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THE

IMITATION

H Mary
OF THE

BLESSED VIRGIN:

COMPOSED ON THE PLAN

OF THE

IMITATION OF CHRIST.

Unius vita, omnium disciplina.

St. Ambr. de Virg. L. 11.

FROM THE FRENCH.

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PREFACE.

THE Translator will not trouble the pious reader with a long preface. To give a just idea of the merit of this little book, it will be sufficient to transcribe the approbation given to the French original, and to say that it comes from the Rt. Rev. T. R. Asseline, Dr. of Sorbon, Professor of Hebrew, and the last bishop of Boulogne, a prelate eminently distinguished by his enlightened and tender piety, profound learning, and constant fidelity to his God, his king, and his country, in the most severe trials which the Catholic Church has ever experienced from the time of the apostles. He died in the month of April, anno 1813, at Aylesbury, where he had accompanied the unfortunate and virtuous Louis XVIII.

APPROBATION.

“ I have read by the commands of the
“ Right Honourable Lord High Chaucellor
“ a manuscript entitled, The Imitation of
“ the Blessed Virgin, composed on the plan
“ of the Following of Christ.—The author
“ represents the Mother of God in the dif-
“ ferent circumstances of her life; lays be-
“ fore the faithful the sentiments which
“ animated her, the virtues she practised,
“ and exhorts them to form themselves on
“ this perfect model in the whole tenor of

“ their conduct in the different situations
 “ and states of life in which Divine Provi-
 “ dence may have placed them.—This
 “ work contains solid and very moving in-
 “ structions. The reader will find in it
 “ science joined to the most tender piety.

“ *In Sorbon, Nov. 10th, 1772.*

(Signed)

“ ASSELINE.”

Of his own performance, it does not belong to the Translator to speak. He is very sensible of its many defects; but he thought that his particular attention should be directed to render exactly the sense of the venerable author, and that accuracy would make up for simplicity of style, or any inelegance of expression, and be his apology.

Pious and indulgent reader, *rather seek in these reflections, for profit, than subtlety of speech. Let not the authority of the writer offend thee, whether he is of little or great learning; but let the love of pure truth lead thee to read. Enquire not who said this, or how it is said, but attend to what is said:** and pray for him, who in this translation, had no other view than thy instruction and the salvation of thy soul.

* Imit. of Ch. B. 1. c. v.

THE

Imitation of the Blessed Virgin,

BOOK I.

IN WHICH ARE CONSIDERED THE VIRTUES OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN, FROM THE TIME OF HER IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, TILL THE BIRTH OF HER DIVINE SON AT BETHLEHEM.

CHAP. I.

Of the Imitation of the Virtues of the Blessed Virgin.

BLESSED are they that keep my ways. . .

Blessed is the man that heareth me, (Prov. viii. 32, 34.) and treasureth up in his heart the lessons of virtue I teach him in the examples of sanctity I have laid before him!

The Church, by applying to the Blessed Virgin these words of the holy Scripture,

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exhorts us to study the conduct which this Queen of Saints led upon earth, and to imitate what we admire in her.

Happy, in effect, is he who imitates Mary, since by imitating Mary, he imitates Jesus, the King, and the first model of all virtues.

The life of this most holy Virgin is an universal lesson. In it, we learn how to behave in prosperity and adversity, in time of prayer, amidst exterior occupations, in honours and humiliations.

We shall never attain the perfection with which she performed all her actions; but that person is most perfect who is the less distant from it.

O! you, therefore, who make profession of serving and honouring Mary; if you wish to conform to this excellent model, endeavour to imitate, as far as compatible with our weakness, her lively faith, ready obedience, profound humility, unremitting fidelity, pure intentions, and most generous love.

Who is not able, when assisted by divine grace, of following her example as a model in the practice of these different virtues.

Without this imitation, your love for her is very weak, and you ought not to expect striking marks of her protection.

Every day, it is true, you say some prayers in her honour. Moreover, you carry upon yourselves some exterior marks of your devotion towards her. You are, perhaps, a member of those spiritual confraternities which are particularly established to honour her eminent virtues.

All this will engage her, undoubtedly, to ask graces of salvation for you. But if your devotion extend no further, and do not induce you to imitate her virtues, your devotion will not save you.

The Philistines possessed the ark of the covenant; nay, they enriched it with gifts; but it never obtained any blessings for them, because they remained always attached to their idols.

O! most amiable Queen of Virtues, if we love thee, is it not right we should do for thee what we do for our temporal friends? We endeavour to form our character according to theirs, and to assume their inclinations.

It is from this conformity that the union of hearts arises. There is no friendship where there is no resemblance of manners.

How can thy heart, so humble and chaste, so absolutely subject to the will of God, so zealous for the interests of God, be tenderly united with a heart addicted to

voluptuousness and pride, unresigned to the will of God, and without any zeal for his glory?

If you love me, *be my imitators, as I have been of Jesus Christ*; this is what thou sayest to each of us, with still much more reason than St. Paul to the primitive Christians. If you are my children, imbibe the spirit of your mother.

The spirit of the children of Mary ought to be like the spirit of their mother; a spirit of charity, a spirit of peace, a spirit of mortification, a spirit of the fear and love of God.

O holy Virgin! I will therefore for the future make my piety towards thee consist above all things in the imitation of thy virtues.

It is the most perfect homage I can offer. It is the greatest testimony of love I can give thee.

CHAP. II.

Of the Esteem we ought to entertain for sanctifying Grace.

MARY was exempt from sin from the first instant of her being. That is to say, she was conceived in the grace and friendship of God.

As for us, we are all, at our entrance into the world, the melancholy victims of the wrath of God. Mary alone, prevented with his love, entered the world as the most admirable work of his grace.

Almighty God could not permit that the temple in which he chose to dwell should be defiled by the least spot or blemish. The honour of the Son required that his Mother should not, even for an instant, be the slave of the devil.

But what a high esteem did Mary conceive of that signal favour? It was for her, as was wisdom in the eyes of Solomon, *the source of all blessings.*

The Lord had possessed her in the beginning of her ways. Prov. viii. 22. This she valued above all earthly crowns.

