

UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE



3 1761 01940635 4



THE

ADMIRABLE LIFE

OF THE GLORIOUS

PATRIARCH SAINT JOSEPH:

TAKEN FROM

THE CITÉ MYSTIQUE DE DIEU,
(THE MYSTICAL CITY OF GOD,)

PRECEDED BY THE "SENTIMENTS OF M. OLIER ON THE DEVOTION TO ST. JOSEPH," TAKEN FROM HIS MANUSCRIPTS.

WITH

AN APPENDIX

OF THE

LIFE OF THE VENERABLE MARIA OF JESUS OF AGREDA
AUTHOR OF THE MYSTICAL CITY OF GOD.

*TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF THE ABBE J. A. BOULLAN,
DOCTOR IN THEOLOGY.*

PERMISSU SUPERIORUM.

First American Edition.

NEW YORK:

D. & J. SADLIER & CO., 31 BARCLAY STREET.

MONTREAL.—COR. NOTRE DAME & FRANCIS XAVIER STS.

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1850,
By D. & J. SADLER & Co.,
In the Clerk's Office of the United States District Court, for the
Southern District of New York.

APPROBATIONS.

THE volume which we now offer to the public under the title of "*The Admirable Life of the Glorious Patriarch St. Joseph*," is a faithful extract, without change, modification, or alteration, taken *verbatim et literatim* from the celebrated production, "*The Cité Mystique*,"* of Mary of Jesus of Agreda. Hence, all the approbations conferred on the latter work are applicable to this. We subjoin a sketch of these various approbations, of which we guarantee the authenticity, having copied them from the acts of the process for the beatification and canonization of the servant of God, Maria d'Agreda.

1. Approbation of the bishop of the place where this servant of God died in the odor of sanctity, and also of that where the work was published. Bishops, (as every one knows) are the judges, in the first instance, of the doctrine of the books which are published in places under their jurisdiction.

2. Approbation of the inquisition of Spain, who examined it, word for word, and authorized its publication and diffusion.

3. Approbation of all the religious bodies appointed to examine this work. They have bestowed unbounded praises upon it, and recommend it as a fruit of the Holy Spirit of God.

* The Mystical City of God.

4. Approbation of the most celebrated universities, who, after a minute examination, have declared that this book contains nothing contrary to faith or morals, and who have exalted it beyond measure, as the Sovereign Pontiff, Benedict XIV., attests in his decree of 1748. The university of Paris alone offers an exception, because, at that epoch, it was controlled by the influences of Jansenism.

5. Finally, the Roman Church, after having placed this work on the Index, August 4th, 1681, on account of the controversy which it excited, withdrew it on the 9th of November of the same year. This last decree is of such force, that in 1713, a bishop having prohibited the reading of it, the Holy Office declared this prohibition to be of no effect, and obliged the bishop to retract it, as being contrary to the decree of the 9th of November, 1681, of Innocent XI., which decree, said the Holy Congregation, has the force of an obligatory law throughout the Universal Church. *Qui habet aures, audiendi, audiat.*

Alexander VIII. authorized the reading of it *oraculo vivæ vocis*. Clement IX., in 1704, prohibited its being placed on the Index. And last of all, in 1729, under Pope Benedict XIII., of holy memory, the Sacred Congregation of Rites promulgated an ample and unanimous decree, which *allows this book to be read and retained without any further examination*. Hence, he who, by whatever rank, dignity, or honor he may be invested, presumes to forbid the reading of this work, which has been approved by the Holy See, will be obliged, if required, to make a public retractation.

Thus, pious reader, the cause is ended. Read the book, and study it without hesitation ; for Rome, who cannot err has spoken.

THE ABBE J. A. BOULLAN.



TO THE DIVINE HEART OF JESUS, AND TO MARY IMMACULATE.

Oh, Jesus! Son of the Eternal Father! Divine Redeemer of our souls, whom Thou hast redeemed by the effusion of Thy precious blood! Thou hast deigned, during Thy mortal life, to call by the sweet name of father, the glorious St. Joseph, and Thou hast chosen to be named by men the son of Joseph. Word of God! Master of eternal wisdom! to whom, unless it be to Thy Sacred Heart, can I more worthily make the offering of this little book, in honor of the incomparable Patriarch? Deign, I implore Thee, to bless it, and its author. All unworthy and miserable as I am, I beseech Thee that this life of Thine adopted father may bear fruits of grace to many souls—that it may become a blessing to the dwellings which receive it—that the sinner may be converted, and the just encouraged to become holy, by meditating upon it. Oh, Sacred Heart of Jesus! vouchsafe to grant that grace, and these favors, in memory of Thy complaisance

in the fidelity and love of Thy glorious servant, Saint Joseph!

Mother of Jesus! Immaculate Virgin! Spouse of St. Joseph, thou who hast deigned to communicate to us by means of thy beloved daughter, Mary of Agreda, all that forms the subject of this volume, disdain not, Queen of Mercy, to bless it. I place it in thy hands. Thou knowest, that, overwhelmed by the weight of my miseries, I have had recourse to thy glorious spouse, whom thou hast permitted me to call my father; and that in acknowledgment of his miraculous benefits I have applied myself, by thy consent, to this work. May this *Life* serve as an instrument to augment the devotion to St. Joseph among the children of the Church. Thou hast warned us, O Mother of Pity, that *the damned will weep bitterly for not having known this means, so powerful and so efficacious, for their salvation, and for not having availed themselves of it.* (*Book V., ch. XVI*). May those who yet live on earth, know and profit by it, to forsake the ways of sin, and to recover the grace of the just.

Worthy father of the Queen of Heaven, St. Joachim, you whom the blessed Mother, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, have given me for my patron in the new vocation to which I have been so freely predestined and called, deign to present the humble offering of my book to the great Patriarch St. Joseph, and obtain for me, by your efficacious intercession, that I may be worthy to persevere to the end in the way which his mediation with Jesus and Mary has opened for me.

Jesus! Mary! Joseph! all hail!

THE ABBE J. A. BOULLAN.

PARIS, *November*, 1856.

CONTENTS.



	PAGE
APPROBATIONS.....	3
TO THE DIVINE HEART OF JESUS, AND TO MARY IMMACULATE	5
INTRODUCTION.....	13
SENTIMENTS OF M. OLIER ON THE DEVOTION TO ST. JOSEPH	29
DEVOTION OF ST. THERESA FOR ST. JOSEPH.....	45

CHAPTER I.

Espousals of the Chaste St. Joseph with the Blessed Virgin.—Various Circumstances which accompanied this mysterious Marriage.....	47
---	----

CHAPTER II.

The glorious St. Joseph, considered in all the Circumstances that concern the Mystery of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin, his Wife.....	59
--	----

CHAPTER III.

St. Joseph discovers that Mary is about to become a Mother, without being able to penetrate the Mystery.—He endures great Suffering on this Account.	73
--	----

CHAPTER IV.

	PAGE
The Suspicions of St. Joseph increase, and he resolves to leave his Spouse.—The Angel of the Lord declares to him the Mystery of the Incarnation.....	84

CHAPTER V.

St. Joseph asks Pardon of the Holy Mary his Spouse.—He resolves to serve her in all Things with Profound Respect	96
--	----

CHAPTER VI.

Mode of Life of the August Mary and St. Joseph.—Conversations between them, and other remarkable Circumstances.....	106
---	-----

CHAPTER VII.

Preparations for the Birth of the Infant Jesus.—Edict of Augustus.—The Blessed Mary and St. Joseph go to Bethlehem.....	116
---	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

Arrival at Bethlehem.—Birth of Jesus in a Grotto.—St. Joseph is present at this Mystery.....	127
--	-----

CHAPTER IX.

Sentiments of the August Mother and St. Joseph for the Infant God.—The Circumcision.—The Spouses give Him the Name of Jesus.....	137
--	-----

CHAPTER X.

PAGE

- The royal Magi come to adore the Infant God in the Grotto of the Nativity.—St. Joseph is present at this Mystery..... 146

CHAPTER XI.

- Our Lady and St. Joseph leave the Grotto of the Nativity, and remain at Bethlehem until the Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple..... 155

CHAPTER XII.

- The Lord prepares our Blessed Lady for the Flight into Egypt.—The Angel reveals it to St. Joseph.—Jesus, Mary, and Joseph commence the Journey..... 165

CHAPTER XIII.

- The Holy Family arrive at Heliopolis.—They fix their Residence in that City..... 175

CHAPTER XIV.

- The Infant Jesus speaks to St. Joseph a Year after His Birth.—According to the Will of the Most High, the Holy Family return from Egypt to Nazareth... 185

CHAPTER XV.

- Sojourn at Nazareth.—The Blessed Mary and St. Joseph go every Year to Jerusalem.—At the Age of twelve, Jesus remains at the Temple, without the knowledge of His Parents..... 194

CHAPTER XVI.

	PAGE
The August Mary and St. Joseph discover the Infant in the Temple among the Doctors.—Return to Nazareth.....	203

CHAPTER XVII.

St. Joseph is no longer able to work.—Conduct of the August Mary and the Divine Jesus, during more than eight Years that the holy Patriarch lived in Sickness and Infirmities.....	210
--	-----

CHAPTER XVIII.

Of the Care which the August Mary and the Divine Jesus bestowed upon St. Joseph in the Infirmities of his latter Days.....	214
--	-----

CHAPTER XIX.

Precious Death of the glorious St. Joseph, caused principally by Divine Love.—He expires in the Arms of the Divine Jesus, assisted by his blessed Spouse, the Queen of Heaven.....	220
--	-----

CHAPTER XX.

Privileges granted to St. Joseph.—His Birth accompanied by Miracles.—His admirable Virtues.—The Virtues which the Most High has promised to those devoted to Him.—Jesus resuscitates St. Joseph after His Passion.—Our Blessed Lady celebrates the Festival of her Espousals	227
--	-----

APPENDIX.

LIFE OF MARY OF JESUS.

	PAGE
PREFACE TO THE LIFE OF THE VENERABLE MARY OF JESUS OF AGREDA.....	239

CHAPTER I.

Her Birth.—The first spiritual Lights which God communicates to her.—Instructions she receives from her Parents.—Her Conduct, to the age of twelve Years. 241

CHAPTER II.

The House of her Parents is changed into a Monastery.—Her Conflicts.—Sensible Favors which she received.—Assaults of the Demon.—Trials caused by the Religieuses of the Community..... 249

CHAPTER III.

She receives signal Graces.—Her Superiors scrutinize her Ecstasies.—Her Punctuality in the Community Life.—Her great Austerities and the Rules she followed in them..... 259

CHAPTER IV.

Miracles which God wrought by her in America.—The Manifestation of transcendent Graces ceases.—Her hidden Life.—Her Sufferings.—Her Communications with the Angels and Saints..... 268

CHAPTER V.

	PAGE
She is elected Superior.—Government of the Queen of Heaven for her.—First Commandment to write the History of the Mother of God.—New Affections.—Her infused Science.—The Laws she receives as Spouse.....	277

CHAPTER VI.

She writes, for the first time, the History of the Mother of God.—Fruits that she gains from this History.—New Order of Life.—Elevation of her State.....	285
---	-----

CHAPTER VII.

The Services she renders to the Church.—Her Interview and Correspondence with the King of Spain.—Consolations, Spiritual and Corporeal, which the Faithful receive from it.—Her Solitude for her Daughters.—She burns her Writings.—Her Mystic Death.	294
---	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

Degrees of her highest Perfection.—She writes anew the History of the Mother of God.—Her last State.—Gratuitous Gifts of the Holy Spirit.—Her Preparation for Death, and Predictions concerning it.....	303
---	-----

CHAPTER IX.

Death of the Servant of God.....	312
----------------------------------	-----

HISTORICAL NOTICE OF THE MYSTICAL CITY OF GOD.....	315
--	-----

INTRODUCTION.

WHO, among the faithful, feels not a holy desire to know the *admirable life* of the glorious Patriarch whom the divine Providence gave to be the spouse of the august Queen of Heaven, and whom the Son of God called Father? It seems to us that the souls consecrated to God, who all have St. Joseph for their patron and protector, will rejoice to read the life of him towards whom they have so particular a devotion. Has not the seraphic St. Teresa made known to the world that St. Joseph is so powerful and so merciful that "*he helps us in all things?*" What a heartfelt joy it is to instruct ourselves in all that constitutes the glory and the grandeur of our incomparable Patriarch!

God, in the wise designs of His Providence, chose to conceal much of what related to this saint, "who has no equal, and will never be equal-

led," from the primitive Church, because it was of the first necessity to establish the law of grace, and to publish the Gospel. Doubtless, these were not incompatible; but the human mind, ignorant as it was, might have been in some degree disturbed at that time, when the faith in the incarnation was still feeble, and the precepts of the New Law were yet, so to speak, in their infancy. But at length the happy times have come when God is pleased to manifest the grandeur of the glorious spouse of Mary, and the reputed father of our Lord. (Cité Mystique, vol. viii. p. 277.)

The devotion to the glorious St. Joseph had its birth, like that of the Sacred Heart, in France. It went forth, at least to the West, from the bosom of Provence, originating in a confraternity at Avignon. The land which the contemplative Magdalen, Martha, and her school of virgins, had consecrated, and where Lazarus had borne a mitre in place of the winding-sheet, witnessed the first honors paid to our saint.

From thence the devotion to St. Joseph was afterwards extended to the universal Church. Gerson was the theologian of this devotion; St. Teresa was its saint; and St. Francis de Sales spread it among the people. The religious bodies of the Carmelites and Jesuits welcomed it with holy joy. Contemplative souls found in

it their nourishment; the laboring classes became attached to it; young people and old adopted it. St. Sulpice, in accepting it, introduced it among the secular clergy. Thus the beautiful devotion to St. Joseph attracted in these latter ages innumerable religious orders and congregations, — great and small, young and old, ecclesiastics and laics, schools and confraternities, hospitals, asylums, and houses of penitence. At this time it is universal: it extends over the whole of Europe and America, and it prevails in the most remote regions where our intrepid missionaries disseminate and make it dear to millions of savages. (Le S. Sacrament, vol. i. p. 218.)

We forewarn the reader that the *admirable life of the glorious Patriarch*, St. Joseph, which he is about to read, is marvellous in the details that form its ground-work, and in the manner by which it was given to the world. Let it be understood that it is not a product of science, nor of the human mind, but entirely of the gift of infused science. The venerable Maria de Jesus d'Agreda wrote, under the dictation of the Mother of God, the history of the Queen of Heaven; and in this book, *the most extraordinary, and the most astonishing that ever came from the hand of a human being*, as it has been justly

termed by the Rev. P. Laurent, in the *introduction* to the life of this servant of God, there were many things appertaining to the glorious St. Joseph. Influenced by the advice of men whose counsels we regard as commands, we have extracted, neither altering nor modifying any thing, all that is contained in the *CITÉ MYSTIQUE* regarding St. Joseph, and have formed from it the volume which we now publish, adding nothing to the text of the servant of God, that the book may not be deprived of the approbations with which it is invested, nor of the grace that was attached to the words written under the dictation of the august Mary.

To this admirable life we have subjoined, in an Appendix, the life of the venerable Maria of Jesus d'Agreda, from her biography, written by a learned and pious cotemporary, the Franciscan father, Samaniego; and we ourselves have rendered this biography complete by adding thereto details which we are persuaded our readers will peruse with interest, because they contain the approbations which the *Cité Mystique* has received from the supreme authority of the holy Apostolic See. They will also find there fruits of grace and salvation which this book is destined to produce in the souls who seek to edify themselves by its perusal. The *Life* is

preceded by an introduction extracted from the manuscripts of M. Olier, of holy memory.

These pages, inspired by the gift of divine illumination, contain, in one view, all that has been published of the most sublime and profound upon the incomparable St. Joseph. We offer them for the meditation of contemplative minds and pious Christians, and especially for the priesthood, who will rejoice to be made acquainted with them. We think that the gift of infused science has never reached a higher degree of elevation, nor produced pages more worthy of veneration.

It might be thought incumbent upon us now to present a treatise on the gift of infused science, to serve as a ground-work for this volume; but the reader will permit us to refer him to the lives of all our saints. All the theologians, without exception, admit these supernatural gifts; and the Church, which cannot err, in the canonization of saints, recognizes special revelations, without, however, even in her approbation, giving them the value or authority of divine faith. The Church, in approving, permits, but does not oblige them to be believed. That which is of obligation is, that those who believe in them from motives which claim their adherence, are not to be troubled on this account

To avoid repetitions, we refer such as may desire more detailed information to the last pages of this volume.

It would, doubtless, be easy to prove the complete accord of all that will be found most extraordinary and marvellous in *the admirable life of the glorious Patriarch, St. Joseph*, with the conclusions and instructions of theologians. Thus, the servant of God declares that Joseph was sanctified in the bosom of his mother, and Suarez (in whose writings are comprised those of all the doctors, since, according to Collet, he has read all and includes all), teaches that he was sanctified before his birth. Maria of Jesus declares that St. Joseph is in heaven in body and soul. Suarez makes the same assertion—and the same may be said of all the others; yet in this work only there are to be found such precise and admirable details as will be sought for in vain elsewhere.

But is it really established that the Blessed Virgin herself dictated the "*Cité Mystique*," from which our volume is an extract, to the venerable Maria of Jesus d'Agreda? The proofs of this fact are numerous, and we request the reader to turn to the life of the servant of God, where he may convince himself of this truth, which we cannot undertake to establish in this place.

We do not pretend to deny that this book will encounter obstinate and ardent adversaries to discredit it; but it will also find, as we trust, friends who will zealously promote its propagation. Hell will neglect nothing to injure the work, and we already know that this enemy will find coadjutors even among good people; nevertheless, reason, truth, and right will triumph in spite of the rage of the demon, and all the obstacles that he can bring to bear against it. Two years since we published an abridgment of the *Cité Mystique*, under the title of *The Divine Life of the Most Holy Virgin Mary*. It is impossible to recount the trouble which this work has cost us, nor the difficulties interposed by the demon to prevent its propagation; nevertheless, we have had the consolation to find that six thousand copies have been disposed of within a short time. If others will aid us, many more will yet be spread abroad of that as well as of *this admirable life of St. Joseph*. We are able here to affirm that we have been filled with graces and benedictions in consequence of the publication of *the Divine Life of the Most Holy Virgin*, and we are far from complaining of all that we have had to suffer in regard to it. We pray the reader to pardon the introduction of these particulars.

Shall we venture to open our mind fully? Why should we detain the truth captive, when the good of souls demands that we fear not to publish it? But to give more weight to our words, we will invoke a great authority, and cite on this subject a passage which is a veritable prophecy made by one to whom God deigned to reveal himself, and communicated to a great servant of God, St. Vincent Ferrer, who reports it in his writings. Another servant of God has, in his turn, adopted and inserted it in the excellent work which he has left us, entitled, "*Treatise on the True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin. By the venerable Grignon de Montfort.*" We quote the remarkable passage from this work, which is a book most precious for souls who are able to penetrate its meaning: "I have said that the Most High, with His holy Mother, will form great saints, *who will surpass in sanctity the greater part of the other saints as much as the cedars of Lebanon surpass small shrubs*, as it has been revealed to a holy soul." (Page 29.)

But to return to Maria d'Agreda, I think it is not hazarding too much to affirm, that from the doctrine of the works of this servant of God will be formed the great saints announced in the preceding lines. Let us hear the response of the venerable author already quoted. "It will

come, and quickly, this happy time, this *age of Mary*, when souls, losing themselves in the abyss of her interior, will become the living copies of Mary, to love and glorify Jesus Christ. *Ut adveniat regnum tuum, adveniat regnum Maria.* May the reign of Mary come, so that the Kingdom of Christ may come."

We have, happily in favor of the opinion advanced here, an authority powerful and decisive for a large number of our readers, that of the pious and learned M. Emery. At the close of his long career, he said, while speaking of the works of Maria of Jesus d'Agreda: "It is only after having read and re-read them that I have understood the wise recommendation of our founder, M. Olier, '*study the interior of Jesus in Mary.*'" Now, it is by this means that the great saints of whom we speak must form themselves.

We might add much more, for God, in the mysterious designs of His merciful providence, has given to us also to know, by many proofs, that in these times He will shed abroad abundant treasures of grace; but this will suffice for those who can understand.

The title alone of our book will be sufficient to attract to it one class of readers, while, for the same reason, it will be rejected by others; for there are among the faithful, we mean even the good,

two classes very different from each other in the dispositions that actuate them respecting heavenly things. "There is a class of persons even numerous," says the learned Bishop of Birmingham, "to whom the annunciation of a miracle, or a voice from heaven, brings more pain than satisfaction, and who find in these a subject of disquietude rather than of joy or consolation. For these the supernatural has no charm—the world of spirits is very far from their thoughts and their hearts; their souls have no place of abode, no friends in these invisible countries; their belief in miraculous manifestations is only a general idea, and remote from their faith, and they feel no desire to witness them." Our readers will not be of this class.

Our book is not intended for persons such as those of whom we have just spoken. We do not ask them to read it, but we beseech them to be careful to remember that they have no right to blame, nor criticize, nor censure those who love to turn an attentive ear to miracles, to instructions which come from on high, when, on the other part, the wise precaution has been observed to wait until the Church has approved that which they are happy to believe. No doubt, and we know it well, too great credulity should be avoided. We must not hasten to seize with

ardor upon every rumor which is said to come from heaven, for this would be simplicity and folly, unless we had examined sufficiently the reasons for credibility. "But if," as St. Teresa has so excellently well said, "If it be simplicity to believe every thing, to wish to believe nothing is TEMERITY." The truth lies between these extremes.

For ourselves, in regard to supernatural things, as soon as we have heard of any, our disposition incline us to joy and happiness—the smile mounts to our lip. Is it not thus with the mother, when she hears that her son has just performed some brilliant action? Even before she has acquired the certainty of it she rejoices in advance. Thus we think we ourselves should feel. A contrary disposition seems to us—we will not say a sin or a crime, God only judges the heart and penetrates the conscience, and we do not assume this right—but we will say that to us it seems a bad symptom, and may be the root of a secret affiliation with the sentiments of the enemies of our faith in regard to divine things.

We conclude this introduction with the instruction—which we would wish to see graven in letters of gold, to be read by the whole world—that the august Queen of Heaven gave to her beloved daughter, Maria of Jesus d'Agreda, when

she had terminated all that related to the glorious Patriarch, St. Joseph. Would that these words might resound from pole to pole, and that our readers might never forget them!

“My daughter, although you have written that my spouse Joseph was one of the greatest saints and most noble princes of the celestial Jerusalem, you cannot now declare his eminent sanctity. Mortals can never know it until they enjoy the vision of God, in which they will with admiration discover the mystery, and they will praise the Lord for it. In the last day when all men will be judged, the unhappy damned will weep bitterly for not having known, because of their sins, this powerful and efficacious means for their salvation, and for not having availed themselves of it, as they could have done, to recover the grace of the just Judge. The world has been greatly ignorant of the magnitude of the prerogatives which the supreme Lord has accorded to my holy spouse, and how powerful is his intercession with His Divine Majesty; for be assured that he is one of the greatest favorites of God, and one of the most capable of appeasing His justice against sinners. I desire you to be most grateful to the goodness of the Lord for the favor which I have granted to you on this occa-

sion, and that you will render to Him continual thanks for the illumination that you have received touching this mystery. Endeavor also, in future, to augment your devotion for my holy spouse, and bless the Lord for that He has favored him with so much liberality, and also for the consolation that I enjoyed in bearing him company and knowing his perfections.

“You must avail yourself of his intercession in all your necessities, and so act as to multiply the numbers of his votaries. Recommend to your daughters to distinguish themselves in this devotion, since the Most High grants on earth that which my spouse requests in heaven, and He will unite to these requests extraordinary favors for men, provided they do not render themselves unworthy to receive them.

“All these privileges respond to the perfection, the innocence, and to the eminent virtues of this admirable saint, because they have attracted the complaisance of the Lord, who destines for him inconceivable largesses, and who desires to show great mercy to those who will have recourse to his intercession.”

We touch upon the great age of the Church—that is to say, the age of Mary, and already we have entered it. The proofs of this fact abound, and seem to us decisive and irrefutable. When

we call this age great, because it is the age of the august Mary, we have evidently nothing in view of the material grandeurs of modern times—neither the application of steam, nor the discoveries in electricity, nor those modern inventions admired and vaunted without measure. In our view, the true grandeurs of the times which begin is not found in these. This age will be great because it will produce eminent saints—saints superior to those we have had, and destined in heaven to a more brilliant crown. It is in this sense that the age on which we enter will be great by Mary, because of Mary—in Mary.

None among Christians will dispute that the age in which the divine Saviour came into the world—when the great queen of angels and men lived—was evidently the greatest. Nevertheless, the Redeemer and His holy Mother did nothing more than practice holiness and glorify God. They invented nothing material—taught nothing with a view to material progress. After the same manner, there will be great men who are about to appear on earth, or, rather, who are, as yet, unknown, for they live already.

Oh! let us say, in conclusion, shall we not preserve during all the days of our lives a tender devotion for this glorious saint *who made a*

part of that which we denominate the TRINITY OF THE EARTH—for this saint, who has no equal, and never can be equalled—whose grandeur and glory we can never know until it shall be given to us to see God face to face without fear of losing him! “The unhappy damned,” the Holy Virgin herself instructs us, “will weep bitterly for not having known, because of their sins, this means—so powerful and so efficacious for their salvation—the intercession of St. Joseph.” May it not be so with us! Let us love, let us venerate the great and glorious spouse of Mary; let us confide in his protection, and praise God for having made him so powerful—for having endowed him with so many merits and privileges, and we shall have the joy to receive, by his intercession, an hundredfold for the little that, by the help of grace, we shall have done in honor of him who is seated in heaven on a glorious throne at the side of Jesus and Mary. Glory to God alone!

THE ABBÉ J. A. BOULLAN.

PARIS, *Christmas*, 1856.

SENTIMENTS OF M. OLIER,
OR
THE DEVOTION TO ST. JOSEPH.*

PRELIMINARY CHAPTER.

THE admirable St. Joseph was given to the world to represent, in a sensible manner, the adorable perfections of God the Father. In his person, alone, were enclosed His beauty, His purity, His love, His wisdom and His prudence, His mercy and His compassion. One saint only is

* We have thought that we could not better commence the LIFE OF THE HOLY PATRIARCH, "*who had no equal, nor ever will have one on earth; of him whose merits and glory will never be known to men, until they enjoy the vision of God,*" (words of Mary of Jesus d'Agreda,) than by prefixing these pages, which a great servant of God has left us. The pious and seraphic founder of the company of St. Sulpice, M. Olier, has written, (as may be seen in *His Life*, by one of his worthy children,) through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, admirable things, the autographs of which have been found after a lapse of nearly 200 years. The article which we now offer to our well-beloved readers, is an extract from one of those autograph manuscripts, containing the sentiments entertained by this illustrious servant of God, through the gift of infused science, regarding the glorious spouse of Mary. After having sought for and read all that has been written in favor of the glorious St. Joseph, we aver, in all sincerity, that we have never met with any thing, in our opinion, so sublime, so beautiful, so admirable, as these few pages. From this point of

destined to represent God the Father, while an infinitude of creatures, a multitude of souls represent Jesus Christ; for the whole Church labors to manifest to the world the virtues and perfections of her adorable Head. All the angels together are created to represent God and His perfections; one single man represents all His grandeur. Thus we must regard the august St. Joseph as surpassing all: as the grandest, the most celebrated, the most incomprehensible, and, by proportion, like God the Father, invisible in his person and incomprehensible in his perfections. And is there not here wherewith to confound, to frighten our ignorance and our misery, seeing that whatever is purest, and holiest, is least capable of being known and understood by us? If St. Joseph, under this point of view, seems to us incomparable, and placed in a class, apart, it is because he, alone, is the universal image of God the Father on earth. Hence it is, that, having chosen this saint to represent His image, He gave him a resemblance to Himself in His invisible and hidden nature, and, to my mind, this saint is not in a condition to be comprehended by the minds of men: so that faith must serve for us as the sup-

view, it is easy to comprehend what the illustrious St. Theresa declares: "*I know by experience that St. Joseph helps us in every way.*" At a later period the Ven. M. Olier writes: "*The Eternal Father clothed Himself in the person of St. Joseph, and, veiled under the humanity of this great saint, He is become merciful—full of tenderness and sensibility for human miseries.*" May this great servant of God who has had communications so sublime respecting the glorious St. Joseph, render him favorable to us, and intercede for us before the throne of God, where, we doubt not, he occupies a distinguished place. It is not, however, our intention here to forestal in any thing, the supreme judgment of the Holy Church in this matter, for we are, and will always remain, her docile and devoted son,

J. A. B.

plement whereby to venerate in him what we are unable to understand.

§ I.

How God the Father honored the great St. Joseph.

St. Joseph having been chosen to be the image of God the Father, the virtues and perfections of this holy person offer admirable subjects for study. What wisdom! what strength! what prudence! what simplicity! Surely there was never any thing like them in the world: for it is easy to understand that, if God the Father chose this saint to be the idea and image of His perfections, if He rendered visible in him what He had from all eternity hidden in the secret of His being, the excellence of this great man must be incomparable.

1. *He is the image of the beauty of the Eternal Father.*
—Without doubt he preserved a grave and modest exterior—he was of an admirable constitution—of beauty unparalleled, because of Him of whom he was the representation, to the Son of God Himself; for if the heavens, the earth, the elements—if, in a word, the whole structure of the world is so beautiful, so rare, so wonderful, and ordained with such due proportion of weight and number, and measure, because it must assist us to admire the perfections of God, and to represent to us His beauty, what ought not to be the beauty of this great saint—of this saint whom God the Father formed expressly to represent Himself to His only Son, to place continually before His eyes His true portrait and image, as a compensation in the time of His absence, and a sort of consolation during the years of His pilgrimage! And what is yet more worthy of consideration, is, that this world, so beautiful and so perfect, which every where

publishes the beauty of its author, represents to men only the admirable greatness of God, considered as a sovereign Being, and a perfect Essence, that is, as great, good, wise, and infinite; but it does not represent Him with the attraction and charms of a father; it manifests Him only as a sovereign, and as the First Cause; while St. Joseph, formed on the idea of the Eternal Father, to represent Him to His Son, exhibits Him in the character of a father, and contains in himself all the attractive features, all the charms and sweetness of the Divine paternity.

2. *He is the image of the holiness of the Eternal Father.*—What must not be the sanctity of St. Joseph, chosen to be the image of God the Father? This great saint lived in perfect holiness, separated from all worldly goods and from all creatures, and the Gospel introduces him to us as filled with this incomparable sanctity, saying, *Cum esset justus*, “because he was just,” that is, holy. He is, besides, established in this unique character of sanctity, since he is destined to be the guardian of the creature who is the most holy and precious in the world. In fact our Lord chose a saint, and one of the greatest saints of the world to be the guardian of the most holy Virgin after His death; a saint who was in some sort the same as Himself, in short, a virgin man, to be the protector and guardian of His Mother. Here, God the Father chose a man whom He made the image of His holiness, so that he should be the guardian and protector not only of the Blessed Virgin, but also of His Son, whom He engenders eternally, *in sanctitate et justitiâ coram ipso*.

3. *He is the character and the image of the fecundity of the Eternal Father.*—The Church presents St. Joseph for our veneration eight days before the holy mystery of the Incarnation, in order that in St. Joseph we shall adore

God the Father, preparing and bearing within his bosom the designs of the holy mystery of His Son ; this mystery being hidden throughout ages, the adorable mind of the Father is given to us to venerate in St. Joseph. It is for this reason, that this saint is represented bearing in his arms, and on his bosom, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Father engendered Him in Himself from all eternity. The angels, who do not characterize the fecundity of God, are never termed fathers, the one of another ; but St. Joseph, image of this Divine fecundity, is called the father of Jesus Christ. He personated the Eternal Father as a mystery, which God has borne, and engendered His Word Incarnate in Mary, and under whom He inspired the Divine substance. In this great saint God the Father appeared in His fecundity, yet separated from flesh and blood, which rank as nothing in the generation of the Son, *qui non ex sanguinibus, neque ex voluntate carnis, neque ex voluntate viri, sed ex Deo natus est.*

4. *He is the image of the love of the Eternal Father for His Son.*—God the Father, in choosing St. Joseph as His image in regard to His Son, lived in the bosom of St. Joseph, where He loved His Son with an immense and infinite love, proclaiming continually of this only Son, *Hic est Filius meus dilectus in quo mihi bene complacui.* The Father, in Himself, loves His Son as His Eternal Word ; and in St. Joseph, He loves the same Son as the Incarnate Word. He abode in the soul of this great saint, and rendered him participant not only in His virtues, but also in His life and in His paternal love, and thus the blessed St. Joseph entered into the love of the Eternal Father for His Son, and loved Him to the extent, the ardor, the purity, and holiness of that love.

5. *St. Joseph is the exterior character of the compas-*

sion and tenderness of the Eternal Father for the miseries of men.—The Eternal Father, having chosen St. Joseph to be the image of His paternity, assumed in him a spirit of compassion and tenderness for the miseries of men, and made Himself, in him, the Father of mercies. Before His incarnation, the Word was full of rigor, *Vox tonitruui tui in rota, vox confringentis cedros.* But after He had become man, and made Himself sensible to our evils, He is full of meekness and tenderness; *Mitis et humilis corde*: He is moved with compassion for our wretchedness, and so has the Eternal Father done in communicating Himself to the great St. Joseph His image. From all eternity God the Father was separated from the flesh, elevated in holiness, infinitely above our condition; He was insensible to our evils, and full of severity towards men; but from the moment that He was clothed in the person of St. Joseph, and that He was veiled under the humanity of this great saint, He became merciful, full of tenderness and sensibility for human miseries. In him He is the Father of mercies, and, for this reason, St. Paul, after saying “Blessed be God,” adds, “the Father of Jesus Christ, Father of mercies,” meaning, that in making Himself the Father of Jesus Christ in St. Joseph, He became the Father of mercies, while formerly He was, in His being of God, just and impassible.

6. *St. Joseph is the image of the wisdom and prudence of the Eternal Father.*—Since God the Father willed to appear in the person of St. Joseph, He communicated abundantly to him His spirit of paternity, *ex quo omnis paternitas*; and, to guide the Eternal Wisdom, He endowed him with a wonderful intelligence and wisdom; for if God confides the guidance and protection of kingdoms to puissant angels, and even to the mightiest of these great

and sublime intelligences—if He charges these pure spirits with the conduct of the celestial spheres, and of those immense bodies, what should not be the grandeur of the saint to whom God confided the direction of His Son, more precious than a hundred millions of worlds, and a hundred millions of kingdoms! What illumination was necessary to conduct and direct in all things this Son, whose every step and movement were so precious and so dear! Ah! it is said, that the most Blessed Virgin had the perpetual view of God, and sometimes even the beatific vision, because of her Son. It is certain that her Divine Son had this clear and distinct view of the Divinity, in order that He should at every instant, do the will of His Father. *Quæ placita sunt ei facio semper*; and He did continually that which He saw Him do, *facio quæ video Patrem facientem*; either never to disobey Him, and to satisfy the adorable designs which God the Father had upon all His steps and all his movements, or because of all their importance to the human race. Now, the same reasons oblige us to believe that the great St. Joseph, charged with the conduct of Jesus, whom he was to lead forward to the accomplishment of the adorable designs of God, His Father, designs of such immense importance for the salvation of men, was himself enlightened with this Divine illumination, to do all things according to the spirit of God, and further, I venture to give utterance to a thought which comes into my mind, and which I dare not warrant, only because it seems novel. It is, that the light which was imparted to St. Joseph for the direction of the Son of God, was of the nature of that of the Blessed Virgin, which the holy doctors declare to have been glorious—God having bestowed upon her all the graces which His omnipotence can accord

to a mere creature. If, then, the light of St. Joseph was a glorious light, it must have been always infallible, to guide the Son of God, who could not err; for, otherwise, we should expose the Son of God, in His obedience to St. Joseph, to fail in the designs of God and in His duty, or to disobey him who held for Him the place of father, and of whom it is expressly said: "He was obedient to them in all things," *et erat subditus illis*. Having been given by God to all men as the model of obedience, if He had disobeyed St. Joseph, each individual would have found in His disobedience a pretext to excuse his own, and to pretend that it is admissible to fail in obedience: that superiors are not possessed of all the requisite qualities to direct with certainty; and would not this be to make God deficient in His promises and in His providence, if He refused to superiors the intelligence which is necessary to direct us? No, never can we mistake, in obedience! God renders Himself guarantee for the persons who direct others. Jesus Christ, our Lord, would otherwise be in a worse condition than the rest of men, who cannot err in obeying. He would be in a worse condition than the inferior angels, for these are submissive to their superiors with an entire confidence, and receive from them assured and infallible light for all their conduct, although it is so much less important than that of the Son of God. Now, if the angels, because they are glorious, have superiors who are gifted with a light of glory, what ought not to be that of St. Joseph, destined by God the Father to guide Jesus Christ as His inferior, and to govern the Blessed Virgin His Mother! And what shame to expose the Son of God to contest with His father, and against him who is filled with the spirit of God Himself. What! could God the Father have exposed our Lord to this unseemliness, by re

fusing to our saint a grace so proper and so necessary to his position? Our great saint is then filled with admirable wisdom, since God commits to him the conduct of the Incarnate Wisdom, *Christum, Dei Sapientiam*; and if God is accustomed to bestow graces in proportion to the eminence of the employments that He confides to us, what, then, has not been the illumination, the wisdom, to which Wisdom itself has been submitted?

St. Joseph was for Jesus Christ what Moses was, formerly, for the people of God. As this people, who were a figure of the Saviour, were withdrawn from Egypt by Moses, so our Lord was also brought out of it by St. Joseph; for we see in this passage from St. Matthew, taken from Osea, *Ex Ægypto vocavi filium meum*—that the people of Israel, in Egypt, are called the Son of God, because they were the figure of Jesus Christ. St. Joseph was, in fact, the protector of the life of Jesus Christ in His flight into Egypt—*Protector salvationum Christi sui*—and he was His safeguard during the course of his life.

