round His death bed. You and John will remain here. She cannot remain alone!... »

« Is She not coming? »

« We are not letting Her come! »

« She is convinced that He will rise from the dead (3)... What do you think? »

« I, after Mary, am the one who believes more. I have always believed that that could be. He said so. And He never lies... Never!... Oh! before I used to call Him Jesus, Master, Saviour, Lord... Now, now I feel that He is so great that I do not know, I dare not give Him a name any more... What shall I say to Him when I see Him?... »

« But do you really think that He will rise?... »

« Another one! Oh! By dint of telling you that I do believe, and of hearing you say that you do not believe, I will end up by not believing any more myself! I have believed, and I do believe. I have believed, and a long time ago I prepared a garment for Him. And tomorrow, as tomorrow is the third day, I will bring it here, to have it ready... »

« But if you say that He will be black, swollen, filthy? »

« Filthy, never. Sin is filthy. But... of course! He will be black. So? Was Lazarus not already putrid? And yet he rose. And his body was healed. But, if I say so!... Be quiet, you misbelievers! My human reason says also to me: "He is dead and will not rise". But my spirit, "His" spirit, because I have received a new spirit from Him, shouts, resounding like blares of silver trumpets: "He will rise! He will rise! He will rise!". Why do you hurl me like a little boat against the cliffs of your doubts? I believe! I believe, my Lord! Although torn by grief, Lazarus has obeyed the Master and has remained in Bethany... I, who know who Lazarus of Theophilus is, a strong man, not a fearful leveret, can appreciate the sacrifice he made by remaining in the shade and not near the Master. But he obeyed. And by such obedience he has been more heroic than if, with weapons, he had snatched Him from armed men. I have believed, and I believe. And I am staying here. Waiting like Her. But let me go. It is daybreak. As soon as there is enough light, we will go to the Sepulchre... »

And the Magdalene goes away, her face flushed with weeping, but always brave.

She goes back into Mary's room.

« What was the matter with Peter? »

« A nervous fit. But he has got over it. »

« Do not be severe, Mary. He suffers.. »

« So do I. But You know that not even once have I asked a pitying caress of You. He has already been cured by You... On the contrary, I think that You alone, Mother, are in need of a balsam. My holy, beloved Mother! But take heart... Tomorrow is the third day (3). We shall lock ourselves in here, the two of us: His lovers. You, the holy Lover; I, the poor lover... But I love Him as much as I can, with my whole self. And we will wait for Him... The rest, those who do not believe, we will lock them in over there, with their doubts. And I will put many roses here... I will have the chest brought here today... I will go to the mansion house and I will instruct Levi. All these horrible things must disappear! Our Resurrected Lord must not see them... So many roses... And You will put on a new dress... He must not see You so. I will comb Your hair, I will wash Your poor face disfigured by tears. Eternal maid, I will act as Your mother... I shall have, at last, the joy of taking motherly care of a child more innocent than a new-born baby! Dear! » and with her emotional exuberance, the Magdalene presses to her breast the head of Mary Who is sitting, she kisses and caresses Her, she tidies the light locks of Her hair ruffled behind Her ears, with her linen dress she wipes the fresh tears that stream down Her cheeks again, again, always...

The women come in with lights and amphorae and large-mouthed vases.

Mary of Alphaeus is carrying a heavy mortar. « It is not possible to stay outside. There is a weak wind that blows out the lamps » she explains.

They place themselves on one side. They lay all their things on a long narrow table, then they give the final touch to their balms, by mixing the already heavy pomade of essences in the mortar with a white powder, handfuls of which they take from a little sack. They mix, working with all their energy and then they fill a large-mouthed vase. They place it on the floor. They repeat the same operation with another vase. Perfumes and tears fall on the resins.

Mary Magdalene says: « This is not the unction that I hoped I should be able to prepare for You. » Because it is the Magdalene who, being more skilled than the other women, has controlled and directed the composition of the perfume, which is so strong that they decide to open the door and leave the window ajar over the garden, which is just beginning to appear in the early light of dawn.

They all weep more loudly, after the remark made by the Magdalene in a subdued voice.

They have finished. All the vases are full.

They go out with the empty amphorae, the mortar no longer useful, and many lamps. Two only are left in the little room, and they tremble, they seem to be sobbing as well, with the flickering of their light...

The women come back again and they close the window, because it is a rather cold dawn. They put on their mantles and they take large sacks into which they put the vases of the balm.

Mary stands up and looks for Her mantle. But they all crowd round Her, convincing Her not to come.

« You are not fit to stand, Mary. You have not had any food for two days. Only a little water. »

« Yes, Mother, We will do it quickly and well. And we shall soon be back. »

« Be not afraid. We will embalm Him like a king. Look what precious balm we have prepared! And how much of it!... »

« We will not neglect any part of the body, or any wound, and we will arrange Him properly with our hands. We are strong and we are mothers. We will place Him like a child in a cradle. And the others will only have to close the place. »

But Mary insists: « It is My duty » She says. « I have always taken care of Him. Only these last three years that He was in the world, I surrendered the care of Him to other people, when He was far away from Me. Now that the world has rejected and disowned Him, He is Mine again. And I am once again His servant. »

Peter, who had approached the door with John, without being seen by the women, runs away upon hearing these words. He runs to some secluded corner to bewail his sin (2). John remains near the door. But he does not say anything. He would like to go as well. But he makes the sacrifice of remaining with the Mother.