She was favoured with many other prerogatives; but this was more precious to her than any other, because it rendered her more acceptable to God.

Her whole life was a continual testimony of her gratitude to God for this unspeakable gift, which no other pure creature ever partook with her.

Christian soul, you received at your baptism the sanctifying grace which Mary received at the very instant of her conception.

Through this grace you have acquired a

right to call God your Father, and Jesus Christ your Brother. You were made *heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ*. Rom. viii. 17.—Nay, the kingdom of heaven was destined for you.

Do you well comprehend the excellency of these glorious privileges? And are you sensible of the whole extent of the obligations which they impose upon you?

Alas! to the shame of Christianity, how few Christians are there who reflect upon them, and who endeavour, by the sanctity of their life, to support the dignity of their high calling!

How few are there, solicitous to preserve unspotted that robe of innocence with which they were cloathed, and which is so striking a symbol of the candour, purity, and piety of the children of God!

We pride ourselves on the advantages of the world, and by the most unaccountable infatuation, we give the last rank, in our opinion, to a grace which alone, properly speaking, deserves our esteem.

We are zealous of preserving unsullied what the world calls illustrious birth; and we are not ashamed of degenerating from one which is spiritual and divine, by indulging grovelling passions, and living a carnal life.

We boast of a pretended independency, and by a monstrous alliance with the devil, we do not scruple to enlist again under his banners, put on his livery, and relapse into the slavery in which we had the misfortune of being born.

We turn with avidity after earthly goods, ^{fun} and transitory riches, and the eternal possession of the kingdom of heaven we neglect, and even despise.

Ungrateful souls, unfortunate victims of sin, whoever you may be, at least *do not harden your hearts against the divine voice which again speaks to you.*

A second baptism still remains for you to recover the grace of adoption which you have lost. It is the baptism of penance.

Have recourse to it with sincerity and confidence. Your heavenly Father ardently wishes to restore his friendship to you. But lose no time; for, perhaps soon, time will be no more for you.

Pure and immaculate Virgin, pray for us, that for the future we may always abstain from sin, and persevere with constancy in our resolutions, to repair the great loss we have sustained by abandoning ourselves to sin.

Thy protection will obtain for us the grace of recovering entirely the friendship

of God ; and then, next to thy divine Son Jesus, our most amiable Saviour and sole Redeemer, we shall praise and bless thee as the cause of our salvation.

CHAP. III.

Of the Care we ought to take to preserve sanctifying Grace.

MARY conceived in the grace of God without the least stain of sin, or the least propensity to sin, had not the same reasons we have to fear falling into sin.

However, if we examine the whole tenor of her conduct, we might think, that she had as much, or even more than ourselves to fear.

She was constantly watching over all the motions of her heart, as if she were in danger of its affections being seduced by the love of creatures.

She was constantly watching over all her words, as if she had to dread the least indiscretion of her tongue.

Conceived with all the privileges of innocence, she chose to live always in the exercise of penance.

As for us, although surrounded with seducing and deceitful enemies, who are in

cessantly busy in availing themselves of our natural weakness, yet we live unconcerned and in the greatest tranquillity.

We confess that we are weakness itself; and nevertheless, we frequently expose ourselves to occasions which have caused the fall of the strongest.

Now, does not presumptuous weakness deserve to lose its support?

We carry the *treasure of grace in a very frail vessel*, which may be broken to pieces at the moment we least expect.

How many enemies are seeking to deprive us of this precious treasure? Enemies within, enemies without, enemies around us.

Enemies within; our passions, which are never entirely subdued. Enemies without, the spirit of darkness. Enemies around us, this wicked world.

Like a lamp half extinguished, our passions may always be enkindled, and occasion dreadful conflagrations.

Had we, with St. Paul, been ravished *to the third heaven*, still we ought to fear being hurled down into the lowest abyss with the devil and his angels.

In vain we tranquillize ourselves on the sincerity of our dispositions, and the fervour of our resolutions. One unfortunate occasion is sufficient to ruin us for ever.

B.

A single look deprived David of the friendship of God. - And a Dalila may seduce and pervert a Sampson.

The strongest and most stately trees of the remotest solitudes have been thrown down by a sudden blast, after having withstood for many years the most violent storms.

In the practice of virtue, we cannot answer with certainty that we shall be faithful to-morrow, because we have been faithful to-day. For want of vigilance, and correspondence to the inspirations of God, a soul which has been the object of his favours, may still be lost.

He who, relying on his former dispositions, does not keep a watchful eye over himself, will soon forget them.

When we intend to sail on a stormy sea and full of quicksands, without taking the necessary precautions to avoid them, we must soon expect a melancholy shipwreck.

It is hard, I acknowledge, to pass our whole life in watching over our inclinations and propensities in order to fight against them. But no one ever became a saint without vigilance and struggle.

O my God! *Penetrate my heart with thy fear.* Ps. cxviii. 120. Fear will render me vigilant; and my vigilance will obtain

for me the happiness of coming off victorious in all my combats.

Make me well understand, that the grace which renders me thy child and friend, is the only good which is worthy of my care, and the loss of which is alone deserving my regret and tears.

How happy should I be, had I never lost this precious treasure. Free from many troubles and afflictions in this life, I should have acquired for the next an inexhaustible source of comfort and delight.

O my God ! I had rather suffer the greatest evils, than expose myself again to lose thy friendship. This is my firm resolution. What a happiness shall I enjoy, if I continue faithful to it.

If I know how to preserve this treasure, thou wilt dwell in my heart, reign in it by thy presence, enlighten it by thy wisdom, support it by thy power, and daily bestow upon it fresh tokens of thy love. In short, thou wilt be thyself its great reward in time and eternity.

CHAP IV.

*Of the Care we ought to take to increase in
Grace and Perfection.*

DISCIPLE.

THOU hast received, O holy Virgin, the plenitude of grace from the first moment of thy conception. Nevertheless thou wast not content to enjoy in peace such an invaluable blessing; thou tookest the utmost care during thy whole life to improve it.

And grace, which always makes new progress in a soul, earnestly tending towards perfection, daily enriched thee more and more. Thou wast as a well cultivated field, in which the least seed fructifies to the hundred fold.