O Eternal Wisdom! if Moses enjoyed such intimate communication with Thee that he saw Thee face to face, what was not that of St. Joseph? The first, who was to conduct Thy Son under a figure, saw Thee face to face; and the second, who was to direct Thy Son Himself, was he not crowned with still greater favors? If he who brought the law of death was in such glory—even in this life—that the children of Israel could not support the brilliancy that shone from His face, how was it, adds St. Paul, with him who bore in his arms the Law of Life, and of the Holy Spirit? Without doubt, he enjoyed the adorable contemplation, and the beatific vision of God.

I give utterance to this thought, and draw these consequences from it, as those of my own mind, enlightened,

nevertheless, as it seems to me, by the light of faith, being sensible of no activity, nor labor of my understanding, to produce them. I leave them to the judgment of my spiritual director.

§ II.

How much Jesus Christ has honored the great St. Joseph.

The Son of God, having made Himself visible, in taking human flesh, conversed and communed visibly with God His Father, veiled under the person of St. Joseph, by whom His Father rendered Himself visible to Him. The most Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, together, represented one single and same person, that of God the Father. They were two sensible representatives of God—two images, under which He adored the plenitude of His Father, either in His eternal fecundity, or in His temporal Providence, or in His love for this Son himself, and His Church. They were, so to speak, a holy oratory for Jesus Christ, and the sensible object of all His devotion. Without doubt, the temple was, for Him, a religious place, since He saw, in this edifice, a dead and material figure of God His Father. But here He saw a figure—living, spiritual and divine—of all His grandeur and perfections, *templo hic major est*. He saw in him the secrets of His Father, and by the mouth of this great saint, He heard the word of His Father, of whom St. Joseph was the visible organ. He was the oracle of Jesus Christ, who caused Him to know all the will of His heavenly Father. He was His dial, who indicated all the moments, marked in the decrees of God. It was before this oratory, that, addressing His Father, He said *Pater noster*, and that He invoked Him in behalf of the whole Church. What an object of love for Jesus Christ!

What a subject for complaisance, and for the exercise of His love! What caresses and sentiments of loving tenderness! Great saint! thou wast happy in being the object of the love of Jesus! Oh, God! what exchanges of love and complaisance! Goodness of my Jesus, how Thou art pleased to have before Thine eyes where-withal to satisfy Thy love! Happy Joseph! Happy Jesus! Happy Joseph, to furnish to Jesus the most worthy subject for His delight! Most blessed art Thou, O Jesus, to find in Joseph the object of Thy holy complaisance! The eyes of Thy spirit see in him the spirit of Thy Father, and the eyes of Thy body see in him a visible image of His beauty, so that in him alone Thou dost find perfect contentment.

It is an admirable life—that of God the Father in Eternity, loving His Son, and the Son, reciprocally, loving the Holy Spirit. That, too, was an admirable life of Joseph and Mary, images of God the Father for Jesus Christ His Son. What was not their love for Jesus, and the love of Jesus for them! Our Lord saw in both the presence, the life, the substance, the person, and the perfections of God His Father; and, beholding these beauties, what love! what joy! what consolation He experienced! The Holy Virgin and St. Joseph, seeing, on their side, the person of God in Jesus, with all that He is—Son of God, Word of the Father, the “splendor of His glory, and the figure of His substance.” What reverence! what respect! what absorbing love! what profound adoration they manifested! It was a heaven—a paradise on earth. Delights without end were there, even in this vale of tears—an abundance of all good things in the bosom of poverty: glory was already begun in the midst of the lowliness, the abjection, the littleness of their life.

O, Jesus! I cease to be astonished that Thou didst remain thirty entire years in this happy abode, without quitting St. Joseph. It surprises me not that Thou wert inseparable from his person. His house alone was a paradise for Thee, and his bosom the bosom of Thy Father, from whom Thou art inseparable, and in whom Thou possessest eternal bliss. Out of this abode Thou didst find nought but subjects of ruin—sinners, and the fatal causes of Thy death. But in the dwelling of Joseph, which was also that of Mary, Thou didst ever find the cherished objects of Thy delights, the holy sources of Thy life. Thou wentest forth from this blessed place only to visit the temple, and the world mocked at Thy solitude and this retired life. But they knew not that the temple was but a dead figure of the bosom of Thy Father, and that St. Joseph, His living image, was the place of Thy pleasure and repose.

Who, then, can declare the excellence of our saint—the great respect which our Lord bore to him, and the devoted love of the Holy Virgin; Jesus Christ regarding in him the Eternal Father as His Father, and the Blessed Virgin revering in His person the same Eternal Father as her spouse?

§ III.

St. Joseph, Patron of Hidden and Perfect Souls.

St. Joseph, having been chosen by God to be His image towards His only Son, was not marked out for any public function in the Church of God, but merely to be the expression of His purity and the incomparable sanctity which separates Him from every visible creature; and hence he is the patron of hidden and unknown souls. Far different

are the functions of St. Peter in the Church, from the operations of St. Joseph within it. St. Peter is established to control its exterior in its government and administrations, to preserve its doctrines, and to direct its prelates and ministers. St. Joseph, on the contrary, who is a saint hidden, and without external functions, is appointed to communicate interiorly the super-eminent life which he receives from the Father, and which afterwards flows through Jesus Christ upon us. The influence of St. Joseph is a participation of that of God the Father in His Son; while that of St. Peter and the other saints is a participation of the grace of Jesus Christ descending on men, and distributing itself by measure among His members. That of St. Joseph is a participation, without measure, of the source which flows from God the Father into His Son; and God the Father, who loves us with the same love with which He loves this only Son, permits us to draw, to taste, to relish in St. Joseph the grace and the love with which He loves this Son. In the other saints, it is in part and by measure that He communicates it; here it is, without bounds or measure, because of what St. Joseph is, and because of that which God the Father bestows on him as His universal image. This saint is the patron of sublime souls who are elevated to the purity and the sanctity of God, as well as of those who are intimately united to Jesus Christ, and to whom he communicates his tenderness for this loving Saviour; and, also, of such as are devoted to God the Father, of whom St. Joseph is a figure. He is a hidden saint whom God willed to hold in secret during his life, and for whom alone He has reserved the interior occupations, without partaking in the exterior cares of the Church; a saint whom God manifests in the depths of hearts, and whom He has Himself stamped for

eneration in the interior of souls. And as St. Joseph devoted himself to God alone during his life, God reserves it to Himself to make him known, and to establish for him esteem, devotion, and veneration. As the image of the Eternal Father, who is the end of all prayer, and the object and end of all our religion, St. Joseph should be the universal tabernacle of the Church; and, for this reason, the soul interiorly united to Jesus Christ, and who enters into His ways and His dispositions, as long as it remains on earth, will be filled with love, with respect, and tenderness for St. Joseph, in imitation of Jesus Christ living upon earth; for such were the inclinations and dispositions of Jesus Christ. He went to love God the Father with tenderness in St. Joseph, and to adore Him under this living image, where He really abode. It is for us to follow this conduct, and to seek our Father in this saint. It is in him that we should go to see, to contemplate, to adore, all the divine perfections, the assemblage of which will make us perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect. We learn from this saint that we can resemble God the Father, and be perfect on earth as He is in heaven. And because that, in God the Father, St. Joseph is the source of all good and of all mercy, it is said of this saint, that we can ask nothing from him that we shall not obtain.

§ IV.

St. Joseph, Patron of Priests.

It is especially for priests, in whom God abides in His plenitude and in His pure and virginal fecundity, to conduct themselves after the model of the great St. Joseph, with regard to the children whom they spiritually en-

gender. This great saint conducted and directed the infant Jesus in the spirit of His Father, imitating His meekness, His wisdom, His prudence; and thus should we act towards all the members of Jesus Christ who are confided to us, and who are other Christs; we should, therefore, treat them with the same reverence as that of St. Joseph towards the Infant Jesus. Let us be superiors in God in regard to them, but inferiors in our persons like St. Joseph, who felt himself infinitely below Jesus Christ, although he had the direction of Him, and was set above Him, in the name and place of the Eternal Father. Hence, we have chosen St. Joseph for one of the patrons of the seminary of St. Sulpice, as the saint whom our Lord has charged in heaven with the express care of priests, as He, in His goodness, has made known to me. The Blessed Virgin also gave me this great saint for my patron, assuring me that he was the patron of hidden souls, adding these words concerning him: "*I have nothing dearer, in heaven or on earth, after my Son.*" One day, while bearing our Lord to a sick person, I repeated to myself these words which came into my mind: "*Dux justı fuisti*"—which reminded me that St. Joseph, having been the conductor of the Just, who is our Lord, I should represent him, in bearing the Son of God, with the same sentiments with which he had so often borne Him during his life.—
From the Autograph Manuscripts of the Ven. M. Olier.



DEVOTION OF ST. TERESA FOR ST. JOSEPH.

* * * * * I CHOSE for patron and intercessor the glorious St. Joseph, and recommended myself earnestly to him; and I acknowledge that at, and from that time, and on many occasions which concerned even my honor and my salvation, this great saint has afforded me more important and prompt assistance than I could have dared to ask of him. I do not remember, even to the present moment, ever having prayed him to grant me any favor which I have not obtained, neither can I think, without astonishment, of the graces which God has bestowed on me by his intercession, nor of the perils from which he has delivered me, both in soul and body. It seems that God accords to other saints the grace to succor us in certain cases; but I know, by experience, that St. Joseph helps us in all things, as if our Lord would show to us, that as He was submissive to him on earth, because he held for Him the place, and bore the name of His Father, He can refuse him nothing in heaven.

Other persons, whom I have counselled to have recourse to him, have had a similar experience—many now have a great devotion for him, and I perceive every day more and more the truth of what I have just said. * * *

* * * My experience of the graces which God ac-

ords through the intercession of this eminent saint, makes me wish to be able to persuade all the world to have a great devotion for him, for I never have known any one who had the true devotion, and who gave proof of it in his actions, who was not advanced by it in virtue. During many years, I do not remember having ever asked any thing on his festival which I have not obtained; and if there happened to be some imperfection in the aid which I implored of him, he repaired the fault, and caused it to succeed to my advantage. * * * * * I will, therefore, in these present circumstances, do no more than, in the name of God, entreat those who do not believe what I say to put it to the proof, and they will learn, by experience, how advantageous it is to recommend themselves to this great patriarch with a particular devotion. Persons given to mental prayer ought, it seems to me, to be warmly affectioned towards him; for I cannot comprehend how we can think of all the time that the Holy Virgin lived with Jesus Christ Infant, without gratitude to St. Joseph for the assistance which he rendered them; and those who have need of a director to instruct them in meditation need only take this admirable saint for their guide to avoid being led astray. May God grant that I am not misled myself in this my boldness, which I have indulged, thus to speak of, and publish the respect which I entertain for him, after having so often failed to serve and imitate him! My restoration to health was an effort of his power; I rose from my bed—I walked—I ceased to be helpless:—and the bad use that I made of such a blessing was an effect of my little virtue.—*Extract from the Life of St. Teresa by Herself.*

THE
ADMIRABLE LIFE
OF THE
GLORIOUS PATRIARCH, ST. JOSEPH.

CHAPTER I.

ESPOUSALS OF THE CHASTE ST. JOSEPH WITH THE BLESSED VIRGIN.—VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH ACCOMPANIED THIS MYSTERIOUS MARRIAGE.

THE Blessed Virgin Mary, after her entrance into the temple, had made, in the presence of all the angelic hosts, a vow of chastity. This most chaste dove had renounced earthly attachments, and the love of all creatures, that she might have no other spouse than God himself; but at the age of thirteen years and a half, it was manifested to our sweet Lady in a vision, that she should enter into the marriage estate. "The Lord tempted Abraham," said Moses,—and also

the Lord tempted our august Mistress ; in which we discover the truth of these words : " The judgments of the Lord are incomprehensible, and His ways are above our ways." The thoughts of the pure Mary were far removed from those of the Most High, for she had desired and resolved to have no husband, so far as it depended upon her own will.

The Lord spoke in a dream to the high-priest, who was St. Simeon, and commanded him to make preparations for the marriage of Mary, daughter of Joachim and Anna of Nazareth, and to convoke an assemblage of the other priests to deliberate upon the subject. St. Simeon obeyed the divine behest, and the assembled doctors, inspired by a celestial impulse, resolved, that in an affair upon which the Lord had declared His good pleasure, they ought to consult His holy will by praying, that He would manifest, by a sign, him who should be the husband of Mary, and that he should be of the house and lineage of David, that the law might be fulfilled. They therefore resolved to appoint a day when all the young men of this family, present in Jerusalem, should be invited to assemble in the temple. It was precisely the day on which our blessed Lady had attained her fourteenth year.

he resolved anew to observe it, resigning himself to the divine will even to the end of his life. But this did not prevent him from entertaining for the virtuous maiden veneration and esteem beyond any of his compeers.

All were engaged in prayer, when they saw blossoms burst forth from the rod borne by Joseph, and at the same instant a beautiful dove was seen to descend, which alighted on the head of the saint. The Lord, at the same moment, spoke to him interiorly, and said: "Joseph, my servant, Mary shall become your spouse, receive her with assiduity and respect, for she is very agreeable in my eyes; she is good and most pure in body and mind, and you will do all that she will tell you." The priests, upon this sign from heaven, determined to give St. Joseph to Mary for her husband. They then called for her, who was more excellent than the sun, more beautiful than the moon, and she appeared with a majesty more than angelic; with a loveliness, modesty, and grace incomparable; and the priests espoused her to Joseph, the most chaste and the most holy of men. The august Mary, with mingled modesty and tenderness, took leave of the priests and of her mistress,—asking pardon of her companions, and expressing her grateful

sense of all the kindness she had received from them; then, accompanied by many of the most distinguished ministers of the temple, she departed with her saintly spouse for Nazareth, the country of the newly-married pair, where lay the possessions of the blessed parents of our sweet Lady.

On their arrival, they were received and visited by all their relatives and friends, with the usual rejoicings on similar occasions; and having religiously acquitted themselves of all those duties which custom commanded in their intercourse with the world, our holy spouses at length found themselves alone in their house. It was a custom among the Jews, that the newly espoused, during the first days of their union, should study together their natural inclinations, in order to promote their future peace.

On one of these days, St. Joseph said to his spouse Mary: "I give thanks to the Most High God for having granted me the favor to choose me for your husband, when I did not in the least merit this honor, and when I believed myself unworthy to bear you company. But His Divine Majesty, who can, when He will, uplift the poor, has showed His mercy towards me. I desire that you will aid me with your goodness and your virtues in offering Him my

thanksgivings. In all that regards His service, I will be your servant. I pray you to supply my deficiencies in those qualities which I have not, but which, as your husband, I ought to possess. Only make me know your wishes, that I may fulfil them."

His most holy consort replied to the saint: "I am well pleased, that the Most High, having destined me for marriage, has had the goodness to choose you for my husband and my master, and, with your permission, I will now express the thoughts and intentions which I wish to impart to you on this subject."

The prevenient grace of the Most High inflamed anew the heart of St. Joseph with His divine love. "Speak," he said, "for thy servant heareth." The Queen of the universe was attended by her thousand angels; for the most pure Mary comprehended the respect and attention to be observed in conversation with her spouse; and that she might have more abundant grace and merits, the Lord had continued in her the reserve and fear that she had in speaking alone with a man, which had never before happened to her, except, it might be in some casual encounter with the chief-priest. The august Virgin then said to St. Joseph: "It is just that we offer thanks, and give glory and

praise to our God and Creator, who has made His mercy to shine upon us, in choosing us for His service. In my most tender youth, I consecrated myself to God by a vow which I made, to be, during all my life, chaste in body and mind, and my desire to preserve my faith to Him is unchangeable. I trust that you will help me to fulfil this vow, and in all things else I will be your servant. Accept, my husband, this holy resolution, and confirm it by your own, so that we may obtain the eternal joys for which we aspire."

The chaste Joseph, filled with joy, replied: "In declaring to me your chaste thoughts and holy resolutions, you have penetrated and opened my heart, which, until you had revealed your own, I was unwilling to uncover. The Lord called me, also, at an early age, that I should love Him with an upright mind. Know, then, that in my twelfth year I, too, made a promise to serve God in perpetual chastity. I now renew this vow, and, with His grace, I will be your faithful servant, and I pray you to receive my chaste affections, and to regard me as your brother."

During this conversation the Most High confirmed anew in the heart of St. Joseph the virtue of chastity, and the pure and holy love

which he should bear to the blessed Virgin, his spouse. Thus he was possessed by this love in an eminent degree, and our august Queen augmented it, and enraptured his heart by her conversation. By this divine assistance the holy spouses enjoyed inexpressible consolation. The august Queen promised to second the desires of St. Joseph, and the Most High imbued him with such an exalted purity, and such an absolute control of his passions, that he served his consort without obstacle, and with a grace as admirable as it was extraordinary. In serving her, he followed the will and the good pleasure of the Lord.

They made a division of the effects which St. Joachim and St. Anna had left to their blessed child. One part was offered to the temple, where she had been educated; the second was devoted to the service of the poor, and the third was placed at the disposal of St. Joseph. For herself, our Queen reserved only the care to serve and employ herself within the house, for she dispensed herself always from the affairs of buying and selling.

In his youth St. Joseph had learned the carpenter's trade, as being one of the most useful to gain a livelihood, for he was without property. He inquired of his saintly spouse if she

would consent that he should practise this trade to gain something for the poor, and also as a means to avoid idleness. The most prudent Virgin consented, and reminded St. Joseph that it was not the will of God they should be rich, but poor, and protectors of the poor, so far as their abilities permitted. After this, the two holy spouses had an humble dispute, in which each wished to obey the other as superior. But the most humble Mary, who was the humblest of the humble, was victorious in her humility, and the man being the head, she would not permit the order of nature to be reversed. She therefore obtained the consent of her husband to receive her obedience in all things. She asked only permission to give alms to the poor, to which the saint consented.

During these first days, St. Joseph, by a new light from above, had penetrated the character of his spouse. Her rare prudence, her profound humility, her incomparable purity, and her possession of every virtue beyond all that he could have hoped, enraptured him with admiration. With a spirit full of joy, and his heart inflamed with ardent affection, he ceased not to praise the Lord, and to offer Him thanks for having bestowed on him so unmerited a treasure. The Lord had also so ordered,

that the Queen of Heaven, by her mien and by her presence, inspired her spouse with such mingled sentiments of reverence and respect, that we find no terms to express them. To the eyes of St. Joseph a radiant splendor shone from the lineaments of our Lady, like that of Moses when he descended from the mount.

Afterwards, in a vision, the blessed Virgin heard these words: "You perceive how faithful I am in my promises: the companionship of my servant Joseph will aid you to preserve the laws of my spouse; obey him as you ought, and be careful of his happiness." She replied: "With the divine favor and help, I will obey Thy servant Joseph, and serve him."

Their marriage had been celebrated on the 8th of September, and until the 25th of March, when the Word became Incarnate, the two spouses had lived in such wise that the Most High prepared them for the work for which they had been chosen.

But let us pause to express our joy on witnessing the fortunate destiny of the happiest among mortals, St. Joseph. Whence comes to thee, O man of God, so eminent a benediction, that among all the children of Adam it can be said of thee alone that God has been so entirely thine that He was taken for thy Son? The

eternal Father gives thee His daughter; the Son places His own Mother in thy charge; the Holy Spirit confides to thee His spouse, and places thee in His stead, and the Holy Trinity gives thee His elect, His only one, for thy lawful spouse. Great saint, dost thou then comprehend all thy dignity? dost thou fathom all thy greatness? Dost thou know that she whom thou hast just received as thy wife is Queen and Mistress of heaven and earth, and that thou art the depositary of the inestimable treasures of God himself? Behold, O man of God, the precious pledge thou hast, and know that if thou dost not render the Angels and the Seraphim envious, thy happiness, and the wonderful mystery of thine espousals excite their wondering admiration. For such joys and favors receive congratulations in the name of the whole human race. For thou art the spouse of her who has only God above her. Thou shalt be powerful and happy among men and angels. Be mindful of our poverty and wretchedness, and of me, miserable worm of the earth, for I desire to be thy faithful servant, and to be enriched and favored by thy powerful protection.

The Priest Simeon summoned the chaste Mary, in order to make known to her this resolution. It was nine days before that on which their designs were to be put in execution. During this time the most blessed Virgin redoubled her prayers, her tears, and sighs, for the accomplishment of the will of God in an event which caused her the greatest pain. The Lord consoled her, saying: "I will give you a spouse who will not oppose your holy desires, but who will rather, by the help of my grace, confirm them. I will choose him for you perfect, and according to my own heart, and I will elect him for you from among my servants." The holy angels also consoled her, saying: "The Most High will guide you in the way which is the best, the most perfect, the most holy."

Joseph was born at Nazareth; nevertheless, by the disposition of the Most High, he had come to dwell in Jerusalem, because of certain reverses of fortune, which resulted so favorably for him that he had the happiness to become the spouse of her whom God had chosen to be His own Mother, under the circumstances that we are about to relate.

The day appointed by the priests arrived. Our blessed Lady had completed the fourteenth year of her age. The young men of the tribe of

Judah, and of the family of David, from whom the august Mary was descended, who were in the City of Jerusalem, were assembled. Joseph, originally of Nazareth, but now an inhabitant of the holy city, was invited to be with them, because he, too, was of that royal race. He was then thirty-three years of age, well made, and possessed of an agreeable physiognomy, which expressed an incomparable modesty. He was indeed as chaste in his thoughts and deeds, as in his inclinations; and having made a vow of chastity when but twelve years old, his life was pure and irreproachable before God and man. He was related to the Virgin Mary in the third degree.

Inspired by the Most High, the chief-priest placed in the hands of each of these young men a dry rod, in order that by this means the Lord should manifest him whom he had chosen to be the husband of Mary. All united their prayers to those of the priests, for none were ignorant of the virtues and modesty of this holy maiden, nor of the reputation of her beauty, and her possessions, as an only child; and each desired to make her his wife. Joseph alone, the most humble, the most pious among them, deemed himself unworthy of so great a boon; and, calling to mind his vow of chastity,

pany and serve you. Determine, then, the day of departure."

The blessed Virgin thanked her prudent spouse for the affection which he manifested for her, and they decided to set out immediately for the house of Elizabeth. St. Joseph prepared provisions for the journey,—some fruit, bread, and a few small fishes, which he purchased. He had also a little beast of burden, which was lent him to carry his provisions, and his spouse, the Queen of all that is created. With this equipage they set out for Judea. They had scarcely left their house, when our Queen, kneeling before St. Joseph, asked his blessing, in order to begin the day in the name of the Lord. The saint hesitated, for, by long experience, he knew the excellence of his spouse, but the holy and sweet importunities of the august Mary conquered, and he blessed her in the name of the Most High.

"*At that time,*" saith the sacred text, "*Mary, rising up, went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judea.*" Now the chaste spouses, Mary and Joseph, having left their father's house, and forgotten their people, took their way towards the house of Zachariah, among the hills of Judea, distant twenty-seven leagues from Nazareth. The roads were rough, and

they possessed no means of transport except such as were afforded by their little animal; nevertheless the most humble and modest of creatures, Mary, prayed St. Joseph to use it for himself. The discreet spouse would not, by any means, consent to this; but in complaisance, he allowed her from time to time to go on foot with him, requesting her with great respect not to refuse him this gratification; and the Queen of heaven obeyed.

They continued their journey in these humble debates, and thus they so well employed their time, that there was not a moment which was not filled by some act of virtue. They walked alone, but the angels assisted them in all things; yet they were visible only to the august Mary. Occasionally she conversed with these angels, and the most pure heart of our sweet Lady was kindled anew with divine love. St. Joseph contributed to all this by his discreet silence, concentrating his thoughts within, and yielding himself to sublime contemplations. At other times the spouses conversed together upon many things regarding the salvation of their souls, the coming of the Messiah, the prophecies which the ancient fathers had received on this point, and other mysteries and secrets of the Most High.

During this journey there happened to St. Joseph something which excited his wonder. Inspired by a special grace, he bore to his spouse a most tender and holy love, and the saint, being of a noble nature, amiable, agreeable and obliging, was inclined to an ever watchful care for her. Now, as the Queen of heaven carried in her virginal bosom the Incarnate Word, the saint was sensible that, through the words and conversation of his spouse, new impressions were made upon his soul, but of the cause he was ignorant. He found himself more and more inflamed by divine love, and in a higher knowledge of those mysteries which formed the subjects of their conversation; and the further they advanced on their way and in their discussions, the more these favors were augmented. He felt also that the words of his spouse served as the organ, by means of which these favors were communicated to him. It was not possible that the discreet St. Joseph should not reflect upon this new and wonderful influence. But although it would have afforded him, filled as he was with wonder, the greatest gratification, without curiosity, to have been informed of the cause of it, his modesty was such that he could not venture to ask to be enlightened.

Our blessed Lady penetrated the thought of her spouse, but, ignorant of the way by which God would conduct this mystery, her great prudence and her own discretion taught her, although she had no command from the Lord to conceal it, how good it was to guard the secret of the most sublime of all mysteries. She therefore concealed it, without making it known to her spouse either on this occasion, or afterwards, during the interior pains which St. Joseph suffered on this account. What admirable prudence! Our sweet Lady prayed to God for the saint, imploring the divine assistance, of which she foresaw he would have need, and of which we shall treat in the following chapter.

This was the first journey which the Incarnate Word made in this world, four days after his entrance into it. Our blessed Lady thus served as a car for the true Solomon (Cant. iii. 9). This journey lasted four days, during which our holy travellers, besides those interior virtues which have God for their object, performed many acts of charity towards their neighbors. The blessed Virgin cured, among others, a poor sick girl, in a village through which she passed, on the first day of her departure.

At length the august Mary and her spouse Joseph arrived at the city of Judea, which was

then inhabited by Elizabeth and Zachariah. This city was distant, as I have said, twenty-seven leagues from Nazareth, and about two leagues from Jerusalem, near the spot where the torrent of Sorec has its source. It was afterwards entirely ruined, but the Lord does not permit the memory of places so venerable to be altogether lost. The Visitation was made at the same place where these divine mysteries are now honored by the faithful who dwell in Palestine, and by pilgrims who go there to offer their devotions.

St. Joseph went on before to give notice to the inmates of the house, and, having knocked at the door, he saluted them, saying: "May the Lord be with you, and fill your souls with His divine grace." St. Elizabeth had been already warned of their coming, for the same Lord had revealed to her that her cousin Mary of Nazareth was on her way to visit her. Now, having heard of her arrival, she came forth quickly, with others of her family, to receive the holy Virgin, who saluted her first, saying: "*The Lord be with you, my dear cousin.*" "*And may the same Lord,*" replied Elizabeth, "*reward you for having taken the trouble to give me this consolation.'*"

The two cousins having retired together, it

was then that the great mystery of the sanctification of John Baptist was operated; but those facts do not belong to this history. Coming out of their retreat, in the dusk of the evening, St. Elizabeth, who was informed of the happiness of the chaste St. Joseph, of which he was himself ignorant, bestowed upon him every mark of esteem and veneration.

After the saint had passed three days in the house of Zachariah, he asked permission of his blessed spouse to return to Nazareth. He took leave, with the promise to return and reconduct our sweet Lady when she should express her wishes. St. Elizabeth offered him presents praying him to accept them, but he received only a few things, because this man of God was not only a lover of poverty, but he had also a magnanimous and generous heart. He then took the road to Nazareth with the little beast that he had borrowed. Having arrived at his house, he was served there, in the absence of his spouse, by a relative who lived near,—the same who had been accustomed to bring them supplies from without, when the holy Lady was there.

After having passed three months, less two days,* in the house of Zachariah, in the midst

* In counting eight days after the Word was incarnate, the

of events and prodigies which do not belong to this history,* the august Mary thought of departure. St. Joseph, having been notified by St. Elizabeth, left Nazareth to reconduct his spouse to her home. On his arrival at the house of Zachariah, he was received with the highest marks of respect, for the holy priest already knew that the great patriarch was the depository of the mysteries and the treasures of heaven. The blessed Virgin received him with discreet demonstrations of joy, and having placed herself on her knees before him, according to her custom, she asked his benediction. After he had taken some repose, they fixed on the day of departure. Their adieux being made, the happy patriarch, joyous again to possess his treasure, although he knew not as yet its full value, set out for Nazareth. The blessed Virgin, as usual, asked his blessing, and, pursuing their way, in four days they reached their place of destination. During their route, the same effects attended their divine colloquies as those which have been already indicated.

holy Virgin and St. Joseph arrived the second of April, towards evening, at the house of Zachariah. If we add three months, less two days, which should commence the third of April, we come to the first of July inclusively, which is the eighth day after the birth of John Baptist, and that of his circumcision.

* All these details will be found in the *Cité Mystique* of Maria d'Agreda.

The discreet Mary perceived that she could not long conceal her condition from her chaste and faithful spouse. But the Lord guided all by means the most conducive to His glory, and so obtain merits for St. Joseph and the Virgin Mother. For this reason He did not make known to them His good pleasure. On their journey, the august Queen met with a woman who had once been virtuous, but who, tempted by the devil, was led into sin, and afterwards possessed by him. As soon as our blessed Lady saw her, she discovered her malady, and, using her queenly power, commanded the evil spirit to depart from the woman, and, having delivered her from the consequences of her sin, she obtained for her the gift of perseverance.

Our holy travellers arrived one day at a hostelry, the master of which was of a vicious disposition, and led a disorderly life. The Lord ordained, as the preparation for his coming happiness, that he should receive the august Mary and St. Joseph with marks of benevolence and consideration. He bestowed attentions and rendered them services beyond those he was accustomed to offer to other strangers. Our Queen, who knew the depraved state of his conscience, offered prayers for her host, and procured the justification of his soul, and the amendment of his life.

At length they reached Nazareth, when the Queen of heaven, assisted by the holy angels put her house in order. St. Joseph occupied himself as usual, for the subsistence of our Lady, and she did nothing to damp the hopes of her spouse. After her return home, Lucifer tempted the august Mary in every way, but he was vanquished with all his infernal legions, and precipitated into the depths of hell. While the Lord had permitted Lucifer to show himself, this enemy had contrived to sow discord among the neighbors of St. Joseph. They came together, and, having called for the innocent Mary, they accused her in the presence of her husband, and in the bitterest terms, of troubling the peace of their families. This reproach was keenly felt by our queen, because of the pain which it caused to her spouse, for he had begun to remark something of her condition; and already suffered anxiety and trouble on this account, as we shall see in the following chapter. Now, the demon, ignorant of the real cause of this trouble, strove to plant the seeds of discontent within the bosom of St. Joseph, so as to make him impatient of his poverty; representing to him at the same time that his spouse Mary remained too long in her retreat and devotions, and that she was idle. But St. Joseph

being of an upright and magnanimous heart, and of great perfection, despised these diabolical inventions, and utterly rejected them. Besides, his internal suffering regarding the state of his spouse occupied him so exclusively, that it obliged him to forget every other. The Lord delivered him from this temptation by the intercession of the Holy Virgin, leaving only that of which we are about to speak in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III.

ST. JOSEPH DISCOVERS THAT MARY IS ABOUT TO BECOME A MOTHER, WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO PENETRATE THE MYSTERY. HE ENDURES GREAT SUFFERINGS ON THIS ACCOUNT.

IT was about five months since the eternal Word had become incarnate in the chaste bosom of the Virgin Mary, when St. Joseph began to observe indications of it, and to entertain suspicions. It was the more apparent, because the proportions of her pure form were so perfect, that the least change was perceptible. Deeply concerned and anxious, St. Joseph, as he one day observed her coming forth from her oratory, perceived that it was no longer possible to doubt the testimony of his own eyes. The heart of the man of God was penetrated with profound sorrow, and he was unable to resist the harrowing reflections that tormented his spirit.

It may not be without utility or interest to notice some of these reflections, which increased the violence of his great affliction. In the first

place, he entertained a most chaste and sincere love for his faithful spouse, to whom, since the commencement of their union, he had devoted all the tenderness of his heart. Besides, his desire to serve her was augmented from day to day by the unequalled holiness and attractive manners of our blessed Lady. Our saint, therefore, was impelled, by a desire natural to his love, to find a response to it on her part. The Lord so ordered it, that, from this same desire, the holy Joseph was still more careful to serve and respect our blessed Mistress.

Thus St. Joseph fulfilled with great zeal his obligations as a most faithful husband and guardian of the mystery which, as yet, was hidden from him. But the more assiduous he was to serve, to honor his spouse while bearing for her a love, so pure, chaste, holy, and just, the more eager was his desire that she should reciprocate his affection. Nevertheless he did not disclose this internal conflict; either because of the respect produced by the humble majesty of his spouse, or because in witnessing the discreet deportment of Mary—her sweet converse, and her more than angelic purity—the revelation would have been too painful.

At the view of what was become so evident, he was lost in amazement. Still, though con-

vinced, he would not allow his imagination to go beyond appearances. Being a just and holy man, and seeing the fact, he suspended his judgment without entering into the cause. What an example for us! It is most probable that if he had been convinced of the culpability of his wife, the violence of his grief would have put an end to his existence. In the second place, his reflections reminded him that he had had no agency in this condition which was but too apparent. Dishonor was inevitable when it should become known; and, as St. Joseph was of a generous and noble heart, this apprehension gave him great pain. Besides, he considered, with rare prudence, the affliction that their own infamy would bring upon them if the matter came to be divulged.

But that which caused the greatest grief of all to the holy spouse, was the fear that his wife would be stoned, according to the law which ordered this punishment; for he could not make himself an accomplice to hide the crime, if it existed. All these considerations pierced the heart of St. Joseph with the deepest grief, in which he found no consolation except in the irreproachable conduct of his spouse. Still, on the other hand, though appearances convinced him, he could neither find means of excuse, nor even

dare to communicate the subject of his grief to any human being. Our saint was then like one environed by the sorrows of death, and he felt the force of the words "*Jealousy is as cruel as hell.*"

He would have sought some alleviation for his pains in spiritual consolation, but grief suspended the powers of his soul. If his reason inclined to follow the suspicions suggested by his senses, the reflections that he made on the tried holiness of his most wise and prudent spouse caused them to vanish like ice in the heat of the sun, or smoke before the wind. If he strove to check the affections of his chaste love, it was impossible, since he found his spouse always more worthy of being loved. And although the truth was concealed from him, she had more power to attract, than the seeming deception of her infidelity to repel him. The sacred ties of love could not be rent asunder, because they reposed on the solid foundations of truth, reason, and justice.

Our saint did not then judge it expedient to declare his grief to his blessed spouse: added to this, the gravity, ever equal and divinely humble, which he saw in her, did not permit him to take this liberty; for, although he saw marks so unequivocal, a conduct so pure and holy as hers could ill accord with infidelity.

Such a fault could not in any manner be compatible with so much purity, holiness and discretion; nor with that assemblage of graces whose growth was each day more visible in the august Mary.

In these perplexities the saintly husband addressed himself to God in prayer. Placing himself in His presence, "Eternal God and my Lord," he said, "my desires and my groanings are not hidden from Thy divine Majesty. I find myself struggling with violent agitations, I have given my heart to the spouse which I received from Thy hands, I have trusted in her purity, but the strange appearances which I discover in her cast me into the most afflicting perplexity. It would be rash to think that she had been unfaithful and had offended Thee, seeing in her such great purity and so eminent a holiness. It is, nevertheless, impossible to deny the evidence of my senses, and sorrow must destroy me unless there be here some mystery that I have not discovered. Reason exculpates, but the senses condemn her. I see plainly that she conceals from me the cause of her condition. What shall I do? I suspend my judgment, ignorant of the cause of what I see. Receive, O God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, my sighs and my tears, as an acceptable sacrifice. I cannot believe

that Mary has offended Thee ; but, also, being her husband, I cannot presume the existence of any mystery of which I can be unworthy."

Saint Joseph persevered in his supplications and united with them many other affections and prayers. He thought there must be in all this some mystery, but his humility hindered him from being assured on this point. All the reasons that presented themselves in favor of the holiness of our most sweet Lady, contributed only to persuade him that she had committed no fault. At the same time the saint never thought of her being the mother of the Messiah, for he could not have believed himself worthy to be her spouse.

Sometimes he suspended his suspicions, at others appearances augmented them. Sometimes he was overwhelmed by agitation ; sometimes in an aching calm, without power to resolve or to believe any thing. He could neither vanquish his doubts nor appease his heart, nor find that certitude of which he had so much need, to regulate his conduct and to calm his mind. And thus it was that the sufferings of the Holy Patriarch were so cruel. They serve as evident proofs of his incomparable prudence and sanctity, and they gained him such merits before God as to render him worthy of the favors he was about to receive.

Through the knowledge and infused light which she possessed, our blessed Lady saw all that passed in the breast of St. Joseph. But, though filled with tenderness and compassion for the sufferings of her spouse, she spoke not on the subject of his pain, but contented herself to serve him with submission and exactitude, because it was not proper to disclose the secret of the great King, without an express command from the Lord.

During this period, while he was in ignorance of the mystery of his spouse, St. Joseph thought it his duty to maintain his superiority, yet with great moderation. In this he imitated the ancient Patriarchs, from whom he would not degenerate, whose wives were very submissive. Although just and good, he therefore allowed himself to be served and honored by the blessed Virgin after their espousals, preserving in all things his authority as chief, which he sweetened by his rare humility and great prudence. And he would have had cause for this if our Lady had been like other women. On her part, the august Mary was most submissive and obedient to her husband, and, although she was above all, none ever equalled her in these. She served her spouse with an incomparable respect and promptitude, and thus she gave oppor-

tunities to our saint, while she served him at the table, or occupied herself in other domestic affairs, to observe her closely, and, to the great affliction of his soul, assure himself more positively of the truth. It was impossible that in her actions the signs of her condition should not be more evident, but this did not hinder her in her tasks. She desired neither to excuse nor to justify herself, because this would not have accorded with the truth, nor with her angelical candor, nor with the grandeur and generosity of her most noble heart; and the pains of St. Joseph found no alleviation. The queen of heaven could easily have alleged the truth of her irreproachable innocence—have exculpated herself, and relieved St. Joseph of his pain by disclosing the mystery, but she would not hazard the justification of so mysterious a truth upon her own testimony, and, with great wisdom, she abandoned herself to the Divine Providence. She strove to console and please him in all things, often asking what he would have her to do. Many times she served him on her knees, and although these loving ways might in some sort console the saintly spouse, they gave him, also, additional causes of affliction in considering the many motives to love and esteem her who plunged him in such perplexity.