Mary Magdalene takes Mary back to Her seat. She kneels in front of Her, she embraces Her knees raising her sorrowful loving face towards Her, and she promises: « With His Spirit, He knows and sees everything. But with my kisses I will tell His Body Your love and Your wish. I know what is love. I know what spur, what hunger it is to love, what nostalgia of being with whoever is our love. And that applies also to any base love that looks like gold, but is filth. And when she who has sinned can understand what is the holy love for the living Mercy, Whom men did not know how to love, then she can understand better what is Your love, Mother. You know that I *know* how to love. And You know that He said so, that evening of my true birth, on the shores of our serene lake, that Mary *knows how to love much* (4). Now this exuberant love of mine, like water that overflows from a tilted basin, like a flowery rosery that streams down a wall, like a flame that finding timber spreads and grows, has poured onto Him, and from Him-Love has drawn fresh power... Oh! my power of loving was not able to take His place on the Cross!... But what I was not able to do for Him - to suffer, and bleed, and die in His place, amid the mockery of all the world, happy, happy, happy to suffer in His place, and I am certain that the thread of my poor life would have been burnt more by the triumphant love than by the infamous scaffold, and from the ashes there would have sprung up the fresh snow-white flower of the new virgin life, unaware of everything that is not God - all that I was not able to do for Him, I can still do for You... Mother, Whom I love with all my heart. Rely on me. I, who in the house of Simon, the Pharisee, knew how to gently caress His holy feet (5), now, with my soul that opens more and more to Grace, with greater gentleness, will be able to caress His holy limbs, to dress His wounds, embalming them more with my love, with the balm taken from my heart wrung by love and sorrow, than with the ointment. And death will not spoil that body that has loved so much, and is so much loved. Death will flee, because Love is stronger. Love is invincible (6). And I, Mother, with Your perfect love, with my total love, will embalm my King of Love. »

Mary kisses this impassioned woman who, at last, has been able to find so much passion, and she yields to her entreaties.

The women go out taking a lamp. One only is left in the room. The Magdalene is the last to go out, after a last kiss to the Mother Who remains...

(1) Ex. 13:1-2 & 11-16, 22:29, Num. 3:11-13, 8:16-18; (2) Mt. 26:34-5 & 69-75, Mk. 14:29-31 & 66-72, Lk. 22:33-4 & 55-62, Jn. 13:37-8, 18:17 & 25-7; (3) Hos. 6:2, Jonah 1: to 3, Mt. 12:38-40, 16:21, 27:63, Mk. 9:31-2, Lk. 9:22, Jn. 2:19-22, 1Cor. 15:3-4; (4) Lk. 7:47; (5) Lk. 7:37-50; (6) Song 8:6.

PART 9 - THE FIRST MESSENGER OF THE RESURRECTION

AT THE SEPULCHRE

(Vol. 5, p. 705-12)

(The women go to Johanna's, while Mary Magdalene heads towards the Sepulchre. Shortly afterwards...)

...the short but strong earthquake takes place, creating a panic again in the people of Jerusalem, still terrorised by the events of Friday (1). The three women retrace their steps precipitately, and they remain in the large hall, among maidservants and servants who are howling and imploring the Lord, fearing new shocks...

... The Magdalene, instead, is just on the border of the path that takes one to the kitchen garden of Joseph of Arimathea, when she is caught in the powerful and also harmonious roar of this heavenly sign, while, in the faint rosy light of dawn, that is advancing in the sky, where to the west a persistent star still resists, and that makes fair the so-far greenish light, a very bright light appears and descends like an incandescent wonderful globe, cutting the calm air in a zigzag course.

Mary of Magdala is almost grazed and thrown on the ground by it. She bends for a moment whispering: « My Lord! » and then she straightens up like a stalk after the wind has passed by, and she runs towards the kitchen garden even faster.

She enters it quickly, and goes towards the sepulchre in the rock as fast as a bird that is chased and is looking for its nest. But, no matter how fast she runs, she cannot be there when the heavenly meteor acts as a lever and as a flame on the seal of lime, placed as a reinforcement for the heavy stone, or when with the final crash the stone door collapses, causing such a shake that joins the one of the earthquake, which, although of a short duration, is so violent that it knocks the guards down as if they were dead.

When Mary arrives, she sees the useless jailors of the Triumpher thrown on the ground like a sheaf of mown corn. Mary Magdalene does not associate the earthquake with Resurrection. But looking at the spectacle, she thinks it is a punishment of God for the desecrators of Jesus' Sepulchre, and she falls on her knees saying: « Alas! They have stolen Him! » She is really disconsolate and weeps like a girl who has come, being sure that she would find her father whom she was looking for, and instead finds the house empty.

She then stands up and runs away to go to Peter and John. And as she thinks of nothing but of informing the two, she forgets to go and meet her companions and remain on the road, but as fast as a gazelle she goes back the road she came, she passes through the Judicial Gate, and flies through the streets, which are a little more crowded, and she rushes against the door of the hospitable house and knocks at it furiously. The mistress opens the door to her.

« Where are John and Peter? » asks Mary Magdalene panting.

« There » says the woman pointing at the Supper-room.

Mary of Magdala enters and as soon as she is in, standing before the two astonished men, and in her voice kept low out of pity for the Mother, there is more anguish than if she had shouted, she says: « They have taken the Lord away from the Sepulchre! I wonder where they have put Him! »

and for the first time she staggers and is unsteady, and in order not to fall, she holds on whatever she can.

« What? What are you saying? » ask the two.