Although born in holiness; yet holiness was not natural to thee. But thou didst render it so by thy incessant attention and care.

Mary stretched out branches as the palm-tree, and her branches are of honour and grace. Eccl. xxiv. 18. -

MARY.

My son, if you wish to improve the grace which will render you the friend and child of God, the temple of the Holy

Ghost, and the brother and co-heir of Jesus Christ, fly from the world, love prayer, frequent the sacraments, and practise all the virtues suitable to your state of life.

The best means of augmenting in you habitual and sanctifying grace, is a constant fidelity to correspond to the motions of *actual* grace.

Listen to the voice interiorly speaking to you, and be guided by its impressions.

The more attentive we are to this voice; the more instructed we become in the science of the saints. In proportion as we make some progress, it teaches us to make still greater.

Many people, after having walked in the practice of virtue for some time, give themselves up to rest, being satisfied with what they have done. But grace never says, It is enough.

Others imagine that it is sufficient not to abandon themselves to wickedness. This is not enough. He who is good, ought to labour every day to become better.

How many Christians will be surprised on the day of judgment, to see themselves loaded with debts towards the justice of God, for not having made a profitable use of the means they had to become great saints?

In the practice of virtue, not to push forward, is to fall back ; not to gain, is to lose.

When we prescribe to ourselves certain bounds in the service of God, he does the same in the distribution of his blessings to us.

But the less you reckon with him, the more generous and bountiful will he be to you, even during this life.

Of the riches of this world, how little soever you may possess, it will always be enough ; but of the riches of grace, you can never have too much.

The servant who neglects to turn to advantage the good of his master, shall be punished.

Awake then, O my son, from your sleep ; it may become lethargic and mortal. Hasten to repair the time which you have lost.

Do not say that you are satisfied if you can occupy the last place in *the house of your heavenly Father*. John xiv. 3. To speak in this manner, is to expose yourself to be excluded.

DISCIPLE.

O ! thou powerful and zealous advocate of Christians. O ! Mary, help me to sanctify a life, which Almighty God has given me, only on condition that I shall love and serve him.

Help me to deserve the glory of heaven, which I can only obtain through the assistance of grace and the practice of good works. I am perfectly aware that my reward will always be proportioned to my fervour and fidelity.

CHAP. V.

That we ought to consecrate ourselves to God from our most tender Years.

HEARKEN, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear : and forget thy people, and thy father's house : and the King shall greatly desire thy beauty, for he is the Lord thy God. Ps. xliv. 12.

Mary listened early to the divine voice which called her to a retired life. From her most tender years, she left her paternal house, to consecrate herself to God in his temple.

Nothing was capable of detaining her ; neither the tenderness of her age, the weakness of her constitution, nor the affection of her parents.

Every thing that delays the sacrifice of a pious soul who seeks God, and loves him alone, is an occasion of grief ; because delay defers her happiness.

Retired in the Temple, Mary applied herself to perform, with all the perfection of which she was capable according to her age and strength, the functions committed to her charge. All the time she could spare was dedicated to prayer and meditation. Thus she disposed herself to receive the peculiar graces which Almighty God intended to bestow upon her.

O! Prince's daughter, how beautiful are thy footsteps. Cant. vii. 1.

Thy example shall be imitated. *After thee, a multitude of virgins shall be brought to the King of Kings, and will consecrate themselves to his service in his temple with gladness and rejoicing.* Psal. xlv. 16, 17.

The offering of their heart, their youth, their liberty, and of their whole selves to God, will be a perfect homage rendered to his Sovereign Majesty, and will draw upon them an inexhaustible source of blessings during the course of their mortal existence.

Oh! how much deceived are those, who do not consider youth as a seasonable time for the practice of virtue.

Mary and all the saints experienced *how advantageous it is to man, to have borne from his youth the yoke of the Lord.* Thr. iii. 27.

Is it treating God as God, to reserve for him only the wretched remains of a life,

which he gave us to be dedicated entirely to his service?

What sacrifice do we make to God, when we wait to engage ourselves in his service, till we are without strength and resources according to the world?

It is much to be feared that we shall carry with impatience the yoke of the Lord, when we resolve to take it upon ourselves, only after having been worn out in carrying the yoke of the world.

We say that we shall give ourselves to God, when we are more advanced in years. But shall we ever attain that old age, which we so fondly hope for? And if we do, shall we amend as easily as we think?

A melancholy experience shews, that if, with old age, we become better informed, we seldom become wiser.

Lord, Lord, open to us, said the foolish virgins; but they came too late, and in vain they knocked at the door. *Matt. xxv. 11.*

Happy is the man, who from his childhood prepares himself to appear before the Sovereign Judge, who will demand a strict account of the employment of our life, without any distinction of age or condition.

He, who does not consecrate to God the beginning of his life, ought to fear lest God, to punish him, should deprive him of it by an untimely death.

O my God, how long have I lived without loving thee! I ought to be inconsolable for such an ingratitude. And if I easily console myself, can I say with truth, that at last I have begun to love thee.

Could I return again to the days of my infancy! my heart, my soul, my thoughts, my affections, all that is mine would entirely be devoted to thee.

Vouchsafe to accept of my most grateful thanks for thy unspeakable mercy in preserving my life, whilst I was continually offending thee.

Supported by the assistance of thy grace, which I implore from the bottom of my heart, I will henceforth serve thee to my last breath, and with so much the more fidelity, that I have begun so late the work of my conversion.



CHAP. VI.

That we ought to give ourselves to God entirely and for ever.

DISCIPLE.

O Holy and fervent Virgin, not only thou gavest thyself to God from thy most tender years, but also without the least restriction or reserve.

Thou madest to him the sacrifice of thy liberty, in order to follow no other will but his.

Thy only satisfaction in this world, was to please him, and thy only pleasure to deprive thyself of every pleasure for his sake.

Thou didst never betray thy sacred engagements; but walked constantly in the ways which the Almighty had pointed out to thee; and thy progress was daily more and more striking.

Thy example is a severe condemnation of my dispositions, and of my backwardness and tepidity in the service of God.