St. Joseph could not entirely conceal his grief: thus he often found himself pensive, sad, and in reverie. Pre-occupied by his sorrows, he sometimes spoke to his spouse with more harshness than formerly. But this was neither from indignation nor vengeance, for he had no such thought—it was merely the effect inseparable from a wounded heart. Our most prudent Lady, on her part, changed nothing in her sweet manners; on the contrary, she took greater pains than ever to comfort her spouse. She served him at table, or offered him a seat. Without doubt, this painful season was one of those which most exercised not only St. Joseph but our blessed Lady. Our incomparable queen offered continual supplications for her spouse to the Most High, that He would vouchsafe to regard and console him. In order better to understand the profound humility and the sublime wisdom of the august Mary in these circumstances, it should be understood that the Lord had not commanded her to keep the secret of the mystery of the incarnation. He did not even disclose His will on this point with as much clearness as in other matters. It seemed that the Lord left all to the wisdom and to the divine virtues of His Elected one.

Thus the divine Providence gave occasion to

the most pure Mary, and to her most faithful spouse, to exercise by heroic actions, each according to their capacity, the virtues and gifts which He had allotted them. He was pleased, thus to say, to witness the faith, the hope, the love, the humility of these upright hearts in the midst of so poignant an affliction. The Lord seemed deaf, according to our manner of speaking, for His greater glory, in order to give to the world this example of sanctity and prudence. He waited until the proper time to speak was come. Let us understand from this the designs of God and His secret ways with the souls whom He cherishes, and whom He would render capable to receive His favors and His gifts. We ought to use every effort, and employ all our care to acquire efficaciously a true resignation to this divine Providence. If men only knew the loving care of this Father of mercy, they would be happy to forget themselves, and cease to plunge into cares at once burdensome, useless, and dangerous. It is of the utmost importance to the creature to let himself be guided by the hand of the Lord, because men are ignorant of His operations, and the ends to which they are to be led by them.

If God were susceptible of being touched like men, by pain or jealousy, He would suffer, in

perceiving that His own creatures desire to seek the least thing in any other than himself. The Lord regards the actions of men; He corrects their faults with love; He foresees their desires; He protects them in danger; He fortifies them in their trials; He assists them in afflictions. None can resist Him, or hinder His will. He executes what He can; He can execute all that He wills, and He will give himself entirely to the just who is in His grace and confides in Him alone. Who can conceive the greatness and the nature of the gifts which He pours into hearts disposed to receive them!

Let us leave all to His providence, for the Most High will give us whatever is most sure and necessary for our salvation. Except the pains which the august Mary endured from those which were suffered by her most Holy Son, the most severe of all her life were caused by the afflictions and perplexities of St. Joseph in the circumstances which we have just related.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUSPICIONS OF ST. JOSEPH INCREASE, AND HE RESOLVES TO LEAVE HIS SPOUSE—THE ANGEL OF THE LORD DECLARES TO HIM THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION.

ST. JOSEPH endeavored to calm the painful agitations of his heart by doing his utmost to remove the conviction of his mind respecting the condition of his wife. But the indications which became every day more visible in her holy person served only to confirm it. The further our Lady advanced, the more amiable, vigorous, active and beautiful she became; and her invincible charms attracted his chaste love, without entirely allaying these conflicting passions. At length all hesitation was at an end; he could no longer entertain a doubt of the evidence. His heart was conformed to the will of God; nevertheless, through the weakness of the flesh, his spirit was exceedingly sorrowful, and nothing remained to dissipate his sadness. He felt his bodily strength diminish—and, al-

though no particular malady manifested itself, he grew thin, and his countenance bore the marks of deep affliction. And as he preserved silence, not seeking consolation elsewhere, (as men usually do,) the sufferings of the saint were naturally more intense.

The heart of the gentle Mary was penetrated by a sorrow not less profound; but she resolved to redouble her cares for the health of her spouse. She continued to conceal the mystery which she had no command to disclose, in order to honor and to preserve the secret of the celestial King. So far as regarded herself, she left nothing undone to promote his comfort—entreating him to remind her of any thing which might contribute to restore his declining health. She besought him to repose himself, and to partake of some little refreshment; for it was but right to supply the wants of the body, in order to obtain strength to labor for the Lord.

St. Joseph, attentive to every movement of his spouse, and sensible of the holy effects of her conversation and presence, said within himself: "Is it possible that a woman so holy, in whom the grace of God is so perceptible, can cast me into such perplexity? What can I find to equal her, if I leave her? Where find consolation, if she fail me? But all these

trouble me even less than the infamy that may result from this unhappy affair ; or that I should give cause to believe that I have been the accomplice of a crime. If I make myself the author of her condition, it will be a falsehood unworthy of an honorable man, and opposed to my conscience and my reputation. In such a state of embarrassment what shall I do? The least evil that can happen is to absent myself—to leave the house.”

Our blessed Lady, being sincerely afflicted by the resolution which her spouse had just taken, addressed herself to the angels of her guard, “You,” she said, “who obey with promptitude all the commands of the Lord, listen now to my prayers. Prevent my spouse, I conjure you, from executing this intention which he has made to absent himself from me.” The angels obeyed their queen, and silently conveyed many holy inspirations to the heart of St. Joseph. They persuaded him anew of the sanctity and perfection of his spouse—that God was incomprehensible in His works, and impenetrable in His judgments, and that He was most faithful to those who trust in Him.

The agitated spirit of St. Joseph was somewhat soothed by these inspirations, although he knew not from whence they came, nor by what

order he received them. Yet as the cause of his grief remained, he always sank again into sadness, and returned to his first resolution to desert his spouse. Then our blessed Lady addressed herself directly to her Son whom she bore in her virginal bosom. "It would not be becoming," said she, "that thy servant should be without a husband who assists and shelters her from calumnies: do not permit him to execute his design to abandon me." The Most High replied: "I will speedily console my servant Joseph, and after I shall have declared to him, through my angel, the mystery of which he is ignorant, you may speak with him concerning it. I will fill him with my spirit, and enable him to accomplish all that he should do in these mysteries. He shall aid and assist you under all circumstances."

The august Mary comprehended how important it was that St. Joseph should have to endure this affliction, by which his spirit was exercised and prepared for the great charge that was to be confided to him. He had now passed two months of suffering, and, overcome by his apprehensions, he exclaimed: "I find no remedy for my grief but absence. I acknowledge that my spouse is perfect, but it is not possible for me to penetrate the mystery of her condition,

and I will not insult her virtue by subjecting her to the penalties of the law. I will depart forthwith." The saint resolved to set out during the night. He therefore prepared a small packet of clothing. Having received a trifling sum of money which was due to him for work, he determined to leave the house after midnight. But as he was accustomed to meditate, he reflected on the importance of the undertaking. "Great God," he exclaimed, "of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the sorrow which breaks my heart is not hidden from Thy divine clemency. Thou knowest, besides, O Lord, (though in other things I am not free from sin,) my innocence touching the subject of my grief. I choose the lesser evil in quitting my spouse, and go to end my days in some desert, there to abandon myself entirely to the care of Thy providence. Forsake me not, for I desire only what is for Thy glory."

St. Joseph prostrated himself, and made a vow to offer at the temple of Jerusalem a part of the small sum which he had reserved for his journey, praying the Lord to defend his spouse from calumny, and preserve her from all evil. Such was the great rectitude of this man of God, and such the esteem which he preserved for our blessed Lady. After this prayer, he took a little repose, intending to depart without seeing

her. Our blessed Lady, from her oratory, observed all that St. Joseph did, or proposed to do; for the Most High revealed it to her.

The Divine Majesty permitted that the Blessed Virgin and her holy spouse should endure these interior sufferings, in order that, besides the merits which so long a martyrdom would procure for them, the succor of the divine consolations should be to them more admirable and more remarkable. The august Mary practised many virtues during this period, whereby she teaches us to hope for relief from the Most High in the greatest afflictions. And what an example is not that of St. Joseph! No one had ever stronger grounds of suspicion, nor more of discretion to control his judgment than he.

The passion of jealousy produces sharp wounds in him who is attacked by it, and no one ever felt its effects so sensibly as St. Joseph, though, in fact, there was no foundation for it, if he had but known the truth. He was endowed with a singular intelligence to penetrate the sanctity and the lovely character of his spouse. But this, in augmenting his esteem for her whom he was about to lose, augmented his sorrow to find himself necessitated to abandon her.

St. Joseph was not subject to the disorders of common jealousy, in which the passions of con-

cupiscence are engaged, which neither reason nor prudence can vanquish. The jealousy of the saint arose only from the depth of his love and a conditional suspicion, viz.: whether his chaste spouse reciprocated his affection; for a pledge so dear as the affection of a wife must not be shared by any other. When love is so well founded, the chains that cement it are very strong, and the more so because there are fewer imperfections to weaken them. There was nothing in our sweet Lady which could diminish the love of her spouse. On the contrary, all that she had received from grace and from nature gave him new subjects every day to strengthen his affection.

After the saint had offered the prayer, of which we have already made mention, he fell asleep in this sadness, which had sunk into dejection. He was sure that he should awake in time to depart at midnight, without being seen, as he thought, by his spouse. Our Lady, on her part, awaited the remedy, and earnestly sought it by her humble prayers. She was consoled by her assurance that the pains of her spouse had now reached their highest degree—the hour of mercy and consolation for that sorrowing heart could not long tarry, and her desires would soon be accomplished. And now the

Lord sent the archangel Gabriel, to disclose, by a divine revelation to St. Joseph while he slept, the mystery which was to be accomplished in his spouse. The archangel acquitted himself of this embassy, appeared in a dream, as related by St. Matthew, and declared to him, in the terms quoted by that evangelist, the whole mystery of the incarnation and redemption.

There are various reasons why the archangel spoke to St. Joseph in a dream, and not in his waking hours, although the mystery had been manifested to others when awake. In the first place, St. Joseph was so prudent and so filled with esteem for the blessed Virgin, that stronger proofs were unnecessary to convince him of the dignity of Mary, and of the mystery of the incarnation; for the divine inspiration penetrates easily into well-disposed hearts. In the second place, his trouble had begun with his senses, and it was but just that they should be mortified and deprived of the angelic vision, since they had permitted the entrance of illusions and suspicions; therefore the truth ought not to enter by their means. The third reason is, that although St. Joseph committed no sin in these circumstances, yet his senses had undoubtedly contracted a species of stain, and it was not proper that the angel should fulfil his embassy at a

time when these senses, which had been scandalized, were interdicted by the suspension of their operations. Besides these, there was the reason which should overrule all others, that such was the will of the Lord, who is just and holy, and perfect in all His works.

St. Joseph saw not the angel through any image or form—he heard only the internal voice, and understood the mystery. He heard what St. Gabriel said, “that he should not fear to remain with Mary his wife, because her condition was the work of the Holy Ghost. That she should bring forth a son, whom he should call Jesus; that He should deliver His people from their sins; and that in this mystery would be accomplished the prophecy of Isaiah—‘A Virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son, who shall be called Emmanuel, which means, God with us.’” We perceive from the words of the celestial ambassador, that the saint had separated from the pure Mary in intention, since he was commanded to receive her without fear.

St. Joseph awoke, informed of the mystery which had been revealed to him, and instructed that his spouse was the Mother of God. He found himself divided between the joy of his happiness, and his unhopèd for dignity, and sor

row for what he had been about to do. He prostrated himself instantly on the ground, and made, with humble fear and inconceivable contentment, heroic acts of humility and gratitude. He gave thanks to God for the mystery which had been disclosed to him, and for having made him the spouse of her whom He had chosen to be His mother—him, who did not deserve to be her servant. The doubts and uncertainty which St. Joseph had suffered, laid in him the foundations of the most profound humility, necessary for him to whom was confided the dispensation of the most holy counsels of the Lord. The remembrance of what had passed served as a lesson for his future life.

Having rendered thanks to the divine Majesty, the holy man began to reproach himself. "O my divine spouse," said he, "most sweet dove, chosen by the Most High to be His own mother, how hast thy unworthy servant dared to call in question thy fidelity! How could he, who is only dust and ashes, suffer her who is Queen of Heaven to serve him? Why have I not kissed the earth thy steps have trod, and served thee kneeling? How shall I dare to raise my eyes in thy presence, or open my lips to speak with thee! Lord, give me grace, grant me strength to pray for pardon! Inspire her to show me

mercy, so that she will not reject her unworthy servant as he deserves. Alas! how clearly she must have penetrated all my thoughts: how can I have the boldness to appear in her presence? I see now the grossness of my conduct, and my stupid mistake; and if Thy justice for my chastisement had permitted me to execute my imprudent intention, what would not be now my wretchedness! Thanks to Thee, my God, throughout eternity, for so great a blessing. I will present myself to my Princess, my spouse, confiding in the sweetness of her clemency, and, prostrate at her feet, I will beseech her pardon, so that for her sake, Lord, Thou wilt regard me with pity, and pardon my fault."

Saint Joseph went forth from his humble chamber very unlike what he was before his recent slumber. Now he was happy; yet he dared not disturb our blessed Lady, who was still employed in the sweets of her contemplation. While awaiting the favorable moment, the man of God with tearful eyes unbound the little packet that he had prepared—but with sentiments far different from those which had previously occupied him. Having learned the honor due to our blessed Lady, our saint watered the house with his tears; he swept it and prepared other little household work, which,

while ignorant of her dignity, he had intrusted to the care of his blessed spouse.

He now resolved to change his deportment towards her, by appropriating to himself the office of servant, reserving that of mistress for her majesty. Further on we shall relate the loving disputes which he had with our queen to decide which of the two should serve and take the humbler place. At the proper time the saint presented himself at the chamber of our blessed Lady, who awaited his coming with the sweetness and complacency which we shall recount in the following chapter. Let us take an example from St. Joseph, who believed, without delay and without doubting, that which the angel revealed to him, in such wise that he merited to be elevated to a great recompense, and to a sublime dignity. And if he abased himself with so much humility, not having committed any sin in what he did, but only in having been greatly troubled under circumstances which seemed to give so much occasion for anxiety, consider how much we ought to humiliate ourselves—we who are nothing but miserable worms of the dust—by weeping over our negligences and our sins, so that the Most High may regard us as father and spouse.

CHAPTER V.

ST. JOSEPH ASKS PARDON OF THE HOLY MARY HIS SPOUSE—
HE RESOLVES TO SERVE HER IN ALL THINGS WITH PRO-
FOUND RESPECT.

ST. JOSEPH, after the discovery of his error, waited until our blessed Lady should come forth from her retreat. As soon as he thought it was time, he opened the door of the little chamber occupied by the mother of the heavenly King, and, throwing himself at her feet, he exclaimed, with humility and profound veneration, "My spouse, Mother of the Eternal Word, behold your servant prostrate before you. By the same Lord whom you bear in your most chaste bosom, I pray you to pardon my presumption. Sure I am that none of my thoughts can be hidden from your wisdom, nor from the divine light which you have received. Great was my blindness to think of deserting you; but you know that I did it in ignorance, because neither the secret of the great King had been revealed

to me, nor the greatness of your dignity. Forget, I entreat you, the many deficiencies of a vile creature who offers his heart and his life in your service; I will not rise from your feet until you have pardoned my folly—until I shall have received your forgiveness and your benediction.”

The august Mary listened with mingled feelings to the humble words of her spouse. She rejoiced in the Lord to learn that St. Joseph was informed of the mysteries of the incarnation, and that he revered them with such profound faith and humility. But she was troubled by the resolution he had taken to change his conduct towards her, and with the respect and submission with which he addressed her. Knowing how much she ought to esteem humility, she was disturbed by the apprehension that St. Joseph, recognizing in her the mother of the Lord, would deport himself in all things as her inferior. Insisting that he should rise, she prostrated herself at his feet, although he made every effort to hinder this, but it was not possible; for in humility she was invincible. Then she said to the saint: “It is I, my spouse, who ought to beseech your pardon for the pain and sorrow that you have had to endure on my account, therefore I beg you will forget them.”

Our blessed Lady, for the consolation of her

husband, continued: "I could not reveal to you the hidden mystery which the Most High had enclosed within me, because it was my duty to await the expression of the will of the Lord. Thus my silence should not be considered as arising from any want of esteem for you, for in all things I regard you as my master and my husband. I am, and I always shall be, your faithful servant; but do not make any change in the demeanor which you have always preserved towards me. The Lord has not elevated me to the dignity of being His own mother to be served, but to be the servant of all, and of you especially. This is my office: it is but just that you should leave it to me, since the Most High has so ordained in giving me your protection.

St. Joseph, by these reasons and many others which were of a sweet efficacy, found his spirit enlightened in a singular manner. He received, through this purest of creatures, extraordinary divine influences, and, entirely renewed in heart, he replied: "You are blessed among women; you are blessed among all nations. May the creator of heaven and earth be glorified by eternal praises, for that He has chosen you for His dwelling. In you alone He has accomplished the promises that He made to our fathers and to

the prophets. Let all generations bless Him that He has not exalted himself in any creature as in you, and that, being the vilest of men, He has chosen me to be your servant." The saint was enlightened by the divine Spirit after the manner of St. Elizabeth; but the light and knowledge which St. Joseph received were, in a certain sense, more admirable, because of his dignity and ministry.

The august Mary replied by the Magnificat and other new canticles; and while chanting them, inflamed by the divine fire, she was rapt in a sublime ecstasy, and, lifted up from the earth in a globe of brilliant light which encircled her, she was transformed as in a glory. St. Joseph was filled with admiration and joy inconceivable at this view of his holy spouse; for he had never yet seen her surrounded with such glory and excellence. She appeared to him quite transparent, and, at the same time, he discovered the integrity and virginal purity of our queen and the mystery of her dignity. He saw, also, and recognized in the chaste bosom of Mary the holy humanity of the Infant God and the union of the two natures in the person of the Word. He adored the Infant God with a profound humility, acknowledged his true Redeemer, and offered himself to His service with fervent acts of divine love.

The Lord regarded him with great favor, and distinguished him among all men, for He accepted him as His reputed father and gave him the title. And to render him conformable to this new and honorable name, He imparted to him all the knowledge and divine gifts to which Christian purity can or ought to aspire.

If it were a proof of the magnanimity of the glorious St. Joseph that he did not die of jealousy, it is also a subject of admiration that he was not overwhelmed by the joy which he felt on this occasion. In the first case his holiness appears, but in the second he received such augmentations of graces and gifts from the Lord, that, if His divine Majesty had not dilated his heart, he could not have been able to receive them. He was entirely renewed and enlightened so as to converse worthily with her who was the Mother of God, and, conjointly with her, to dispense all that concerned the incarnation and the charge of the Word made man. It was also manifested to him, in order that he should recognize the obligation imposed on him to serve his holy spouse, that all the gifts he had received from the Most High were received through her and for her. He knew that the gifts he had received before his espousals were bestowed because the Lord had chosen him for this office, and that

those which he now received were because she had merited them for him. And as our blessed Lady had been the instrument by which the Lord had wrought the sanctification of John the Baptist, and his mother, St. Elizabeth, she was the organ, also, by whom St. Joseph received the plenitude of grace. This most happy spouse knew all this, and he responded to it like a faithful and grateful servant.

The holy evangelists made no mention of these great mysteries, nor of many others which were known to our blessed Lady and St. Joseph, because, for many reasons, they were not suitable to be made known to the Gentiles on their first conversion. These things were reserved, by the impenetrable judgments of Providence, for times which the divine wisdom judged more suitable,* or when the Church should have need of the intercession and support of our holy Queen. The faithful St. Joseph, after having been made aware of the dignity of his spouse, and the mystery of the incarnation, conceived so lofty an esteem for her, that, although he had been always pure and perfect in his life, he now became as a new man. He resolved henceforth to change his conduct, and to redouble his ven-

* Jesus said, "I have yet many things to say to you: but you cannot bear them now."—*St. John*, xvi. 12.

eration towards our blessed Lady. This was in conformity with the wisdom of the saint, and due to the excellence of his spouse, for he was servant, and she mistress of the universe. St. Joseph knew all this by divine illumination. Now, to satisfy the desire he had to honor her in whom he recognized the Mother of God, when he spoke to her, or passed before her, if alone together, he bent the knee. He would not suffer her to wait on him, nor that she should occupy herself in other humble offices, such as sweeping the house, cleansing the vessels, and many other things which he thought derogatory from the dignity of our queen.

But our saintly Lady, who was the humblest of the humble, and whose humility was not to be overcome, prayed St. Joseph not to pay her such honors as to bow the knee to her. This veneration, she said, was doubtless due to the Lord, whom she bore in her bosom; but while He remained there, the person of Christ could not be distinguished from her own. The saint, yielding to her humble desires, rendered this worship to the Lord, who was in the bosom of Mary, and to her as His mother, only when unperceived by her.

They had also humble disputes respecting their servile employments. St. Joseph could

not consent to allow our amiable Mistress to perform them, and strove to prevent it. On her part, she did what she could, but while she was retired in her oratory the saint found time to do many things, and thus our sweet Lady was frustrated in her desires to be the servant. At these times she addressed her meek complaints to the Lord, and prayed him to oblige her spouse not to hinder her in the exercise of humility.

This virtue is so agreeable at the tribunal of God, that we ask for no common grace when we pray for it; for humility imparts a certain greatness to all things, and inclines God to clemency. The Divine Majesty hearkened to the request of our blessed Lady, and his guardian angel said, interiorly, to the blessed St. Joseph, "Do not frustrate the humble desires of her who is above all creatures in heaven or on earth. Permit her to serve you in external things, and preserve for her in your interior the greatest reverence. Render to the Word made man, in all times and in all places, the homage that is due to Him. You can, meanwhile, assist his Mother, and honor always the Lord of the universe who is within her."

Having received these orders from the Most High, St. Joseph no longer refused her humble exercises to our sweet Lady. Thus both offered

to God the sacrifice of their will. The most pure Mary, in practising her profound humility, and faithful obedience to her spouse; and St. Joseph, by obedience to the Most High, with a holy confusion to see himself served by her whom he recognized as mistress of the universe and mother of the Creator.

Thus our saint was compensated for the humility which he could not exercise; for to see himself served as he was humiliated him far more, and obliged him to abase himself still more profoundly in contempt of himself. In these dispositions St. Joseph meditated upon the Lord, whom the august Mary bore in her chaste bosom, adoring and rendering to Him honor and glory. Then, in recompense for his sanctity and his respect, mingled with fear, the Infant God, made man, sometimes manifested himself in an admirable manner. He saw Him in the bosom of His most pure Mother, as through a luminous crystal. Afterwards, our incomparable Lady conversed more familiarly with her blessed spouse upon the mysteries of the incarnation, for she knew that he was now informed of the secrets of the hypostatic union of the two natures, divine and human, within her virginal bosom.

No tongue can relate the celestial discourses that were held between the blessed Virgin and

St. Joseph. - And who can describe the effects produced on the gentle and pious heart of this holy man, on finding himself the spouse of her who was the veritable mother of his Creator, and to see her performing for him the duties of a simple servant?

If the Almighty enriched the house and the person of Obed-Edom with such plenteous benedictions for having received the ark of the Old Testament, what benedictions would He not bestow upon St. Joseph, to whom He had confided the true ark, and the Legislator himself who was enclosed within it?

The happiness and the fidelity of this saint were incomparable, not only because the living Ark of the New Testament abode in his house, but because he guarded it like a faithful and prudent servant. The Lord placed him over His family, also, that he should provide for it according to its necessities as a faithful administrator. Let all nations acknowledge him, bless him, and publish his praises, since the Most High has never done for any other what He has done for this incomparable saint. In view of mysteries so august, I will glorify this adorable Lord, and confess Him as holy, just, merciful, wise and admirable in all His wondrous works.

CHAPTER VI.

MODE OF LIFE OF THE AUGUST MARY AND ST. JOSEPH.—
CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THEM AND OTHER REMARKA-
BLE CIRCUMSTANCES.

THE humble house of Joseph, which our saints made their dwelling-place, consisted of three chambers only. St. Joseph slept in one of these, and used another as a workshop, where the tools were deposited which served for use in his trade of carpenter. The third, which contained a small bed, the work of our saint, was appropriated to the Queen of Heaven, who slept there, and made it her ordinary abode. This order was established from the date of their marriage.

Before he was informed of her dignity, the saintly husband rarely, except when some affair obliged him to ask her advice, visited his wife, because he was engaged with his work, and she remained in her retreat. But after his happiness was made known to him, the holy man became more assiduous, and went very often to

seek our blessed Lady, to renew the offer of his services. Yet he never approached her but with great humility and reverent respect. Before speaking to her he was careful to observe how she was occupied. Thus, many times he saw her rapt in ecstasy, and inclosed within a radiant light; at others, he found her discoursing with angels. Often she was prostrate, in the form of a cross, and speaking with the Lord. In these circumstances our saint contented himself with the liberty of gazing upon her with the most profound reverence. It was granted to his merits to hear the harmony of the angelic chants, and to inhale a delicious fragrance that strengthened him and filled his whole being with spiritual joy and consolation.

The holy spouses were alone in their house, for they kept no servant—not only because of their great humility, but also that they found it most convenient to have no witnesses of the prodigies that were of such frequent occurrence with them.

Our Lady never left the house, unless obliged by some pressing circumstance; but a woman, their neighbor and relative, she who had served St. Joseph during the sojourn of the Blessed Virgin at the house of Zachariah, took charge of their external affairs. She was abundantly

recompensed for these services, not only in her own advancement in perfection, but her family also felt the beneficent effects of the protection of the holy family. The august Mary many times healed their maladies, and filled them with heavenly benedictions.

Their nourishment was very frugal; but they partook of it every day, and together. St. Joseph sometimes ate flesh meat, but the holy Virgin never, although she prepared it for her spouse. Their ordinary diet consisted of fruits, fish, bread, and cooked vegetables. But this was always taken with great moderation, and only so much as was needful, but the quality varied according to circumstances.

St. Joseph never saw his holy spouse asleep. He did not know, from his own experience, whether she slept at all. Her place of rest was the little bed made by the saint. It had two coverings, between which she was accustomed to place herself to take a brief and light repose. The under garment of the august Mary was a tunic or chemise, but little softer than woolen stuff. She never left it off, except when it was worn, nor soiled it, and no one in the world saw it, not even St. Joseph. In all her works, and in whatever she did for St. Joseph, the greatest cleanliness was observed.

Before St. Joseph was informed of the mystery of the Incarnation, our blessed Lady, at certain times when he was not occupied, used to read to him from the Holy Scriptures, particularly from David and the Prophets. She explained them like an experienced instructress, and her holy spouse questioned her on many points, her replies to which gave him such cause for admiration, that both united in praising and blessing the Lord. But after the saint had discovered the grand secret, our Lady addressed him as the elected of God, to be the coadjutor of the works and mysteries of the Redemption. They discoursed then openly together, and with a more clear understanding, of the prophecies which referred to the conception of the Word by a Virgin Mother, His birth, and His most holy life.

Our august Lady explained all; and then they spoke of what they should do when the day, so much desired, should come—when the Child should be born, when He would be in her arms, and she should nourish Him from her virginal breast, and when, alone among mortals, her holy spouse would be the only one who would participate in this inconceivable happiness! But she said little of the death and the

passion, for she was unwilling to afflict the tender heart of her spouse.

The faithful and happy St. Joseph was all enkindled by divine love in these gracious conversations, and, shedding tears of joy, he cried out: "Is it indeed possible that I shall see my God and Redeemer within your chaste arms?—that I shall adore Him there?—that I shall hear His sweet voice?—that I shall touch Him?—that my eyes shall see His divine face?—that the sweat of my brow shall be employed in His service, and for His support?—that we shall speak and converse with Him? Whence comes to me such bliss as none could ever have deserved? Why have I not rich treasures, that I might lay them at His feet?"

Our august Lady replied: "The great God comes not into the world to find riches, for He needs them not; for them would He not descend from heaven. He comes on earth only to repair the disorders of the world, and by sure ways to conduct it to eternal life; and these ways are none other than humility and poverty. For this He has chosen our poor habitation. He wills not that we be rich in worldly goods, which are but vanity and vexation of spirit."

The saint often besought the holy Virgin to instruct him in the character of the virtues,

especially that of the divine love, in order that he might understand how to conduct himself in a suitable manner towards the God-man, so as not to be rejected as an unprofitable servant. The Mistress of the Virtues condescended to his request, and explained to her spouse the properties of the virtues, and the manner of practising them with all possible perfection. Nevertheless she deported herself in these instructions with such great discretion, that she appeared in no wise the mistress of her spouse, for she interrogated the saint and instructed him by her questions.

They mingled these conversations, or readings from the Scriptures, sometimes with manual labor, when the saint was obliged to continue at his work. Our most amiable Lady added to them the consolations of the celestial doctrines; and thus the happy husband made greater advancement in virtue than with the work of his hands. She showed to Him the great fruit that may be drawn from labor. Believing herself unworthy to be maintained by her spouse, she was humbled, in thinking how much she was indebted to him. She felt herself as much obliged as if she had been the most useless of creatures, and, being unable to assist our saint, she served him whenever it was possible. About

this time St. Joseph saw, one day, a great number of birds come to recreate the queen of creatures. They fluttered around her, as if to form a choir, and sang with a delicious melody. St. Joseph had not before witnessed this marvel, and, overflowing with joy and wonder, he exclaimed: "Is it possible that unreasoning creatures acquit themselves of their obligations better than I? It is just that if they recognize, serve, and honor you, so far as they are capable, that you should permit me also, to acquit myself of what is justly your right." But the most prudent Virgin replied: "I am but a simple creature, yet I ought to induce all creatures to praise the Most High."

It often happened that they found themselves in want of necessaries, for they were very liberal to the poor, nor were they careful, like worldly people, to provide for their wants in advance. Now the Lord so ordered it, that the faith and patience of His holy Mother and St. Joseph should not be idle. These privations were an inexpressible consolation to the august Mary, not only because of her love of poverty, but also of her humility, through which she considered herself undeserving of the necessary aliments of life. She prayed the Most High only to supply the wants of St. Joseph.

The All-Powerful forgot not His poor, and,

while giving them occasion to augment their merits and to exercise their virtues, He gave them also food in season. Sometimes He inspired their neighbors or acquaintances to assist them by a gift. Oftener St. Elizabeth sent them succors from her own house; for, since the visit of the Queen of Heaven, she had resolved to help them, and our sweet Lady sent in return some work of her own hands. Our Holy Mistress sometimes exercised the power with which she was endowed over creatures, and the birds brought fruits or bread. Her happy spouse was frequently a witness of these events.

They were also sometimes assisted, in a wonderful manner, by the ministry of angels. But before recounting these, it is well to remark that the nobleness of heart, the faith, and the generosity of the saint were so exalted, that his soul was free from every taint of avarice, or sordid care for the future. And although the holy spouses devoted themselves to labor, they never demanded the price of their work, nor would they enter into bargains, for they did not labor from motives of interest, but to exercise charity towards those who had need of it, leaving the acknowledgment of it to their discretion.

When some payment was made to them, they received it not as a price or recompense, but as

an alms. It often happened that no recompense was offered for their work, and that they found themselves entirely destitute of food, and then the Lord provided it. One day, when their usual dinner hour was past, and no morsel of food was to be found in the house, they remained a long time in prayer and thanksgiving to the divine Majesty, for this affliction. During this time the holy angels prepared a repast. They arranged the table and placed thereon fruits, bread of a very delicate kind, fish, and a sort of conserve of wonderful sweetness and excellence; and then some of these blessed spirits went to call their Queen—others, St. Joseph. Each of them recognized the heavenly gifts, and, with holy tears of joy, renewed their thanksgivings to the Most High. At length they partook of the repast, which, being finished, they united in chanting praises, truly sublime, to the beneficent giver of every good gift. The august Mary and her spouse often experienced wonders of this character, for there were no witnesses from whom it was necessary they should be concealed. The Lord was very liberal towards them, whom He had appointed administrators of the most wonderful prodigies which had ever been wrought. It is necessary to remark, that when our blessed Lady composed canticles of praise, either alone, or with St.

Joseph or the angels, we are to understand that they were always new, like those composed by St. Hannah, mother of Samuel; Moses; Hezekiah, and other prophets. If they had been written, they would form a large volume, which would have been the admiration of the world.

The providence of the Most High declares himself Protector of the humble who confide in Him, because the Divine Majesty regards them with love. He is pleased with them—He bears them in His bosom—He is attentive to all their desires and all their pains. The august Mary and St. Joseph were very poor, and often found themselves in great want, but never did they allow the poison of avarice or cupidity to enter their hearts. They sought the glory of God alone, abandoning themselves entirely to His most loving care.

We ought to be content with what is necessary, and to be convinced that the providence of our Creator can never fail. If He be slow sometimes to send us His help, we should not be afflicted nor lose hope. He who has abundance ought not to fix his hopes upon it. We should attribute to God both abundance and poverty, and make a holy use of both. Let us practise this doctrine, and abandon ourselves to Providence, and nothing that is needful for us can ever be wanting.

CHAPTER VII.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE BIRTH OF THE INFANT JESUS.
—EDICT OF AUGUSTUS.—THE BLESSED MARY AND ST.
JOSEPH GO TO BETHLEHEM.

THE Mother of the eternal Word, the holy Mary, seeing the period of the birth of the Infant God approach, would not undertake to make the necessary preparations for it, without the commands of her husband, and the will of God. Although she was able to decide for herself in whatever concerned the maternal office, she preferred to practice the duties of an obedient and most faithful servant. She therefore consulted her holy spouse, St. Joseph. "It is time," she said, "to begin the preparations for the birth of my most blessed Son. With your permission I will provide the swaddling clothes to receive Him. I have some linen, spun by myself, which will serve for a part, if you will seek for the finest and softest that can be found for the rest. And that all may be well done, let us offer a special prayer to His Divine

Majesty that we may do whatever is most agreeable to Him.”

St. Joseph replied: “If it were necessary to give the purest of my blood to testify my readiness to render service to my God, and to do what you request, I should esteem myself happy to pour it out in the cruellest torments. Order all as it seems best, for I desire to obey you as your servant.” While they were engaged in prayer, the Most High replied to each in particular by the same voice. “I have descended from heaven to earth to elevate humility, and to debase pride—to honor poverty, and to make riches contemptible. For this reason, it is my will that you treat me in the humanity which I have assumed, in all things exterior, as if I were the child of both of you—and interiorly you will recognize in me the Son of my eternal Father, and true God, with the veneration and love due to Me, being man and God at the same time.”

The august Mary and St. Joseph were confirmed by this divine voice in the wisdom that should guide their actions in all the services which they were to render to the Infant God. They resolved to practise the most sublime and perfect mode of honoring their true God, and never among mere creatures was He so perfectly

honored. But before the eyes of the world they treated Him as if they were conjointly His parents, because it was the Lord's will that men should so believe. The celestial inhabitants were in admiration of the conduct of the holy spouses as we shall relate further on. They resolved also to devote to the Infant God all the services which their condition admitted, without attracting observation, so that the secret of the great King should be concealed; neither should he want for any thing, for, in ministering to Him, they could manifest their ardent love so far as it was possible.

St. Joseph, having received payment for some of his work, purchased, according to the wishes of his spouse, two pieces of cloth, one white, and the other nearer violet than gray—the best that could be found. Our lovely Lady made of them swaddling clothes for her most holy child. She made little shirts of the linen that she had spun during the early period of her marriage, with the intention of offering it at the temple. Happily her intention was changed; nevertheless she made an offering of what was left. The blessed Virgin had woven this linen on her knees, with tears of an inexpressible devotion. St. Joseph also purchased flowers and aromatics, from which the holy Mother com-

posed the most delicious perfume that ever was made. With this she sprinkled the swaddling clothes consecrated to the Victim, and, folding them, she placed them in a case which she and St. Joseph carried with them to Bethlehem, as we shall see.

It is hardly necessary to remark, that all these works recounted here ought not to be regarded simply as facts. Their objects, and the intentions which inspired them, redolent of sanctity, and enriched with the highest perfection, must be taken into view. The divine Mother, her heart all glowing with love, offered all the sacrifices which the ancient law contained in figure. She realized, in truth, the ancient figures, by the exercise of virtues and acts both interior and exterior. Her happy spouse, on his part, accompanied her in many of them.

If the smallest portion of grace that a creature, whoever he may be, receives, by means of a virtue that he has practised, is worth more than all the universe, who can estimate its greatness in her who surpassed the merits of the highest Seraphim? Our holy Lady saw the humanity united to the Divinity in the person of the Word, saw all the interior acts of the most holy soul of her divine Son, and the prayers that He offered for her, for St. Joseph, for all

the human race, and especially for the predestinate.

The Most High had determined, by His immutable will, that the only Son of the Father should be born at Bethlehem. The ancient prophets had long since announced it. The Lord disposed all things for the accomplishment of His divine decree; and it was by an edict of Cæsar Augustus, who commanded, as it is recorded by St. Luke, a census to be made of the whole world. It consisted in acknowledging the authority of the Emperor of Rome, and paying a certain tribute. To effect this, every one was obliged to inscribe himself on the register of his native city.

This edict being published at Nazareth, St. Joseph was informed of it. Returning home, in much trouble, he related to his blessed spouse what had happened. The most prudent Virgin replied: "The edict of an earthly potentate ought not to disturb you in this manner, since the Sovereign of heaven and earth takes care of all things that belong to us. His Providence will assist us. Let us abandon ourselves with confidence to His guidance."

The holy Virgin was instructed in all the mysteries of her divine Son, and she knew that He was to be born in Bethlehem, poor, and a

stranger; but she said nothing of this to St. Joseph. They conferred together upon what they ought to do, for the period of the birth of the Infant God approached. At length St. Joseph said to his spouse: "It seems to me that I cannot be dispensed from executing this edict of the emperor. And although it would suffice to go alone, I dare not leave you, for I should not have a moment of repose—my heart would be in perpetual alarm. It would be risking too much to propose to you to accompany me to Bethlehem; it would expose you, too evidently, to danger. This apprehension gives me great pain. Present, I entreat you, my supplications to the Most High, that He may not separate me from you."