And panting, she replies: « I went ahead... to buy the guards... so that they would let us go. They are there like dead bodies... The Sepulchre is open; the stone is on the ground... Who? Who did it? Oh! come! Let us run... »

Peter and John set out at once. Mary follows them for a few steps. Then she goes back. She seizes the mistress of the house, she shakes her, violent in her far-sighted love, and she shouts in her face: « Mind you do not let *anybody* go to Her (and she points at the door of Mary's room). Remember that I am your mistress. Obey and be silent. » Then she leaves her aghast and joins the apostles, who are striding towards the Sepulchre...

... In the meantime, Susanna and Salome, after leaving their companions and reaching the walls, are caught in the earthquake (2). Frightened, they take shelter under a tree and remain there, torn between their desire to go to the Sepulchre, or to run to Johanna's. But love overcomes fear and they go towards the Sepulchre.

They are still frightened when they enter the garden and see the senseless guards... they see a bright light come out of the open Sepulchre. Their fright increases and reaches its climax when, holding each other's hand to pluck up courage, they peep in from the threshold, and in the dark sepulchral cave, they see a bright most beautiful creature, that smiling kindly, greets them from the place where it is standing - leaning on the right hand side of the anointment stone, which, grey as it is, disappears behind so much incandescent brightness. They fall on their knees, utterly astonished.

But the angel speaks to them gently: « Be not afraid of me. I am the angel of the divine Sorrow. I have come to rejoice at its end. The sorrow of the Christ, His humiliation in death is over. Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified Whom you are looking for, has risen from the dead. He is no longer here! The place where He was laid is empty. Rejoice with me. Go. Tell Peter and the disciples that He has risen and will precede you in Galilee. You will see Him there for a short time, as He said (3). »

The women fall with their faces on the ground, and when they raise them, they run as if they were chased by a punishment. They are terrorised and they whisper: « We shall die now! We have seen the angel of the Lord! »

They calm down a little in the open country, and they consult with each other. What are they to do? If they relate what they have seen, they will not be believed. If they say where they come from, they may be charged by the Judaeans with the murder of the guards. No. They cannot say anything to friends or to enemies...

Fearful, dumbfounded, they go back home along a different road. They go in and take shelter in the Supper room. They do not even ask to see Mary... And in there they think that what they have seen is nothing but a deception of the Demon. Humble as they are, they conclude that « it is not possible that they have been granted to see the messenger of God. It is Satan who wanted to frighten them to send them away from there. »

They weep and pray like two little girls frightened by a nightmare...

... The third group, that of Johanna, Mary of Alphaeus and Martha, when they see that nothing new is happening, decides to go where their companions are certainly waiting for them. They go out into the streets, where by now there are frightened people, who comment on the new earthquake connecting it with the event of Friday, and see also things which do not exist.

« It is better if they are all frightened! The guards may be so as well and will raise no objection » says Mary of Alphaeus. And they walk fast towards the walls.

But while they are going there, Peter and John, followed by the Magdalene, have arrived at the garden. And John, who runs faster, is the first to arrive at the Sepulchre. The guards are no longer there. Neither is the angel there any more (4).

John, timid and sorrowful, kneels down at the open entrance to venerate and get some indication from the things he sees. But he only sees, heaped on the floor, the linen cloths placed on the Shroud. « There is really nothing, Simon! Mary has seen accurately. Come, come in, look. »

Peter, who is breathless after so much running, goes into the Sepulchre. On the way he had said: « I will never dare to approach that place. » But now he thinks only of finding out where the Master may be. And he calls Him also, as if He might be concealed in some dark corner.

At this early hour in the morning, it is still very dark in the deep Sepulchre, which receives light only from the opening of the entrance, where John and the Magdalene now cast a shadow... And Peter finds it hard to see, and has to help himself with his hands to ascertain what the situation is... He touches, trembling, the table of the anointment, and feels that it is empty...

« He is not here, John! He is not here!... Oh! come here! I have wept so much that I can hardly see in this poor light. »

John stands up and goes in. And while he does so, Peter discovers the sudarium in a corner, folded diligently and within it the Shroud, rolled up carefully (5).

« They have really abducted Him. The guards were not here for us, but to do that... And we have let them do it. By going away, we have allowed that... »

« Oh! where will they have put Him? »

« Peter, Peter! This... is really the end! »

The two disciples come out looking annihilated.

« Let us go, woman. You will tell the Mother... »

« I am not going away. I am staying here... Somebody will come... Oh! I am not coming... There is still something of Him here. The Mother was right... To breathe the air where He was is the only relief left to us. »

« The only relief... Now you also can see that it was nonsense to hope... » says Peter.

Mary does not even reply to him. She crouches on the ground, close to the entrance, and weeps, while the others go away slowly (6).

She then raises her head and looks inside, and through her tears she sees two angels, sitting at the head and at the foot of the anointment stone. Poor Mary is so stupefied in her fiercest struggle between hope that is dying, and faith that does not want to die, that she looks at them like one whose mind is completely blank, without even being surprised. The strong woman, who has resisted everything like a heroine, has nothing left but tears.

« Why are you weeping, woman? » asks one of the two shining young boys, because they look like very beautiful adolescents.

« Because they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have put Him. »

Mary is not afraid to speak to them. She does not ask: « Who are you? » Nothing. Nothing amazes her any more. She has already suffered everything that can astonish a human being. Now she is only a broken thing that weeps without strength or reserve.