My conduct covers me with shame. Almighty God being always the same towards me, does he not always deserve from me the same fidelity and allegiance?

MARY.

But why, O my son, why did you stop,

after having so well begun ? Is not our God as great and amiable to-day, as he was yesterday ?

Have you not always the same relations with him ? Do you depend on him less at one time than at another ? Is not the obligation to be entirely his, equal at all times ?

In proportion as you advance in years, the blessings of God increase. With them your gratitude also ought to increase, and consequently your fidelity.

God has formed your heart, and for him alone ; therefore he ought to be its sole master.

He has not said to you : Lend me your heart, but *give me your heart*. Docile to his voice, you had given it him. What right have you had to take it back again ?

It is doing too great an honour to the world, to give it some share in your affections, and offering to God the greatest outrage, to give him such a rival.

You say that you consider it as the greatest misfortune, not to be in the number of the friends of God. But in the eyes of this jealous God, what is a weak, an inconstant, and pusillanimous friend. Your God does not think it too much, to give himself entirely to you. Be therefore entirely his.

Give him all, and with him you will find all.

The world and all worldly things are nothing for him for whom God is all.

DISCIPLE.

Weak as I am, I am in need, O holy Virgin, of a strong and powerful grace, to enable me to profit by thy instructions, and walk in thy footsteps.

Ask, I beseech thee, at the same time thou animatest me by the example of thy fervour, ask all the assistance which is necessary for me.

Alas ! after so much inconstancy, so many infidelities, shall I dare again present my heart to Jesus ? But his wrath cannot resist the supplications of an humble and contrite heart, and thy powerful intercession.

Mother of Mercy, vouchsafe to obtain my peace with him ; and through thy maternal influence may this most amiable Saviour fill my heart with the abundance of his graces, that I may have for the future no other inclination, feel no other desire, but to love and serve so good a Master all the days of my life without restriction or reserve.

CHAP. VII.

Of the Advantages and Comforts of Solitude.

DISCIPLE.

WHAT serene and happy days didst thou pass in the temple, O ! holy Virgin.

Enjoying in peace the communications of God, thou wast preparing in thy soul a temple still more glorious and worthy of him.

In the temple, thy mind was constantly occupied with the presence of God, and continually meditating on his grandeurs and perfections.——And thus hidden in the secret of the sanctuary, the *Beloved* was *entirely thine*, and thou *entirely his*.

All the riches, beauty and delights of this world were for thee a mere nothing.

MARY.

Truly, my son, a soul living in solitude, at a distance from the world and its vanities, passes the most happy days.

In her solitude, she is occupied with God alone, as he were the only being existing with her upon earth.

Her mind is always recollected, in order

to listen to the voice of her God; and nothing is capable of interrupting the effusions of her heart, which she is incessantly pouring forth before him.

In these few words, *thou art the God of my heart*, which she likes to repeat, she finds all her glory, riches and delight.

Sitting, as the Spouse of the Canticles, *under the shadow of her Beloved*, (Cant. ii. 3.) she beholds, with feelings of pity and compassion, the trouble which men give themselves to become rich and great; and she conceives nothing worthy to be loved, except the object of her love.

All the transactions and occurrences of the world, make little impression upon her. The beloved of her heart is, and ever shall be, the model of all perfections; he is, and ever shall be, the most transcendent pattern of holiness and amiability. This thought is for her an inexhaustible source of unspeakable enjoyments.

When Almighty God intends to instruct a soul by his divine lessons, and to *speak to her heart*, he leads her into solitude. Os. ii. 14.

My son, ask of him a relish of retirement, and that spirit of recollection with which the saints were animated. Love to

live far from the world, and never shew yourself abroad but from necessity.

When from this motive you appear among men, imitate the dove, which, when constrained to go out of the ark, soon returned; because, out of the ark, she could find no place where she could rest.

If you do not shun the world with the greatest care, you will soon imbibe its principles and inclinations. And if once you begin to relish the things of the world, you will relish no longer the things of God.

The Spouse of the Canticles sought her beloved in the streets of Jerusalem, and did not find him.

Acknowledge, that you have seldom retired from the societies of the world, without being more guilty than you were before.

You must love to live in retirement, if you wish to appear with safety in public. It is in the silence of solitude, that you will learn how to speak, when you are in the midst of the world.

A retired life is one of the most powerful means of preserving our innocence. Nothing weakens so much the virtue of man, as his frequent intercourse with men.

Is it possible to breathe the contagious

air of the world, without catching the infection? Frequently repair to solitude, in order to breathe an air more pure and salubrious.

The holy inhabitants of the desert declared, that they never had more facility in conversing familiarly with God, than after they had renounced the concerns and companies of the world.

My son, it is God's *delight to be with you*. Be, therefore, delighted to be with him; and you will find him no where with more facility than in solitude.

In solitude you will disclose your most intimate thoughts with more liberty, and communicate all your sentiments to him, with the confidence and respect of filial love.

It is there that he will inspire you with reflections which will assuage your grief, calm your anxieties, dissipate your fears, solve your doubts, and that he will point out to you the road, which you ought to follow to regulate your conduct in all things with propriety, wisdom and security.

In short, it is in solitude that he will speak to you from heart to heart, as a friend to his bosom friend, and impress in your soul the knowledge of those truths,

which are a pure effect of his love, and which are understood only by those who love him.

CHAP. VIII.

Of the Choice of a State of Life.

MARY, who from her most tender years sought and loved God alone, deserved by her correspondence to his grace, all the blessings and assistance she stood in need of, to embrace the state of life, the best appropriated to the accomplishment of his designs over her.

To be happy in a state of life, a concurrence of things and circumstances is required, which Divine Providence actually prepares and ordains for those faithful souls who consult God in this important affair.

Can a young person entertain such a confident hope, if she follows the fatal impressions of her rising passions.

By her marriage with St. Joseph, Divine Providence caused Mary to reap the precious fruit of the virtues which she had practised.

Had the world been consulted to find

out a husband for Mary, her friends undoubtedly would have made choice of a man distinguished by his riches and talents.

To choose a man recommendable only for his virtues, and who had lived from his infancy in the fear of the Lord, they would have been little solicitous. This is not the conduct of the world.