The humble Mary obeyed the request of St. Joseph only to prove her obedience, for she was not ignorant of the Divine will. She therefore laid the desires of her faithful spouse before the Lord, who replied to her: "Obey my servant Joseph in what he has proposed and desires. Bear him company in this journey. I will be with you, for it is my will that you should go." The Lord ordered nine thousand angels to join the thousand who formed her guard.

Our blessed Lady confided to St. Joseph this response, and declared that it was the will of

the Most High that she should accompany him to Bethlehem. The saintly man was full of joy, and expressed his humble gratitude for this favor. He said to his spouse: "I have no other anxiety in this journey except the pain which it will cause to you. But I hope to find relations and friends who will receive us with kindness." The kind heart of the good man induced him to believe this, but the Lord had disposed otherwise. The saint was mistaken in his expectations, and suffered much from the disappointment.

Our sweet Lady forebore to reveal to St. Joseph what was already known to her touching the event to be accomplished. They appointed the day of departure, and St. Joseph went to engage a beast of burden. It was very difficult to find one, because of the great number of persons who were going to their different cities to be enrolled, in obedience to the imperial edict. At length he found a little ass, which, if he could have known it, was the happiest of all his race, since he carried the Queen of the Universe, and the King of kings, and was present at the birth of the Infant God. During five days the august Mary and St. Joseph were engaged in preparations for the journey. Their provisions consisted of bread, fruits,

and fish, as in going to the house of Zachariah. And as the most prudent Virgin knew that she would be long absent from the house, she secretly arranged her affairs according to the will of God. Finally they recommended it to a person who was to take charge of it until their return.

The hour of departure arrived. The blessed Joseph, who treated his beloved spouse with renewed respect, sought, like a vigilant and faithful servant, to find reasons to serve and please her. He entreated her, with much affection, to make known to him all that she desired for her comfort, and for the good pleasure of the Lord whom she bore in her virginal bosom. Our Queen meekly accepted the holy affection of her spouse: she even consoled and animated him to endure the fatigue of the roads, for His Divine Majesty willed that they should accept the inconveniences of the journey with an equable and joyous heart.

Before setting out, our blessed Lady knelt to ask the benediction of St. Joseph. The man of God excused himself because of her dignity, but the always invincible humility of the august Virgin conquered, and obliged him to give it. She then prayed him to offer himself anew to her most holy Son, and to obtain for her His

divine grace. After these holy preparations they set out for Bethlehem, in the depths of winter, which made the journey more painful and more inconvenient.

The august Mary and the glorious St. Joseph left Nazareth to go to Bethlehem! Poor and humble travellers they were, in the eyes of the world, which had no more esteem for them than it had for humility and poverty. But, O! wonderful secrets of the Most High! hidden from the proud, and impenetrable to the wisdom of the flesh, our travellers were not alone, nor poor, nor despised. They had a magnificent suite, inestimable riches, and a glory unparalleled. They were the highest objects of the care of the eternal Father, and of His immense love. They bore with them the treasures of Heaven, and the Divinity itself.

All the celestial court revered them. The insensible creatures recognized the living ark of the Testament far better than the waters of the Jordan recognized that which was only the type of her. With them were the ten thousand angels, appointed for His Divine Majesty and His holy Mother. The incomparable Mary and her saintly spouse marched with this regal train, unseen by the eyes of mortals. The angels chanted canticles to the Lord, and to His blessed Mother,

acknowledging her sometimes as a car, incorruptible and living—sometimes as the fertile ear, which contains the living wheat—sometimes as a richly freighted vessel.

The holy travellers were five days on the way ; for the careful husband would not make long journeys. There was no night for our Queen during this time, for the angels threw so bright a radiance around her that the light was equal to the most serene day. St. Joseph enjoyed this favor, and also the view of the angels. They formed a celestial choir, in which our august Lady and her spouse responded to the blessed spirits by canticles and hymns of praise.

The Lord united to these favors some sufferings. The great numbers of persons who thronged the hostelries to obey the imperial edict, were causes of much pain to the modesty of the saintly Mary and her spouse. They were thrust aside as sordid poor, and received less attention than others who seemed richer. Thus our holy travellers, weary and worn, were often received with harsh words at these hostelries. Sometimes they were even sent away as troublesome, and unworthy of consideration, at others, the Mistress of heaven and earth was put into a corner of the vestibule—and even this could not always be secured, and she and St. Joseph

retired to places still less proper or decent in the world's estimation.

The troop of angels followed them every where, so that the couch of the true Solomon was guarded from the alarms or surprises of the night. The faithful spouse, seeing the mistress of the universe so well cared for, reposed in peace so as to recover a little from the fatigues of the day; for it frequently happened that, being in the most rigorous season of the year, and arriving at the hostelries half frozen by the snow and rain, they were obliged to take refuge among the animals, because men gave them nothing more commodious.

The Mistress of creatures might easily have commanded the winds and snows, but she forebore, that she might imitate her divine Son in His sufferings. The faithful St. Joseph, nevertheless, took great care to put her under shelter, and also the holy angels; in particular the prince St. Michael, who always assisted on the right of the Queen. Knowing that it was the will of the Lord, they sometimes protected her from the rigor of the weather, and rendered other services to our sweet Lady and to the blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus.

CHAPTER VIII.

ARRIVAL AT BETHLEHEM.—BIRTH OF JESUS IN A GROTT
TO.—ST. JOSEPH IS PRESENT AT THIS MYSTERY.

OUR holy travellers, the blessed Mary and St. Joseph, reached Bethlehem on the fifth day of their journey, on Saturday, about four o'clock in the afternoon—the hour when, at the winter solstice, the sun is near his setting, and the night approaches. They entered the town to seek a shelter, and having made inquiries, not only at the inns, but among their relations and friends, they were refused with rudeness and contempt. Our august Lady followed her spouse, who went from house to house—from door to door, in the midst of the crowds who arrived. And, although she knew that the houses of men, like their hearts, were closed against them, she willingly endured all this mortification in obedience to St. Joseph. At the same time it was more painful to find herself in the midst of such a crowd, than to be disap-

pointed in finding a lodging. In wandering about the city, they found the house where the register was kept, and, to avoid the necessity of returning there, they inserted their names, and paid the tribute. Then, pursuing their way to find a place of refuge, they applied at more than fifty houses, and were every where refused. The holy angels admired the wonderful mysteries of the Lord, the patience and sweetness of the Virgin Mother, and the insensibility of men.

It was nearly nine o'clock in the evening when the faithful St. Joseph, deeply grieved, turning towards his prudent spouse, "My courage fails me," he said, "to find not only that I cannot lodge you according to your merits, but that I cannot even secure for you such a shelter as is rarely or never refused to the poorest and most contemptible applicant. Doubtless some mystery underlies this. I remember to have seen, without the city walls, a grotto where the shepherds are accustomed to fold their flocks. Let us go there, for if the place is not occupied, you will there receive from heaven the hospitality which men refuse to us."

The most prudent Virgin replied: "Do not afflict yourself, my spouse. The place you speak of is quite conformable to my desires. Change your tears into joy, for we love and we possess

poverty, which is the inestimable treasure of my holy Son. He comes from heaven to seek it. Let us go with pleasure whither the Lord conducts us." Immediately the holy angels guided the saintly pair towards this place; they found it unoccupied, and, full of celestial joy, they praised the Lord.

The palace which the King of kings and Lord of lords had prepared in this world to receive His only Son, incarnate for men, was the lowly and humble grotto where the most pure Mary and St. Joseph had retired, after having been repulsed by all, as it has been related. This place was so unpromising, that, in spite of the extraordinary affluence of strangers at Bethlehem, no one had deigned to occupy it. In fact, it was suitable only to the masters of humility and poverty, and the wisdom of the eternal Father had reserved it for them.

The august Mary and Joseph entered the place, and, by the radiance of the angels, they saw that it was as poor and solitary as they could have wished. They then fell upon their knees, praising the Lord with thanksgivings for this blessing. The grotto was formed out of the natural rock, and was so unequal and rough, that it was fitted only for the lodging of animals.

The angelic spirits assumed a corporeal and

human form. St. Joseph saw them, for it was proper that, on this occasion, he should enjoy this favor, either to diminish his pain, or to animate his spirit and elevate it for the events which the Lord had prepared for this same night. Our blessed Lady, informed of the mystery which was about to be accomplished, resolved herself to cleanse the grotto. The holy Joseph, attentive to the dignity of his admirable spouse, entreated her to leave this care to him. He therefore began to sweep and purify every part of it, and our humble Lady seconded him to the best of her power. The angels also assisted them, until in a short time the grotto was brought into a decent condition, and they filled it with a delightful perfume.

St. Joseph kindled a fire, of which there was much need, for the weather was very cold. They afterwards supped from the remains of food still left; but our sweet Lady ate only on the pressing solicitations of her spouse, whom she desired to obey in all things. At the close of their repast, they returned thanks to God as was their custom, and afterwards discoursed together concerning the mystery of the incarnate Word.

The most prudent Virgin knew that the hour approached. She entreated St. Joseph to seek repose, for the night was far advanced. The

man of God yielded to her solicitations, praying her to follow his example. In order to provide for her the means of rest, he arranged their luggage in such a way as to make up a species of crib, on the floor of the grotto, and, leaving to the august Mary this sort of bed, he withdrew into an angle at the entrance to engage in meditation and prayer. The Holy Spirit came to visit him, and he felt himself drawn by a gentle force that rapt him in ecstasy, during which the events of this night were manifested to him. He remained in this ecstasy until called by his holy spouse. This mysterious slumber of Joseph was more sublime and more fortunate than that of Adam in paradise.

[This would be the place to speak of the wonderful birth of the Infant God, and to admire the prodigies of every kind that accompanied it; but since it is impossible to relate all, we prefer to confine ourselves to what regards St. Joseph exclusively. The reader who desires to be informed of all these circumstances, is referred to the great work of Maria d'Agreda. It is not without lively regret that we omit here the narration of those facts which have commanded the admiration of heaven and earth.]

The evangelist St. Luke relates that the Virgin Mother, having brought forth her first born

Son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger. He does not mention who placed Him in her arms. But the two princes, St. Michael and St. Gabriel, were the ministers on this occasion, and they presented Him to her with as great a reverence as when the priest exposes the holy host. The holy Mother received the Infant God into her arms from these two celestial princes. She served as the altar and sanctuary, which the angels of her guard approached to adore their Creator, and venerate that youthful virgin of fifteen, so worthy to dispense these great mysteries. It was time for the prudent Lady to call her faithful spouse, then in a state of divine ecstasy, where he knew, by revelation, all the mysteries of the sacred birth of this night. It was but just, that, before any other mortal, he should enjoy the honor to see, and the consolation to adore, by means of his senses, the Word made man, since he had been chosen to be the faithful guardian of this sublime mystery.

The saint returned from his ecstasy, and, having recovered the use of his senses, the first object that met his view was the Infant God, in the arms of His Virgin Mother, and leaning upon her sacred face and chaste bosom. He adored Him, on this living altar, with the most pro-

found humility, and with warm tears of tenderness. He kissed His feet with new joy, and with such rapturous affection that, but for the divine assistance, he could not have survived it. Certainly, but for the help of God, he must have lost his senses upon this occasion.

After St. Joseph had adored the Infant, the most discreet Mother asked permission of her Son to seat herself, for she had, until then, remained kneeling. The saint gave her the swaddling clothes, which they had brought, and she wrapped the Infant in them with the highest possible reverence, devotion, and neatness. Afterwards, as it is recorded by St. Luke, the evangelist, she laid Him in the manger, carefully placing therein a little straw and hay, to serve for the first bed of the Incarnate Word on earth. It was then that, guided by the Divine will, an ox came from the field, and joining the ass, which they had brought with them, they warmed, by their breath, the Infant God whom men had refused to receive. And thus was miraculously accomplished the prophecy of Isaiah: "*The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel hath not known me.*" Is. i. 3.

The heavenly courtiers, having celebrated, in the grotto of Bethlehem, the birth of their Incarnate God, and our Redeemer, many of them

were sent to different places to announce the happy tidings to those who were prepared to hear them. The prince St. Michael was directed to the fathers in Limbo, to inform them that the only Son of the Eternal Father, who was made man, had just been born. He bore messages, on the part of the blessed Mother, to St. Joachim and St. Anna. For this numerous assembly of the just it was the day of great consolation.

Another angel was sent to St. Elizabeth and her son John, who adored their Incarnate God. As soon as St. Elizabeth heard of it, she instantly despatched a messenger to Bethlehem with presents to the Mother of the Infant God, consisting of a small sum of money, linen, and other things, to supply the wants of the poor Mother and her saintly spouse. But the messenger had no orders but to visit her cousin and St. Joseph, to leave her gifts, to inform himself of their necessities, and quickly to bring her news of them. On his return, he recounted to St. Elizabeth the poverty of her relative, of the Child and Joseph, and the strange feelings that he had experienced while with them.

Other angels also went to announce the same glad tidings to Zachariah, to Simeon, and to Anna, the prophetess, because the Lord found each pre-

pared to receive them with advantage. All the just then living on the earth, although unacquainted with this mystery, were, nevertheless, sensible of its divine effects when the Saviour was born. To some, indeed, the Lord revealed it, and of this number were the Magi, who were inspired with renewed desires to seek Him.

The neighboring shepherds were blest above all others. They were of those who waited for and desired the coming of the Messiah; and, humble and poor, they were engaged in watching their flocks at the time of the birth. Hence they were in a state of holy preparation: they merited to be the first-called. The archangel St. Gabriel was sent to them. They were troubled at seeing him, but the celestial prince reassured them. Illuminated by the Divine wisdom, they set off for Bethlehem, to witness the miracle of which they had just heard. On entering the grotto, they found, as it is said by St. Luke, Mary and Joseph, and the Infant laid in a manger.

The divine Infant looked upon them, and, prostrate, they adored the incarnate Word. The blessed Mother was attentive to all. She spoke with the shepherds, and instructed them. They made, afterwards, several other visits, during the sojourn of the holy family in the grotto,

and brought them presents proportioned to their poverty. They did not speak of what they had seen until after the blessed Mary, the Infant, and St. Joseph had departed from Bethlehem. Their testimony was not believed by all; but Herod believed, only not with a holy faith. They were, nevertheless, saints, and filled with divine science, even to their death.

The coming of the incarnate Word was terrible only for hell. Many things were concealed from Lucifer and his agents, which he might naturally have known; but he considered it an idle fancy to believe that the Word would come and establish His power in so obscure and humble a manner. The Mother of wisdom penetrated all the deceit of Lucifer. She glorified the Lord, and offered prayers for all of the human race, who, by their sins, had made themselves unworthy to recognize the Light who had just been born to redeem them.

CHAPTER IX.

SENTIMENTS OF THE AUGUST MOTHER AND ST. JOSEPH FOR
THE INFANT GOD.—THE CIRCUMCISION.—THE SPOUSES
GIVE HIM THE NAME OF JESUS.

DURING the time that our august Lady abode in the grotto, which was an incommo-
dious place, and exposed to the inclemency
of the weather, she took the greatest care to pro-
tect her tender and sweet Child. She had
brought coverings with her for this purpose, and
she held Him almost constantly in her arms,
except when she left Him in those of St. Joseph.
She wished to afford him the gratification to aid
her in this service, and that he should serve the
Incarnate God in the office of father.

The first time the saint received the In-
fant God, our blessed Lady said to him, "Re-
ceive within your arms, my spouse, the Creator
of heaven and earth. Enjoy His sweet com-
panionship, so that my Lord and my God may
take delight in you." And speaking interiorly

with the divine Infant she said, "Rest in the arms of your servant and friend Joseph, my spouse. It pains me to be without you for a single instant, but I wish to share my blessing with him who is worthy of it." The faithful St. Joseph, conscious of this new happiness, humbled himself profoundly. "Queen of the universe," he replied, "how can I dare, I who am so unworthy, to hold in my arms the same God in whose presence the pillars of heaven tremble. Supply my deficiencies, my baseness, and pray His divine Majesty to regard me with clemency." The holy man, hesitating between his desire to receive the Infant God and the respectful fear that held him back, offered to Him acts of love, faith, humility and respect. He fell on his knees, and received Him with a holy trembling and inconceivable veneration from the hands of His blessed mother, shedding gentle tears of joy. The Infant God regarded him with a caressing air; and at the same time renovated his soul by His divine influence. The faithful Joseph, finding himself enriched by so many and such magnificent benefits, gave utterance to new canticles of praise. After enjoying for a time the ineffable delight of folding the Lord in his arms, he restored Him to His blessed mother. They both placed themselves on their

knees to give or to receive Him, and at all times with the same veneration. They made three genuflexions before approaching His divine Majesty, kissing the earth with the greatest humility and adoration.

Much more might be said of the veneration observed by the blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and the angelic spirits towards the Infant God. When the saint was occupied, St. Michael or St. Gabriel bore Him in their arms. No tongue can do justice to the canticles of praise and glory which the Queen of Heaven chanted with the angels and St. Joseph, who, of all mortals, was most happy and most favored in this respect. Besides these favors, he received another, most precious to his soul. His most gentle spouse, in speaking with him of the Infant, called Him often, *your son*, not that He was really the son of St. Joseph, for He was the Son only of the Eternal Father, and of His Virgin Mother. This favor was an unspeakable joy to the Saint, and his spouse often renewed it.

In regard to the circumcision of her Son, the wise Mary had no express order from the Eternal Father. She considered, on the one hand, that her holy Son came to confirm the law in fulfilling it himself, and more than this, to suffer for mankind: hence He would not refuse the pain of circumcision.

But, on the other hand, maternal love and compassion led her to desire the exemption of her beloved Son from the sufferings consequent upon it. She confided her sentiments regarding this mystery to her chaste spouse, who so tenderly sympathized in these mingled feelings, that he was moved to tears.

Before the eight days after His birth were accomplished, the Queen of Heaven addressed herself in prayer to the Divine Majesty, who thus responded: "You know well that you must offer Me your son and Mine to endure this, and other far greater sufferings. Let Him then shed His blood, and give me the first fruits of the eternal salvation of men."

The august Mary then explained to St. Joseph, with rare prudence, the reasons why he should prepare himself for the circumcision of the Infant God. She reminded him that the time prescribed by the law approached, and that they must submit to it, having no order to the contrary. Her saintly spouse replied: "That he would conform himself to the Divine pleasure in all things made manifest by the common law." He then inquired how the circumcision should be performed.

The Blessed Virgin said, that, in fulfilling the law, she would not be separated from the Infant,

nor place Him in charge of any other person, but that she would support Him in her own arms. Yet since, from His temperament, His pain would be greater than that of ordinary children, it would be necessary to be prepared with remedies for the wound. The careful mother prayed St. Joseph also to seek a vial of crystal in which to gather the precious blood, which she wished to preserve; and she had linen cloths also ready, so that not a drop should fall on the ground. St. Joseph then went to call a priest, whom he begged to come to the grotto to perform the rite of circumcision, as being the legitimate minister for this office.

The august Mary and St. Joseph discoursed together respecting the name which they should give to the Infant God in the circumcision. "When the angel," said St. Joseph, "declared to me the great mystery of the incarnation, he commanded me to call your divine Son *Jesus*." The Virgin Mother replied: "He made the same declaration to me when the Word was made flesh in my bosom. Therefore we will request the priest to give Him this name on the register of circumcised children."

While the Queen of Heaven and St. Joseph held this discourse, innumerable troops of angels descended from heaven in human form, and

of incomparable beauty. They bore a device, upon which was engraved the name of Jesus. The two archangels, St. Michael and St. Gabriel, each held in their hands a luminous globe of wondrous beauty and splendor, within which was written the most holy name of Jesus. They thus addressed their Queen: "This name which you see is that of your Son. The most Holy Trinity have given it to your only Son our Lord, with power to save the human race. He will chastise His enemies, and reduce them to serve as His foot-stool. He will exalt His friends, and place them in glory at His right hand. But all this must be purchased by His sufferings and His blood."

The most happy St. Joseph saw and heard all. He was unable to penetrate the mysteries of the redemption like the mother of wisdom, but he discovered some of them. The holy spouses, were filled with joy and admiration—in brief, there passed between them, or in their presence, at various times, so many wonderful things, that it would be impossible to convey any just idea of them.

There was at Bethlehem a synagogue, not for offering sacrifices, which could be offered only at Jerusalem, but to read there the Law of Moses. The priest, who was minister of the law,

was also of the rite of circumcision. Nevertheless, any one could circumcise. Our august Mother desired, because of the dignity of the Infant, that the priest should be the minister, and for this reason it was that the happy St. Joseph summoned him. The priest came to the grotto. At the view of the Mother and the Child his heart was sensibly touched with singular devotion and tenderness. The happiness which he enjoyed in touching the flesh of the Infant God renewed him by a secret power, and rendered him holy and agreeable to the supreme Lord of the universe.

In order to perform the circumcision with all the respect that was possible in such a place, St. Joseph lighted candles. The priest requested the Virgin Mother to withdraw for a little space, to avoid the pain of witnessing the sacrifice, but she prayed the minister of God to permit her to assist at the sacrament. The priest then consented that she should support the Infant in her arms. Thus she was the consecrated altar upon which the verities represented by the ancient sacrifices began to be accomplished.

The blessed Mother unswathed her divine child, and, drawing from her bosom a linen cloth, she placed it under the Infant, so that it should receive the blood and the relics of the circum-

cision. The priest accomplished his office, and the Infant God offered to the Eternal Father three things of such infinite value, that each would suffice for the redemption of a thousand worlds: the first was the form of a sinner; the second, the pain He suffered as man; the third, His most ardent love, with which He began to shed His blood for the redemption of men. The tender and affectionate Mother gathered the sacred relics and the blood shed upon the linen, and placed the whole in the care of St. Joseph.

The priest inquired of the holy spouses what name they intended to give to the circumcised child. Our sweet Lady, always attentive to the respect which she bore to St. Joseph, requested him to declare it. The Saint, turning towards her with veneration, intimated that so sweet a name should be pronounced by her lips—when, by a divine disposition, Mary and Joseph said: at the same moment, "*Jesus is His name.*" The priest replied, "You are of one mind in this, the name you give to the Infant is great." In writing it he was touched by a great interior tenderness, saying to them, "I assure you that I believe this child will be a great prophet of the Lord." The august spouses replied to the priest by an humble acknowledgment, and, hav-

ing given him the wax lights, and some other trifles as offerings, he departed.

The holy Virgin and her spouse remained alone with the Infant. They celebrated anew the mystery of the circumcision by canticles, which they composed in honor of the most sweet name of Jesus. The careful Mother dressed the wound of the Infant God with the usual remedies. She invited the angels to sing. The ministers of the Most High obeyed their Queen, and with heavenly melody they chanted the same canticles which she and St. Joseph had composed in praise of the most sweet name of Jesus.

13

CHAPTER X.

THE ROYAL MAGI COME TO ADORE THE INFANT GOD IN THE GROTTTO OF THE NATIVITY.—ST. JOSEPH IS PRESENT AT THIS MYSTERY.

OUR blessed Lady knew, by infused science from the Holy Scriptures, that the Magi would come from the East, to acknowledge and adore her most holy Son. She had been informed of this approaching mystery by the angel who had been sent to these kings to announce the birth of the incarnate Word. St. Joseph had received no intelligence of this mystery, because it had not been revealed to him: therefore, the circumcision having been celebrated, the holy man proposed to our sweet Lady to quit their poor abode, for now they could easily find some hostelry in Bethlehem to which they could retire, until the time should come to present the Infant in the temple of Jerusalem.

This most faithful and careful spouse was in continual distress at not being able to procure for the Son and His mother the comforts which

they had need of, yet he referred all to the wishes of his spouse. The humble Mary replied, without revealing the mystery: "I am ready to do all that you command; do whatever you judge to be best." This virtuous indifference threw St. Joseph into greater perplexity, for he had hoped that his spouse would decide what should be done.

While they conferred together, the Lord answered by the ministry of the princes, St. Michael and St. Gabriel: "The Divine will ordains that the three kings who come from the East to seek the King of Heaven shall adore in this same place the Word made man. It is ten days since they began their journey, and they will very soon be here." By this new information, St. Joseph was consoled and informed of the will of the Lord. The blessed Virgin remarked that, "Although this place may be poor and uncomfortable to the eyes of the world, it is, nevertheless, precious, since the Lord is content with it." These words of our prudent Lady afforded a sensible joy to St. Joseph, who replied, "That they could, perhaps, remain in this holy place until the day of the presentation in the temple, without returning first to Nazareth, because of the distance and the severity of the season; and if they should be obliged by stress

of weather to leave it, they might easily find a shelter in Jerusalem, since it was distant only two leagues from Bethlehem.

The august Mary conformed in all things to the wishes of her husband. She prepared the grotto for the reception of the Magi, as well as the poverty of the place admitted, and used her power over creatures to protect her Son from the rigor of the winter. Neither the wind, the snow, nor the rain dared to approach Him, but paused at a safe distance. The Mother, nevertheless, suffered from the cold; while St. Joseph enjoyed, with the Infant God, the benign effects of that privilege; but he knew not that this exemption was owing to the commandment of his blessed spouse.

It often happened that while our sweet Lady held the Infant God in her arms, she knelt to adore Him. She entrusted Him to St. Joseph with the respect which we have already mentioned. She embraced His feet, and when she desired to kiss Him on the face, she requested, in an interior voice, His consent. In all she was most prudent, most perfect, without deficiency or excess. But there were between the Infant God and His Virgin Mother, other caresses far more sublime. She was made acquainted with the interior acts of the most holy soul of her Son.

His humanity was manifested to her as in a luminous crystal, and the blessed Virgin beheld the hypostatic union, the soul of the Divine Child and all its operations. Then our humble Lady imitated Him in His works, and in His prayers.

The most happy St. Joseph enjoyed not only the favors and caresses of the Infant God, as an ocular witness of those which passed between the Son and the Mother, but he was found worthy to receive them from Jesus himself. When our blessed Lady was engaged in preparing their food, or in other household occupations, she placed the Infant God in his hands. While St. Joseph held Him, his pious soul thrilled with divine emotions, for the Infant Jesus regarded him with satisfaction; He reclined on his bosom, and bestowed on him marks of infantine affection.

Whenever the august Mary separated herself from the Infant God, she took with her the relics of the circumcision, which St. Joseph usually carried about him for his own consolation. Thus the two spouses were always enriched—the sacred Virgin by her divine Son, and the happy Joseph by the precious blood that had been shed, and the Deified flesh. They preserved these holy relics in the little vial of crystal, which the saint had purchased. Our blessed Lady placed in it the flesh that was removed,

and the blood that was shed in the circumcision, for she had cut out all those places of the line, which had received it. She afterwards placed this precious deposit in charge of the Apostles, and left it to them as the property of the holy Church.

The Magi kings, who came to seek the new-born Infant God, were natives of a country east of Palestine. David, and Balaam, also, had prophesied their coming. They were very learned in the natural sciences, and in the Scriptures of the people of God. They had some belief in the advent of the Messiah. For the rest, they were men of great probity, loving truth and practising justice. They were neighbors, and lived in intimate friendship and faithful correspondence. They had noble, great, and generous souls, free from the avarice which too frequently degrades the hearts of princes. They were warned, by the ministry of angels, of the birth of the incarnate Word. With clear and abundant instructions, the guardian angel of each declared to them in a dream, and at the same time, the mystery of the incarnation and the birth of the Redeemer. They knew that this new-born Infant was true God and true man, whom they ought to adore as their Creator and Redeemer, and that the star, which Balaam

had predicted, would be given as their guide to conduct them to the place where He would be found.

The Magi kings awoke, and in spirit they adored the immutable being of God, and glorified His mercy for that the Word had taken human flesh in the bosom of a Virgin, to redeem the world, and they prepared to depart, that they might find Him. At the same time, the holy angel formed a star which was suspended in the air, to conduct the kings to the grotto. In leaving their homes they saw it, and followed the route which it indicated. Thus guided, they arrived at Jerusalem, when it disappeared. They then inquired where was the King of the Jews, who had just been born.

Herod, as it is recorded by St. Matthew, assembled the chief priests and scribes, who replied: "According to the prophecy of Micah, the Messiah is to be born at Bethlehem." Herod called the Magi, and inquired of them the time when they had first observed the appearance of the star. He then said to them: "When you shall have found this Child, inform me of it, so that I, too, may go and adore Him." On passing out of Jerusalem, the Magi again saw the star, which stood over the grotto of the nativity.

The Lord had made known to the august Mother the coming of the Magi, and when she heard they were near the grotto, she mentioned it to St. Joseph, in order that he might remain at her side, which he did. Although the Evangelists make no mention of it, it is nevertheless certain that St. Joseph was present when the kings adored the Infant Jesus. The Magi already knew that St. Joseph was not His real father, and that His mother was a Virgin. The admirable Mother awaited these pious kings with the Infant God in her arms. An extraordinary splendor shone forth from the Infant, and our sweet Lady was exceedingly beautiful. They were lost in admiration, adoring the Infant, and acknowledging Him as true God and true man. Then rising up, they bent the knee before the Mother in testimony of their veneration, and offered their felicitations on the happiness that she enjoyed in being the Mother of the Son of the Eternal Father.

The three kings prostrated themselves anew, and adored the Infant Jesus. Afterwards they addressed themselves to St. Joseph, and congratulated him on his happiness in being the spouse of the Mother of God. Having passed three hours in the grotto, the kings requested permission to go and seek a lodging in the city,

to sojourn there. Several persons accompanied the Magi, but they, alone, participated in the effects of grace and knowledge. The holy Mary and Joseph remained with God, and glorified the Divine Majesty in new canticles of praise, because His holy name began to be known and adored among the nations.

The three kings left the grotto to seek repose in a hostelry of Bethlehem. They passed a great part of the night in discourse, intermingled with many tears and sighs, respecting what they had seen in the Infant God and His holy Mother. They ceased not to admire the splendor that shone from the Infant Jesus, the modesty of the blessed Mother, the holiness of the happy St. Joseph.

During this conference, the Magi were not unmindful of the great destitution of Jesus, Mary, and St. Joseph, in the grotto, and they therefore sent to them, by their servants, liberal supplies of provisions. The august Mary and Joseph received them with gratitude, nor did they reply by empty thanks, but by efficacious benedictions. The Magi disposed themselves to sleep, and the angel warned them of the way in which they should proceed.

As soon as it was day they returned to the grotto of the nativity, to offer the gifts

they had brought. They prostrated themselves before the celestial King, and adored Him with profound humility: afterwards, opening their treasures, as it is related in the Gospels, they offered to Him gold and frankincense and myrrh. Our blessed Mother received these gifts of the kings, and presented them to the Infant Jesus in their name. They also offered to the sweet Mother their services, their resources, and all that they possessed. Our prudent Lady thanked them for all these offers, but she would accept nothing. The kings then besought her not to forget them, which she promised. They asked the same of St. Joseph. Having received the benediction of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, they took leave, with such an effusion of tenderness and affection, that it seemed their hearts would melt. To avoid meeting Herod, they resolved not to pass through Jerusalem. All the remaining lives of these blessed kings were in harmony with their divine vocation.

After their departure, our Lady and St. Joseph chanted new canticles of praise. They compared these wonderful incidents with the Holy Scriptures, and with the prophecies of the Prophets and Patriarchs, and they saw, with unspeakable joy, that their predictions began to be accomplished in the Infant Jesus.

CHAPTER XI.

OUR LADY AND ST. JOSEPH LEAVE THE GROTTA OF THE NATIVITY, AND REMAIN AT BETHLEHEM UNTIL THE PRESENTATION OF THE INFANT JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.

AFTER the adoration of the Infant Jesus by the Magi, our saints resolved to quit the grotto, since nothing more was expected there. The prudent Mother said to St. Joseph: "My spouse, these presents, which the Magi have left for our God, ought not to be useless. I must not occupy myself with temporalities, therefore I pray you dispose of all as belonging to my Son and to you."

The faithful spouse replied, with his accustomed humility and meekness, "That it was but right she should distribute them herself." The blessed Virgin persisted, saying: "You ought to do it, to exercise charity towards the poor, who claim the part that belongs to them." After this humble contestation, the august Mary and St. Joseph decided to divide the gifts into

three parts; one for the temple at Jerusalem, another for the priest who had circumcised the Infant, the remainder for the poor.

The Almighty, to induce them to leave the grotto, inspired a poor woman, who was honest and charitable, to visit our Queen. She lived in a house that stood against the wall of the city, quite near the holy place. Having heard of the coming of the Magi, she inquired of the blessed Virgin if she knew that certain wise men, who were said to be three kings, were come to seek for the Messiah. Our Princess took occasion from this, to instruct her, without declaring the mystery of her Son; whereupon this woman offered them her house, pressing her strongly to accept the invitation, seeing the incommodities of the grotto for our Lady, her spouse, and the Child.

Our Queen did not refuse the offer. A little time afterwards she spoke of it to St. Joseph, and they determined to make their abode in that house until the time should come for the purification and the presentation in the temple. That which decided them was, that a crowd of people began to come to the grotto. Our sweet Lady, St. Joseph and the Infant, left it with much regret, because of their veneration for it, and directed their steps to the house of the poor

woman, who received them with the greatest cordiality. After they had quitted it, the Lord sent an angel to guard the grotto, and this angel still guards it with a flaming sword, so that no animal has entered it since that time. If he does not hinder the entrance of the enemies of the faith, it is by the secret judgment of the Most High. Christian princes could aid in this miracle if they set themselves with ardor to recover the holy places. It has been declared to me, that veneration for the Holy Land is one of the most powerful and efficacious means to establish and confirm the Catholic monarchies.

The august Mary prepared herself, by fervent desires, to offer in the temple her adorable Infant to the Eternal Father. She embellished her soul by the practice of the highest virtues. The Infant Jesus conversed with His Mother, but in an intelligible voice only when she was alone. Her holy spouse did not enjoy this happiness until a year after His birth.

During the time which our august Queen passed at Bethlehem, she was visited by many persons, who were nearly all of the poorest class. They spoke of the arrival of the Magi, and of the coming of the Messiah. By a disposition of divine Providence, the approaching birth was a subject of public conversation among the Jews.

The prudent Mother had various occasions to practise great virtues. Those good people held such fabulous discussions upon matters of religion, that the ingenuous St. Joseph smiled at them, but, at the same time, admired the impressive replies of our great Lady, and the divine wisdom with which she instructed them.

The Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph remained with the divine Infant, in their humble dwelling at Bethlehem, until the close of the forty days prescribed for presenting Him in the temple. This period being fulfilled, our Lady and St. Joseph prepared for the journey. They resolved to offer the only Son of the Eternal Father according to the law, knowing His desire to be submissive to the law, and to be offered to His divine Father. Having fixed the day of departure, they took leave of their pious hostess, whom they left crowned with celestial benedictions.

They went first to visit the grotto of the nativity. The blessed Mother gave the Infant to St. Joseph, and, prostrate on the earth, she venerated this holy place. Her holy spouse did the same, with inexpressible devotion. Then the Blessed Virgin requested leave of St. Joseph to make the journey barefooted, and to carry the holy Infant in her arms. Our august Lady usually wore a kind of shoes which covered the

feet. The thread was taken from a plant resembling hemp, which was suitable for the poor.

St. Joseph, having requested her to rise, thus replied: "The Son of the Eternal Father, whom I have within my arms, gives you His benediction. I am well pleased that you should go on foot, carrying Him, but not barefooted. Be content with your pious desire, which will be agreeable to the Lord, who has inspired it." St. Joseph sometimes used authority towards the august Mary, but it was always with great respect. He used this authority as head, only that she might not be deprived of the consolation she enjoyed in the practice of humility and obedience; and as the saint obeyed her in so doing, he mortified and humbled himself in commanding her, and thus both were obedient and humble.

St. Joseph refused to allow her to go to Jerusalem barefooted, because he feared the cold might injure her health; but his fears arose from his ignorance of the admirable nature of her virginal constitution. Our blessed Lady, implicitly obedient to her spouse, did not make the journey barefooted. They left the grotto, after having asked the benediction of the Infant God, who bestowed it, perceptibly, upon them. St. Joseph loaded the ass with the

package of swaddling clothes, and that portion of the gifts of the Magi which they had reserved as an offering at the temple. All the celestial court accompanied them, in visible forms. Our blessed Lady and her spouse enjoyed their vision. These heavenly spirits celebrated the mystery by new and admirable canticles, and, thus disposed, they traversed the two leagues which separated Bethlehem from Jerusalem. The weather was severe—nor did this happen without the particular providence of God. Nothing was to be seen but frost and ice, so that the Creator made Man trembled with cold, like one of mere human birth. He wept in the arms of His loving Mother. Our potent Queen addressed herself to the winds and elements, and commanded them, authoritatively, to become milder. They obeyed the order of their legitimate mistress for the Infant, without changing towards her.

During this time, and while our blessed Lady was on the way with the Infant Jesus, the chief priest, Simeon, had a revelation that the incarnate Word was coming to the temple, in His Mother's arms, to offer himself to God. The same revelation was made to the holy widow, Anna, and it was revealed to her, and the high priest, also, that St. Joseph was with his most

pure spouse. And having communicated to each other what had just been revealed to them, they agreed to send the steward of the temple to meet them, after having instructed him how to recognize our holy travellers. The steward executed the order he had received, which proved a great consolation to our august Queen and St. Joseph. The fortunate host left them in his house, and went to give an account of his mission to the high priest.

The saintly spouses formed their plans the same evening. Our ever-prudent Lady advised St. Joseph to go at once and present the gifts of the kings at the temple, so as to avoid attracting public attention. She also prayed him to bring, on his return, the turtle doves, which they intended to offer publicly the following day. St. Joseph executed all in such a manner that he seemed only an ordinary stranger, who offered myrrh, incense, and gold to the receiver of the gifts at the temple. He did not use any portion of them to purchase a lamb, because this would not have accorded with their poor and humble condition. Neither did they depart, in the least particular, from the poverty and humility which they held in such high esteem, even though it might have tended towards good and pious ends.

Simeon was, according to St. Luke, a just man, fearing God, and awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he should see Christ the Lord before his death. On that night he was instructed by Divine illumination, and discovered, with great clearness, all the mysteries of the incarnation and redemption of the human race. By the knowledge of these sublime revelations he was elevated above himself. The same night St. Anna had also a revelation of many of these mysteries, from which she received unspeakable consolation.