The angelical youth looks at his companion and smiles. And so does the other. And in a flash of angelical joy they both look outside, towards the garden all in bloom with millions of corollas that have opened at the first sunshine on the closely planted apple-trees of the orchard.

Mary turns round to see whom they are looking at (7). And she sees a Man, most handsome, and I do not know how she does not recognise Him at once. A Man Who looks at her pitifully and asks her: « Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for? » It is true that Jesus is dimmed out of pity for the woman, whom emotions have exhausted and who might die from sudden joy, but I really wonder why she does not recognise Him.

And Mary sobbing says: « They have taken my Lord Jesus! I had come to embalm Him while awaiting His resurrection... I gathered all my courage, my hope and my faith around my love... and now I cannot find Him any more... Or rather, I put my love around faith, hope and courage to defend them from men... but all in vain! Men have abducted my Love, and with it they have deprived me of everything... O my lord, if you have taken Him away, tell me where you have put Him. And I will get Him... I will not tell anybody... It will be a secret between you and me. Look: I am the daughter of Theophilus, Lazarus' sister, but I am on my knees before you to implore you, like a slave. Do you want me to pay you for His Body? I will do so. How much do you want? I am rich. I can give you as much gold and as many gems as it weighs. But give it back to me. I will not denounce you. Do you want to strike me? Do so. Until I bleed, if you wish so. If you bear Him a grudge, let me expiate it. But give Him back to me. Oh! don't make me wretched with this misery, my lord! Have mercy on a poor woman!... Do you not want to do it on my behalf? Then, do it for

His Mother. Tell me! Tell me where is my Lord Jesus. I am strong. I will take Him in my arms and I will carry Him like a child to safety. Lord... lord... You can see it... for three days we have been struck by the wrath of God for what was done to the Son of God... Do not add Desecration to Crime... »

« Mary! » Jesus shines in calling her. He reveals Himself in His triumphant brightness.

« Rabboni! » Mary's cry is really the « great cry » that closes the cycle of death. With the first one, the darkness of hatred enveloped the Victim with funereal bandages; with the second, the lights of love increased His brightness. And Mary stands up as her cry fills the garden; she rushes to Jesus' feet and would like to kiss them.

Jesus moves her away, hardly touching her forehead with the tips of His fingers: « Do not touch Me! I have not yet ascended to My Father in this appearance. Go to My brothers and friends, and tell them that I am ascending to My Father and yours, to My God and yours. And then I will come to them. » And Jesus disappears, absorbed by an unsustainable light.

Mary kisses the ground where Jesus was, and she runs towards the house. She goes in like a rocket, because the main door is half open, to let the master pass, who is going to the fountain; she opens the door of Mary's room and drops on Her breast shouting: « He has risen! He has risen! » and she weeps happily (8).

And while Peter and John rush there, and Salome and Susanna, still frightened, come from the Supper room and listen to her narration, Mary of Alphaeus with Martha and Johanna come in from the street, and out of breath they say « that they have been there as well, and they saw two angels, who said that they were the Guardian of the Man God and the angel of His Sorrow, and ordered them to tell the apostles that He had risen from the dead. » And as Peter shakes his head, they insist, saying: « Yes. They said: "Why are you looking for the Living One among the dead? He is not here. He has risen from the dead, as He said when He was still in Galilee. Do you not remember? He said: 'The Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of sinners to be crucified. But on the third day he will rise from the dead (9)' " »

Peter shakes his head, saying: « Too many things during these days! They have been upset. »

The Magdalene raises her head from Mary's breast and says: « I have seen Him! I have spoken to Him. He told me that He is ascending to the Father, and then He will come. How handsome He was! » and she weeps as she had never wept, now that she no longer has to torture herself to oppose the doubt rising from every side.

But Peter and John are very doubtful. They look at each other and their eyes say: « Women's fancy! »

Then also Susanna and Salome dare to speak. But the very inevitable difference in the details of the guards that first are there like dead bodies and then are not there, of the angels that sometimes are one and sometimes are two and did not show themselves to the apostles, of the two versions concerning Jesus' coming here or His preceding His disciples in Galilee, makes the doubt, and more than that, the persuasion of the apostles grow stronger and stronger.

Mary, the blessed Mother, is silent, supporting the Magdalene... I do not understand the mystery of this maternal silence.

Mary of Alphaeus says to Salome: « Let the two of us go back there. Let us see whether we are all intoxicated... » And they run out.

The other women remain there, quietly derided by the two apostles, near Mary Who is silent, engrossed in a thought that each interprets in a personal manner, and no one realises that it is ecstasy.

The two elderly women come back: « It is true! It is true! We have seen Him. He said to us, near Barnabas' kitchen garden: "Peace to you. Be not afraid. Go and tell My brothers that I have risen from the dead, and that they should go within a few days to Galilee. We shall be together again there" (10). That is what He said. Mary is right. We must inform those who are at Bethany, Joseph, Nicodemus, the most faithful disciples, the shepherds, we must go and do, and do... Oh! He has risen!... » and they all weep happily.

« You are mad, women. Grief has upset you. The light has seemed an angel to you. The wind, a voice. The sun, the Christ. I do not criticise you. I understand you, but I can only believe what I

have seen: the open empty Sepulchre, and the guards who have run away with the stolen Corpse. »

« But if the very guards say that He has risen! If the whole town is in a turmoil and the Princes of the Priests are mad with rage, because the guards have spoken while running away terrified! Now they want them to say something different and they are paying them for that. But it is already known. And if the Judaeans do not believe in the Resurrection, they do not want to believe, many other people do believe... »

« H'm! Women!... » Peter shrugs his shoulders and is about to go away.