Selfish views, considerations merely human, are the principles of almost all marriages. The advantages of fortune, rather than the blessings of grace, are the motives which influence and fix the determination.

Hence so many ill-suited connections, in which the married couple are a mutual torment to each other.

God permits it, to punish even during this life, those who neglected to consult him in an affair, in which we shall never succeed, unless he be both the promoter and the guide.

He permits it to punish those who, during their youth, took no care to secure his protection by the practice of virtue.

The choice of the parents of Mary, or rather the choice of God, fell upon Joseph, *a just man*, the most virtuous man upon earth, the worthy spouse of this blessed Virgin.

Therefore, there never was a more happy

marriage; never two hearts were more delighted to be united together. What trouble could disturb the peace of their souls? Mary and Joseph were in the state of life which God had ordained for them.

Many people are unhappy in their state of life; they themselves suffer, and cause others to suffer also. Why? because they embraced it against the will of God.

It is to them that the prophet (Is. xxx. 1.) addresses these words; *Woe to you apostate children, that you would take counsel, and not of me.*

The grace of a vocation, is a grace of the highest importance, and upon which many other depend. If we be unfaithful to it, we must not expect to obtain others.

If we deviate from the order of that special Providence, which prepares chosen graces, for those who are disposed to conform to the will of God; we shall be left in the order of that universal providence, which truly will give those graces, by which we may be enabled to work out our salvation, but with which alone, it is much to be feared that we shall not succeed, or at least without the greatest difficulty.

Therefore consult and beseech the Lord, O! you who are deliberating on the choice of a state of life. Say to him with the

Royal Prophet: *Make the way known to me, wherein I should walk.* Ps. cxlii. 8.

At the same time live such a life, as to deserve the friendship of God.

If his will be not clearly known to you, consult those who hold his place. He will enlighten their mind, and teach them what you have to do.

Jesus, who overthrew Saul on his journey to Damascus, did not explain his designs to him, but sent him to Ananias to be informed of them.

Consult your parents as duty requires. Yet it is always to be feared, lest parents in those delicate circumstances, should give their children an advice too conformable to the maxims of the world. *A man's enemies, says our Lord, shall be they of his own household.* Matt. x. 36.

In short, consult death in some degree; that is, determine yourself, as you would wish to have done at your last moments.

CHAP. IX.

Of Purity, and how much we ought to esteem it.

WHEN the angel proposed to Mary to become the mother of God, he

did not explain to her whether that sublime prerogative could be reconciled with the vow of virginity which she had made. Therefore she suspended her consent.

She preferred to surpass by her virginity all creatures in merit, rather than be above them all by grandeur and dignity.

But, *fear not*, Mary, this very purity of which thou art so jealous, will make thy God, who wished to be born only of a pure virgin, descend from heaven into thy chaste womb, and assume our human nature.

In effect Mary gave her consent only after she had understood by the words of the angel, that by becoming the Mother of God she had nothing to fear for her purity.

O precious virtue, how dear and valuable oughtest thou to appear to us, since to thee we are indebted for our Redeemer, and since the purest of all creatures preferred thee before divine maternity.

This virtue obtained for the beloved disciple the friendship of Jesus. O! happy the souls of which it shall be the brightest ornament upon earth! they will enjoy throughout eternity the singular favour of *following the Lamb wherever he goeth*. Ap. xiv. 4.

The prince of the apostles had great

privileges. But it is to the virgin disciple alone that Jesus permitted to repose on his bosom at the last supper.

Jesus gave to Peter the care of his Church; but to John that of his Mother.

By purity we bear a resemblance upon earth with the angels in heaven.

The practice of this virtue makes us acquire a merit of which the angels are destitute.

The most chaste souls are those who participate more intimately in the union, which the incarnate Word has vouchsafed to contract with mankind.

O you! who consider the vice contrary to purity, as a very excusable weakness, remember that there are few vices which God has so seldom forgiven, and more severely punished.

This vice drives away the spirit of God, which does not dwell in a *carnal man*.

This vice is almost always attended with a sort of blindness. It was necessary that a prophet should come to David guilty of adultery, in order to make him comprehend the heinousness of his crime, and inspire him with sentiments of penance.

This vice hardens the heart. Solomon, who had been for so many years the wonder of the world by his wisdom, became an

idolater towards the end of his life; because he abandoned himself to impurity.

Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost. (1 Cor. vi. 19.) Therefore, impurity in a Christian, is the *abomination of desolation in the holy of holies.* Matt. xxiv. 15.

O Jesus! the Spouse of Virgins, who hast chosen a virgin for thy mother; inspire me with a tender love for purity, and with the greatest horror for the contrary vice.

The virtue of purity is above the strength of our corrupt nature. *I cannot otherwise be continent; except God gives it me by a particular grace.* Sap. viii. 21.

I solicit this grace of thee, O Lord, God Almighty; through that purity, which rendered Mary so agreeable in thy sight, and obtained for her the unspeakable honour of becoming the Mother of thy Son.

I earnestly beg it of thee, through the love which so many virgins bore to thee the divine spouse of their souls, and which they preferred here below before all the pleasures the world can afford.

Grant me to consider always as my greatest enjoyment, to despise and overcome all the pleasures, which thy holy law condemns.

Awake in me the fear of those eternal flames, which thou hast prepared for impure souls.

Extinguish the relish of sensual pleasures; and penetrate me with the love of the delights of heaven.

Deliver me from those troublesome temptations which so often assault me, even during my exercises of piety.

O, my Saviour, if thou permittest that I should be tempted, grant me the grace of resisting the temptation with courage and perseverance, and thus by my resistance enable me to avail myself of these very motions, to give thee an unequivocal proof of my love.

CHAP. X.

Of the Precautions necessary to preserve the Virtue of Purity.

MARY, by the grace of her conception was inaccessible to the seductions of vice. Yet she was troubled at the sight of the angel who appeared to her under human shape.

When the angel saluted her, *she thought immediately with herself what manner of salutation this should be.* Luke i. 19.

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Finding herself alone with him, was sufficient to excite her fears.

Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; said the angel to her. Luke i. 31, 32. Nevertheless, these words were a new subject of trouble for Mary.

She did not call in question the possibility of what the angel announced to her: for nothing is *impossible to God*. She inquired only how the mystery will be accomplished.

What discretion in her question! What reserve! she says only what is necessary.

By such a conduct it is easy to know a soul whose purity is her treasure.

Purity is a most delicate flower, which dreads the least blast. A word, a look, is sufficient to excite alarm.

A virgin who is truly sensible of the whole value of this angelic virtue, fears the remotest occasions which might expose her to danger.

Flattering words, engaging offers, nay conversations seemingly innocent, awake her suspicions, and make her redouble her attention and vigilance.

But if so many precautions be necessary to preserve chastity in all its integrity, can it be said that there are many chaste souls upon earth?

In order to preserve this virtue unimpaired, it were to be wished that people would take the same care they use to enjoy the reputation of possessing it.

For how many souls have not an idle and effeminate life, dangerous books, and too free conversations, been an occasion of shameful falls?

Many Christian virgins hold conversations, frequently without fear, with persons who are not angels.

If they say that they are upon the watch to guard themselves against any possible danger, I answer them, that the devil is also upon the watch in order to compass their ruin.

A virgin who is fond of praise, will not remain long in a state of indifference for the man who addresses her with a flattering language.

With regard to the virtue of purity, the less we fear, the more we have to fear.

We are ingenious to overlook the dangers we love; and the proof that we love them, is our readiness and attention to hide them from our view.

We are all made of the same clay. Perhaps it will happen to us, what happened to so many others, who made the most melancholy experience of their weakness.

Although we are to rely on the assistance of grace, yet we are not allowed to expose ourselves to danger. This assistance is secured only to those who meet with temptations which they have not sought after.

Had you for many years together gained the most glorious victories over the enemies of purity, do not consider yourself as invincible. Never cease to mistrust yourself.

Be faithful to avoid the daily occasions with which you are surrounded on all sides, and which the devil multiplies.—Then the Almighty will grant you graces of courage and fortitude, in those unforeseen occasions, in which a great virtue is required to gain a great victory.

O holy Virgin, Mother of God, obtain for me, that distrust of myself, that prudence in all my steps, and that mortification of my senses so necessary to preserve my heart chaste and undefiled.

I cannot flatter myself to be in the number of thy friends, a happiness which I most sincerely wish, unless I love in a particular manner a virtue which has been one of the principles of thy glory.

O most pure and chaste Mother, queen of Virgins, obtain for me the grace of living in such an exact purity of body and

soul, that thou mayest find in me this characteristic of thy dearest children.

CHAP. XI.

Of true Grandeur.

THERE is a wide difference between the distinctions of the world and those of which grace is the principle.

Immense riches, superb palaces, a numerous retinue, proclaim the grandeur of kings.—The contempt of the world, horror of sin, the love of God, such are the appendages which announce the grandeur of the just.

The true glory and merit of man consist in *fearing God and keeping his commandments*. Eccl. xii. 13.

The angel whom the Lord sent to Mary, said to her; *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee*. Could he make a greater encomium of her.

The man to whom it could be said, *thou hast found grace with God*, thou art acceptable before God; would undoubtedly deserve all the praises of angels and men.

At the time when the angel was sent to Mary, Augustus and Herod were on the throne. They were addressed with the

high-sounding titles of great, powerful, magnanimous. But what were they in the sight of God, the only equitable judge of true grandeur?

A young virgin, hidden in the solitude of Nazareth, was more worthy of the greatest honours and praise than they.

Solid grandeur is not to be esteemed, according to the vain ideas of man; but according to the ideas of God, who alone is great, and before whom nothing is great, if compared with him.

What are all those renowned heroes of antiquity, when compared with the great man whom religion forms by the practice of virtue?

He that ruleth his spirit, is better than he that taketh cities. Prov. xvi. 32.

It is less hard to conquer others, than to conquer ^{of} ~~oneself~~. A true Christian is not to be considered as one of those heroes of a day, who owe all their heroism and glory to some particular circumstances. He is a hero in all occurrences.

His glory is to overcome all the obstacles which oppose him, as his end is to possess God and rest in him.

Moreover, can there be a greater honour than to serve God and belong to him. *To serve him is to reign.*

The holy Scripture, speaking of Abraham, Moses, and David, the greatest men who ever appeared upon earth, calls them servants of God. This title alone comprehends all others : or rather, all others are nothing, if compared to it.

The title of servant of God, is as much above the title of king and sovereign, as God is above kings and potentates.

O immortal King, and sovereign Lord of the universe, I am made for thee and thee alone ! Is it possible to know thee, and offer a tender of our homage to any other being ? Is it possible to know thee, and not esteem above all the distinctions of the world, the honour of being thy servant ?

What a glory for man, a creature so miserable and wretched in himself, to be allowed the honour of loving and serving thee !

O Lord, through thy grace make me well comprehend that he, who in the obscurity of a private life, similar to that of Mary, is attentive to accomplish thy will, and serves thee with fidelity, does something greater and more glorious, than all that is looked upon as great and glorious by a blind and infatuated world.

May the dignity, honour and glory at-

tending thy service, inspire me in all my actions and employments with a generosity, courage, and greatness of soul, worthy of the master whom I serve.

CHAP. XII.

That God giveth his Grace to the Humble.

MARY.

MY son, I will teach you a secret to enable you to obtain of God the greatest graces. It is to esteem yourself always unworthy of them.

God giveth his grace to the humble. In a heart full of itself, God finds no room for his favours.

DISCIPLE.

Queen of Saints, thou hast given us on this subject an example, which is an inexhaustible source of instruction.

We have only to consider thy behaviour during the visit of the angel whom the Lord had sent to thee, to know the humble sentiments thou didst entertain of thyself.

The angel announced to thee that thou wast on the point of becoming the Mother of God; and thou couldst not conceive how he could have thee to be raised to such an eminent dignity.

The idea of an elevation so much above nature, made thee, in some degree, suspect the visit of the angel.

Nay, at the very moment the Supreme Being came to incarnate himself in thy womb, thou didst only annihilate thyself in the abyss of thy nothingness.