The day having come when the Son of Justice was to appear, our blessed Lady prepared the turtle doves and two lights. She then wrapped the infant Jesus in His swaddling-clothes, and set out, with her saintly spouse, for the temple. Arrived at the gates, the happy mother adored the Lord in spirit and in truth, and made an offering to the divine Majesty of herself with her Son whom she held in her arms. The most fortunate of men, St. Joseph, felt at the same moment a new and sweet effusion of the Holy Spirit, which filled him with joy and divine light.

Conducted by the same Spirit, the high priest Simeon came to the temple, and, approaching the place where Mary stood with Jesus, he beheld

them all radiant with light. Anna approached and saw it, also. Simeon took the Infant in his arms, and offering Him to the eternal Father, intoned the celebrated canticle, "*Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace.*" Afterwards he announced the cruel passion which the heart of Mary must suffer at the view of the sufferings of Jesus.

The blessed Mary and St. Joseph admired the sublimity of the Spirit which had inspired Simeon. The holy old man gave his benediction to the happy parents and to the Infant. When the holy priest prophesied the passion, the Infant humbly inclined His head, in testimony that He accepted the prophecy, and would fulfil it. The tender mother comprehended all the mysteries included within this prophecy. On his part, the holy St. Joseph also penetrated many things concerning the redemption and the sufferings of Jesus, but his knowledge was less comprehensive than that of his spouse, because he was not to witness their accomplishment on earth.

The Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph took leave of the high priest, after having received his benediction, and that of St. Anna, and returned to the house which had been prepared for them. Here they resolved to remain nine days longer, to visit the temple and to renew there, each day,

the offering of the most holy Host, with devout thanksgivings. The number nine had always been dear to the holy family. They began their novena and remained in the temple from before the hour of tierce to the evening, choosing the most humble and retired quarter. It was at this time the divine Majesty promised that the august mother should obtain all that she would ask for those who were devoted to her, as long as the world was to endure, and even for great sinners, if they would avail themselves of her intercession.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LORD PREPARES OUR BLESSED LADY FOR THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.—THE ANGEL REVEALS IT TO ST. JOSEPH.—JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH COMMENCE THE JOURNEY.

ON the fifth day of the novena, after the Presentation, the Blessed Virgin had a vision of the Divinity, in which she was warned to fly into Egypt because Herod sought to destroy the new-born Messiah. The Lord referred her to St. Joseph, to be guided by him in all things relating to this journey. But the exceeding affection of our Lady for her most holy Son grieved her heart, on considering the pain which so young a child must suffer in executing this command. She was touched with compassion, and could not restrain her tears.

The faithful St. Joseph observed the affliction of his spouse, and supposed it to be the effect of the prophecy of St. Simeon. But as he had a tender affection for our queen, and was also of a most compassionate temper, he was troubled at the affliction of his spouse; and it was for this

reason that the angel appeared to him in a dream. During this same night, as it is related by St. Matthew, the angel of the Lord said to him, "*Arise, and take the child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass, that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him.*"

Filled with zeal and anxiety, St. Joseph arose on the instant, and, approaching the place whither his beloved spouse had retired, he said to her, "It is the will of the Most High, that we shall be afflicted, for His angel has declared to me the command of His Majesty, that we shall fly with the Infant into Egypt, because Herod designs to destroy His life. Prepare, then, for the fatigues of this journey, and tell me what I can do for your comfort, and for the service of our most sweet Infant." "My spouse," replied our queen, "if we receive so much good at the liberal hands of the Most High, it is but just that we should receive from Him temporal pains and afflictions."

The blessed Mother and St. Joseph approached the cradle where the Infant Jesus slept; nor was this slumber without mystery. The holy Mother thus addressed Him: "Flee away, O my beloved, and be like to the roe, and to the young hart; come, let us go to the fields." St.

Joseph added: "Thy power cannot be limited by that of the kings of the earth, but Thine exalted wisdom would conceal it. Who can fathom the impenetrable secrets of Thy Providence?" Our august Lady then awakened the Infant. Our loving Saviour, willing to show, by certain marks, that He was of true human nature, and to affect His parents, wept a little, but soon He became quiet.

The holy Virgin and St. Joseph asked a benediction of the Divine Infant, which He bestowed in a manner not to be mistaken. Then gathering their humble garments, they departed, without further delay, a little after midnight, making use of the same beast of burden which they had brought from Nazareth to Bethlehem. They travelled with all diligence towards Egypt, quitting Jerusalem to go to another country, concealed by the silence and obscurity of the night.

It is not possible to find faith and hope more firm than that of our Queen and her faithful spouse, but they were pained because of the Infant Jesus. They knew not what might happen to them on this long journey, nor where it was to terminate, nor how they would be received in Egypt, nor how they could educate this Child. But the angels strengthened them in such wise,

that, issuing from Jerusalem by the gate towards Nazareth, they began their journey with great ardor.

The Blessed Virgin could have wished to pass through Hebron, where at this moment St. Elizabeth sojourned, and because it was but little out of their way; but the prudent St. Joseph, who was in great apprehension of Herod, could not consent to the least delay. "I think," said he, "that it is of the greatest importance not to retard our journey for even a moment, but to hasten it as much as possible, so as to be removed from danger. For this reason we ought not to pause at Hebron, where we should, perhaps, be sought after sooner than elsewhere." The Blessed Virgin obeyed St. Joseph, not only in that which he commanded, but she would not even send an angel to her cousin without his consent. What an admirable example to teach us to renounce our own will, which is often so prejudicial to us!

The angel having instructed St. Elizabeth, she desired to come and adore the Infant Jesus, but the celestial ambassador prevented her. She then sent a person to convey, in all haste, food and money to the holy family, with clothing for the Child. This messenger found them at the city of Gaza, distant twenty hours from

Jerusalem, by the road that leads from Palestine to Egypt.

Our holy travellers remained two days in this town, on account of the fatigue of St. Joseph, and to give rest to the ass, which carried our Queen. They dismissed the servant of Elizabeth, and St. Joseph charged him to reveal to no one the place where he had found them. The Lord appointed a better means of securing this silence. He destroyed his memory of the fact.

The charitable Mary shared the presents of Elizabeth with the poor, whom she never forgot. Of the cloth she made a covering for the Infant, and a mantle for St. Joseph, capable of protecting them from the severity of the weather. She also prepared such of the provisions as could be preserved, to provide for the necessities of her Son and St. Joseph, without having recourse to miraculous assistance.

The happy St. Joseph was a witness of the mysteries which passed between the blessed Mother and the Infant Jesus. The holy Mary understood, through intellectual visions, the unity of the Divine Essence with the Trinity of persons; the eternal generation of the Word, and the procession of the Holy Ghost without priority or posteriority. Finally, the august Mother contemplated all the interior acts of her only

Son, and imitated them. The happy Joseph was often a witness of these divine mysteries, and received illumination from them which smoothed the difficulties of the road.

From time to time our saint took care to inquire of his spouse how she found herself, and if she had need of any thing for the Infant or herself. He approached Him and adored: he kissed His feet and asked His benediction. Sometimes he took Him in his arms. Thus our great patriarch overcame gently all the fatigues of the journey. His holy spouse encouraged him; yet external things never interfered with her sublime thoughts and affections.

Three days after their arrival at Gaza, our saintly travellers set out for Egypt. They then entered the sandy desert called Beersheba, which has an extent of sixty leagues before reaching Heliopolis, near Cairo. They made short journeys, because of the sand. Many events happened to the holy family. The Most High allowed them to suffer from the hardships of the desert. Our blessed Lady was much distressed, but she supported them with patience for the sake of her Son and husband. St. Joseph, on his part, suffered greatly from his inability to protect the Infant and Mother, notwithstanding all his cares.

In traversing the desert, it was absolutely necessary that they should pass the nights in the open air, and without shelter; and it was in winter, and the month of February. The first night which overtook them, obliged them to stop at the foot of a hill. The Queen of Heaven seated herself on the sand with her Son in her arms, and they supped on what they had brought from Gaza. The Blessed Virgin gave milk to her Infant Jesus, and His Majesty consoled them in many pleasing and caressing ways. The saint raised a sort of little tent with his mantle and some sticks, so that the Incarnate Word and His holy Mother should not be exposed to the night air. Our great Lady knew that her most holy Son offered this affliction to the Eternal Father, together with His sufferings, and those of herself and St. Joseph. She united with Him in prayer. St. Joseph slept on the ground, his head supported by the little box of swaddling clothes and their other poor apparel. The following day they continued their route, and then their provision of bread and fruits failed them, so that the Mistress of the Universe and her holy spouse, feeling the pressure of hunger, found themselves in the direst distress, and, although that of the saint was the most severe, both were in the greatest affliction. Thus they

passed one of the first days of their journey, until nine in the evening, without nourishment. Our blessed Lady then addressed herself to the Most High. "Eternal and Almighty God," said she, "I offer to Thee thanks, and I bless Thee. How, being only a poor useless creature, how shall I dare to ask any thing for myself? But have regard to Thine only Son, and grant the means to sustain His natural life, and to preserve that of my spouse!" The Most High permitted that to the rigors of the elements should be joined those of hunger, exhaustion, and of this sort of abandonment—and then came a tempest of wind and rain, that wearied them extremely.

The careful Mother, exercising her power as Queen of creatures, commanded the elements not to offend their Creator, and to reserve for her their rude attacks. The Infant Jesus, to recompense this loving care, gave commands to His angels, and they formed a luminous globe, impenetrable to the weather, which inclosed their God made man, the Blessed Virgin, and her spouse. This protection was bestowed on other occasions, also, while crossing the desert.

But food was wanting, and this want which could not be supplied by any human industry, was most pressing. The Lord then helped them by the ministry of angels, who furnished them

with bread and excellent fruits, and brought them, besides, a beverage of delicious flavor. Upon this, they sang canticles of praise to the Lord, who feeds all flesh, at a convenient season. Such was the repast which the Lord made for His three travellers in the same desert, where Elias, flying from Jezebel, was strengthened by bread baked in the ashes which the angel of the Lord brought him.

None of the miracles wrought in favor of the Jewish people are worthy to be compared with those which the Lord wrought during this journey for His Son made man, and the august Mary and St. Joseph, to preserve the natural life on which depended the salvation of the human race. But the Lord always waited until the necessity was most urgent. Let the poor rejoice in this example—let not the hungry be cast down—let those who suffer persecution expect help in season, and let none complain of Divine Providence! When was it ever that the Lord failed to help those who put their trust in Him? Come! come to Him with humility and confidence! The eyes of your fathers regard you with fixed attention!

The Most High not only took care to nourish our pilgrims, but He also offered them sensible recreations, to soothe the weariness of the way.

It often happened that the blessed Mother, pausing with the Infant God, was speedily surrounded by large numbers of birds. The blessed Queen received them, and commanded them to praise their Creator: the birds obeyed, and the devoted Mother recreated the Infant Jesus in the sweetest canticles. The holy angels joined their voices to that of our lovely Lady.

The Son and the Mother sometimes held interior communications, so sublime, that words are inadequate to express them. The holy St. Joseph participated in some of these mysteries, and their divine consolations made him forget his fatigue while he enjoyed the delights of such society; but he knew not that the Infant conversed with His Mother.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOLY FAMILY ARRIVE AT HELIOPOLIS.—THEY FIX THEIR RESIDENCE IN THAT CITY.

THE flight of the Incarnate Word had other mysteries, and other ends, besides that of withdrawing from the effects of Herod's anger. It was rather the means employed by the Lord to visit Egypt, and there to operate the wonders of which the Prophets had spoken, Isaiah, in particular, ch. xix. 1: "*The Lord will enter into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence,*" etc. But we will not here pursue this point.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, continuing their journey, arrived at the inhabited portion of Egypt, and before reaching Heliopolis, where they were to sojourn, the angels led them through many other places. From this cause they employed more than fifty days in the journey, passing over two hundred leagues, although they might have arrived much sooner at Heliopolis if they had followed the direct road.

The Egyptians were strongly inclined to idolatry and superstition, and idols were placed every where. There were many temples where devils made their abode, and they were so given to the worship of demons, and so blinded by their delusions, that nothing short of the omnipotent arm of the Lord had power to reform this misguided country. Now, the Infant Jesus, with His Mother and St. Joseph, entered the habitations of the Egyptians. And when He entered, in the arms of the august Mary, raising His eyes towards heaven, and joining His hands, He prayed for the salvation of the poor people enslaved by the devil. Then exercising His power over these evil spirits, He precipitated them into the abyss. The idols fell at the same moment with a loud noise, the temples sank into ruins, and the altars were overthrown.

The cause of these prodigies was known to our Lady, who united her prayers to those of her Divine Son. St. Joseph also discovered that all these wonders proceeded from the Incarnate Word, and, filled with holy admiration, he praised and blessed Him. The demons failed to discover the cause. The Egyptians were amazed, although the most learned still preserved certain traditions of prophecies of Jeremiah, when he

was in Egypt, that a King of the Jews should come into their kingdom, and the temples of their idols should be destroyed.

In their trouble, some of the people came to visit our blessed Lady and St. Joseph, and discoursed with them on the ruin of their temples. The Queen of Wisdom availed herself of the occasion to instruct them. Her words were so sweet and so forcible, that the rumor of the arrival of our holy travellers was extended. Jesus and Mary passed through many towns of Egypt, chasing the demons not only from the temples, but from the bodies of the people. Our Princess and St. Joseph instructed many persons in the path to virtue and to eternal life.

They arrived at Heliopolis. Many idols were possessed by demons of great power, particularly one which abode in a tree at the entrance of the city. When the Word made man passed it, the demon was precipitated into the depths of the abyss, and the tree bowed itself to the earth. Several authors have recorded this miracle, for the leaves and fruits of this same tree, afterwards, cured many maladies.

Various writers have recorded this sojourn of the holy family in Egypt. Some mention their residence in one city, some in another. All may be true in referring to different epochs, for the

holy family were at Hermopolis, Memphis, Mataria, and other towns, but they fixed their abode at Heliopolis, because the angels had said to our blessed Lady and St. Joseph, that they were to stop at this place. Thus this city of the sun, according to its name, saw the Son of Justice and of Grace.

Immediately upon their arrival, St. Joseph sought a lodging, offering a fair price. The Lord guided him to a poor habitation, a little out of the town, as the Queen of Heaven had wished, and they took possession of it at once. On entering it with her Son and St. Joseph, our blessed Lady prostrated herself and kissed the earth with profound humility. She then began the lowly task of cleansing her humble abode, and, so indigent were their circumstances, that she was obliged to borrow the broom with which she swept the house.

Although our holy strangers were content to be lodged within the bare walls of this poor tenement, food and furniture were still wanting. The miraculous succor, which they had been accustomed to receive by the ministry of angels, had ceased since they had entered inhabited regions. The Lord placed them at the table of the poorest poor, which is to have recourse to alms; and, while suffering from hunger, St. Jo-

seph went to ask for food for the Son of God. By this example he teaches the poor never to complain of their wants, nor to be ashamed to beg, when all other legitimate means have failed, since it was necessary to beg at so early a period to support the life of the Lord of all created things. During the three first days, after their arrival at Heliopolis, our blessed Lady had no other aliment for herself and her adorable Son than that which St. Joseph received as alms, nor until he began to gain something by his labor. (The same thing happened in divers places of Egypt.) Having received payment for certain work, he made a little bedstead, entirely of wood, for the Mother, and a cradle for the Infant. For himself he prepared no other bed than the earth. Nor was there any furniture in the house, until, by the sweat of his brow, he acquired money to purchase some indispensable articles.

In this extreme poverty, Mary and Joseph never spoke of their house at Nazareth, nor of their parents and friends, nor of the presents of the wise men. They regretted none of those things, and supported their indigence without uttering the least complaint—without dwelling on the past, without fear of the future. On the contrary, they were always joyous—abandoning

themselves entirely to Divine Providence in the hour of their greatest need.

Oh, the baseness of our infidel hearts! With how many troubles, cares and pains are they not possessed, at the smallest inconveniences! The example of our blessed strangers should serve as a grave rebuke for our pusillanimity in times of trial and affliction. Our prudent Lady and her spouse, deprived of all temporal goods, lodged, with joy, in their destitute habitation. Of the three chambers that it contained, one was consecrated as a sanctuary for the Infant Jesus and His most holy Mother. In it were placed the cradle and her little bed. The second was appropriated to St. Joseph for prayer and repose, and the third served as a shop, where he worked at his trade. Our august Lady, seeing their extreme indigence, and that her spouse was obliged to increase his ordinary toil to enable them to subsist, resolved to aid him by her own labor. She judged it best to employ the day in work, so as to gain what was necessary for their food, for the clothing of St. Joseph, and to furnish their house, reserving only the night for her spiritual exercises. The Infant God approved this prudent decision of His Mother, and regulated the order of her life and her manual labor. But when the holy Mother saw that it was time

to relieve St. Joseph, by procuring for him the society of her Son, she said to Him: "My Son and my Lord, regard your faithful servant with the love of son and father." And, addressing the saint: "Receive, my spouse, within your arms, the Lord, who holds within His hands the heavens and earth, and who will sweeten the fatigues of your toil."

The saint was accustomed to receive this favor with great humility and gratitude, asking his holy spouse if he might take the liberty to caress the Infant. Reassured by the prudent Lady, the consolation he received in these caresses made him forget all his pains, so that they seemed easy and most sweet. When the holy spouses took their repast, the Blessed Virgin held the Infant. Having placed whatever was necessary on the table, she took Him again from the arms of St. Joseph. All that I can say of any thing that our saints did, is, that they were the admiration of the angels, and that they were according to the good pleasure of the Lord. When Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would enter Egypt on a light cloud, to make His wonders shine there, by this cloud, he meant His most holy Mother. After the Son of Justice had enlightened Egypt, and the cloud, free from every taint of sin, the august Mary, had fer-

tilized it, this land brought forth abundant fruits during many ages, as we have seen in the great number of saints and anchorites whom, in the sequel, it produced.

The Lord sojourned at Heliopolis, and when He entered the temples, the idols and altars were overthrown, with a frightful noise. The whole city was in the greatest terror, and many persons of both sexes went to visit the strangers, and spoke of it to our blessed Lady and St. Joseph. Our blessed Mother conversed with them with much prudence, wisdom and sweetness. She withdrew them from their errors, and, at the same time, healed some diseased persons. The rumor of these miracles spread abroad to such a degree that our blessed Lady, seeing herself approached by multitudes of people, inquired of her divine Son what He would have her to do. The Infant God replied, that she should impart to them the knowledge of the true God, and instruct them in His worship and of the means to put away their sins.

The blessings which these souls thus obtained were so abundant that it would require many volumes to record the wonders that were manifested during these seven years. Two years later, St. Joseph also began to heal the sick. Our blessed Lady devoted herself chiefly to the

cure of women; she herself dressed their wounds; but for men, she healed them by her words only.

During the period of their sojourn, Heliopolis was infected by the plague. This misfortune, and the report of the wonders which they wrought, brought them great numbers of sick people, who went away healed in body and soul. But the Lord, wishing to extend His grace, determined, on the request of our Blessed Lady, that St. Joseph should instruct and cure the sick. And she obtained for him a new interior light, and a singular grace of holiness for the exercise of this ministry, so that, in the third year after their arrival, St. Joseph began the exercise of these gifts from heaven. He usually instructed and cured the men, and our Blessed Lady the women. We can easily conceive the good they wrought, but it is impossible to give the details of it.

King Herod was much disappointed when he heard that the Magi had visited Bethlehem—had seen the august Mary and St. Joseph, and had already left Palestine. He was also informed of what had passed in the temple. He then gave orders to make a strict search for our Queen, her Infant, and St. Joseph. But the Lord, who had commanded their departure from Jerusalem

by night, concealed their journey. And now it was that the demon inspired Herod to murder all the children of that region who were under two years old.

Herod promulgated this diabolical command in the sixth month after the birth of our Redeemer. Her most sweet Son, and the august Mother prayed to the Almighty for the holy innocents. The Divine Providence was most gracious towards these infant martyrs, and they all received, some more, some less, the use of reason, and a sublime knowledge of the being of God. They exercised heroic acts of faith, adoration, respect, and love of God. They willingly received martyrdom, and the angels who assisted them bore their souls to Limbo.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE INFANT JESUS SPEAKS TO ST. JOSEPH A YEAR AFTER HIS BIRTH.—ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF THE MOST HIGH, THE HOLY FAMILY RETURN FROM EGYPT TO NAZARETH.

ONE day, while the Blessed Mary and St. Joseph discoursed together upon the mysteries of the Lord, the Infant Jesus, having completed his first year, desired to break silence, and to speak, in a distinct voice, with His faithful foster-father. The two spouses spoke of the Infinite Being of God, and His goodness in sending His only Son to be the Master and Redeemer of men—to converse with them, and suffer the pains which their depraved nature had deserved.

St. Joseph, in this meditation, admired the works of the Lord, and redoubled his grateful thanksgivings for His love. The Infant God, who was in the arms of His Mother, used them as a pulpit, from which He thus addressed the saint: "MY FATHER, I am come from heaven

to be the light of the world, and, as a good shepherd, to seek and to know my sheep, and to give them the food of eternal life. I desire that you may both become children of the light, since you are so near to its source." * These words of the Infant Jesus, full of life and force, poured into the heart of the holy patriarch a new love—a profound respect—an inexpressible joy. He cast himself at the feet of the Infant God and offered devout thanks that the first word which he had heard Him pronounce was *father*. With many tears, he prayed his Divine Majesty to illuminate him with celestial light, to enable him to do whatsoever should be most agreeable to Him, and to thank Him for the manifold blessings that he had received from His liberal hand.

Fathers, who naturally love their children, feel great consolation when they perceive that they give promise of becoming wise and distinguished in the world; and even when they are not so, their natural affection induces them to praise whatever their children may say or do. Now, although St. Joseph was not the real father of the Infant, but only His foster-father, the love which he bore Him surpassed, beyond comparison, all that fathers have ever had for their children; because grace, and even nature,

were more powerful in him than in others, or in all fathers united. It is, therefore, by this love, and by the delight he felt in being the reputed father of the Infant Jesus, that we are to measure the joy of his pure soul, when he heard the Son of the Eternal Father call him *father*, in beginning to speak with him so graciously.

This first year having been passed in swaddling clothes, the prudent Mother judged the time had come when He should be put upon His feet. The Infant Jesus said to her: "My Mother, you will clothe me in a long tunic, of a plain color. I will wear none but this. It shall grow with me, and it shall be for this that they will cast lots after my death. I ought to have only one coat in this world, in order to instruct men to esteem and to love poverty. I consent that you give me some common sandals, which I will wear until the time comes for my public preaching, when I must go barefooted." The Queen of Heaven employed herself immediately to accomplish the will of her most holy Son. She provided wool of the natural color, of which she spun and made a little tunic, all of one piece. She wove it on a frame. There was a mystery in making this tunic without seam. On the prayer of our Blessed Lady, it

changed its natural hue into another, which was between violet and silver color, very perfect, so that the shade could not be distinguished. Besides this, she made a half tunic of linen, for an under garment, in which He was crucified. The holy Mother, having thus clothed the Infant Jesus, put sandals upon Him, and set Him on His feet. The tunic proved to be exactly fitted to Him, and He never quitted it until the executioners despoiled Him of His clothing, to flagellate and crucify Him, because it grew with His sacred body as much as was necessary. The same thing happened with the sandals, and the other tunic, which served as drawers. The Infant Jesus found himself afoot. There appeared in Him a grace quite wonderful, for He surpassed, in beauty, all the children of men. The angels were surprised that He had chosen so humble a vestment.

Our Blessed Lady and her holy spouse were filled with joy on seeing their Infant walk with so much grace, and possessing such rare beauty. When He had reached eighteen months, He was weaned—afterwards He ate meat, but always very sparingly. When He was grown up, He took His food at the same hour with our blessed spouses, and nothing more; and when at the table with His parents, they waited always for Him to give the

benediction at the commencement, and to return thanks at the close of the repast.

The Infant Jesus grew in the admiration of all who knew Him. Having attained His sixth year, He began, sometimes, to go out to visit the sick in the hospitals. From every quarter they came to felicitate and bless the parents for having such a Child. Many children of Heliopolis, as is usual, accompanied our amiable Jesus. He instructed them in the knowledge of the Divinity and of the virtues, and taught them the way to eternal life.

This lovely and beautiful Child, in proportion as He advanced in age, assumed a graver demeanor towards His parents; and some time after the swaddling clothes were laid aside, the most tender caresses, which had always been made with a certain reserve, ceased. The circumspection of His parents in this regard, arose from their perception in Him of so much of the majesty of the hidden Divinity, which, if He had not tempered it, would often have produced a fear so full of respect, that they could not have dared even to speak to Him. But His presence never ceased to inspire them with sentiments altogether divine and ineffable.

In this majestic grandeur, He was dutiful towards His most holy Mother, and treated

St. Joseph as the one who held the name and office of His father, obeying both as their humble Child. It is impossible to enumerate the souls who were converted and saved in Heliopolis, and in all Egypt—the sick whom they cured, and the wonders they wrought, in the seven years of their abode there. During this time the Infant Jesus attained the age of seven years, and this was the term of that mysterious exile which the Eternal Wisdom had fixed. To fulfil the prophecies, it was necessary that He should return to Nazareth. The Eternal Father, one day, declared His will to the humanity of His divine Son, in the presence of His holy Mother. The Son and the Mother disclosed nothing of the new order from heaven to St. Joseph, but the angel of the Lord appeared to him the same night in a dream, as it is related by St. Matthew, and instructed him “to take the Child and His Mother, and return to the land of Israel.” The Most High so eminently esteems good order, that the Infant Jesus being God, and His Mother so superior in sanctity to St. Joseph, nevertheless He would not that the undertaking of the return to Galilee should depend either upon the Son or the Mother, but that it should be conducted by St. Joseph, who filled the office of head to this divine family. This example

teaches to all mortals how agreeable it is to God, that they who are inferiors in the mystical body, although more worthy by other qualities, should obey and submit themselves to those who, by their office, are their superiors.

St. Joseph went instantly to communicate the commandment of the Lord to the Infant Jesus and His Mother, who replied, "that the will of the heavenly Father should be executed." Upon which they prepared with all possible diligence for their departure. They distributed among the poor the little furniture they possessed, and this was done by the agency of the Infant God.

They left Heliopolis for Palestine, with the same angels who had accompanied them to Egypt. Our Queen rode a little ass, with the Infant God in her lap, and St. Joseph walked near them. All their acquaintances felt sensibly their departure, and took leave of them with many tears. They passed several of the inhabited places of Egypt before arriving at the desert, and left every where marks of their charity. They cured many sick persons, and chased away a multitude of demons, who knew not by what power they were precipitated into the abyss.

I will not pause to record the various circum-

stances that attended the Infant Jesus and His Blessed Mother, in their departure from Egypt. It may suffice to say, that they who approached them with any pious affection were enlightened in the truth, assisted by grace, and penetrated by divine love. At length, our holy travellers left behind them the inhabited country, and entered the desert by which they had come. There they again suffered discomforts similar to those they had endured after leaving Palestine. In these extremities the Lord himself provided for them by the ministry of the angels. Sometimes the Infant Jesus ordered these spirits to bring food for His holy Mother and her spouse.

This consoled the holy Patriarch, seeing that he was altogether unable of himself to find support for the King and Queen of Heaven. On other occasions the Infant God exercised His divine power in multiplying some morsel of bread into as much as they had need of. For the rest, this journey passed off as the preceding one. But when, on approaching Palestine, the cautious St. Joseph heard that Archelaus reigned in Judea, in the place of Herod, his father, he took another road, without entering Judea, and they came to Nazareth, their country, because the Infant was to be called a *Nazarene*. There they found their old abode, under the guardian-

ship of that pious woman, the relative of St. Joseph, to whom he had written on their departure for Egypt, requesting her to take charge of it and whatever it contained: and they found all in good condition.

When our Blessed Lady had entered it with her divine Son and holy spouse, she prostrated herself to render thanks. The happy Mother then regulated her affairs according to the intentions of the Infant God, and St. Joseph did the same, in whatever regarded his employment for the support of the Infant, the Mother and himself. The happiness of the holy Patriarch was immense; for it was a favor and an unutterable joy to have been chosen to gain by the labor of his hands wherewithal to sustain the Infant God and His Mother, to whom belonged heaven, earth, and all that they contain.

The Queen of Heaven desired to requite the labors of the saint. She served him and prepared his simple food with the most affectionate gratitude, and, obeying him in all things, she regarded herself more as his servant than his spouse. She considered herself unworthy that even the earth should sustain her, and she established her rare humility on such solid foundations, that she was always plunged in an abyss of annihilation, and still lower in her own esteem.

CHAPTER XV.

SOJOURN AT NAZARETH.—THE BLESSED MARY AND ST. JOSEPH GO EVERY YEAR TO JERUSALEM.—AT THE AGE OF TWELVE, JESUS REMAINS AT THE TEMPLE, WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS PARENTS.

JESUS, Mary and Joseph, had finally reached Nazareth, and their poor dwelling was changed into a new heaven. If it were necessary to relate all the wonders that happened there before the Infant God had reached His twelfth year, many volumes would be required.

Soon after their return to Nazareth, the Lord tried His most Blessed Mother. The Most High determined that our holy Lady should be the first disciple of her Son. The Incarnate Word and His Blessed Mother occupied themselves in these profound mysteries during the twenty-three years of their abode at Nazareth. The Lord caused her to feel internally His absence. Besides this, the Infant God, without making known any cause for it, was more grave than ordinary. We omit here many admirable things, that we may not withdraw ourselves too much

from the life of our holy Patriarch. The prudent Mother never neglected any thing that regarded the corporeal service of her Son, taking great care of His diet as well as that of St. Joseph. She also obtained that the Infant Jesus consoled His foster-father by His presence, as much as if he had been His natural father.

The Infant God obeyed His Mother, and was often with St. Joseph while at his work in which he was continually occupied, so that thus, by the sweat of his brow, he might maintain those so dear to him. In proportion as He grew in stature, He aided the holy Patriarch, so far as it was possible at His age, and sometimes He wrought miracles to produce results which surpassed His natural strength, thereby to relieve the saint of his labor; but these marvels occurred only in the presence of the three.

Some time after the return of our saints to Nazareth, the period arrived when the precept of the law of Moses obliged the Israelites to appear before the Lord at Jerusalem. This commandment was obligatory three times a year, but it was binding only on the men—women might present themselves for devotion, at their choice. Our Blessed Lady conferred with her spouse as to what they should do on this occasion. The saint wished to conduct thither

the Queen of Heaven and her holy Child, to offer them anew to the Eternal Father. The holy Mother was inclined to go from devotion, but she undertook nothing without the consent of her Master, the Incarnate Word. Having consulted Him, it was resolved that St. Joseph should present himself there alone, twice in the year, and the third time they should all go together. It was at the festival of the Passover that the sweet Jesus and His Blessed Mother accompanied St. Joseph. When he went alone, the saint made the journey on behalf of all, and, as deputy for the Son and the Mother, (who prayed for him at Nazareth,) he made mysterious prayers in the temple at Jerusalem, offering the sacrifice of his lips. And as he offered there Jesus and Mary, this offering was more agreeable to the Eternal Father than any which all the rest of the people of Israel could offer.

When the Incarnate Word and the Virgin Mary accompanied St. Joseph to the festival of the Passover, this pilgrimage was more admirable for him, because the ten thousand angels accompanied our divine travellers. They made short journeys on these occasions, because, after the return from Egypt, the Infant Jesus desired to go on foot, which obliged them to move slowly. The first time they travelled in this manner, our

Blessed Lady and St. Joseph, were careful to assist Him, by taking Him sometimes in their arms, but afterwards He went entirely on foot. The prudent Mother offered no opposition, but led Him by the hand, and the glorious Patriarch sometimes enjoyed this consolation.

Every time the Son and the Mother made this journey, they operated wonders for the good of souls. When they stopped for the night, in some hostelry, the Infant God and His Mother were never separated. She often saw Him engaged in prayer for the whole human race, and united her prayers to His. Many times, as in a mirror, she beheld all the affronts, all the ignominy, and all the sufferings which her most sweet Child would suffer in the City of Jerusalem, and she was transpierced by the sword of grief which Simeon had predicted. But the Infant God, to alleviate her sorrow, prayed her to offer these pains, which regarded them mutually, for the salvation of men.

Our holy family, as I have said, continued to go every year to the temple, to celebrate the Pass-over. The Infant God had attained His twelfth year, the epoch at which He was to make manifest the splendors of His inaccessible light. Our holy pilgrims remained an entire week at Jerusalem. The happy Mother and St. Joseph received,

each in proportion to their dispositions, such great favors from the liberal hand of the Lord, that the human understanding is not able to conceive them.

The seventh day past, they took the road towards Nazareth. But as they issued forth from the City of Jerusalem, the Infant God left His parents unperceived, and remained behind, while they pursued their journey, not knowing what had happened. The Lord availed himself of the customs of the people; for the troops of strangers divided themselves, and, for the better preservation of propriety, the women went together. The children accompanied, indifferently, their father or their mother. St. Joseph had reason to believe that the Child Jesus went with His Blessed Mother, nor could he imagine that she would have set out without Him. Our Blessed Lady had less strong reasons to persuade herself that our adorable Saviour was with the Patriarch St. Joseph, but the Lord diverted her mind by other divine thoughts at the beginning, so that when she found herself alone without her best beloved, she believed that the glorious St. Joseph had taken Him with him, and that the Supreme Lord had willed to grant him this consolation.

Our holy spouses travelled on with this idea

throughout the day, as St. Luke informs us, and, having left the city by different gates, rejoined each other afterwards. The holy Mary and her spouse met at the place where they were to pass the first night after their departure from Jerusalem. But our Blessed Lady, seeing that the Infant God was not with St. Joseph, as she supposed, and the holy patriarch not finding Him with His Mother, both were thrown into such consternation that they nearly lost the power of speech, and remained some time without uttering a word. Both, from humility, attributed the fault to themselves, of allowing Him to be separated, by their want of care for the divine Infant. Recovering a little from their amazement, they conferred together, in extreme grief, respecting what was to be done. The tender Mother spoke first: "My spouse, my heart can find no repose, unless we go at once to seek my holy Child." They instantly commenced their researches, by inquiries among their relatives and acquaintances, but none could give them tidings of Him, nor mitigate their sorrow; on the contrary, it was augmented, for no one had seen Him since they had come out of Jerusalem.

The Mother of Wisdom formed various conjectures in her mind, and the first thought was, that Archelaus, having had some knowledge of

the Infant Jesus, might have caused Him to be apprehended. She feared that He had been cast into prison and maltreated. Her deep humility induced her, also, to fear that, unhappily, her services might not have been pleasing to Him. This innocent Dove passed the three days, during which she sought the Saviour, in tears and groanings, without repose—without food or sleep. The celestial spirits of her guard were not ignorant of where He was, but she was so reserved and so humble, that she did not inquire of them where she could find Him.

The grief of our Blessed Lady on this occasion surpassed all that all the martyrs united have suffered; and in it she exercised a patience and resignation unparalleled. For, O! prodigy of holiness—of prudence—of perfection! in such an unheard-of affliction, and in such absorbing sorrow, she was neither troubled, nor lost her interior nor exterior peace—she gave way to no movement of impatience, nor of disordered tenderness. She sought for her Child with a divine wisdom, inquiring of many persons if they had not seen Him, and giving marks by which He might be recognized. Among others, a woman replied to her inquiries: “A child, having the same features that you describe, presented himself yesterday at my door, asking

alms, which I gave him. His charming manners and exceeding beauty won my heart.' These were the first tidings the afflicted Mother had obtained of her Son in Jerusalem, and she forthwith proceeded to the hospital of the city, hoping to find the Master of poverty among the poor, where she was informed that the child she described had visited them during three days, bringing them alms, and had left them much consoled in their afflictions. Having failed to find Him among the poor, she doubted not that He would be in the temple. The holy angels now said to her: "Queen of the universe, you will soon behold the light of your eyes. Hasten to the temple." The glorious patriarch, St. Joseph, advanced towards her at this moment, for, to gain time, he had sought for the Infant God in another direction, and he also had been directed, by an angel, to the temple.

He suffered extremely from fatigue during these three days, going sometimes in one direction, sometimes in another, occasionally with his blessed spouse, oftener alone, and always with inconceivable care and solicitude; for his life would have been endangered if the hand of the Lord had not sustained him, and if our precious Lady had not taken care to alleviate his extreme

affliction, besides obliging him to take some little food and rest. The tender and devoted love which he cherished for the Infant God imparted such an exceeding desire to find Him, that he forgot all besides. Following the counsel of the celestial princes, our holy spouses hastened to the temple. In the next chapter we shall relate what happened there.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AUGUST MARY AND ST. JOSEPH DISCOVER THE INFANT
IN THE TEMPLE AMONG THE DOCTORS.—RETURN TO
NAZARETH.

OUR Blessed Lady, ever so assiduous in the service of her Divine Son, had, nevertheless, lost sight of Him, and left Him to wander away from her at Jerusalem. Although it might suffice to say that the same Lord so ordained it, we may also perceive how this separation was effected. It is certain that, besides taking advantage of the multitudes of people, the Infant God used, also, supernatural means, and while the men and women were separating from each other, the omnipotent Lord gave to His Blessed Mother an intellectual vision, which so possessed all her faculties, and so elevated her above things of sense, that she was unable to do more than mechanically to follow the path she travelled. St. Joseph had the reasons we have already adverted to, but he, also, was

elevated to a most sublime contemplation, which induced a more ready acquiescence in the idea that the Infant had accompanied His Mother, and by this means the adorable Child separated himself from His parents and remained at Jerusalem. He withdrew himself when near the gates of the city, and, returning, he traversed the streets, meditating, by His divine science, on the events of the future, and offering himself to His Father for the salvation of souls.

In order to inaugurate the honor of humble mendicity, as the eldest son of holy poverty, He employed three days in asking alms. He visited the hospitals, consoled all the poor whom He found there, and shared with them the alms He had received. He secretly re-restored to several sick persons health of body, and to many that of the soul. He wrought these miracles in favor of some who had showed Him kindness, wishing to accomplish, in advance, the promise that He would afterwards make to His Church.