Then the Mother, who still has on Her heart the Magdalene, who is weeping like a willow-tree in a downpour, for her too great joy, and who kisses Her fair hair, raises Her transfigured face and says a short sentence: « He has really risen. I have had Him in My arms and I kissed His Wounds. » She then bends over the head of the passionate woman and says: « Yes, joy is even stronger than sorrow. But it is only a grain of sand compared to what will be your ocean of eternal joy. You are blessed because you made your spirit speak above reason. »

Peter dare not deny any longer... and with one of those sudden changes of the old Peter, who is coming back to light again, he says and shouts, as if the delay depended on the others and not on him: « Then, if it is so, we must let the others know. Those spread out in the country, look for them, take action. Come on, get a move on. If He really should come, let Him at least find us », and he does not realise that again he confesses that he does not believe blindly in His Resurrection...

(1) Mt. 28:1-8, Mk. 16:1-4, Lk. 24:1-8, Jn. 20:1-10; (2) Mk. 16:5-8; (3) Mt. 26:32, Mk. 14:28; (4) Lk. 24:12; (5) Mt. 27:59, Mk. 15:46, Lk. 23:53, Jn. 19:40, 20:5-7; (6) Jn. 20:11-18; (7) Mk. 16:9-11;

(8) Lk. 24:9-11; (9) Mt. 20:17-19, Mk. 10:32-4, Lk. 18:31-4; (10) Mt. 28:8-10.

A DESERVING GIFT FOR THE MAGDALENE

(Vol. 5, pp. 714, 744-5)

(Jesus comments to Maria Valtorta ...)

« ... And after showing Myself to the Pure One, to Whom by right of Holiness and Maternity it is just that the Son-God should go, I present Myself to the redeemed woman, to the file-leader, to the representative of *all the female creatures*, whom I have come to free from the sting of lust. So that she may tell them to approach Me to be cured, to have faith in Me, to believe in My Mercy that understands and forgives, to look at My Body adorned with the five wounds, in order to defeat Satan, who rummages in their flesh.

I do not let her touch Me. She is not the Pure One, who can touch without contaminating Him, the Son Who goes back to the Father. She has still much to purify through penance. But her love deserves that reward. She *was able to rise through her own will* from the sepulchre of her vice, to strangle Satan who held her, to defy the world out of love for Her Saviour, she was able to divest herself of everything that was not love, she was able to be nothing but love that is consumed for her God. And God calls her: "Mary". Listen to her replying: "Rabboni!" Her heart is in that cry.

As she deserved it, I entrusted her with the task of being the messenger of Resurrection. And once again she will be somewhat derided, as if she were raving. But the judgement of men is of no importance to her, to Mary of Magdala, to Mary of Jesus. She saw Me raised from the dead, and that gives her a joy that appeases all other feelings.

Do you see how I love also who was guilty, *but wanted to come out of guilt?* Not even to John did I show Myself first. It was to the Magdalene that I showed Myself (1). John had already received the state of son from Me (2). He could have it, because he was pure and could be not only a spiritual son, but also one who gave the Pure Mother of God, and received from Her, those needs and those cares which are connected with the body.

The Magdalene, the one revived to Grace, has the first vision of Grace Risen.

When you love Me to the extent of overcoming everything for Me (3), I take your diseased heads and hearts in My pierced hands, and I breathe My Power on your faces. And I save you, I

save you, children whom I love. You become again beautiful, wholesome, free, happy. You become again the dear children of the Lord. I make you the bearers of My Goodness among poor men, to witness My Goodness to them, and convince them of it, and of Me.

Have, have, have faith in Me. Love. Be not afraid. May what I suffered to save you, assure you of the Heart of your God... »

(During His first appearance to the ten apostles (4), Jesus is asked why he appeared to Mary Magdalene immediately after appearing to His Mother – and before coming to them. Jesus replies:)

« I had twelve apostles. And I loved them with all My Heart. I had chosen them and like a mother I took care to bring them up in My Life. I had no secrets for them. I told them everything, I explained everything, I forgave everything. Their humanity, their thoughtlessness, and their stubbornness... everything. And I had some disciples. Some rich and some poor disciples. I had women with a gloomy past or of a delicate constitution. But the apostles were the favourite ones.

My hour came. One betrayed Me and handed Me over to the executioners (5). Three slept while I was sweating blood (6). All of them, with the exception of two, ran away cowardly. One denied Me out of fear (7), although he had the example of another one, who was young and faithful. And, as if it were not enough, among the twelve I had a desperate suicide (8) and one who doubted My forgiveness so much that only with difficulty and through maternal words he believed in God's Mercy. So that, if I had looked at My group, if I had looked at it with human eyes, I should have said: "With the exception of John, faithful out of love, and of Simon, faithful to obedience, I no longer have disciples". That is what I should have said while I was suffering in the enclosure of the Temple, in the Praetorium, along the streets, on the Cross.