Of all the titles attached to the high dignity with which thou wast honoured, thou didst retain only the quality of servant of the Lord.

A second Eve, how widely different wast thou from the first. Her pride made her lose all her privileges; and thy humility was the principle of all thy honours and prerogatives.

The Almighty, *to do great things to thee*, did not consider personal accomplishments, nor the splendour of a high birth; he regarded only the sentiments of thy humility.

A God willing to debase himself so low as to become man, must have had an infinite regard and love for humility.

It behoved him to choose for his mother, a woman, who by her profound humility, deserved more than any other, the most exalted of all dignities.

Thou didst please God by thy virginity, and conceived him by thy humility.

MARY.

My son, in the sight of men, and much more in the sight of God, the most deserving is he who thinks himself the less so, at the same time that he is adorned with the greatest merit.

On what does *the Lord look down*, with complacency in heaven, and on earth? But *on low things*; that is to say, on humble souls.

To whom shall I have respect, saith the Lord, *but to him that is poor and little, and of a contrite spirit.* Is. lxvi. 8.

Pride is the cause of the poverty of many Christians, who are so greatly destitute of the riches of grace.

If they studied to know themselves, this knowledge would produce humility; and humility, by drawing down upon them abundant graces, would deliver them from their indigence.

O! my son, get rid of *self*, or in other words, of complacency in your pretended accomplishments; and Almighty God will bestow upon you his choicest gifts. Make yourself rich, by confessing that, of yourself, you are nothing but misery and wretchedness.

If you be humble, God will employ you for the advancement of his glory. For it

is only to those who wish neither to usurp, nor to share it with him, that he commits the interest of his kingdom.

When you receive some favour from God, reflect with humility and gratitude, how good and indulgent a master he must be, to treat with so much kindness, the least of his servants.

Attribute nothing to yourself, either of the good you possess, or of the good you do.

Nay, when you correspond faithfully with grace, always remember, that it is through grace that you are faithful, and that God crowns his own gifts when he rewards your merits.

Be penetrated with these sentiments. God possesses all; I have nothing but misery: God is all; I am nothing: God is omnipotent; I can do nothing without his assistance.

Then, though you are nothing of yourself, though from yourself you possess, and can do nothing, nevertheless you will be something in the eyes of God; he will be pleased to bestow his favours upon you, and render you victorious over all your enemies.

CHAP. XIII.

*That solid Glory is particularly to be found
in Humility.*

THE words which the angel addressed to Mary, could not be reconciled in the mind of this humble Virgin, with the opinion which she entertained of herself.

Her pure soul was troubled, and she seemed to apprehend that it might be an illusion of the senses, or a snare from the spirit of darkness.

The angel announced to her, that she was *blessed among all women*. Believing herself the least of all, Mary did not conceive how such praise could be bestowed upon her.

The angel also assured her, that she had found grace with God, and that, if she would give her consent, she should become a mother.

Yet, at the sight of the exalted dignity destined for her, Mary humbled herself, thinking it too great a happiness to bear the name of his handmaid.

O! you who are longing after glory, Mary teaches you where you will find it.

True and solid glory consists in becoming

little. It is the judgment of God himself. *He that is the least among you all, is the greatest.* Luke ix. 48.

This greatness is not only solid but secure. No one will dispute it to you, nor try to rob you of its possession.

By becoming the least, you will become the greatest; because being convinced that of yourself you are and can do nothing, this conviction, by annihilating yourself in your own eyes, will exalt you before God, whom you will acknowledge as the supreme author and bountiful giver of all good gifts.

Then you can rely upon the power of God, with so much the more confidence, that he is always delighted to support and strengthen the weak.

Moreover, humility will deliver you from all those base and vile condescensions to which a proud and ambitious man is obliged to submit. For, is there a more degraded and abject being, than he who is continually hankering after applause, and eagerly seeking to aggrandize himself?

Humility will teach you to look with indifference on all the honours of this world, because through their glaring splendour, you will easily discover their illusion and vanity.

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It will induce you not to compare yourself with your neighbour; but to honour, and see him without grief above you, either by rank, reputation, or the esteem of others.

Humility appears to man something low and contemptible, because he appreciates every thing by his senses, and is only struck with sensible goods: it is nevertheless the virtue the most capable of forming noble and generous hearts.

Of all virtues, humility is that which displays in man more solid reason and a more magnanimous soul.

But above all, humility will give you a resemblance with Jesus, the Man-God, and the principle of all true grandeur and glory.

Never is man greater, nor can he obtain more glory, than when he endeavours to imitate this divine model. And we cannot nearer approach him than when we are humble, and love humiliations.

Jesus was humble, and loved humiliations, because he knew that thereby he glorified his Father.

It was during the humiliations of Jesus, that his heavenly Father declared that he *was well pleased in him*, and that the angels sung—*Glory to God in the highest*.

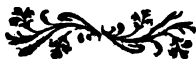
If you are humble like Jesus, God shall

be glorified. And is there any thing more glorious than to advance the glory of God?

Queen of heaven, in whom this divine oracle was so admirably verified; *he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*; (Luke 18, 14.) and who hast, by thy most profound humility, been exalted to the highest degree of grandeur; obtain for me all the graces I so much stand in need of, to destroy that fund of pride which is so predominant in me.

Alas! till now, I have borne only the appearances of humility, and exhibited in my conduct exterior marks of that virtue, merely to gain the esteem of the world, which, notwithstanding its perversity, despises the proud and haughty.

Obtain for me a sincere humility, and thorough conviction of my weakness, that I may, after thy example, refer all things to God, expect all things from God, depend for all things on God, and thus render myself worthy of the esteem of God, who is the only source of all grandeur and distinction.



CHAP. XIV.

That an humble Soul is careful to hide the Gifts of God from the Eyes of Men.

THE angel sent by the Lord to Mary had exalted her in the highest manner, and announced to her that she was to become the Mother of the Son of God. But no one learnt from Mary what the angel had said.

She never was seen behaving and acting outwardly as the Mother of the Messias. She conducted herself as a woman of the lowest condition.