Having occupied himself with these and many other works, according to the will of God, He went to the temple, where, on the day mentioned by St. Luke, the Rabbis, or doctors of the law, were assembled in an apartment, where they disputed whether the Messiah was not already

born. They were installed in their seats with that authority which usually accompanies those who pass for learned men. The Infant Jesus approached the assembly. The opinions of the doctors upon this subject were widely different, for some asserted the fact, while others denied it; and those who supported the negative, alleged the testimony of the Scriptures and the prophecies, understood by them in the gross manner which the Apostle speaks of. Now, these sages, as they deemed themselves, advanced the opinion that the Messiah ought to come with all the majesty and pomp of a monarch, but, as yet, they saw no indications of this power and liberty.

The Master of Truth, Jesus, perceived that the discussion was about to terminate in this error, for, although there were men who held the contrary opinion, their number was small. His immense charity could not endure this ignorance of His works, and their sublime ends, in these interpreters of the law. The Infant God drew nearer. He entered into the midst of the assembly with admirable majesty and beauty, and excited in these doctors the desire to hear Him with attention.

He opened His discourse, saying: "I have heard all that has been said touching the coming

of the Messiah, and the conclusion respecting it. In offering an objection to this decision, I pre-suppose what the prophets have said, viz.: That His coming should be with great power, and with glorious majesty; for Isaiah declares that He shall be our legislator, our king, who shall save His people. Daniel assures us that all tribes and all people shall serve Him. The Scriptures are filled with similar promises. But my doubt is founded on these passages and divers others. The same Isaiah says that He shall be satiated with opprobrium, and led like a sheep to the slaughter. Jeremiah tells us that His enemies should assemble to erase His name from the land of the living; and David, that He would be the refuse of the people. How will it be possible to harmonize these prophecies? We cannot deny that the Messiah must come twice—the first time, to redeem the world; the second, to judge it. The prophecies should, then, be applied to these two events, giving to each what belongs to it. Following these observations, if we conclude that the first advent will be with power and majesty, this must not be understood in a material sense, but of a new spiritual kingdom. And with this just interpretation, all the Scriptures, which cannot be harmonized in any other sense, will be found uniform.”

To these the Infant God joined many other reasons. The scribes and doctors, who had listened to Him, remained silent. At length, "What wonder is this?" said they. "Whence comes this marvellous child?" The august Mary and St. Joseph arrived in time to hear the conclusion of the discourse. The doctors of the law arose, and our Blessed Lady, overwhelmed with joy to have found her treasure, approached her Divine Child, and said, as it is related by St. Luke: "*Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee, sorrowing.*" His Majesty replied to her: "*How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?*"

The Evangelist relates that the Blessed Mary and St. Joseph did not understand the mystery of these words. It was because of their interior joy, which they had sowed in tears. The prudent Mother said to her divine Son: "Do not separate me from your presence. Receive me for your servant, and if through my own fault I have lost you, I entreat your pardon." The Infant God received her with complaisance, and they again set out for Nazareth. After they had gone a short distance from Jerusalem, our Blessed Lady prostrating herself, adored her holy Son, and asked His benediction. The Divine

Jesus raised her from the ground, and spoke to her with great sweetness. Afterwards He lifted the veil, and, with greater clearness than ever before, revealed to her His most holy soul and its operations.

The blessed Mother conversed with her most sweet Child, respecting the mysteries that He had opened to her. The celestial Master informed her that these doctors and scribes knew not that His majesty was the Messiah, because of their presumption and confidence in their own wisdom. Our Redeemer converted many souls during this journey, and, as His holy Mother was present, He made her the instrument of these miracles. He restored many sick persons to health, He comforted the afflicted, and wrought other wonders which I do not pause to recount.

They arrived at Nazareth. The Evangelist St. Luke includes, in a few brief words, the mysteries of their history: "*The Infant Jesus was subject to His parents,*" i. e., to His holy Mother and St. Joseph. "*His Mother kept all these words in her heart, and Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and man.*" We shall speak of this further on, adding, only, at this time, that the humility and obedience of our Lord towards His parents, offered new sub-

jects of admiration to the angels, as did also the dignity of his pure Mother, to whom the God Incarnate was confided, in order that, by the help of St. Joseph, she might minister to His wants.

Although the obedience of the Son was only a consequence of the natural maternity, still, to exercise the rights of a Mother over her Son, a different grace was necessary from that which she had received to conceive and bring Him forth. The august Mary possessed all these needful graces, proportioned to this ministry and office, and with such abundance, that they were reflected upon her happy spouse, so that he was also the worthy foster-father of Jesus Christ, and head of this most holy family.

18*

CHAPTER XVII.

ST. JOSEPH IS NO LONGER ABLE TO WORK.—CONDUCT OF THE AUGUST MARY AND THE DIVINE JESUS, DURING MORE THAN EIGHT YEARS THAT THE HOLY PATRIARCH LIVED IN SICKNESS AND INFIRMITIES.

THE Queen of Heaven completed her thirty-third year, and her chaste form retained all its natural perfections so beautifully and well proportioned, that it was the admiration of the angelic choirs. Her sacred body had reached its full development, so that this august Princess resembled the holy humanity of her Son. The pure Mary preserved this admirable complexion at thirty-three, without the least change, and at the age of seventy, she had lost nothing of her strength and beauty. Our blessed Lady understood this privilege. She knew that the resemblance of the humanity of her divine Son was to be always preserved in her. St. Joseph was not aged when this lovely Queen had attained her thirty-third year, nevertheless his strength was much exhausted, because the cares, travels,

and continued pains he had taken for the support of his spouse and the Lord of the Universe, had worn upon his health more than his years. The Lord, who desired to advance him in the exercise of patience and the other virtues, permitted him to suffer from certain maladies, that hindered him much from application to manual labor. His prudent spouse, who had always appreciated, loved and served him beyond all that other women have done in regard to their husbands, perceiving his indisposition, said to him, "My spouse, I am under extreme obligations for your fidelity, and the increasing care and fatigue you have imposed upon yourself, in order, by the sweat of your brow, to maintain me, your servant, and my adorable Son. You will receive from the liberal hand of the Most High the recompense for your pains, and the precious benedictions which you have merited. I beg you to cease from this incessant labor, and repose yourself. I will now labor for you, in testimony of my gratitude, as long as the Lord shall give us life."

The saint listened to the reasonings of his sweet spouse with many tears; and, although he assured her that he desired to continue his toil, he yielded to her solicitations, believing it his duty to obey her, and discontinued his labors.

In order to have nothing superfluous in this holy family, they gave away his tools in alms.

St. Joseph being thus relieved from labor, gave himself entirely for the rest of his days to the contemplation of the mysteries which he had nourished in his breast, and to the practice of virtue. He was happy in these occupations to find himself in the presence and enjoyment of the conversation of the Incarnate Wisdom and of her who was His Mother. With such helps, he arrived at so high a degree of sanctity, that next to his blessed spouse, who was always unique among mere creatures, *he surpassed all men, and he will never be surpassed by any.**

Our august Queen and her divine Son assisted, served, and consoled him in his maladies, with the most assiduous care. It is impossible to depict the humility, respect, and love which these charitable cares produced in the sincere and grateful heart of the servant of God. The Blessed Virgin charged herself with the support of her most holy Son and her spouse, by her own work. The Eternal Wisdom so disposed it, in order that her merits and virtues might reach the highest degree, and serve as an example to put to shame the children of Adam.

The Lord offers this *strong woman* to us as an

* Suarez maintains this same doctrine *ex-professo*.

example. The heart of her husband trusteth in her, and not only that of her spouse Joseph, but also that of her Son, at once true God and man, as Solomon declares in the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs. Means were not wanting to the Lord to support the corporeal life of His Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, since man lives not by bread alone. He could have miraculously provided for them every day, but the world would have been deprived of the privilege of witnessing the industry of the most pure Mother of God, and if our Blessed Lady had not acquired these merits, she would have failed to obtain much of her reward.

With prudent diligence she provided for all. Neither our adorable Saviour nor His Mother, ate flesh meat—their food consisted of fish, fruits, and herbs, and they partook of these with great moderation. Our august Lady, nevertheless, prepared meat for St. Joseph, and served it in the manner most agreeable to him. It happened sometimes, that her labor was insufficient, because St. Joseph had need of more than heretofore. On these occasions, our Lord exercised His power. He often so ordered that His Blessed Mother accomplished much in a short time, so that her work multiplied itself in her hands.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OF THE CARE WHICH THE AUGUST MARY AND THE DIVINE JESUS BESTOWED UPON ST. JOSEPH IN THE INFIRMITIES OF HIS LATTER DAYS.

IT is a common mistake to regard the Lord Jesus only as Redeemer, and not as a master, who by His example instructs us to suffer afflictions. And, although Catholics do not fall into the insensate errors of the heretics, for they all admit that without good works, and without afflictions, there is neither recompense nor crown, yet we find many children of the Holy Church who are scarcely to be distinguished from those who are in darkness, since they avoid works which are painful to them.

Let us reject this manifest error, and let us be assured that sufferings have not been for our Lord Jesus Christ alone, but for us also. The most beloved of our divine Master have received the greatest share of the cross. Let us not be so bold as to say, that if the Saviour suffered as man, He is, at the same time, God, and hence

His is, to human weakness, rather a subject for admiration than of imitation. The Saviour of our souls overturns this excuse by the example of His most innocent Mother and St. Joseph, and that of many men and feeble women also.

The Lord conducted, by this royal road of suffering, the spouse of His blessed Mother, St. Joseph, whom His Majesty loved above all the children of men. To increase his merits and his crown, before his power of gaining merits had ceased, the Lord bestowed on him, in the last years of his life, certain exceedingly acute maladies, which caused excessive pain throughout his body, and great debility. Besides these, there was another mode of suffering, more gentle, yet very distinct, which resulted from the force of his burning love. This love was so vehement, and at times his transports were so impetuous, that his pure spirit must have broken the chains that bound it to the body, if the same Lord had not given him the power of resisting it. His Majesty made him suffer this sweet violence, because, from the natural feebleness of a body so attenuated, this painful exercise was a great merit for the saint, not only from the effects of the pain that he suffered, but from the cause, which was love; hence he

acquired incomparable merits. Our blessed Lady had knowledge of all these mysteries. She penetrated the interior of the saint, so that she might not be deprived of the joy she derived from the conviction of having a spouse so holy and so beloved of the Lord. She observed the candor and purity of his soul—his ardent affection, his lofty and divine thoughts, his patience and sweetness in his maladies, the great sufferings that he bore without a complaint or sigh, neither asking any solace. Our great patriarch supported all his pains with an incomparable patience and magnanimity. All this his faithful spouse remarked, as well as the value and the merits of the many virtues which the saint practised, and she conceived so high a reverence for him that we will not attempt to express it. She applied herself, with the greatest joy, to sustain and console him. As she had little esteem for what she did herself to relieve the great discomforts of her spouse, and because of the love she bore him, she commanded the viands that she prepared for her holy patient to give him strength and re-establish his appetite, since this was to preserve the life of the saint—the just—the elect of the Most High.

When St. Joseph partook of this food, he was sensible of the sweet benedictions and the genial

effects of the viands, and inquired of his spouse: "What aliments of life are these which vivify me, restoring my appetite and my strength, and fill me with new consolation?" The Queen of heaven served him on her knees, and, when his pains were violent, she removed his sandals, and supported and assisted him with the tenderest affection. Although the humble saint made every effort to hinder his spouse from taking such unwearied pains, it was always in vain, for our sweet Lady understood the maladies of her patient, and when he most needed help, and she therefore hastened to assist him, in all his wants, with the greatest affection. She often said things which exceedingly consoled him. During the three last years of his life, which were those of his greatest suffering, she never quitted him, day nor night. If for a moment she withdrew, it was only to serve her Divine Son, who united with His Mother to assist the holy patriarch, except when He was necessarily occupied in other works; so we may say that never was patient so well served. From hence we may learn how great were the happiness and the merits of St. Joseph, for he alone has merited to have her for his spouse, who was also the spouse of the Holy Spirit. The charity of our blessed Lady towards St.

Joseph was not satisfied by these services of which we have spoken. She strove to console him by still other means. Sometimes she prayed the Lord, with the most ardent charity, to deliver her spouse from his sufferings, and to inflict them upon herself. In making this request, she believed herself to deserve the pains of all creatures, regarding herself as the least of all. She alleged, also, the holiness of St. Joseph, and the delight which the Lord took in this heart, so conformed to that of His Majesty. She witnessed the sufferings of her blessed spouse, and had compassion for them: she knew his merits, and the pleasure which her adorable Son had in him. She rejoiced in the patience of the saint, and magnified the Lord. Sometimes, the Queen of Pity, touched by the excruciating pains of her spouse, and melted by tenderest sympathy, having obtained permission from her Divine Son, commanded His sufferings, and their natural causes, to suspend their activity, and cease so cruelly to afflict the just and the well-beloved of the Lord.

At other times, she prayed the saints and angels to console her spouse, and to strengthen him in his troubles, when the weakness of the fragile flesh demanded it. By this species of commandment, the blessed spirits appeared to the holy pa-

tient in the human form, all radiant with beauty and splendor, and conversing with each other of God and His infinite perfections. Occasionally they chanted celestial music, with a sweetness that suspended his bodily pains, and inflamed his pure soul with divine love. The man of God had, besides, for his greater consolation, a particular knowledge, not only of all these favors, but also of the holiness of his most holy spouse, of the love that she bore to him, of the interior charity with which she served him, and others of the excellences of this great Queen of the universe. All these united produced such effects upon St. Joseph, and enabled him to acquire so many merits, that, in this life, it is not possible to conceive them.*

* M. Olier, who has written such sublime pages on St. Joseph, affirms that we cannot know, here below, the merits of the glorious St. Joseph, and that we are incapable to conceive them. What a eulogy!—*Manuscripts of M. Olier.*

CHAPTER XIX.

PRECIOUS DEATH OF THE GLORIOUS ST. JOSEPH, CAUSED PRINCIPALLY BY DIVINE LOVE.—HE EXPIRES IN THE ARMS OF THE DIVINE JESUS, ASSISTED BY HIS BLESSED SPOUSE, THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

DURING eight years St. Joseph had been exercised by pain and sufferings, and his generous spirit was ever more and more purified in the crucible of patience and divine love. With years his tortures increased, his strength diminished. The inevitable term of life, to which we pay the universal tribute of death, approached. His blessed spouse increased her devotion and her cares to serve him with inviolable fidelity.

This most holy Lady, knowing, through her infused science that the last hour of her chaste spouse in this place of exile was very near, went to find her adorable Son, and said to Him: "My Lord and my God, the time for the death of your servant Joseph, which you have determined by an eternal will, approaches. I beseech

you, Lord, by your infinite goodness, to assist him in this hour, so that his death may be as precious to you, as his life has been agreeable. Remember, my Son, the love and humility of your servant—his merits—his virtues, and the pains he has taken to preserve your life and mine.”

Our Saviour replied to her: “My Mother, your requests are pleasing to me, and the merits of Joseph are in my thoughts. I will now assist him, and I will give him so eminent a place among the princes of my people, that it will be a subject of admiration for the angels, and a motive for praises to them and to men. I will not do for any nation that which I will do for your spouse.” Our august Lady returned thanks to her most sweet Son for this promise.

During the nine days that preceded the death of St. Joseph, the Son and the Mother watched by him day and night. They so arranged it that one or the other was always with him. During these nine days, the angels chanted, three times each day, by the commandment of the Lord, celestial music for the holy patient. It was composed of canticles of praise to the Most High, and of benedictions for the saint himself; and, besides, so delicious a fragrance pervaded all of this poor habitation, that not only the man of

God was fortified and cheered by it, but many persons on the outside.

A day before his death, all inflamed with divine love for so many benefits, he was elevated into a sublime ecstasy, which continued twenty-four hours, the Lord preserving his strength and life by a miraculous interposition. In this ecstatic state he clearly beheld the Divine Essence, and discovered in it, without a veil, that which he had believed by faith, either in the incomprehensible Divinity, or in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption—the Church Militant and the sacraments with which she is enriched. The Holy Trinity destined him to be the precursor of our Saviour Jesus Christ to the saints who were in limbo, and commanded him to announce to them anew their redemption, and to prepare them for the visit which the same Lord was to make them to conduct them to eternal felicity. St. Joseph returned from this ecstasy radiant in beauty, his soul divinized from the view of the being of God. He addressed himself to his spouse, and requested her benediction; but she prayed her most holy Son to give it, which His Divine Majesty was pleased to do. Our Blessed Lady, having knelt, besought St. Joseph to bless her as her spouse and head. The man of God, not without a divine impulse, gave his benedic-

tion to his beloved spouse before their separation. She afterwards kissed the hand with which he had blessed her, and requested him to salute for her the saints in limbo.

The most humble Joseph, wishing to close his life by the seal of humility, asked pardon of his holy spouse for the faults which he might have committed in her service as a feeble man of earthly mould. He entreated her to assist him in this last hour, and to intercede for him. He testified, above all, his gratitude to our adorable Saviour, for the benefits that he had received from His most liberal hand during all his life, and particularly in this sickness. Then taking leave of his blessed spouse, he said to her: "You are blessed among all women, and chosen above all creatures. Let angels and men praise you. Let all nations know and exalt your dignity. Let the name of the Most High through you be known, adored, and glorified in all future ages, and eternally praised by all the blessed spirits, for having created you so pleasing in His eyes. I trust to meet you in the heavenly land."

After this, the man of God addressed our Lord Jesus Christ, and, wishing to speak to His Majesty with profound respect, he made every effort to kneel on the ground. But the sweet Jesus approaching, received him in His arms,

and the saint, supporting his head upon His bosom, said: "My Lord and my God, Son of the Eternal Father, Creator and Redeemer of the world, give Thine eternal benediction to Thy servant, who is the work of Thy hands. Pardon the faults I have committed in Thy service and in Thy company. I confess Thee, I glorify Thee, I render to Thee, with a contrite and humble heart, eternal thanks for having chosen me, by Thine ineffable goodness, from among men to be the spouse of Thine own Mother. Grant, Lord, that Thine own glory may be the theme of my gratitude through all eternity."

The Redeemer of the world gave him His benediction: "Rest in peace," He said; "the grace of my heavenly Father, and mine, be with thee. Proclaim the good tidings to my prophets and saints, who await thee in Paradise, and tell them that their redemption is nigh." As our beloved Redeemer pronounced these words, the most happy Joseph expired in His arms, and His Divine Majesty closed His eyes. The angels chanted the sweetest hymns of praise, and, by order of the supreme King, they conducted this most holy soul into Paradise, where the saints recognized him as the reputed father of the Redeemer of the world, and His greatly beloved one, who merited singular ven-

eration. He imparted a new joy to this innumerable assembly, by announcing to them, according to the commandment of the Lord, that their redemption would not long be delayed. We must not omit to mention, that although the precious death of St. Joseph was preceded by so long a sickness, and such severe sufferings, these were not the chief causes of it. He might have lived longer, notwithstanding these maladies, if the effects of the ardent love that burned in his chaste bosom had not been super-added, for this happy death was rather a triumph of love than the penalty for sin. The Lord suspended the supernatural aid by which He had preserved the strength of His servant, and hindered the violence of his love from destroying him; and this help failing, nature was vanquished. This victory sundered the ties that detained his holy soul in the prison of the body, in which consists our death. Thus, love was the last of his maladies, and it was also the greatest and most glorious, since, by it, death is the sleep of the body, and the principle of life.

Our blessed Lady, seeing that her spouse had ceased to live, prepared his body for sepulture, according to the customary usages. No other hands than hers, and those of the angels who assisted her, touched him. In order that all

should be conformable to the incomparable modesty of the Virgin Mother, the Lord clothed the body of St. Joseph in a celestial splendor, which covered it in such a manner that the face only was visible, and thus the pure spouse saw not the rest of the body which she prepared for interment. Several persons were attracted to the house by the sweet fragrance that exhaled from the holy corpse, and, seeing it so beautiful, and as flexible as if it had been living, they were greatly astonished.

The body of St. Joseph was carried to the common cemetery, followed by relatives, friends, and others, and by the Redeemer of the world and His holy Mother, and a great multitude of angels. Our prudent Lady preserved an unalterable dignity, nor did she permit her interior affliction to hinder her in ordering all things necessary for the interment of her spouse, or the service of her Son. She acquitted herself in all with a regal magnanimity, and, at the close, she gave thanks to her adorable Son for the favors He had bestowed on St. Joseph. Our august saint was one of those who enjoyed the privilege of exemption from the sight of the demons at his death, because these spirits of darkness, wishing to approach him, were sensible that a powerful force arrested them, and the angels hurled them into hell.

CHAPTER XX.

PRIVILEGES GRANTED TO ST. JOSEPH.—HIS BIRTH ACCOMPANIED BY MIRACLES.—HIS ADMIRABLE VIRTUES.—THE VIRTUES WHICH THE MOST HIGH HAS PROMISED TO THOSE DEVOTED TO HIM.—JESUS RESUSCITATES ST. JOSEPH AFTER HIS PASSION.—OUR BLESSED LADY CELEBRATES THE FESTIVAL OF HER ESPOUSALS.

THE duration of the life of this happiest of men, St. Joseph, was sixty years and some days. He espoused the Blessed Mary in his thirty-third year, and he lived a little more than twenty-seven years in her society. At the death of her holy spouse, our Lady was nearly forty-one years and six months old. She felt a natural grief at his death, because she had loved him as her spouse, as a very great saint, and her protector and benefactor; and, although the well-regulated mind of our admirable Lady controlled her sorrow, it was not the less profound. The more she knew of the high degree of sanctity which her spouse had attained among the great saints, whose names are inscribed in the Book of

Life, the greater was her affection for him. And, since we cannot lose without sorrow that which we tenderly love, we cannot doubt that the grief of the Blessed Virgin was very great, when we measure it by the love she bore to the holy patriarch.

This is not the place to treat, particularly, of the excellence of the holiness of St. Joseph, for I have no order to impart, more than what will serve generally to make manifest the dignity of his spouse, to whose merits (after those of her divine Son) we must attribute the gifts and graces with which the Most High favored the glorious patriarch. And, even if our blessed Lady had not been the meritorious cause, or the instrument of the sanctity of her spouse, she was, at least, the immediate end to which that sanctity referred. The virtues and graces which the Lord communicated to His servant, Joseph, were conferred to render him more worthy of her whom He had chosen to be His Mother. It is by this rule, and by the esteem and love which this adorable Lord bore to His most pure Mother, that the sanctity of St. Joseph is to be measured. Doubtless, if there had been found in the world another man more perfect and more excellent, His Majesty would have made him the spouse of His own Mother; and, since He conferred

this dignity upon St. Joseph, it must be granted, without contradiction, that he was the greatest saint of God on earth. As he had been created for such an exalted purpose, it is certain that it was with the design to render him worthy of the august Mary, and to proportion him, by her powerful right, to these same ends. This proportion was to be found in the holiness, the virtues, the gifts and graces, natural or infused, which he so eminently possessed.

I observe a difference between this great saint, and the other saints, in the gifts of grace which they received. There have been many saints who have been gifted with privileges, all of which were not connected with their own sanctification, but had regard to other objects for the service of the Most High. They were gratuitous gifts, or apart from sanctity. But for those of our holy Patriarch, all the gifts that he received, augmented in him the virtues, and his interior sanctification. The ministry with which they were connected was a consequence of his holiness and his good works, for the more holy he was, the more worthy was he to be the spouse of the august Mary, and the depositary of the treasure and the mystery of Heaven. He ought to have been, as he was, in reality, a prodigy of holiness, and, by the special providence of God,

he was sanctified at his birth. His nature was in just proportions—his qualities excellent—his complexion perfect, and to these were superadded purity of soul and right inclinations. In him the concupiscence of the flesh found itself enchained, so that no unregulated inclinations could gain the mastery. Although he had not the use of reason at his first sanctification, in which he was justified only from original sin, his Mother was sensible of a new joy in the Holy Spirit, and, without fully penetrating the mystery, she performed great acts of virtue, and believed that her child would become great before God and man.

St. Joseph, as we have said, was born beautiful and most perfect by nature. He brought to his parents an extraordinary joy, like that at the birth of the little Baptist, although the cause of it was less manifest. The Lord advanced him in the use of reason, and gave it to him in all its perfection, in the third year of his age. He communicated to him, also, an infused science, and a new augmentation of grace and virtue. The holy child began, henceforth, to know God by faith; he knew Him also by natural reason, as the primal cause and author of all creatures, and he comprehended, with a most

sublime conception, all that was said of God and His works.

He had, at the same time, the power of elevated contemplation, and he practised the virtues admirably, in proportion to his tender years. The use of reason dates with children usually about or after their seventh year. St. Joseph, in his third year, was already, in his reasoning faculty, a perfect man, and in holiness also. He was of a sweet disposition, charitable, kind, and sincere. In all things he gave evidence of holy and angelic inclinations, and, growing in age and in perfection, he attained, by a most holy life, the age at which he espoused the most Blessed Mary.

Then to augment for him the gifts of grace, and to confirm him in these gifts, our Blessed Lady aided him by her prayers. She earnestly supplicated the Most High, that if He commanded her to enter the marriage state, He would sanctify her spouse Joseph, so that he should conform himself to her chaste desires. This august Lady knew that God would be gracious to her prayers, and that He would operate in the soul of the holy Patriarch effects divine and beyond expression. He imbued him with the perfect fulness of all the virtues and all the gifts.

His Divine Majesty perfected anew all his

faculties. In the virtue of chastity he was more elevated than the highest seraphim, because, inhabiting a body, mortal and earthly, he possessed a purity equal to theirs—they being disengaged from matter. There never even entered into his thoughts any image in the slightest degree impure, or of an animal or sensual nature. By this perfection, and by his angelic integrity, he was prepared to be the spouse of the most pure of creatures, and to live in her society. Without this privilege he could not have been capable of arriving at so great and excellent a dignity.

Equally admirable in the other virtues, especially in divine love, he was like one who finds himself at the fountain, and replenishes himself with that living water which conducts to eternal life, or as an inflammable substance near the sphere of the sacred fire, that kindles without resistance. All that can be said in the most exalted praise of this loving spouse, has been already expressed, when it was recorded that the love of God was the cause of his sickness, and the instrument of his death. The sweet pains of love surpassed those of nature, and these were less active than the first. As the objects of his love, our Lord Jesus Christ and His Mother were present, and since the saint possessed them

in a closer union than any other mortal could approach, it was inevitable that this most faithful and candid heart must exhale itself in the affections of a love so constituted.

Blessed be the author of such great wonders, and blessed be the happiest of men, St. Joseph, in whom they were all most worthily wrought! He merits that all nations should know and bless him, since the Lord has not honored any other among mortals, nor ever manifested so much love for any as for him.

In the course of this history, I have said something of the visions and revelations with which our saint was favored. It is certain that he had many more than we can relate; but we may imagine great things if we consider that he was made acquainted with the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of His most holy Mother—that he lived so long in close association with them, that he was regarded as the Father of this Divine Saviour, and was truly the spouse of our Blessed Lady.

Besides all this, I have discovered that the Most High accorded to him, because of his great sanctity, certain privileges in favor of those who choose him for their intercessor, and who invoke him with devotion. The first is, to obtain the virtue of elasticity, and to be withdrawn from the

danger of losing it; the second, to receive powerful assistance to be freed from sin and to recover the grace of God; the third, to acquire, by his means, devotion for our Blessed Lady, and dispositions to receive her favors; the fourth, to obtain a happy death and a special protection against the demons at this last hour; the fifth, to intimidate the enemies of our salvation by pronouncing the name of St. Joseph; the sixth, to obtain health of body and consolation in affliction; the seventh privilege to have, by his intercession, successors in families.

God grants all these favors, and many more to those who ask for them as they ought, in the name of St. Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin; and I entreat all the faithful children of the Holy Church to have a great devotion for this great saint, and to be persuaded that they will become sensible of the favorable effects of his protection, if they will dispose themselves worthily to merit and to receive them.

Our Lord arose from the sepulchre after His passion and death, invested with beauty and glory, as the prophets had announced. Finding Himself with the saints and prophets whom He had relieved from prison, He promised to all the human race, the universal resurrection of the

dead as a consequence of His own glorious resurrection, in the same flesh and in the same body, each in his own ; and, as a pledge of this promise, His Divine Majesty commanded the souls of many saints to reunite with their bodies, and be raised to an immortal life. These bodies arose, as Saint Matthew records in his Gospel, and among them were those of *St. Anne*, ST. JOSEPH, and *St. Joachim*: the others were ancient Fathers and Patriarchs.

Our Blessed Lady was careful every year on the festival of her most holy and chaste spouse St. Joseph, to celebrate the espousals, through which the Lord had given him to be her faithful companion, in order to conceal the mysteries of the Incarnation of the Word, and to execute with the highest wisdom the secrets and the works of the redemption of the human race. And as all these works of the Most High were as a deposite in the most prudent heart of Mary, and as she kept this festival as a mark of her high esteem for him, the joy and gratitude with which she celebrated his memory were ineffable.

Her most holy spouse Joseph descended at the festival all radiant with glory, accompanied by innumerable angels, who solemnized it with great joy in chanting new hymns, which were composed by our most Blessed Lady, in grati-

tude for the benefits which her spouse and herself had received from the hand of the Most High.

After having thus employed several hours, she discoursed a part of the day with her glorious spouse, on the Divine attributes and perfections; for, in the absence of the Lord, these were the occupations that best pleased His gentle Mother. A little before taking leave of the holy spouse, she entreated him to pray for her, in the presence of God, and to praise Him in her name; she also requested him to offer prayers for the Holy Church and the Apostles. She asked his benediction, and the glorious saint returned to heaven.

GLORY

TO THE DIVINE HEART OF JESUS,

TO MARY IMMACULATE,

AND

TO ST. JOSEPH.

APPENDIX.



LIFE OF THE VEN. MARY OF
JESUS OF AGREDA.

BY THE

REV. FATHER SAMANIEGO, O. S. F.

P R E F A C E

TO THE LIFE OF THE VENERABLE MARY OF
JESUS OF AGREDA.



THE life of the servant of God, Mary of Jesus, offers the most perfect model of a soul rising from virtue to virtue, according to the words of the prophet, even to the summit of perfection; and her character demands from us an attentive study and meditation. There is much to learn in these pages for whomsoever desires to follow the path of holiness without looking back. They offer a unique example of the spiritual life in its perfection.

It may, perhaps, be objected that only a small number of privileged souls receive such great favors, or are called by the way of ecstasies, visions, and the most eminent gifts of infused science. However this may be, it remains not the less incontestable that a great many are called to perfection and to contemplation, if not infused, at least acquired; and that both lead to the highest perfection, as it is expressly taught by the great mystical doctor, St. Teresa, in her "*Treatise on Perfection*," Chapter XVIII. Another of her admirable works, "*The Interior Castle*," cannot be too highly recommended to the reader. As for those who are incredulous in regard to the divine communications and celestial favors which are mentioned in this *Life*, let them remember that the Church does not reject them:—she examines them with care, but she is not incredulous. Without doubt to believe on slight grounds

is folly—*qui cito credit, levis est corde*. Eccl. xix. 4. Nevertheless, it would be temerity to refuse credence to facts which the most learned and pious men do not hesitate to pronounce worthy of all confidence. God, in the impenetrable designs of His mercy, has permitted us to be a witness of prodigies that yield in nothing to any of the wonders recorded in the life of Mary of Jesus. For ourselves, we profess openly that nothing has been more useful to our soul than our belief in the miracles of God in His saints.

It seems evident to us that we have reached the times which the venerable Grignon de Montfort speaks of in his "*Treatise on the True Devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin*." "At the end of the world, and very soon, the Most High, with His Holy Mother, will form for themselves great saints, who will as much surpass the greater number of other saints as the cedars of Lebanon surpass little trees—as it has been revealed to a holy soul, and as we read in the writings of St. Vincent Ferrer, p. 29."

Thus three saints affirm that in the present age, which is the age of Mary, the Holy Spirit will pour out upon souls the gifts of wisdom for the operations of miracles of grace. These souls, in imitation of Mary of Jesus d'Agreda, will become living copies of Mary, and will lose themselves in the abyss of her interior, to love and glorify Jesus Christ. Mary of Jesus is the great model to follow, and the doctrine of her writings is the way and the truth which lead infallibly to Jesus Christ. The works of this servant of God are destined to be the book of life for the great souls of whom we speak.

To observe the decree of the Sovereign Pontiff, Urban VIII., of happy memory, of the 5th of July, 1634, we protest that all the visions, revelations, miracles, and other extraordinary favors recorded in the "*Life of Mary of Jesus*," have no other authority than that given by the testimonials reported by us.

LIFE OF THE VENERABLE
MARY OF JESUS, OF AGREDA.

CHAPTER I.

HER BIRTH.—THE FIRST SPIRITUAL LIGHTS WHICH GOD COMMUNICATES TO HER.—INSTRUCTIONS SHE RECEIVES FROM HER PARENTS.—HER CONDUCT, TO THE AGE OF TWELVE YEARS.

THE venerable Mother, Mary of Jesus, who wrote the *Cité Mystique de Dieu*, (The Mystical City of God,) was born at Agreda, a city of old Castile in Spain, on the 2d of April, 1602. Her parents were Francis Coronel and Catharine d'Arana, both noble, and of great virtue.

She was baptized on the eleventh of the same month, and by a special disposition of Providence, she was named Mary, to which she afterwards added that of Jesus, which was the name given by the early Christians to the Mother of

the Saviour, whom they called MARY OF JESUS. Her Mother, convinced that her daughter was destined by God for great things, guarded her with watchful care.

II. Before the little Mary was capable of profiting by the lessons of her parents, God began to instruct her in a wonderful way. With the earliest use of her reason she had an exalted vision, in which her understanding was enlightened by divine illuminations, and her will confirmed. This supernatural vision was the beginning of knowledge to the child; from it she learned to know God as the creator of the universe, the preserver and vivifier of all that has existence. Human miseries were made manifest to her in herself; and the consciousness she attained of them, humbled her to the very depths of her nothingness. Human nature in its first state of innocence was revealed to her, and she discovered the ravages that sin had made in man. She was attracted by the goodness and the infinite beauty of God, and absorbed in His love, and she conceived a very great fear of offending God and of losing His grace. Thus the spiritual edifice of this soul was established on the solid foundations of love, humility and fear.

From this time, having the perfect use of her

reason, which was aided by the light and knowledge acquired in the vision, she began to exercise her powers of reflection. The Lord communicated to her, also, an infused knowledge of the articles of the faith which she should believe; of the commandments of the law of grace, and those of the holy Church which she should observe; of the nature and the qualities of the persons with whom she should associate, and of her conduct towards them.

Favored with such admirable lights, she resolved to employ all her faculties to love God and keep His commandments; and she lived in great serenity of mind and tranquillity of conscience, not allowing herself to be scandalized by the conduct of others, and acting in all things with the simplicity of the dove.

But God, having resolved to raise the edifice of the spiritual life of this child to a sublime elevation, willed to consolidate it by the sure counterpoise of afflictions. He suspended, therefore, His caresses, and the effects of His presence. This affliction was very great. She sought her beloved, but was not able to find Him, and, penetrated by grief, she wept and lamented. This absence of the Lord continued during several years, for she received no other extraordinary favors, until some days after taking the religious habit.

Meanwhile the Lord gave her only that interior illumination which is usually enjoyed by souls who follow the way of perfection.

The sorrowing child feared to have offended the Lord, and that His absence was intended as a chastisement. The humble sentiments she entertained for herself led her to regard all with whom she associated as her superiors, and this humility, being deeply grounded in her heart, made her timid in their presence. She found neither repose nor consolation but in retreat. Worldly conversation, although it is permitted, rendered her melancholy, and, under these appearances, she came to be considered a useless creature.

Her parents were pained to observe these timid and sombre dispositions in their daughter. Her mother suspected them to be the effects of an idle or slothful nature, and, under this impression, she treated her with severity, and reproved her with harshness. The father followed the example of his wife. This was designed by Providence, in order to preserve the humility of the child. In these afflictions she sought after God. "My divine Master and adorable Lord," she cried, "my father and my mother have forsaken me! O cast a favorable look upon Thy helpless child!" But all the gates of consolation were shut, and her heart was in bitterness.

The Lord accompanied these spiritual pains by others of her body, which gave a timely mortification to the flesh, so that it should not resist the spirit; and she was exercised by almost continual disorders or maladies. These indispositions began from her sixteenth year, for her intense sufferings disturbed her health. With great submission to the Divine will, she made a wise use of her afflictions to deepen her humility, and of her maladies to exercise her patience. She was much encouraged by the remembrance of the passion of our Saviour, which she often called to mind: and when the Lord said to her, "*I have suffered far more for thee,*" she forgot all her pains.

III.—Her parents did not neglect to imbue her mind with the principles of Christian doctrine. Her pious mother undertook to instruct her, and was agreeably surprised to find that this child, so useless in worldly matters, was so capable to learn and so inclined to devotion. From this, she inferred that in her little Mary some divine secret lay concealed. She took her to the churches, taught her how to frequent the sacraments, and to practise mental prayer.

The Lord enlightened the youthful Mary more and more, by that interior knowledge of which we have spoken. In relating the effects

which she experienced from it, she says: "It consoled me in my afflictions—corrected me in my disorders—checked me in my imperfections, and animated me in my tepidity." She usually received, with this enlightenment, two divine favors: one was an interior voice, which said to her heart: "Come to me, my spouse. Leave terrestrial things. Purify yourself. Direct your actions to please me, for *I am that I am*. Hasten, my dove, to fulfill the desires that I awaken within you." The other was an interior reprehension of her defects and vices; for, if she received any satisfaction with complaisance, the Lord shed so much bitterness within her soul that she became dissolved in tears.

