

XI. JESUS OF NAZARETH.

If their home at Nazareth was dear to Mary and Joseph before they left for Bethlehem, what was it now when the sound of little feet was heard upon its floor, and a childish voice called for " Father " or for " Mother!" Joseph's trade, that kept him away all the morning and afternoon, seemed harder than ever, but he consoled himself by thinking that his loss was Mary's gain.

Yes, she had the Child all to herself during those early years. He sat at her feet as she spun, or stood by as she did the kneading, or the baking, or the washing of the little house. When she dropped anything, He was quick to pick it up. He noticed what she wanted before she knew herself, and ran to fetch it; and as soon as He was able He helped in the household work. Neighbors would stand at their doors to watch the young mother and her beautiful Boy as they went together to the fountain. They were all in all to each other, it was plain, and His manner towards her, so reverent and so tender, was delightful to see. How happy were Mary and Joseph, when, sitting down to their simple meal, they had the little Jesus between them; when, morning and evening, they knelt beside Him, knowing that He whose prayer went up with theirs was Himself the God to whom they prayed.

See them—how reverent they are, how still, how attentive. Was there ever a scene on earth more beautiful than morning and night prayers at Nazareth! In the synagogue they heard the Prophecies read which told of the coming Messiah . . . "Despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows . . . I have not turned away my face from them that spat upon me." What did Mary feel as she watched the calm, grave face of her Boy and thought of the dishonor that was to come!

On Sabbath evenings they walked together through the flowery fields or up the grassy slopes of Nazareth, drinking in every word, as the Child spoke to them of the God who had made all these things for our use and enjoyment, who so loved the world as to give His only Son to save it.

As Jesus grew older, He swept the house, washed the dishes, ground the corn, and at last went with Joseph to the workshop to learn such rough carpentry as His Foster-father could teach Him. No work was too lowly or too commonplace for Him who had made all things out of nothing. Mary and Joseph were never tired of watching Him and admiring the care with which all was done and finished; not once or twice, or when the work was interesting or new to Him, but day after day, year after year when it was dull and tiresome.

They never forgot who He was; never got used to the thought that He who came at their call, and went errands, and brought home the modest pay for Joseph's work, was the Lord of Angels and of men. "Whence art Thou?" their hearts

would cry, as they saw the readiness with which He obeyed their slightest wish, the cheerfulness and grace with which He served them. It must have been from Mary's lips that St. Luke gathered all we know of those long years at Nazareth which we call the Hidden Life. Twice in the same chapter he speaks of her habit of pondering the words and actions of her Divine Son, and all that befell Him. And he tells us what about Him was most marvelous to that pondering heart of hers: "He was subject to them." He—to them!

Indeed, He was the Hidden God of Nazareth. His cousins, James and Joseph, and Simon, and Jude, little thought that He who played with them, or with sweet words settled their childish disputes, was the Desired of all nations, the long-promised Messiah whom the whole world was expecting. And their elders, who, as we are told, would say in their troubles: "Let us go and have a talk with the Son of Mary," did not know that He was able to dry their tears and refresh the heavy-laden—because He was God.

We wonder, perhaps, why He gave so much time—twenty years and more—to this Hidden Life, or why He remained hidden at all. He was to be on earth only three and thirty years. There was so much to teach and to do, and He could have begun at once. But do we not all know that the best teaching is by example? Whether the lesson is needlework, or swimming, or painting, or drill, what we want is, not merely to be taught by words, but to be shown by our teacher what we have to do.

We may be sure our Blessed Lord did not want to lose time, for no one knew as He did how much had to be done. He had us all to teach—men, women, and children—and to teach in the best way, by example. Therefore He would begin at once, as soon as He came into the world. And He would begin with the children. They are His first class. He calls them all round Him, the children of America, and Europe, and Africa, and Asia, and says to them: "Look at Me in My home. It might have been a rich home, provided with all kinds of comforts and conveniences. But because most of My followers would be poor and unable to have these things, and all of them would be inclined to care far too much for the pleasant things of this life, I chose to be poor. We had nothing unnecessary at Nazareth, nothing pretty or curious—a table, a few stools and mats, a meal-tub, a chest for clothes. My Foster-father had to rise early to go to his work. My Mother mended and washed for us and cooked our homely meals; we had no servant. For all of us it was hard labour, early and late.

"Will not those who are poor among you be comforted by seeing Me poor? Will not those who are better off deny themselves something for My sake, and give to those who are poor like Me? And will not all children try to give up their own way, to obey cheerfully, to reverence father and mother as well as love them when they see how for long years I did all these things in My little home at Nazareth."