I had some women... And one, the most guilty in the past, has been, as John said, the flame that has joined together the broken fibres of hearts. That woman is Mary of Magdala. You denied Me and you ran away. She defied death to be close to Me. When they insulted her, she uncovered her face, ready to receive spittle and slaps, considering that by doing so she would resemble her crucified King more. And when people sneered at her from the depth of their hearts because of her firm faith in My Resurrection (9), she continued to believe. Although tortured, she took action. When she was desolate this morning she said: "I will divest myself of everything, but give me my Master". Can you still dare to ask Me: "Why to her?"... »

(1) Jn. 19:26-7; (2) Jn. 19:26-7; (3) Dt. 6:5; (4) Mk. 16:14, Lk. 24:36-43, Jn. 20:19-23; (5) Mt. 26:47-50, Mk. 14:43-5, Lk. 22:47-8, Jn. 18:2-5; (6) Lk. 22:44-6; (7) Mt. 26:34-5 & 69-75, Mk. 14:29-31 & 66-72, Lk. 22:33-4 & 55-62, Jn. 13:37-8, 18:17 & 25-7; (8) Mt. 27:5; (9) Hos. 6:2, Jonah 1: to 3, Mt. 12:38-40, 16:21, 27:63, Mk. 9:31-2, Lk. 9:22, Jn. 2:19-22, 1Cor. 15:3-4.

“SHE WAS NOT AFRAID”

(Vol. 5, p. 770-1)

(In a later appearance to His apostles, Jesus takes them to the place of His Crucifixion, and says to them:)

« I died there. And I have sanctified it for ever. I solemnly tell you, that until the end of times, there will be no holier place than it, and from all over the Earth and in all ages crowds will come to kiss that dust. And there is already someone who has preceded you, without fearing mockery and revenge, without being afraid of being contaminated. And yet, the person who has preceded you had double reason for being afraid of that. »

« Who is it, Lord? » asks John, whose side Peter prods with his elbow to make him ask the question.

« Mary of Lazarus! As she picked the flowers trampled on by My feet as I entered her house, before Passover, a souvenir of joy that she distributed to her companions, so now she went up to Calvary, and with her hands she dug the earth, hard with My Blood, and she came down with her load and laid it on My Mother's lap. She was not afraid. And she was known as "the Sinner" and as "the disciple". Neither She, Who in Her lap received that earth of the place of the Skull, thought

She would be contaminated. My Blood has cancelled everything, and holy is the clod of earth where it fell... »

PART 10 - THE CLIMAX OF THE CYCLE OF LOVE

THE DEATH OF MARY MAGDALENE

(Notebooks 1944, pages 252-9)

(Maria Valtorta describes what she sees:)

I see a cavern in the rock where there is a bed of piled-up leaves on a rustic frame of interwoven branches, bound together with rushes. It must be as comfortable as a rack for torture. The grotto also has a large stone which serves as a table, and a smaller one which serves as a chair. Against the side farthest back there is another one: a large stone splinter sticking out of the rock which - I don't know whether it is naturally or by patient, toilsome human effort - has been polished and presents a rather smooth surface. Upon this, which looks like a rustic altar, a cross made of two wicker-bound branches is resting. The inhabitant of the grotto has also planted ivy in an earthy cleft in the ground, and guided its branches to frame the cross and encircle it, while, in two rustic vases - which seemed to have been modeled in the clay by an unskilled hand - there are wild flowers picked nearby, and right at the foot of the cross, in a giant shell, there is a little wild cyclamen plant with small, very clean-cut leaves, and two buds which are about to blossom. At the foot of this altar there is a sheaf of thorny branches, and a scourge with knotted cords. In the grotto there is also a rustic jug with water. Nothing else.

Through the narrow, low aperture, mountains can be seen in the background, and since there appears a moving luminosity which is glimpsed in the distance, one would assume that the sea is visible from this point. But I cannot confirm this. Pendulous ivy branches, honeysuckle, and wild rosebushes - all the usual pomp of mountainous locations - hang over the opening and form a sort of moving veil, separating the interior from the exterior.

A thin woman, wearing rustic, dark clothing, covered by a goatskin as a blanket, goes into the grotto, pushing aside the hanging branches. She looks exhausted. It is impossible to determine her age. If one were to judge by her withered face, one would say she was quite old - over sixty. If one were to go by her flowing locks, still beautiful, thick, and golden, not over forty. Her hair hangs down in two braids over her curved, slender shoulders, and it is the only thing that shines out in that desolation. The woman must certainly have been beautiful, for her brow is still lofty and smooth, and her nose, well-shaped, and the oval, though thinned by weariness, regular. But her eyes no longer sparkle. They are deeply sunken in their sockets and marked by two bluish bistres. Two eyes which reveal the many tears they have shed. Two wrinkles, almost two scars, have been engraved from the corner of each eye along the nose, and finally dissolve into that other wrinkle, typical of those who have suffered greatly, which descends from the nostrils like a circumflex accent, to the corners of the mouth. Her temples look sunken, and the blue veins are outlined in the intense paleness. Her mouth hangs down in a weary curve and is a very pale pink. It must once have been a splendid mouth; now it is withered. The curve of the lips is like that of two broken wings, dangling. A mouth of pain.

The woman drags herself over to the mass of stone which serves as a table, and sets bilberries and wild strawberries upon it. She then goes to the altar and kneels down. But she is so exhausted that she nearly falls in doing so, and must hold herself up with one hand on the stone slab. She prays, looking at the cross, and tears flow down her wrinkles to her mouth, which drinks them in. She then lets her goatskin slip down, remaining with only the rough tunic to cover her, and takes the scourges and the thorns.

She clasps the thorny branches tightly around her head and her loins, and scourges herself with the cords. But she is too weak to do so. She drops the scourge, and supporting herself against the altar with both hands and her forehead, she says, "I can't withstand any more, Rabbi! I can't suffer more, in memory of your pain!"