IV. By favor of this spiritual intelligence, she desired, passionately, to practise the virtues. She exercised herself chiefly in the theological virtues of faith, hope, and, especially, in charity; for her will was captivated by the love of God. She neglected no occasion—not even the least—to practise the moral virtues, and she always cherished the highest esteem for virginal purity. Even in her eighth year, the pious child had a strong inspiration that it would be an agreeable offering to the Son of the Virgin to consecrate to Him her virginity, and, taking the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and some

other saints for witnesses, she made a vow of perpetual chastity. From this time the divine spouse increased his favors, although he continued, apparently, absent. In this state she remained until the twelfth year of her age.

She had addressed herself to her confessor, to learn how she could better serve God. He was a spiritual and interior man, who, perceiving the fervor of the child, taught her how to practise mental prayer. God, as if He had awaited the instructions of man, revealed Himself to this loving soul. He placed her in the oraison of quietude, and she felt, with a most sweet tranquillity, the presence of God. The Lord elevated her to such a state that she herself said: "*I lived without living, because Thou, Lord, livedst in me.*" She remained some years in this state, with considerable progress in the divine life.

The Lord had inspired her to preserve the secrets of her interior, but it was not possible that those who associated with her should not perceive something of what she concealed. They observed her equanimity of spirit in afflictions, her joy in contempt. "It is all I ask," said she one day to her mistress, "that they should despise me." They remarked, also, that, from her earliest years, she had deprived herself of a part of her food, for the poor. Her mother

took her with her to visit the poor, and she manifested great joy when she was allowed to dispense the alms.

The report of her virtues spread through the city. In the general esteem excited by her uncommon merit, some persons had the curiosity to watch her in her retreat, where they saw her in the practise of penances almost impossible at her age. They witnessed her great modesty—her extraordinary recollection—the devotion with which she approached the sacraments—and were edified. Her Confessor, notwithstanding his prudence, could not always preserve silence, and sometimes communicated his thoughts to devout persons, and thus she reached the twelfth year of her age.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOUSE OF HER PARENTS IS CHANGED INTO A MONASTERY.—HER CONFLICTS.—SENSIBLE FAVORS WHICH SHE RECEIVED.—ASSAULTS OF THE DEMON.—TRIALS CAUSED BY THE RELIGIEUSES OF THE COMMUNITY.

AFTER having completed her twelfth year, which is the age required for permission to enter in religion, she declared anew to her parents, her vocation. They, doubting nothing, resolved to satisfy her desires, and wished her to take the habit of the bare-footed Carmelites, when, oh, impenetrable secrets of Divine Providence! there happened as follows:—

The pious Mother of the young Mary employed three or four hours, daily, in oraison. One day, the Lord spoke with her, and said, "That it was His will she should build in her house a monastery for nuns, where she and her daughters should make their profession, and that her husband should become a religious of the Order of St. Francis, where his two sons already were." The Lord spoke in the same

manner to her confessor, the venerable F. John de Torrecille, and the obedient lady going to the Convent to communicate to him what had passed, the servant of God came to meet her, saying: 'My daughter, I know already the object of this visit.'

All difficulties and opposition, being at length overcome, the Ordinary and the regular Superiors consented to the foundation. When the fervent Mary heard of this remarkable disposition of the Lord, with regard to her parents, her joy was immense. She encouraged her Mother, and incited her to perseverance. The foundation was retarded during three years, and she ceased not to pray the Lord to shorten the time. Finally, on the 16th of August, 1618, the new monastery was commenced, and on the day of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, the first Mass was solemnly chanted in the new Church. The Monastery was placed under the Order of St. Clara, and the foundresses required that the sisterhood belonging to it, should be bare-footed, although the Order of the Conception of this province wore shoes.

On the 13th of January, 1619, the mother and her two daughters, with three sisters, who had come from the Convent of St. Louis of Burgos, to be foundresses, entered the humble

monastery in perpetual enclosure, and formed there a community. Our Mary, on taking the habit, assumed the title of Mary of Jesus. She was at that time sixteen years of age.

While the parental mansion was being converted into a monastery, the embarrassments of the workmen, and the crowds of people who came about it, had somewhat disturbed her mind. This was permitted by Divine Providence, that her soul might be better established in humility, from the experience of her own weakness. By the help of His grace she repaired these distractions in a little time, yet she did not cease to weep for them as bitterly as if they had been the greatest sins. And, now she began to act as if she had but just commenced life. She reflected how worthy God is to be loved and served, and she represented to herself the sublimity of interior actions. She pondered seriously upon her own fragility, and the great dangers to be encountered in spiritual life. She therefore resolved to follow faithfully the path of virtue, with courageous, humble, and submissive firmness.

II. Although under the pressure of an inextinguishable fear, which is the offspring of love and humility, she persevered throughout her life in this resolution. This fear, which the high-

est illumination could not dissipate, would have proved a hindrance to the flight of her spirit towards God, if the Lord had not tempered it by an absolute confidence in the virtue of obedience according to the words, "*He who hears you, hears me; he who obeys you, obeys me.*" In order to preserve herself with assurance, in obedience to her superiors and confessors, she yielded to the inspiration to show them clearly all her interior—not only that of her sins and imperfections, but also of the least temptations.

The foundations upon which the spiritual edifice of this creature were elevated, were then, love, humility, fear and obedience. She made a general confession not only to ease her conscience, but that her confessor might guide her with security. She applied herself entirely to the holy exercise of oraison in a manner so admirable, and so useful, that she never made it without striving to discover her faults, in order to correct them at once. She commenced by meditation, considering the truths and mysteries which faith inculcates, purifying and ornamenting her soul by their lights, so that she might become the worthy tabernacle of the Lord.

The rule which she followed was to put herself in the lowest place, and to persevere in it until the Lord should elevate her to a higher

degree. The divine spouse, to whom fidelity and true humility are so agreeable, delayed not her entrance into the prayer of recollection, where she annihilated herself, forgot the earth, and, as if in a glowing furnace, was purified. From this He raised her to a higher eminence, in which the fire of divine love began to burn with great spiritual sweetness. All this happened in the first months of her noviciate.

The most frequent subject of her oraison, during this time, was the passion of our Lord Jesus. She bore, always, the image of Jesus Christ crucified, vividly engraved on her heart, and she was sensible of its wondrous effect for the preservation of her interior purity. This holy exercise produced the most salutary effect upon her soul, and brought forth rich fruits.

She divided her time according to her obligations. The remaining hours were employed in reading spiritual books, in mental or vocal prayers, and other exercises of devotion and penitence. Not a moment was wasted. She slept only enough to support life. Without ceasing, she had on her lips these words of David: "*What shall I render to the Lord for all the good He hath done unto me?*" Often her confessor refused to permit the penances which she wished to practise, and she submitted in obe-

dience, believing, always, that the opinion of her confessor was just.

Mary of Jesus passed, in this manner, the years of her noviciate, with great spiritual progress. On the 2d of February, 1620, the day of the Purification of our Lady, she made her profession with her pious mother. Her sister was still too young. Having entered into her religious vows, she continued her spiritual life with renewed fervor. After many entreaties, she obtained the most retired chamber of the convent, and it became the field of her spiritual combats.

III. The Lord, having chosen to make her the historiographer and the disciple of His Most Blessed Mother, elevated her spirit, from degree to degree. But the harbinger of all grace was affliction. This was the only door by which she entered into divine favor. Before receiving the extraordinary graces which Divine Providence destined for her, the demon had permission to afflict her, outwardly, in a surprising manner. The infernal dragon left no means untried. When the servant of God offered up devotions, in the silence of the night, the demon extinguished the light, and sought to disturb her by frightful imaginings. He appeared to her under various forms of horrible animals. Sometimes

he presented himself in that of a foetid corpse; at others, as a living man. He maltreated her in her person, and tormented her in every way to interrupt her exercises. But God imparted to her such courage, that she despised all these attacks, and entirely disregarded the enemy.

The Lord favored her, during these combats, with sensible caresses. When she received Holy Communion, in partaking of the holy elements, she enjoyed a taste of inconceivable savor. Many times she saw the Blessed Sacrament surrounded by a miraculous splendor. These favors were succeeded by varied divine apparitions. The Queen of angels appeared to her, the first time, with her adorable Son in her arms, invested with splendor and glory. She sank prostrate at His feet, with profound humility; but the merciful mother raised her up, and the most sweet Jesus received her within His arms. This apparition gave her strength to support every pain. The august Queen of Heaven was the object of her first vision.

The Lord continued to distinguish His servant by these favors. On the festival of Pentecost, a beautiful dove, all radiant, appeared to her, and rapt her, as if in ecstasy. On another occasion, our Redeemer appeared in the deplorable condition to which He was brought at His

passion. But the combats of the demon succeeded to these sensible favors, and, finally, the Lord gave more ample permission to the enemy.

The demon, perceiving that he was despised by our humble maiden, attacked her, by the permission of the Lord, with greater cruelty. He augmented her maladies, and added extraordinary torments. She was thrown into a state of such extreme debility, that she seemed, constantly, as if in a dying condition. At the same time, he vexed her by horrible fancies, and every species of tribulation. And, as he had discovered that the torment of this soul was the dread of offending God, he attacked her at this point, exciting her fears by insinuations that she was in the road to perdition. He tortured her in other ways, which the following words of the saint will explain. "He tormented me," said she, "with pains which cannot be mentioned, singularly strange for a soul who had throughout life cherished purity.

IV. The fury of the demon was not satiated. He undertook now to afflict her by means of creatures. The convent was so contracted in its dimensions, that her exercises could not be concealed from the other nuns. Some observed her with admiration, others from curiosity. The mother foundresses, seeing the servant of God

continually ill, though she did not keep her bed, resolved to suspend her practices. The demon induced them, under the pretext of compassion, to do as we shall relate.

In order to interrupt her holy exercises, they obliged her to remain in their presence, and even caused her to be watched at night. They forbade her to communicate to her confessor what was passing within her, and she was allowed only half a quarter of an hour for confession. She was punished by being deprived of Holy Communion, and with harsh words. If, being reprov'd, she did not justify herself, they were displeas'd; and if she said any thing in the hope of satisfying them, they impos'd mortifications. And, besides, the Lord hid His presence from her! Thus circumstanced, she was destitute of all consolations, for prayer, confession, and communion were allow'd her only under restrictions. The demon took advantage of all this to destroy her. But this opposition, and these pains, could not check the servant of God in the way of perfection. In her temptation she had recourse to purity of intention. With regard to the sisters, she accepted their censures without excusing herself, and pray'd for them. She was always admirable in her obedience to her superiors, and forming,

from their opposition, a means of obtaining merits for herself, she prayed in spirit while striving to satisfy them. Thus she pursued the path of her spiritual life in treading under foot the snares of hell.

CHAPTER III.

SHE RECEIVES SIGNAL GRACES.—HER SUPERIORS SCRUTINIZE HER ECSTASIES.—HER PUNCTUALITY IN THE COMMUNITY LIFE.—HER GREAT AUSTERITIES, AND THE RULES SHE FOLLOWED IN THEM.

IN this abridgment of her life, we cannot enter into the particulars of the various grades of her sufferings, nor of the degrees of prayer which the Lord communicated to her. The servant of God wrote on this subject a treatise, entitled *The Ladder*, in which she records the counsels of the Lord to avoid dangers, the steps by which she ascended to perfection, and the instructions she received from the Holy Ghost.

At the beginning of her religious life, she was able to conceal the favors she received, but, having been elevated to a higher contemplation, it was no longer possible either to hide them, or withdraw herself. On discovering them, some of the religieuses pronounced it hypocrisy. Others said she had lost her senses. The servant of

God consoled herself by the reflection that this would draw contempt upon her. She would gladly have concealed these favors, but the impetuosities of the spirit continued, and became manifest ecstasies.

The Lord designed to enter into intimate communication with this soul, by the way of intellectual revelations and visions, and for this reason he favored her with the ecstasies which ordinarily introduce these visions. On the Saturday after the Feast of Pentecost, in 1620, she inquired of the Lord, in her oraison, "What shall I do?" and a transport of love for God ensued, in which she found herself in a state of perfect interior recollection. In this state, she saw in a vision the Mother of God, with her most holy Son in her arms. The Blessed Virgin gave her an instruction on the virtues, and it seemed to her that the divine Lord drew her heart from her, and changed it. This was her first ecstasy.

From this time, when she was in her eighteenth year, her ecstatic raptures were so frequent that she could no longer conceal them. After receiving Holy Communion, the Lord so transported her in an ecstasy, that, in spite of her efforts, which caused the blood to flow from her mouth, she was unable to resist it. Notwithstanding her esteem for these divine favors, and

her appreciation of the good effects which they wrought in her soul, her humility suffered, because they were known to others. "We ought not to desire these transcendent graces," said she. "I do not wish for them; but I must go whither His Majesty is pleased to conduct me. May His holy will be done in me."

II.—It is not surprising that different sentiments existed in the community with regard to events so extraordinary. The religiouses omitted nothing to enlighten themselves, and went even further than the rules of prudence would approve. They were persuaded there was a supernatural cause at work, and requested the Father Provincial to examine the case. The ecstasies assumed this form: The body was deprived of the use of the senses, as if it had been dead, or inanimate. It was a little raised above the earth, and so light, that, by a single breath, it was moved as easily as a feather. The face appeared more beautiful than usual, and the posture was so modest and devout, that she resembled a seraph in human form. She remained in this state two and even three hours.

The Provincial, who was a very learned man, and, at the same time, devout and prudent, carefully examined the case, and also the circumstances attending it. He probed the interior of

the servant of God—examining her principles, her progress, and her actual condition, together with all the secrets of her soul—and he found all according to the spirit of God. He resolved to put her to the proof by a trial, the effect of which is an assured mark of a good spirit, although the failure of it ought not to be too much censured. He ordered her to come to the parlor, while she was in an ecstasy, and she obeyed immediately. The abbess made the same experiment, with a similar result, and also her confessor, and the mistress of novices.

After so exact a scrutiny, the Provincial decided that it was not judicious to stifle the spirit of the servant of God. He recommended precautions, so that these wonders should not be exposed before seculars; and he provided for her a pious and prudent confessor, to whom he confided the peculiarities of her condition, her recollection, her exercises, and her austerities. The servant of God was much consoled by this examination, because she regarded the judgment of her superiors as the surest guide for her conduct.

Mary of Jesus pursued her spiritual course. The religieuses conceived a great esteem for her extraordinary virtue, and this esteem changed into a sort of veneration, as the ecstasies became

more frequent and more marvellous. All regarded her as a prodigy of holiness, but the exposure caused her humility to suffer an inexorable martyrdom.

In proportion as the Lord multiplied His favors afflictions and pains responded to them. Those caused by the demon were so cruel, that they surpassed her natural strength. The all-powerful Lord fortified her even in these ecstasies. "The soul," she one day said to her confessor, "receives sometimes favors of such a character, that the body is supernaturally refreshed and strengthened; without this I should be dead." The absences of the Lord succeeded these visits: the demon ceased not to whisper that she followed the way to perdition, and, in her humility, she fancied it was true. Here was the sting of the angel of Satan which afflicted this soul,—the fear that the grandeur of the revelations might stimulate her pride.

III. After the departure of the Provincial, she regulated her life with her confessor, so as not to be hindered in following the common life. She was always so exact in the rules of the community, that she was regarded as a model by the other religieuses. Obedience only could hinder her, and she was mortified to fail in the prescribed regularity. Even when there were only

the prayers of the divine office to be said, she availed herself of them.

Having become paralyzed, she caused herself to be transported to the choir, and there ardently besought the Lord not to remove her sickness and sufferings, but so to moderate them that she might not be prevented from being with the community. She received this benefit by means of the blessed Mother of God, and became more fervently attached to her service. She was cured through a holy image of our Lady of Martyrs, which was brought into her cell.

The pains by which the demon tormented her did not cease, but the Lord so regulated the time of her paroxysms that she could perform her common obligations. She was very exact to observe the rules, the constitution, and all the holy practices of religious life, never omitting any thing.

IV. In her personal penances she followed inviolably the rules which her Divine Spouse had given her. "That which the Lord has ordered and instructed me to do," said she to her confessor, "is, to put far from me, in all my exercises and penances, whatever might interfere with the purest intention of pleasing Him alone: all imprudence, which is dangerous in these

matters; all occasions that might attract esteem towards me; all that fervor which arises from self-love, or is not clearly examined by the interior light; not to commend myself in making them, since all that we can do for God, is as nothing in proportion to what we ought to do, and to do nothing but in obedience."

She slept only two hours daily, on a sort of bed made in the form of a grate; sometimes on the pavement, or on the floor. She arose towards eleven o'clock in the night, and began the exercise of the cross, which lasted three hours. She occupied an hour and a half in meditating the passion of the Lord. For half an hour she carried a heavy cross of iron while contemplating the foot-steps of the Saviour. She continued half an hour prostrate in the form of the cross, the remainder of the hour she stood with her arms extended. She then employed the time remaining in thanksgivings and prayers for all men. At two o'clock she went to Matins with the community, and at four o'clock she re-entered her chamber, when her pains took possession of her until six o'clock. At six she went to make her meditation with the community. She confessed, and received holy communion. She then employed an hour and a half in the contemplation of the Lord. The remainder of the day was

occupied in the offices of the convent and in writing, when her confessor required it. Then she was engaged an hour in oraison. At six she partook of a small portion of food, and at seven she went to compline. Finally, retired to her cell, she made her examination of conscience, and other devotions, and took her two hours of sleep. Her usual food consisted of herbs and vegetables, and of these she took only as much as was necessary. She ate but once a day. She went, nevertheless, to the refectory, but it was only to kiss the feet of the others, to ask their pardon kneeling, or to prostrate herself at the door, so as to be trodden under foot. She fasted three times a week on bread and water, and on Fridays she drank nothing. She took the discipline five times daily, and sometimes she lost much blood.

All the ordinary penances, besides others, on extraordinary occasions, were more painful to her than to others, because she was of a delicate complexion, and, besides, the Lord often miraculously augmented her sensibility to pain. But to her it seemed always as if she did nothing; for, reflecting upon what she owed Him, she forgot all that she had suffered.

In her ecstasies, her love of souls was more and more inflamed, and this love becoming

strong as death, and its zeal inflexible, her soul was pierced with poignant sorrow. In this state, the Lord sometimes made known to her His will, that she should labor for His creatures; and she offered herself to suffer, and even to give her life, if it were necessary, for the salvation of a single soul.

One day, after having communicated, while in ecstasy, the Lord showed to her, in a wonderful manner, the whole universe by abstractive images. Among the multitudes of those who neither professed nor confessed the faith, His Divine Majesty declared to her, that they who were the least disposed to be converted, and to whom His mercy was most inclined, were the Gentiles of New Mexico. The communication of these lights continued, and the Lord showed her with greater distinctness those kingdoms and provinces of Indians, commanding her to pray and labor for them. He gave her a distinct knowledge of their manners and customs, their dispositions, and their great need of the ministers of God. The faithful servant was excited always more and more to labor and to prayer. Then the Lord, whose judgments are impenetrable, and whose ways are incomprehensible, operated in her, and by her, one of the greatest wonders, which has commanded the admiration of ages.

CHAPTER IV.

MIRACLES WHICH GOD WROUGHT BY HER IN AMERICA.—
THE MANIFESTATION OF TRANSCENDENT GRACES CEASES.
—HER HIDDEN LIFE—HER SUFFERINGS.—HER COMMU-
NICATIONS WITH THE ANGELS AND SAINTS.

WHILE she prayed for these souls, the Lord placed her in ecstasy, and it seemed that she found herself—she knew not by what means—in a totally different region, and in the midst of Indians. It appeared that she saw them—that she found the climate of their country warmer than her own; and the Lord commanded her to preach the faith, and she seemed to preach to the Indians in her Spanish language, and they understood her, and she understood them. She wrought prodigies in confirmation of the faith. The Indians were converted, and she catechized them.

This wonderful state was renewed, and more than five hundred times it seemed to her that she was transported into that country, and that a great nation and its king were con-

verted to the faith of Jesus Christ. She saw the monks of St. Francis, and counselled the Indians to send some of their people to invite these religious to come among them, informing them where they were to be found.

The servant of God communicated all these strange things to her confessor. The report was current, among religious of both sexes, that she had been conveyed, bodily, to the Indies. The truth is, that a woman—whether it was the servant of God herself, or some angel in her form—wrought these wonders. The religious who were in New Mexico were surprised at the arrival among them of a great troop of Indians, who demanded to be baptized. Who had instructed them? It was, they said, a woman, whom, by their description, they recognized to be a nun.

Father Alonzo de Benavides, a devout man, moved by his zeal for the good of souls, sent to them some of his religious. Finding them already sufficiently instructed, they baptized the king and his family, and a great number of persons, so that Christianity flourished in those provinces. Meanwhile, the fathers desired to know who was that servant of God who had been the instrument, in the hands of the Almighty, of doing so much good. Father Alonzo

de Benavides, some years after, found cause to return to Spain. He arrived in Madrid in 1630, and conferred with the Rev'd Minister-General, on the principal affair which had brought him to Europe. The Father Bernardin, of Sienna, who had examined her, doubted not that it was Sister Mary of Jesus, and appointed Father Alonzo his commissioner to her.

Father Benavides arrived at Agreda, and, having exhibited the letters of the General, he went to the convent with the confessor, and a religious of great reputation, to interrogate the servant of God. She replied, in virtue of obedience, and declared, with much prudence, the time, the beginning, and the progress of these marvellous events. The father interrogated her respecting the particular marks of places, and the occupations and modes of living among the Indians; and, while giving him the proper names of the provinces, she confessed that she had seen this father there, fixing the day, the hour, and place where she had seen him, and the religious who accompanied him.

Father Benavides, with the Provincial and the confessor, made a written report of these facts. Their conjecture was, that she had been carried, bodily, to the Indies; but this was an exaggeration, for the servant of God said, in refer-

ence to this point: "That which I think the most certain, is, that an angel appeared in my form, and that the Lord showed me, here, in oraison, what passed there."

The servant of God gave a letter to the father for the religious who were employed at these conversions; and, having returned to New Mexico, he related to his assembled brethren how he had found in Spain her who had wrought the wonders of which they had been witnesses. Father Alonzo wrote an account of these facts, which is preserved in the archives of the Custodia, and a copy of it was sent in 1668, which has served to prepare this memoir.

II.—The servant of God was subjected to an insupportable martyrdom, as soon as her ecstasies became noised abroad. The attention of seculars was excited. The religieuses opened the grating so that they could see her. They drew aside the veil, and showed how she could be moved by a breath. A vain babbler told her of it. It is impossible to express the mortification of the servant of God, when she was assured of the truth. She locked herself up; but the religieuses, removing a board from the door, carried her to the choir, as easily as a feather. She had no consciousness of it; but she said, afterwards, that, if she had been put in

the pillory, she should have suffered less than in hearing of what they had done.

During three years she had endured this kind of publicity. She supplicated the Lord to withdraw these favors, and used all human means to conceal them. At last the Lord sent her superiors who provided remedies, and He granted her prayer in causing to cease all that excited observation. The religieuses who had judged of her sanctity only by these prodigies, were dissatisfied. Some said she had been under the influence of a good spirit; others suspected some secret sin. The servant of God endured these affronts with joy, but she suffered from the absence of the Lord. The demon then dared to propose to restore the ecstasies if she would make a compact with him. But, armed by faith, and inflamed by charity, she detested and drove him from her presence.

III.—The servant of the Lord besought her Divine Master to conduct her, by secret ways, unknown to the world. The Lord promised it, and, from that time, she felt a great change in her interior. Her elevations of spirit were admirable: the superior portion of her soul soared towards God: its powers were absorbed in the Divinity, and she received sublime revelations and instructions in a manner purely intel-

lectual. In her exterior nothing extraordinary was apparent.

The servant of God discusses the degrees, the modes, and the effects of this communication in the 2d chapter, book i. of the history of the Blessed Virgin. She continued in this way during her life, the divine light always increasing in her to the last. She now made a new rule of life, and wrote thirty-three counsels, which she practised. These are the principal: "To go in every thing against my will, and do nothing according to its appetites; never to commit any sin, nor imperfection, with deliberate intention; to be devoted to the Blessed Virgin; to offer to the Eternal Father the merits of His most holy Son—His blood, and the treasures of the holy Church—praying to Him for the salvation of souls, by the love which He bears them; to put myself always in the lowest place."

The extraordinary merit of Sister Mary of Jesus won the hearts of the community. They changed their opinions, and, becoming convinced of her great worth, they persevered in sustaining her. Meanwhile, the Lord dilated the interior powers of her soul, and she received communications, without causing any embarrassment to her exterior occupations. In this eminent

state she discovered the profound mysteries hidden in the life of Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother. Although the visions and revelations she now enjoyed were intellectual, she had, sometimes, imaginary, and even corporeal visitations. But as soon as she felt that the visions, or expressions, came by the imagination, or the senses, she placed herself in indifference, called up her faith, and thus left no room for the suggestions of the demon. She received her favors only as a means whereby to serve God more entirely.

IV.—The attacks of the demon did not cease. During their continuance she had no fear; but, afterwards, her miseries so oppressed her spirit, that the enemy made her apprehend she might not be in the right way. Sometimes he excited disquiet by means of creatures. At others, he impressed his suggestions on her imagination with such force, that she was unable to expel them from her mind. He made “mountains out of molehills,” and endeavored to persuade her that all which had happened arose from the imagination, or natural causes. He pretended that this was the voice of conscience, and the counsel of God himself. To withdraw her from obedience, he insinuated that she deceived her

confessors. From these followed the sadness, affliction and obscurity that filled her soul.

The servant of God, in this painful condition, was admirable. She sought after God by faith. She humbled herself, acknowledging her nothingness, and confessed all her sins. This remedy alone satisfied her. Her sufferings in this way, during her life, cannot be expressed. "What surprises me," said she to her confessor, "is, that I am not more experienced; whence I conclude there is, in these sufferings, a divine intention." We shall again refer to these extraordinary combats.

V. The object of all these favors bestowed upon the servant of God, was to prepare her to make known to the world the "*Divine life of the Most Blessed Virgin.*" God, who proportions means to their ends, gave her, besides her guardian angel, five other angels, who made themselves visible to her. Their communications served to enlighten, instruct, correct, and advise her. Sometimes they sent forms into her imagination when the Lord spoke with her in this superior part, and at other times they cleared up her difficulties.

She wrote a short treatise on what the celestial spirits taught her touching the direction of the spiritual life. In her hidden life, the angels

conducted her as the superior angel illuminates the inferior. They thus prepared her during many years. One day, the Lord manifested to her, in Himself, the glory of His saints, and said: "Be faithful to me; love me much; dilate your heart, and place it in my hands. I desire that your conversation shall be only with me, my angels, and my saints. I give you two of my elect." St. Agnes and St. Ursula appeared, and she felt that these glorious virgins were as if present with her continually.

The two saints gave her instructions upon the fidelity of the spouse of the Most High—of the employment of the superior part of the soul—of the modest deportment of the inferior part, and the manner of acting towards creatures. The servant of God found these counsels so advantageous, that she wrote a little treatise, which she communicated to her confessor. She lived as if in glory amid these heavenly occupations.

CHAPTER V.

SHE IS ELECTED SUPERIOR.—GOVERNMENT OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN FOR HER.—FIRST COMMANDMENT TO WRITE THE HISTORY OF THE MOTHER OF GOD.—NEW AFFECTIONS.—HER INFUSED SCIENCE.—THE LAWS SHE RECEIVES AS SPOUSE.

SHE had passed three years in the eminent state of which we have spoken, when His Divine Majesty ordained that she should be Superior of the community, for the good of her sisters. The Divine Providence disposed all with power and gentleness. It was in the year 1627, the eighth of the foundation of the monastery, that the Superiors had the inspiration to appoint, as the Superior, Mary of Jesus. The Lord had, as we have hinted, forewarned His servant on the subject, by manifesting to her His will. It was one of the most grievous trials that could have been inflicted upon her, for her profound humility was disturbed by it.

She addressed herself to God, praying Him to remove from her this bitter cup, but all was of

no avail. The Lord had implanted within her so tender a devotion to the Queen of angels, and so great a confidence in her goodness, that she undertook nothing without invoking her aid. She therefore poured forth her heart in the presence of the Virgin Mother. The merciful Queen appeared to her, and said: "My dear child, be consoled; I will be Mother and Superior for you, and also for your children; I will supply your deficiencies; you shall be the instrument by which I will accomplish the will of my Son and my God."

The humble servant yielded to the Divine will. The Superiors appointed her president on the festival of St. Joseph, 1627, and, after having obtained a dispensation, on account of her youth, from Rome, she was elected abbess, to the great joy of the community. The Queen of Angels acquitted herself of the promise she had made. The Lord confirmed it, saying, that He gave her His Blessed Mother for Superior, that she should obey her as her faithful disciple.

From this epoch the communication of the Mother of God with this creature continued to be intimate, frequent, and sublime. She directed her, gave her counsel, corrected her defects, and imbued her with heavenly doctrine. The servant of God accused herself every night of her

faults, prostrate before the Queen of Heaven, to recognize her superiority. She also placed in the middle of the choir an image of the Mother of God, and at her feet the rules and seal of the convent, which are the insignia of government. When she dedicated the history of the Queen of Angels to her sisters, she found it necessary to reveal to them this mystery, and henceforth the nuns called this holy image their Superior.

II. The marvellous effects of this government of the Mother of God were visible both in their spiritual and temporal affairs. In less than eleven years the servant of God formed this monastery in the inviolable observance of the rules, and in conformity to the constitution of the Recollects. She established there usages so holy, and exercises so sublime, and observances so devout, that nothing better could be desired for the highest perfection of a religious community. In her administration the golden mean was observed between too great zeal and too much indulgence; the reins of regular discipline were held firmly, without doing violence to the infirmities of nature.

The venerable mother, Mary of Jesus, with eminent holiness governed this monastery during thirty-five years; for when the election depended on the community, they applied to the

nuncios, for dispensations to enable them to re-elect her. The servant of God besought the generals of the order to release her from this position; and, finally, in 1652, she prevailed on the nuncio to refuse a dispensation. It was permitted by God, that her sisters might see in her a model of the most perfect obedience, and appreciate the value of her government. At the end of three years she was re-elected, and continued to be, by dispensation, until her death.

When she was first Superior, or, rather, the Vicar of the Queen of Heaven, she undertook to build a new convent, having in her possession only forty francs. But the church and the other buildings were completed in less than seven years, without any diminution of the funds of the community. The church was consecrated by the bishop with extraordinary pomp, in the midst of a concourse of people and clergy assembled from many leagues around. She maintained an unbroken calm in regard to all the material wants of the community, although the Lord allowed them sometimes to touch the limits of extreme necessity.

III. In 1627 the Most High began to declare to the servant of God His holy will that she should write the life of the Virgin Mother. The Lord having inspired her with a most ardent

devotion for His holy Mother, she desired to prepare a treatise which should be pleasing to her. In this view she wrote what had been communicated to her on the praises and prerogatives of the Mother of God. This treatise was greatly applauded, but it was doubted that she was the author. She was examined on this subject, and it was discovered that this admirable treatise was as nothing in comparison to the Divine knowledge contained within her soul.

She offered an humble resistance, as may be seen in the *Introduction* to the history of the Blessed Virgin. The Lord gave her ten years to prepare for it—His Divine Providence also procured a confessor capable, learned, prudent, and pious, to assist her. Father Francis André de la Torre had the inspiration to consecrate himself to the conduct of this soul, and he directed her during twenty years, to the time of his death, excepting rare absences by the order of his Superiors.

IV. The Lord now granted to her a new infused science, perspicuous and general; but whether it is that science, even infused, brings with it the danger of some sinful complaisance, or that the human understanding has need, in order to use the heavenly light with liberty, to be purified in the crucible, the servant of God was

plunged into new afflictions. She was cast into a night of complete obscurity, which lasted eighty days, and the light of faith was her only guide. The demons had ample power to afflict and to tempt her. Lucifer, accompanied by his legions, continued his attacks during this entire period. They consisted of horrible visions, terrible voices, unheard-of cruelties; he even went so far as to blaspheme by her mouth. He transfigured himself into an angel of light; he feigned miracles, and dared to present her with holy water, but was unable to resist its effects.

The Lord manifested to the servant of God after this combat, that the demons had attacked her by more than a thousand dangerous temptations; but Mary of Jesus, armed with the buckler of faith, had won a complete victory. At length the permission of the Lord ceased, and the demons fled. She had also a dangerous illness, in which the approaches of death were represented to her. Finally, she was placed in view of hell, and as if in this horrible pit. It was the last proof which the Lord imposed to elevate this creature to the sublimity of infused science.

V. After this tenebrous night, the Most High disclosed to her the secrets and mysteries of His wisdom. He bestowed on her a more dis-

inct intelligence of the Church Militant, with the grace and gifts which He communicates to mortals in this valley of tears. She was endowed with a more eminent knowledge of the Church Triumphant, of the essential glory of the angels and saints, and of accidental glory. The infinite perfections of God and His attributes were manifested to her in a degree above the ordinary power of grace.

This illumination was habitual to her, and permanent. She penetrated the meanings of the Scriptures, and understood Latin, without being able to speak it, and she obtained the use of the most proper terms of scholastic and mystical theology. But this knowledge did not make her less humble; she never spoke of it unless in obedience to her Superiors. All these lights contributed only to augment her love for God, to serve Him, and labor to persuade others to love Him.

After these favors the Lord called her to a higher perfection, by an interior voice, gentle and efficacious. He represented to her His innumerable benefits, and engaged her to correspond with them. She sought, like the thirsty hart, to please the Lord, and in her pains of love, she ejaculated, "I pray Thee, Lord, to grant me that high perfection which Thou wilt in me, and the instructions necessary to practise it!"

VI. She was already the spouse of the Most High, and to perfect her in this state, the Divine Majesty regulated His love, and prescribed inviolable laws for her, commanding her to write them as a rule of life, and to communicate them to her Superiors. She therefore wrote, inspired by her Divine spouse, an admirable treatise, entitled "*The laws of the spouse, the elevations of her chaste love, and instruction in the Divine science.*" This treatise has three parts, under the metaphor of the construction of the temple of Solomon. The first teaches how to prepare and polish the materials—that is to say, the senses and faculties of the soul; the second, how to form the virtues; and the third, how God communicates Himself in a sublime way to the soul.

During many years this humble virgin practised these Divine laws. Inflamed by the love of her spouse, she had a holy zeal for His honor. She labored incessantly that her Well-Beloved might not be offended. To this effect she interposed the merits of the passion of the Redeemer, and practised painful works on behalf of sinners. She wrought great good, but it is enough to say here that in this way she became capable of serving as the instrument to write the great work of the admirable history of the Mother of God, to reform morals and sanctify souls.

CHAPTER VI.

SHE WRITES FOR THE FIRST TIME THE HISTORY OF THE MOTHER OF GOD.—FRUITS THAT SHE GAINS FROM THIS HISTORY.—NEW ORDER OF LIFE.—ELEVATION OF HER STATE.

IT was now ten years since she had begun to know the will of heaven, when renewed orders were positively given to write the Divine history, and the narration of the mystical city of God for the glory of the Most High, the honor of the Mother, and the sanctification of the faithful. Seeing herself obliged to yield, in her perplexity she had recourse to her confessor. He, too, who, during ten years, had understood all, decided that she must obey, and the Superiors whom he consulted were of the same opinion.

Thus confirmed by obedience, the venerable Mother began, in 1637, to write the history of the Queen of Angels. In only twenty days she had completed the first part. The Divine light, and the intelligence of the mysteries of which she wrote, were so vivid, that her pen could not keep

pace with their impetuosity. The Lord concealed from the demon the commencement of the work, lest he should retard it, and in order that it should be evident, from the extreme rapidity with which it was written, that it sprang from Divine power.

II. When the demon knew of this first part, foreseeing that souls would be greatly benefited by it, he employed all his stratagems to prevent its continuance. In her apprehensions of having offended God, she employed her time in appeasing the Lord, and thus it was delayed; but at length it was finished. Who can describe the fervent affections of that inflamed heart while writing this history? The attention she was obliged to give to the light imparted to her, and the occupation of writing, had interrupted her ardor to imitate the Queen of Heaven, but in composing the last chapters, moved by a Divine impulse, she exclaimed: "Lord, may Thy will be done in me; I offer myself to obey Thy orders with submission." At these words she saw descending from heaven an angel of wondrous beauty, who had orders to instruct, reprove, and humble her. He said to her: "O soul! follow the steps of thine august Mistress, the Blessed Virgin, practise her precepts, imitate her virtues, and be faithful in all that regards the service of

our Lord." In this disposition she finished the history of the Blessed Virgin.

Having completed the work, the Lord excited her to a keen sorrow for her sins, and appeared to her in a vision. It seemed that He presented her to the eternal Father, and said: "We have lifted up this soul from the dust of her misery, that she might write the history of my Mother, because our Divine providence has determined that in an age so overgrown with sins and offences against Thy Majesty we should reveal the history of my Mother as a remedy. It is but right that the soul who has written this doctrine should practise it." The most Blessed Virgin made the same request, and the eternal Father granted it. Then the memory of her past sins, of her ingritudes, and negligencies became still more grievous, and the servant of God wept bitterly, when she heard a voice declare: "The days of this creature are ended; dead to the world, she is born for God." The Redeemer applied to her the merits of His blood, and the most holy Trinity confirmed her in the name of Mary, that she might practise the doctrine of the history she had written.

The Lord imprinted upon her a lively horror of sin, and disclosed to her the sweetness of the Divine yoke. He showed her the faults she had

committed, and seeing her contrite and confused, and unable to restore one for a thousand, He confirmed her in her state as spouse. She was then returned to the Mother of the King, in order to be prepared. The Queen of Heaven instructed her in the first place, to renounce all honors, pleasures, and conveniences, and all human favors, and to seek for labors and sufferings, that she might bear some resemblance to her spouse. Thus she became crucified to the world, and lived no more in it, nor for it, but Jesus lived in her, and she for Jesus. The merciful Mother instructed her how to cast off the bad habits contracted by her sins, her imperfections, and unmortified passions, and to purify her imagination of the images produced by intercourse with the world. She adorned her with rich ornaments, and showed her the lofty habitation of her interior, where she could be sheltered from the attacks of her enemies.