The voice brings me to recognize her. It is Mary Magdalene. I am in her grotto as a penitent.

Mary is weeping. She calls Jesus lovingly. She cannot suffer any more. But she can still love. Her flesh, mortified by penance, can no longer withstand the effort of scourging herself, but her heart still beats passionately, and consumes itself in its final strength by loving. And she loves, remaining with her forehead crowned with thorns and her waist clasped by thorns; she loves by speaking to her Master in a continuous profession of love, and a renewed act of contrition.

She has slipped, with her brow touching the ground. The same posture she had on Calvary before Jesus, when He was placed on Mary's lap, the same one she had in the house in Jerusalem when Veronica explained her veil, the same one she had in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea, when Jesus called her and she recognized Him and worshipped Him (1). But now she is crying, because Jesus is not there.

"Life is fleeing from me, my Master. And will I have to die without seeing You again? When will I be able to take delight in your face? My sins are before me, and accuse me. You have forgiven me (2), and I believe hell will not possess me. But how long will I be detained in expiation, before living by You! Oh, good Master! For the sake of the love You have given me, comfort my soul! The hour of death has come. For the sake of your desolate dying on the cross, comfort your creature! You begot me. You. Not my mother. You raised me up, more than You raised up Lazarus, my brother (3). For he was already good, and death could only mean waiting in your Limbo. I was dead in my soul, and to die meant eternal death. Jesus, into your hands I entrust my spirit! It is yours, because You have redeemed it. As a final expiation, I agree to experience the harshness of your dying in abandonment. But give me a sign that my life has served to expiate my sinning."

"Mary!" Jesus has appeared. He seems to come down from the rustic cross. But He is not wounded and dying. He is as handsome as on the morning of the Resurrection (4). He comes down from the altar, and goes towards the prostrate woman. He bends over her. He calls her again, and since she seems to believe that the Voice is sounding for her spiritual senses, and remains with her face to the ground, she does not see the light Christ is emitting. He touches her, resting his hand on her head and taking her by the elbow, as in Bethany, to lift her up again.

When she feels touched, and recognizes that hand by its length, she cries out loudly. And she uplifts her face, transfigured with joy. And she lowers it to kiss the feet of her Lord.

"Get up, Mary. It's Me. Life is fleeing. It's true. But I have come to tell you that Christ awaits you. There is no waiting for Mary. Everything is forgiven her. From the first moment it was forgiven. But now it is more than forgiven. Your place is already prepared in my Kingdom. I have come, Mary, to tell you this. I did not order the angel to do so, because I repay a hundredfold for what I receive, and I remember what I have received from you. Mary, let us together relive a moment in the past. Remember Bethany (5). It was the evening after the Sabbath. Six days remained before my death. Do you remember your house? Everything was beautiful in the blossoming tract of its orchard. The water was singing in the pool, and the first roses could be scented around its walls. Lazarus had invited Me to his supper, and you had stripped the garden of the loveliest flowers to adorn the table where your Master would take his sustenance. Martha did not dare to reproach you, because she remembered my words (6), and looked at you with gentle envy, for you shone with love while coming and going for the preparations. And then I arrived. You ran faster than a gazelle, preceding the servants, to open the gate with your usual cry. It always sounded like the cry of a freed prisoner. I was, in fact, your liberation, and you were a liberated prisoner. The apostles were with Me. All of them. Even the one who was then like a gangrenous member of the apostolic body. But you were there to take his place. And you did not know that, while observing your head, bending to kiss my feet, and your sincere, love-filled eyes, I forgot my disgust over having the betrayer at my side. I wanted you on Calvary *for this reason* (7). You in Joseph's garden *for this reason* (8). Because to see you, was to be sure that my death was not without a purpose. And my showing Myself to you was an act of gratitude for your faithful love. Mary, blessed are you that have never betrayed, and has confirmed Me in my hope as the Redeemer - you in whom I saw all those saved by my death! While everyone ate, you worshipped. You had given Me the perfumed water for my weary feet, and chaste, ardent kisses for my hands, and still not content, you wanted to break open your last precious vase and anoint my head, freshening up my hair as a mother does, and anoint my hands and feet so that all your Master's limbs would be scented as members of the

consecrated King... And Judas, who hated you because you were now honest and rejected the appetites of males with your honesty, reproached you... But I defended you, because you had done everything out of love, such a great love that the memory of it accompanied Me in the agony, from Thursday night until the ninth hour... Now, because of this act of love you gave Me on the threshold of my death, I come, on the threshold of your death, to repay you with love. Your Master loves you, Mary. He is here to say this to you. Do not be afraid or anxious about another death. Your death is no different from that of those shedding their blood for my sake. What does the martyr give? His life out of love for his God. What does the penitent give? His life out of love for his God. What does the lover give? His life out of love for his God. See that there is no difference. Martyrdom, penance, and love consummate the same sacrifice - and for the same purpose. In you then, a penitent and a lover, there is martyrdom, as in those perishing in the arenas. Mary, I will precede you into glory. Kiss my hand and lie down in peace. Rest. It is time for you to rest. Give Me your thorns. Now is the time for roses. Rest and wait. I bless you, blessed one."

Jesus has obliged Mary to lie down on her couch. And the saint, with her face washed with tears of ecstasy, has lain down as her God has wanted her to, and now seems to sleep, with her arms crossed over her chest and her tears continuing to fall, but with a smile on her mouth.

She rises again to a sitting position when a very bright radiance appears in the grotto, because of the arrival of an angel bearing a chalice, which he sets upon the altar and worships. Mary, kneeling beside her cot, worships, too. She can no longer move. Her strength is failing. But she is blessed. The angel takes the chalice and gives her Communion. He then goes back up to Heaven.

Mary, like a flower scorched by too much sun, bends - she bends with her arms still crossed over her chest, and falls, with her face amidst the leaves of her cot. She is dead. The Eucharistic ecstasy has cut the last thread of life.

(Jesus says:)

"Although creatures may be consummate in the generosity of love, and in repaying those who have loved them, they are always very relative. But your Jesus surpasses all human immensity in desire, and every limit to satisfaction. For your Jesus is God, and to you, the generous and loving - since this is a page which I address especially to you, the souls that are not satisfied with obeying the precept, but embrace the counsel and push your love for Me to holy acts of heroism - I give with my abundance as God, and as a good God.

"I create the miracle for you, to repay you with joy for all the joy you give Me. I take the place of what you lack, or produce what you need. But I let nothing be lacking, for you that have stripped yourselves of everything out of love for Me, to the point of living in a material or moral solitude, in the midst of the world which does not comprehend you, and which mocks you, and which, repeating the insult of old which was previously directed at Me (9), your Master, shouts at you, 'Madmen!' and takes your penances and your lights to be diabolical signs. For the world enslaved to Satan believes that satan is the saints who have placed the world under their feet, and turned it into a stool to rise higher towards Me and plunge into my Light.

"But go ahead and let them call you 'madmen and demons.' I know that you are possessors of true wisdom, of upright intelligence, and that you have the soul of an angel in a mortal body. I remember, and not a single loving sigh is forgotten, what you have done for Me; and as I defend you against the world - for I bring the best ones in the world to know what you are in my eyes - so I compensate you when the hour comes, and I consider that it is time to infuse some sweetness into your chalice.

"It is only I who have drunk it to the last drop, without sweetening it with honey; I who had to cling to the thought of those who would love Me in the future, so as to be able to withstand to the last, without coming to curse man, for whom I was shedding my Blood, and experience - more than experience, abandon Myself to - the desperation of my condition as one abandoned by God (10).

"But I don't want you to suffer what I suffered. My experience was too cruel to impose on you. And it would mean tempting you beyond your strength. God is never imprudent. He wants to save, not destroy you. And to impose certain excessively cruel hours on you would mean destroying your souls, which would bend down like a branch burdened with too much weight, and in the end would remain broken, and experience the mire, after having experienced so much Heaven.

"I never disappoint those who hope in Me. Say this over and over again to everyone. "

(1) Jn. 20:14-17; (2) Lk. 7:47; (3) Jn. 11:20-44; (4) Jn. 20:11-18; (5) Mt. 26:6-13, Mk. 14:3-9, Jn. 12:1-8; (6) Lk. 10:38-42; (7) Mt. 7:55-6, Mk. 15:40-1; (8) Jn. 19:25, 20:11-18; (8) Mt. 12:24, Mk. 3:22, Lk. 11:15, Jn. 10:20; (10) Mt. 27:46, Mk. 15:34.

POSTSCRIPTS

(Vol. 1, p. 77-8, Vol. 5, p. 845)

(We return to an early chapter of "the Poem", where Jesus comments to Maria Valtorta, a victim-soul, at the conclusion to the "pre-Gospel".)

« ... The reason why victims have been tortured by utter despair is about to cease in the world. Therefore, Mary, the time of your dreadful suffering for too many reasons in such strong contrast with your feelings, will come to an end as well. *But your suffering will not cease: you are a victim.* But part of it: the latter, will cease. Then the day will come when I will say to you, as I said to Mary of Magdala when she was dying: "Rest. It is now time for you to rest. Give Me your thorns. It is now time for roses. Rest and wait. I bless you, o blessed soul"... »

(Shortly before His Ascension into Heaven, Jesus gives His apostles - who will be His future priests - some last instructions:)

« ... I remind you that, at times, God allows also His chosen ones to fall, not because He likes to see them fall, but because a greater future advantage may come from a fall (1). So offer your hands to those who fall, because you do not know whether that fall is the resolute crisis of an illness that dies for ever, leaving in the blood a purification that brings about health. In our case: that brings about holiness... »

(1) James 1:2-4, 1:12.

FROM GREAT SINNER - TO GREAT SAINT

(Vol. 3, p. 622)

(Jesus comments to Maria Valtorta - and to us all - about the visions she has seen of Mary Magdalene:)

« You have thus seen the complete cycle of the Magdalene. From her death to the Life. Of all the resurrected people of My Gospel she is the *greatest*. She was raised from seven deaths (1). She was reborn. You have seen her raise the stalk of her new flower higher and higher above the mud of the earth, like a flowery plant, and then bloom and smell sweetly for Me, and die for Me. You have seen her when she was a sinner, then when, thirsty, she approached the Fountain, then when she repented, then when she was forgiven, then you saw her as a lover, then as a pitiful woman bent over the slain Body of her Lord, then as a servant of My Mother, Whom she loves because She is My Mother; and finally you have seen her as a repentant soul at the threshold of her Paradise.

O souls who are afraid, learn not to be afraid of Me by reading the life of Mary of Magdala. O souls who love, learn from her how to love with seraphic ardour. O souls who have erred, learn from her the Science that will prepare you for Heaven.

I bless you all to help you to rise. Go in peace. »

(1) Lk. 8:2.

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