III. The servant of God prepared a treatise on these instructions of the Lord and His holy Mother, entitled, "*The laws of the spouse; her considerations and sighs to obtain the last and true end—the good pleasure of her Divine Spouse.*" To this she added a short treatise, "*The excellences and the virtues of the Mother of God,*" to carry always about her. She wrote it because she heard a

voice, in the superior portion of her soul, which said: "You have need of a mistress to conduct you; of a mother to protect you; of a friend to console you; of a queen to obey; of an example to rule your life; of a model of all the virtues. Now, all these you will find in Mary."

She composed another little treatise, called "Meditations on the Passion of our Redeemer," taken from the second part of the Divine history. The interior voice said to her: "Place here the passion of the Lord; let it be food for your understanding, consolation for your spirit, occupation for your mind, and you will draw from it abundant fruits for your soul." In this same book she wrote the exercises that she practised, prayers, sublime meditations, useful devotions, the order of her life, distribution of time, and the fervent elevations of her spirit. She completed it in 1641, and it did not meet the fate of her other writings, which, as we shall see, she afterwards burnt.

She passed ten years in this employment of disciple of the Mother of God, receiving great and frequent favors, mingled with many extraordinary afflictions. The Lord then bestowed on her an admirable privilege, which was continued to the end of her life. This was, that all His communications should be preceded by so

great a sorrow for her sins, that her heart seemed broken. The love and fear of God, and contempt for herself, accompanied this sorrow. With this disposition she received all the Divine favors. At the least fault or imperfection she was reprov'd so severely, that she was lost in contrition and humility. The Lord favored this creature with a singular participation in all the gifts and graces which had been accorded to His Mother, though in a very inferior degree, but in kind the same. One of these gifts was the knowledge of created things in themselves, without mistake; the other was an impetuous communication of the light of truth, and the power of grace, which instructed her, not to permit an affection for any earthly thing in this vale of tears, even when lawful and honest. It was permissible for her to love God alone, and her neighbor in Him, and to labor, according to her condition, for the salvation of souls.

IV. In her fervor, the servant of God had collected a great number of vocal prayers, which she habitually recited. But, after having been elevated to a high infused contemplation, these prayers embarrassed her. It seemed that she ought to dispense with the least perfect; yet she feared to abandon the use of devotions which

she had so long practised. Her confessor decided to diminish them. He left her the Divine office—the little office of our Lady—her litanies, the chaplet, her *Pater* and *Ave*, the visit to the altars, five disciplines a day, the exercise of the cross, and that of death. He permitted her to read the *Abridgment of the Christian Doctrine*, according to her custom, from childhood. He also moderated her austerities.

When she was Superior, he decided that she must follow the rules of the community. The docile Superior obeyed, and conformed herself to the community in regard to all external things. In 1633 she introduced the Divine office at midnight, as it is used among the Recollects of St. Julian, which led to the change in her exercises. Her vocal prayers were moderated in 1644. She never refused her assistance to any one. She visited and consoled the sick, gave counsel, and found means to help all. She was never idle.

V. She conducted all her actions after the manner of the angels, never losing sight of God, and making frequent interior acts of adoration, praise, respect, and love. In her oraison, her contemplation was sublime. She assisted at the holy sacrifice with great devotion. In the confessional, her confessors were astonished to see

so much sorrow, and such resolutions to correct faults so trivial that they could scarcely discover an imperfection. The angels, perhaps, were in admiration, when she received Holy Communion. At the refectory, she considered that if she responded so little to the natural benefits of the Lord, she did still less for the supernatural favors, so great and so multiplied, which she received.

Every day she practised some mortification. On Monday she prostrated herself at the door of the refectory, that she might be trodden under foot; on Thursdays she kissed the feet of her sisters; on Fridays she remained on her knees, imploring mercy for her sins. In the duties of her office she acted with admirable humility and wisdom, governing with gentle severity and modest authority. She treated her sisters with maternal affection, and took great pains to supply their necessities. She loved them, without respect to persons. She chastened offences against God, and forgot those which were against herself. In fine, she took counsel of all, in grave affairs, and obeyed the counsels even of her inferiors.

In her associations with persons of the world she was very careful not to lose her interior recollection. She closed her eyes, guarded her

hearing and her tongue, and gave utterance only to words of discretion, full of humility and charity. When it was necessary, she stimulated others to practise virtue, with heavenly prudence. She had written many sentences, from which we quote this: "*The Divine anger moves slowly to vengeance, but the delay of punishment is compensated by the greatness of torment.*"

In this abridgment much must be omitted of the graces she received, and of the pains, the absences, and the combats that accompanied them. The Divine spouse formed, by this varied treatment, a spiritual life that obtained the admiration of the angels, when they saw rising, as it were, from the desert, a creature so blessed and so united to her Well-Beloved.

25*

CHAPTER VII.

THE SERVICES SHE RENDERS TO THE CHURCH.—HER INTERVIEW AND CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE KING OF SPAIN.—CONSOLATIONS, SPIRITUAL AND CORPOREAL, WHICH THE FAITHFUL RECEIVE FROM IT.—HER SOLICITUDE FOR HER DAUGHTERS.—SHE BURNS HER WRITINGS.—HER MYSTIC DEATH.

THE Providence of God, in proportion as men, by their enormous sins, provoke the Divine wrath, raises up souls of eminent sanctity to appease His outraged justice. It is easy to perceive that Mary of Jesus was one of these, who, far better than the other Esther, found grace before the King of the Universe. In the year 1630 the Lord manifested to her the approaching calamities of His Church, saying that He could have wished to find another Moses to oppose himself to His anger.

His Divine Majesty, in 1637, began to show her the assemblies held by the demons in hell against the holy Church and the faithful, and against Spain in particular, as she wrote, twenty

years later, to Pope Alexander VII. She saw that they determined to stir up wars against the Christian princes, the better to sow heresies without difficulty. With this view many legions spread themselves over the world. The servant of God prayed and groaned before God, and the Lord replied to her that this was a chastisement for the sins of Catholics ungrateful for His benefits. The war soon broke out. She saw the Church like a bark agitated by the impetuous waves of affliction, while the faithful, ecclesiastics and seculars, sought no remedy for it. She was afflicted, but the Mother of God excited her to pray with redoubled ardor. It seemed to her that His Divine Majesty had elevated her to this holy and sublime state for the good of the people of God, that she might labor for them. From this time she made it her chief employment to implore the Divine clemency to turn away these scourges from Christendom.

She prayed with great fervor for Spain, who has preserved the purity of her faith in its integrity. She endeavored to diminish the faults of her children, who, being more enlightened and more favored, ought to commit fewer sins. The loving Lord, inclined to satisfy the desires of His servant, opened a way which could not have been imagined—it was, that a poor nun,

shut up in her cloister, should have a close, frequent, and even familiar communication with her Sovereign.

II. In the year 1643, King Philip IV., pressed by the wars of Catalonia and Portugal, on his way to Saragossa, took the road by Agreda. He wished to see the servant of God, and the first time he spoke with her he felt such virtue in her words that he went away consoled. He prayed her to be his mediatrix with God for his people and himself, and requested her to write to him of whatever she judged best for the service of God.* The venerable mother obeyed, and she began to exhort him through her letters to correct and reform the morals of his kingdom. The king experienced from them such good effects that he continued this holy intercourse of letters during twenty-two years, while the servant of God still lived. His majesty folded his paper in two, writing on one side with his own hand, and the servant of God replied on the other. The king died four months after Mary of Jesus.

III. The Lord so ordered that the faithful should come to her for consolation in their

* There was found recently, at the imperial library of Paris, a part of this correspondence, which has been translated and published under the title, "*The Sister Mary d'Agreda and Philip IV.*"

Inedited correspondence, translated from the Spanish by Germond de Lavigne. 1 vol., 8vo. Vaton, Paris.

troubles, and all found a remedy for either corporeal or spiritual afflictions. People of all sorts and conditions were gathered from many distant places; but she preferred the poor, who are generally destitute of human aid. She thus diminished, according to her ardent desires, the number of sinners, for, while administering to the body, she gave instructions for spiritual wants. The Lord, by a singular privilege of His grace, made known to her the state of their consciences.

The faithful, before leaving her, generally begged some souvenir as a memorial of her benefits. Unable to resist so pious a desire, the venerable Mother gave to each a cross, medal, image, rosary, or scapular. One day, in her retreat, recollecting the spiritual wants of these people, she prayed the Lord to grant the grace to withdraw from sin, or to avoid the occasion of it, and to be assisted at the hour of death, to all who would pray with devotion, having upon them some one of the objects that she gave—and the Lord heard her prayer. The servant of God left no means untried for the salvation of souls. She said to one of her Superiors, who desired her to inform him of what passed in her mind on this subject: "I cannot explain the ardent desires which the Most High has implanted in my soul for the salvation of the

people of New Mexico, and for the conversion of those who know Him not, or who are in a state of mortal sin." It often happened that she found herself surrounded by many guardian angels, who invited her to pray for the souls confided to their charge, and to suffer pains on their behalf. Sometimes the angel guardian of a soul informed her that it was in danger of perdition, that her prayers might deliver it; and many persons declared themselves to have been saved by the servant of God from dangers that menaced their eternal salvation.

IV. She especially extended her solitudes over the nuns of this happy monastery as her duty demanded. Her ardent desire that all might be holy made her endure a sort of martyrdom. She so acted as to blend prudence with her charity and zeal to advance them in perfection. With regard to the Rule of the Constitutions, and the regular observances, she never permitted any thing which could introduce the least relaxation. She neglected no duty. Above all, she had recourse to prayer, addressing herself to Jesus Christ, and to the Queen of Angels, and representing the promises they had made to her. She held conferences so fervent and so sublime, that the sisters said, if they had but profited by them, they would be sera-

phim in perfection. She persuaded them to make frequent spiritual exercises of such a kind, that she who made them, could assist at all the exercises of the community. They vied with each other in the practice of virtue. In a word, she procured for her sisters, by all possible means, the grace of the Lord. Each of them, in imitation of her, wore an image of Jesus Christ; and she obtained for those who used them with devotion, powerful helps to excite them more and more in the Divine love. She also obtained, that those who prayed with devotion before the image in the choir should find there a sure asylum, and grace to protect them against the demon, and in temptations.

V. In the year 1643, her confessor, father Francis André, was obliged to be absent for a considerable time. An ancient religious was put in his place to confess the servant of God. He, having little understanding of her affairs, declared to her that women ought not to write, and that, therefore, through obedience, she must burn the history of our Lady, and all her other papers. As soon as the order was received, and without reply, she burned all the manuscripts that were within her power.

The principal confessor, on his return, reproved her sharply, and, persuaded that it was

very important to preserve an original, written by the hand of the servant of God, he commanded her to write it over again. But, during the eighteen months that remained before the death of this father, the servant of God was hindered in the work, the Lord so disposing it for His own purposes. Father Francis André de la Torre died in 1647, on St. Joseph's Day, after having assisted the servant of God nearly twenty years. He left all the writings of Mary of Jesus, with orders to transmit them to the Provincial, but she persuaded his agent to give them to her. The Superiors having appointed for her the same confessor who had caused the other papers to be burned, he burned these also! This loss was irreparable; but the judgments of God, who permits it, are impenetrable.

The Lord finally gave her such a confessor as she had need of in her present circumstances. This was father Andrew de Fuen Mayor. He began to confess the servant of God in 1650, and she continued to confess to him during the remainder of her days. This confessor obliged her to write a second time the history of the Blessed Virgin. Finally, informed of the principal events which had passed in her interior during the whole course of her life, he obliged her to undertake the history of it, which was a

great mortification to her. Nevertheless, obedience works miracles. She commenced, but she could write little more than the foundation of her monastery, and the lives of its fathers. Death surprised her in this work, which would have contained reproductions of all the treatises that she had written, which had been burnt, and in a heavenly manner, for the lights of her last years were the most sublime and abundant. But we must not question the judgments of the Most High, who has not permitted us to possess them.

VI. When the Lord renewed the order to write a second time the history of His holy Mother, she knew that His Divine Majesty designed to elevate her to a new state. She employed seventy-two days to prepare herself for a general confession in 1651, and thirteen days were occupied in her confession. This preparation was followed by a mystical death. The Lord several times repeated this grace, yet none could say she had ever receded. The new life of the spirit, which is the mystic death, has various degrees; and the servant of God obtained many times this new life, without losing that which she had received.

The venerable Mother, well knew these degrees, in the deaths she had experienced, and, being elevated to a new life, all that she had

hitherto done for God seemed but an invisible point, in proportion to the obligations she discovered still remaining. Nevertheless, the Lord did not exempt her in these deaths from combats with the world, nor from the temptations of the demon, nor from the tumults excited by the flesh, the passions, and the appetites; nor did He destroy her enemies so as not to deprive her of the merit of combating them, but He enfeebled them, in order that the victory should declare for her in the conflict.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEGREES OF HER HIGHEST PERFECTION.—SHE WRITES ANEW THE HISTORY OF THE MOTHER OF GOD.—HER LAST STATE.—GRATUITOUS GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.—HER PREPARATION FOR DEATH, AND PREDICTIONS CONCERNING IT.

IT was the Lord's will that the servant of God should henceforth apply herself to the imitation of the Queen of Angels, no longer as a disciple, but as her daughter. Mary of Jesus called this state *religion*, and she began it by a novitiate. The Mother of God willed to constitute herself her mistress of novices; she adopted her as her daughter, engendered in her love. The servant of God entered upon this novitiate of the imitation of the Mother of God, on the day of the Purification of the Virgin, in the year 1652, in quality of daughter. She copied in herself, with all possible exactitude, the virtues of the Queen of Angels, having always her example before her eyes. And after being exercised in this observance, she made a vow of the most sublime nature that had ever

yet been heard of. Renewing in the hands of the Mother of God her four vows, she made a fifth, to obey her in the instructions which she gave as her mistress.

She made this vow in one of the most exalted visions to which the Lord had then elevated her, and she felt that the most pure Virgin, on confirming it, gave her in recompense a spiritual embrace. We may infer from this vow a perfection of life beyond all expression. It is only necessary to read the instructions given to her by the Mother of God, in the *Cité Mystique*, and to remember that the servant of God executed them with fidelity.

The Lord elevated her to a degree still higher. After having passed some time in the imitation of the Most Blessed Virgin, the Most High placed her in another, of the immediate imitation of Jesus Christ. The Divine Jesus would be her master, and commanded her to imitate Him, until her soul should arrive at a sort of resemblance with her celestial Spouse. He promised her, that if she observed the laws of this state, all the promises of the Gospel would be renewed in her.

On the day of the Assumption, in the year 1653, the Lord lifted her into a still more sublime state than she had yet known in her

mortal life. He placed her in the novitiate of contemplation of the Essence of God. This novitiate is a state of union with God, in which His Divine Majesty lives in the soul, by being, mystically, its life, the virtue of its virtue, the movements of all its being, and the vivifying power of all its actions.

These three novitiates are like the degrees of different elevations, each of which is more lofty than the preceding. The servant of God ascended from one to the other, the first preparing her for the second, and these two for the third. But it is worthy of observation here, that she did not leave the lowest degree to mount to the highest, for each is a preparation for the next in order, and necessary for its security; neither can the highest be attained except through the two first. The Lord gave this counsel to His servant, viz., that the novitiate of the imitation of the most pure Mary prepared her for that of the imitation of Jesus Christ; for the Mother is the immediate entrance to the Son, and the novitiate of the imitation of Jesus Christ and His evangelical doctrine would conduct her to the sublimity of the Essence of God; since the Son is the way to the Father, and all who seek for God must go through His only Son, who conducts them to Him.

Two years and a half after this, on the day of the Assumption, the servant of God was elevated (whether she was in the body, or out of the body, she knew not,) before the throne of the Most Holy Trinity, and she made, in presence of the Incarnate Word, and of His most pure Mother, her profession of the state of daughter and imitatrice of this Queen. And it was as if the Most High confirmed her in this state.

II. The Lord then reiterated His orders to write the second time the history of the Queen of Angels. Her confessor seconded them, and her Superiors obliged her to obey. In the year 1655 she began it anew, in the form in which the original, written by her hand, exists at this time. The demon made every effort, and practised every ruse that his malice could suggest, to hinder the work. She wrote at no period when she was not sensible that all the fury of hell opposed it. The infernal dragon hoped she would die before its completion, and he would not have been mistaken, if the Lord had not miraculously preserved her life, as the angels revealed to the servant of God.

Mary of Jesus, in the midst of these combats, wrote this history, imitating, as closely as possible, the august Queen of Heaven. At the same time she applied herself with care to learn in

the holy gospels whatever she ought to know, in order to imitate her Divine Master. The chief counsel that she received from the Lord in this school was to suffer without repugnance, to embrace pain with pleasure, to take up her cross, and to follow Jesus Christ with fervor. The demon gave her matter for suffering.

The serpent came to ask permission of the Lord to persecute her, as he did formerly for Job. The permission of God being given, she was soon sensible of a species of cruel martyrdom, without consolation either divine or human. She found no consolation even in her confessor. But she suffered in great tranquillity, endeavoring to imitate her adorable Master. At length, triumphing over hell, she finished her admirable work.

III. The servant of God continued her life in the three states of imitation of the Mother of God—of novice, of the imitation of Jesus Christ, and of the contemplation of the Divine Essence, with great perfection, under a general law of the Divine love. She was attentive to the most holy will of her Well-Beloved, so as to do nothing that was not agreeable to Him. Having passed some years in these observances, the Lord crowned all His graces by calling her to the profession of these sublime

states of perfection, and it seemed that she could not rise higher in this mortal life; but God is an immense ocean of perfection.

Mary of Jesus had an admirable knowledge of the life, of all the operations, and of all the virtues, of the Mother of God, and she copied and imitated, with that inferior proportion which we must suppose, the virtues and the operations, interior and exterior, of the Queen of Heaven. By the protection of this powerful mediatrix, she was elevated to the imitation of Jesus Christ, and the Most High made her enter, by this door, to the sublime state of the contemplation of the Divine Essence, where she had the happiness to enjoy the intimate embraces of union with His Divine Majesty. Then, at the view of the glory and grandeur of God, she transformed herself into His image, in advancing from one light to another light—from the imitation of Mary to that of Jesus Christ—from the contemplation of the sacred humanity to that of the divinity, and from an affection inflamed, to a flame more ardent, by the movement of the Holy Spirit.

IV. Here would be the place to treat of the virtues in detail, but this would too much enlarge our abridgment. We will only add a few words on the gratuitous gifts with which her

soul was endowed for the benefit of others. She had the *gift of speaking with eminent wisdom*, as we see by her writings, which are admired by all the learned; *the gift of speaking with science*, which was evident to all those who were charged with her direction, and which is seen in the sublime instructions that she has left. *The gift of faith* is visible in her, by the services she rendered to the Church, principally in New Mexico. All her precautions to conceal her gift of *healing the sick* could not prevent its manifestation. The gift of *operation of the virtues* showed itself in the numerous conversions wrought by the venerable Mother upon various persons possessed by the demon. The *gift of prophecy* was very frequent. The gift of *the discernment of spirits* was so remarkable in this servant of God, that, by a singular grace of the Lord, she discovered the interior of the persons who had recourse to her. *The gift of speaking different tongues* was communicated to her—since, speaking Spanish to the Indians, they understood her as if she had addressed them in their own language; and, finally, the gift of *interpretation of tongues*, which her Superiors had many times occasion to remark.

IV. For a long time the venerable Mother, Mary of Jesus, had prepared for death. Her first occupation, after matins, was to meditate

upon the voice of the Most High, who called her to judgment. She wrote this meditation with considerations so full of awe, that they excite terror in reading them. She composed another meditation on the response which her soul would make at this terrible judgment. She expresses her sorrow for her sins—desires the last sacraments, and to have the assistance of priests at that awful hour. To this she adds two other meditations—one on the judgment of the righteous, and the reprobate soul; the other on the universal judgment, which she intersperses with considerations of fearful import.

She preserved, in a coffer, the bones of her father, and, when visiting them, she made sublime reflections, reading, afterwards, the recommendation of the soul. Every Friday she prepared herself for her last hour. From time to time she made retreats, to be better prepared. Finally, the Most High, by the prayers of the humanity of Jesus Christ and the Virgin, sent an angel to dispose her for a holy death.

VII. According to the example of many saints, she saw clearly the approaches of death. Desirous to perform the exercises of a retreat, she said to her sisters, who were disturbed by this absence from them: "It cannot be dispensed with, because I make it to prepare myself to

die well." After this retreat, she held the chapter on Monday, in place of Friday. "This will be the last that I shall hold," said she. She asked to have her feet washed. "Wash them well," she said to the sister, "for I shall soon receive Extreme Unction."

She had prayed the Lord to be assisted by His priests. Now it happened that the father, Zalizanes, left Madrid to preside at a chapter of his order: "Let us go," said he, "by Agreda, for the Lord calls me there." Father Samaniego, Provincial, also went there. The servant of God, who had fallen ill, enjoyed this great consolation, for the General visited her every day. From the commencement they saw that the sickness of the venerable Mother was mortal, and, when it was known, the sorrow was universal.

CHAPTER IX.

DEATH OF THE SERVANT OF GOD.

THE sickness of the servant of God lasted from the first vespers of Ascension Day to the day of Pentecost, on which she expired. The Lord granted her the grace of a good death, and it was not sudden. He left her in the one obscure light of faith, that the merit of the servant of God should manifest itself. On the third day of her sickness she confessed, with so many marks of perfect contrition for her sins, that the confessor was in admiration of it, and she confessed many times during her sickness, giving testimony of her exalted esteem for this sacrament.

On the Sunday within the octave of the Ascension, she received the holy Viaticum. The Superior commanded her to ask His Divine Majesty to prolong her life if it were His will, and to grant her the grace to be submissive to His most holy will. In this manner she practised obedience until her last moments. Every day

she received holy communion, for she took nothing until after having received this sacrament. She endured without complaint all her sufferings, and refused no remedies, although she knew they were of no avail.

She profited by every spiritual pain, and at last, on the Thursday of the Octave of the Ascension, her physicians judged that she ought to receive Extreme Unction. The Father-General, Zalizanes, announced this to the venerable Mother, who rejoiced on hearing of it. Towards evening she received it with touching devotion. "I begin," said she, "to console myself, and to take courage." She spoke with her sisters, and blessed each one in particular, giving them salutary counsels. Then she took leave of them, and returned to her recollection. She persevered in it until the day of Pentecost.

On this day, the Father-General gave her the benediction of St. Francis, and, surrounded by the most eminent religious of the order, and the nuns of her monastery, towards the hour of tierce, when it is thought the Holy Spirit descended upon His Apostles, without having lost her reason, or her senses, she yielded up her spirit to her Creator, to enjoy Him eternally in glory, as we may presume, from her life and her death. Before expiring she said: "Come!

come! come!" and at this last word, her spirit departed on the 24th of May, in the year of our Lord 1665.

Here terminates the recital of the Rev. Father Samaniego, which we have abridged with the most scrupulous exactitude; for the life which he has left us of the servant of God, is as accurate as it is full of unction. It is remarkable, especially, for the great mystical science which it reveals in its author, a very rare gift in these latter times. We shall now proceed to lay before the reader the acts and authentic documents which we have discovered, through which it is our desire to honor the servant of God, and to re-establish the memory of her glorious gifts and graces.

HISTORICAL NOTICE

OF

THE MYSTICAL CITY OF GOD,

(From which the Admirable Life of St. Joseph is extracted,)

CONTAINING THE PAPAL DECREES IN RELATION TO IT, THE APPROBATIONS OF MANY EMINENT SERVANTS OF GOD, ETC.



IN the highest rank among the saints of past ages, who have been endowed with signal graces and singular privileges by the august Queen of Heaven, must be placed, without hesitation, the Venerable Mary of Jesus, called of Agreda, from the name of the city in Spain where she passed her life. A writer, whose authority will not be suspected, the celebrated J. Goerres, in his monumental work on *Mysticism*, cites as an example, in the chapter entitled *Culminating Point of Christian Mysticism*, the life of Mary of Agreda; and, in fact, no more perfect model can be found of the most elevated ways of mystical perfection. As an example, she is *unique*, and most valuable as a study in this progress of the soul, which, according to the words of the prophet, rises from degree to degree, even to the summit of perfection: *ibant de virtute in virtutem*.

But another and more powerful motive makes it our duty to publish a rather extended notice on Mary of Jesus. It is our desire to call the attention of our readers to her great work, *The Cité Mystique*—The Mystical City.

During more than three years we have pursued our researches on this subject with an ever growing ardor, and we

have been so fortunate as to find irrefutable documents relating to it. In one of the libraries of Paris we have discovered the acts of the process for the canonization of the servant of God. Supported by these documents of unexceptionable authority, we advance, and hope to terminate all debates on this question. And after the publication of the papers which we are about to insert in this article, no one, we hope, among Christians, will be tempted to imagine that it is forbidden to read the works of Mary of Agreda, as it has been too frequently asserted.

There are divine and supernatural gifts so marvellous, that if all the authority of the holy doctors and that of the Church did not absolutely affirm them, we should be inclined to regard as doubtful. But doubt is permitted only to *ignorance and to bad faith*, and neither can justify a man at the tribunal of conscience, nor, consequently, at the tribunal of God.

The God of mercy grants to souls the privilege known under the name of *clear, distinct, and precise words, or supernatural expressions*, by which we mean, that God consents to speak to a soul, either directly and immediately, as it happens in certain cases, or by the ministry of angels, which is the most common. Sometimes it is the Father, sometimes the Son; at other times it is the august Mother of God, and, in rare circumstances, the saints, who discourse with souls in an elevated state of contemplation.

St. Teresa, whose authority in these matters is sovereign, because of the approbation which the Church has stamped on her writings, treats this question at length in the Interior Castle, Sixth Mansion, chap. iii. "God," she says, "makes His presence felt in various ways. It is effected by certain discourses, of different kinds, which He makes to the soul: some of them seem to come from without, others are profoundly interior; some seem to come from the superior part of the soul, others are so much in the exterior as to be heard by the ear." Alvarez de Paz adds that they seem sometimes

to issue from the depths of the heart.—*Interdum et ipso penetrati cordis assurgere*, vol. iii. bk. v. ch. 6.

The seraphic saint explains the means by which to distinguish the origin of these discourses, which may proceed from the imagination, or the demon, or from the Divine being. "When it is God who speaks," she continues, "suddenly He silences in us all other thoughts to make us attentive to what He says, and it is less in our power not to hear, than it is in the power of a person very quick at hearing not to hear what is said to him by another in a loud voice. When God speaks, it is beyond the power of the soul to stop the ears, or to think of any other thing than what it hears. I hope," she adds, "that I have correctly explained what regards these divine discourses, and imparted some useful advice to the souls whom the Divine Master may honor with such favors.

Suarez, and in him we hear all the doctors, explains the manner of operation. After a profound examination of the mode by which the angels communicate their thoughts to each other, he applies it to the souls to whom God imparts this gift. Suarez, Part II. book ii. chap. 27. Scaramelli, in his *Directorio mystico* treats this noble subject *ex professo*, and based on the doctrine of the great doctors, he developes, under every point of view, whatever relates to this matter Tract iv. chap. 14, 15.

We should add, that the servants of God who hear these supernatural and heavenly discourses, sometimes behold, under corporeal forms, the celestial personages who pronounce them, while at others they see nothing and hear the voice only.

The little we have said will suffice to attract the attention of priests, and engage them to study these wonders of grace. In view of the phenomena of magnetism and neo-spiritualism which now invade the world, they will come to a better understanding both of truth and error, and discern more clearly the snare which the angel of darkness labors to spread for men, in luring them either to the denial of what is super

natural, or to the grossest delusions, into which he plunges the unhappy adepts of his tenebrous doctrines.

But let us hasten towards our object, and inquire, 1st. Whether it is permitted to any one, by whatever authority he may be invested, to forbid the reading of the works of Mary of Jesus d'Agreda? 2. Whether it be true that the reading of them is allowed, and that pious souls have nothing whatever to fear in regard to the doctrine which is taught in the *Mystical City of God*?

With regard to the first point our task is easy. Eleven years after the appearance of this work, which had already been translated into Italian, it suddenly became the subject of a lively discussion. The tribunal of the Holy Office "*in regard to the circumstances of the time,*" according to the words of the postulator of the cause for the canonization of Mary of Jesus, issued a decree of prohibition August 4th, 1681.

But God, who brings good out of evil, caused the prohibition to contribute to the greater triumph of this work. In fact, three months later, Nov. 9th, 1681, the decree was revoked. We have the gratification to place here the authentic text of the decree of revocation. It is extracted from the process of canonization:—

Innocentius Papa XII.

In negotio librorum sanctimonialis Mariæ a Jesus de Agreda supersedendum duximus quamvis sacræ hujus inquisitionis ratio et stylus aliter suaderunt.

Datum Romæ sub annulo piscatoris, Nov. 9th, 1681.

The reader will, doubtless, inquire what is the force of this decree, and whether it has the veritable character of obligatory law in the Universal Church? On this point we need not even invoke the common teaching of the doctors. The sovereign authority has resolved the question, without leaving room for the smallest doubt or discussion. In 1713, the Holy

Office published a decree by which it prescribes to the Bishop of C—— to conform himself to the suspensory decree of Innocent XII., which prohibits him from forbidding the reading of the works of Mary of Jesus of Agreda. We subjoin the text of this decree.

Decree of the Holy Office.

“In the Congregation held Sept. 19th, 1713, when were present their Eminences, Cardinals Acciaioli, Spada, Ferrari, Fabroni, and Ottoboni, it was decreed, that the letter of the Inquisitor de C—— must be withdrawn, and that the suspensory decree has the force of law throughout the Universal Church.”

The original is in the Convent of Ara Cœli at Rome. We have, consequently, the right to declare that no one is permitted to forbid the reading of these works, and that whomsoever shall attempt such a prohibition must not only be disregarded, but even obliged to retract what he has had the boldness to utter. 2d. The Holy See, by permission of Divine Providence, has done more than merely to protect the works of Mary of Jesus against her adversaries,—the reading of them is formally permitted and encouraged. Pope Alexander VII., of holy memory, has expressly authorized them to be read, *oraculo vivæ vocis*. Finally, under Pope Benedict XIII., the sacred Congregation of Rites passed the following decree:—

“It is ordered that the cause of the above mentioned servant of God shall be continued before the holy Congregation of Rites without further examination of the *Cité Mystique*, and these books can be retained and read. March 14, 1729.”

This decree is signed by Pope Benedict XIII.

The tribunal of the Holy See having definitively decided the cause, the reader will not hesitate to seek his own edification in the doctrine of the works of this seraphic servant of God.

Having cited the authentic decrees of the Court of Rome, we shall now proceed to render justice to the works of the illustrious servant of God. It is nearly a year since the correspondence of Mary of Jesus with King Philip IV. of Spain was found in the Imperial library. These letters have been published by an editor of the *Revue de Paris* in one volume. In his review, M. Germond de Lavigne, in speaking of *The Cité Mystique*, thus expresses himself:—"We have read this astonishing book, this treatise *ex professo*, of the celebrated ascetic, and we can only say, with the doctors who have edited it, that the mysteries of the Christian religion, the principles of the Catholic Church, the most difficult texts of the Holy Scriptures and confused computations of the evangelical history, the most secret decrees of Divine Providence, of theology, sacred, dogmatic, exegetic, scholastic, moral, deliberative, mystical, all are here assembled. What are we to think of these sublime inspirations of the soul when it is disengaged from matter, when it is purified by contemplation and meditation? Is it really a revelation from on high?"—*Revue de Paris*, Dec. 15th, 1854; Jan. 1st, 1855.

Thus speaks a writer in a Review little suspected, we must admit, of any tendency towards mysticism. But the truth inspires him to make this precious avowal.

We will now offer a brief resumé of the opinions of those who are most competent to judge in these matters, viz., the members of religious orders, and universities who have made the most minute examination. Father Antoine, surnamed the very celebrated doctor, thus expresses himself:—"This book has enchanted me. Every line is clear and full of life: in a word, all that it contains contributes to elevate the soul, inflame the heart, and excite profound devotion." Father Andreas Mendo, of the Society of Jesus, says, "the entire work is like a continual light that illuminates the mind, and a flame that kindles the will. It banishes tepidity, and excites us to rise to the highest degrees of virtue. Whoever reads it

with care, cannot fail to be instructed, and will be stimulated to become more holy."

Father Dydace de Sylva, Benedictine, says, "The study of this work is most profitable. It possesses an admirable and efficacious virtue to persuade. All that can be said in its favor is below the truth. As soon as we begin to read it, we are rapt in admiration. I feel, with lively regret, that I have need of the wisdom of an angel to express my meaning, my veneration, my desires, on this subject." Father John of the Mother of God, says, "I have been so happy as to get possession of this book, which has filled me with delight. All induces me to think that the spirit of the author has been illuminated by light from on high. The perusal of it will bring great consolation to the faithful."

The most celebrated and renowned universities have rivalled each other in exalting this admirable production. We omit the testimonials of Madrid, Alcalá, Salamanca, and Toulouse, whose eulogiums leave nothing to be desired, and cite only the University of Louvain, as follows: "Learned men or ignorant may gather admirable fruits from reading this work, which the faithful may do without fear of danger to faith or morals. We find nothing in it that tends either to the relaxation of virtue, or to an indiscreet rigor. In reading it, we are sensible of a special grace that is not felt with other books, and the more we read, the greater is the relish and the pleasure it imparts."

The Bishop of the Diocese of Sister Mary of Jesus thus announces his approbation: "I conclude that this work is really good, that it contains a heavenly doctrine, of which it is impossible to entertain the slightest doubt. We find in it a doctrine solid, strong, true, conformable to the Gospel, which leads to the knowledge of God and of the most pure Virgin, Mother of God, and excites to the love of virtue, and to a horror of sin."

The Bishop of the Diocese in which it was first printed, de-

clares, "Many theologians, the most distinguished by their authority, their learning, and their zeal for the faith, have examined every part of this work, word for word, and have approved it as being conformable to the dogmas of the Catholic faith, and useful to promote good morals."

What more can be said in praise of a book? We here aver that all our citations have been faithfully copied by ourselves from the authentic printed reports which we have translated with all possible fidelity.

But in order to leave nothing obscure, we will not omit to repeat here, that the Faculty of Paris censured several pages of the first part after its translation into French, in 1696. Now, Benedict XIV. informs us in the decree of 1748, rendered in the cause of the beatification and canonization of the servant of God, that Amort, the most formidable adversary of Mary d'Agreda, acknowledged the censure of the Faculty of Paris to be without foundation and of no value. Hence, we need not pause to prove that this censure is marked as null, for numerous reasons that were explained by the postulator before the Holy Congregation of Rites. We hope there will be no further question for the future.

Spain, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, held within her bosom saints whose holiness and good works must continue forever to be celebrated in the Church. The mystical life, especially, which at this epoch, was flourishing in various nations of Europe, had in that country a prodigious impulsion. Our age, so earnest in seeking for whatever preceding times have left that is most precious, will not allow the treasures, the marvellous fruits of the gift of infused science of that happy period, to remain long in oblivion. We return to our study of the incomparable glory of Catholic Spain, Mary of Jesus d'Agreda.

We are not alone in our judgment of the seraphic servant of God. At the moment of writing these pages, a religious, venerable by his virtues and his talents, formerly Provincial

of his order, Father Laurent, has completed the publication of *The Life of the Venerable Mother, Mary of Agreda*. This Life is none other than that of Father Samaniego, of which we have given an abridgment in this volume.

In a very beautiful introduction, Father Laurent writes as follows upon the great work of the venerable Mary:—

“The divine inspiration makes itself felt in every page. In reading it we are persuaded that it was only in the celestial regions, where she was rapt in her ecstasies, that she could gather the knowledge of these sublime mysteries, the revelation of the most adorable and ineffable designs of the Most High upon the august Mary.”

“It is under the dictation of the Mother of Jesus Christ that she retraces the mortal life of the Queen of Heaven; so that this work, fallen from the pen of a simple girl without acquired knowledge, and living in the obscurity of a cloister, is perhaps, *the most extraordinary, and the most astonishing book that ever issued from mortal hands*. The author approaches without hesitation the most sublime mysteries of the Christian religion, and unfolds them with rare clearness. She developes, without embarrassment, and with a prodigious facility, the Catholic dogma, and the most difficult passages of the holy writings. The sacred chronology is as familiar to her as to the most eminent doctors; she reveals the most secret ways of Providence: sacred theology, sublime philosophy, extensive knowledge of the natural sciences, persuasive eloquence, all are here united, even to the precision, the correctness, the elevation, the vigor, and elegance of the style.”—*Life of the Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus d'Agreda*. Introd. pp. 16, 17.

We have dwelt designedly on the work of this servant of God. The *Cité Mystique*, in our view, is not only, according to Father Laurent, “the book, the most extraordinary and astonishing that ever issued from the hands of any living creature:” it seems to us to be manifestly destined, in the

designs of Providence, to produce great fruits for the sanctification and the higher perfection of souls in these latter times.

898107
 We give, in conclusion, a brief resumé of the acts of the cause for the beatification and canonization of Mary of Jésus of Agreda. The reader must perceive that God has been pleased to manifest the glory and the sanctity of his servant, declared Venerable by the Church, and who will be placed on her altars, as we hope, within a few years.

She died, May 24th, 1665, on the day of Pentecost. Soon after, the process of the Bishop of her Diocese was opened on her virtues and miracles in general, and the *fama sanctitatis*. On the 21st of November, 1671, the demand was made for the process of canonization. Clement X. introduced the cause August 24th, 1672. The commission of introduction was signed, Jan. 28th, 1673. The decree on the non-culte was carried June 27th, 1674. The apostolic process on the sanctity, the virtues, and miracles in general, was presented Sept. 2d, 1679. The process was opened, the servant of God was declared Venerable, and finally, Dec. 16th, 1689, the council were named by Innocent XI. for the examination of the books.

After a long course of disappointments, the case was resumed in 1745, under Benedict XIV. who, in 1748, rendered a decree, that he did not contest *Prout oportet*, the authenticity of the writings. At length, Clement XIV. declared that the book, the *Cité Mystique* really belonged to Mary of Jesus of Agreda. And now, other proceedings will speedily be instituted to renew this cause, and we trust, in the age of Mary, the servant of God will receive the supreme honors of beatification and canonization which will fill the measure of her glory on earth.

THE END.