Although she had the most tender love for Joseph, her chaste spouse, although her conversations with him were frequent; yet she did not disclose to him the secret of her dignity.

Afterwards when she paid a visit to Elizabeth, she found her already informed of the mystery of her divine maternity; but she did not avail herself of this favourable opportunity to enter with her into particulars.

Mary left to God, to manifest, when he should think proper, this secret so glorious to her.

The whole application of her mind was to keep herself constantly hidden in her humility.

Thus ought we to hide from the eyes of men what we are before God, and the favours we receive from his divine bounty.

Hidden virtue is always safe. To God alone it belongs to manifest it to men.

When we publicly expose our treasure, we run the risk of losing it. The richest colours are soon faded when exposed to open air.

Martha said to her sister; *The Master is come and calleth for thee*; but she said it *secretly*. John xi. 28.

But *man*, always blind and *sensual*, does not esteem, nay he does not *perceive* the things which are above the senses, and are of the spirit of God. 1 Cor. ii. 14. To speak of holy things to him, is exposing them to raillery and ridicule.

God communicates himself in secret. And whatever passes between him and the soul whom he enriches with his favours, he will have it kept entirely secret.

One man among a thousand (Eccl. vii. 29.) can, and even ought to know your spiritual wishes; that he may teach you how to improve them. It is the man who here below holds for you the place of God,

in order to lead you in the ways of salvation and perfection.

As with regard to others, be outwardly in their presence, as all virtuous people ought to be : humble, modest, affable, and of an even and sweet temper. But let your interior be hidden from them.

Let them even judge you very little instructed in spiritual matters, and quite different from what you really are. It is a happiness which will make you enjoy in security the graces which God bestows upon you.

God commands us to walk with fervour in the ways of his precepts : but it is a great advantage to perform your journey silently and unperceived.

Many souls, after having received singular favours from God, have been lost, for having reflected too much on them, taken a vain complacency in themselves, and discovered their merits, to obtain the admiration of those who should not have been acquainted with them.

Had they been guided by the interior spirit of the Blessed Virgin ; the spirit of humility, which is always attended with divine light, would have inspired them with wisdom and diffidence, and discovered

to them the snares and stratagems of the spirit of pride.

One cannot be too cautious to avoid being deceived in a spiritual life, and especially in extraordinary ways.

What is in itself an excellent and heavenly liquor may, without this precaution, become at length a deadly poison.

It has always been remarked, that a truly interior soul suffers a real anguish, and stands in need of great submission to the will of God, when he permits that some of the particular favours which he has bestowed upon her should be outwardly manifested.

CHAP. XV.

Of the Prudence of Faith.

MARY was *thinking with herself*, says the Gospel, when the angel sent by the Lord saluted her. Her thoughts proceeded from humility and faith.

This prudent virgin knew, that sometimes the spirit of darkness transforms himself into an angel of light; and that the spirit of error imitates sometimes the voice of the Spirit of truth.

Therefore she questioned the angel, and waits for his answer, in order to see whether it will agree with what the prophets had said of the Messias, and with the principles of her religion.

But after the answer of the angel, she wanted nothing else to regulate her conduct, because she found it conformable to the word of God.

There is a prudence which is the principle of our submission to faith, instead of being contrary to it.

Prudence makes us open our eyes, to assure ourselves of the truth of revelation; and submission makes us shut them, to believe blindly what it teaches.

We ought not to believe every spirit. 1 John iv. 1. Concerning religious matters, therefore, I will never believe, but what is conformable to what God himself has said, or has revealed through his Church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth. 1 Tim. iii. 15.

God has given us means to know what he has revealed: but revelation being once proved, *anathema*, even to an angel, who would teach me any thing contrary to what it teaches.

I believe what religion teaches, because it teaches me nothing but the word of God.

And can there be any thing more certain, than what is said by him who is truth itself.

It is as much impossible that I should be deceived, as it is impossible that God can deceive me, or himself be deceived.

It is a folly to believe as the word of God a doctrine which is not clearly established by solid proofs. It was the folly of the heathens, and is still that of many Christians.

But to believe as the word of God, what is evidently demonstrated as such, is the distinctive characteristic of consummate wisdom.

To believe with a firm faith the truths which God has revealed, is to participate in some degree in the infallibility of God himself.

Examination in religious matters, when undertaken with the spirit of Mary, will always render us firm and immoveable in faith.

But there are some people, who set about examining in order to entertain the errors which they love, rather than to learn what they ought to believe and love.

Their intention is not to find out the truth, in order to adhere to it; but to find

out, if possible, some reasons to call in question the truth which they cannot bear.

A safe method of knowing what they ought to believe, and how they ought to live, is not what they seek after: the end of all their enquiries, is to live a criminal life without remorse.

Those who are impatient of the constraints which faith commands, are always fond of systems of irreligion.

It is only when it begins to be painful and troublesome, that faith becomes doubtful and suspected.

What revolts free-thinkers, is rather the sanctity of its maxims, than the incomprehensibility of its mysteries.

They must either subdue their passions, or be continually haunted with remorse and terrors. Therefore they determine themselves to believe nothing, or at least to entertain doubts on every thing, except on the dreadful blindness in which they live.



CHAP. XVI.

Of Submission to Faith.

WHEN Mary was assured that God had spoken to her by the voice of the angel, she firmly believed, that whatever the angel had told her would be accomplished, and she believed it without seeking to comprehend it.

She did not ask for a miracle like Achaz, she did not doubt like Zachary. It was not then that she asked, *How shall this be done?*

How will this child, of which I am to be the mother, accomplish the redemption of mankind? what will be the establishment of his kingdom? The angel did not hear her start any such objection.

None of these questions and curious enquiries, so usual to weak souls, did she allow herself; she immediately submitted her judgment to the yoke of faith.

After her example, humble yourself, O my soul, by submitting your reason to truths which are above your understanding.

Do not seek to comprehend the mysteries which faith proposes. If you could comprehend them they would be no longer mys-

teries. It is sufficient for you to know that they are grounded upon truth.

You cannot call them in question, if you will but consider the striking characters of the religion which teaches them, and reflect on the ready submission with which they were received throughout the whole world.

These mysteries are incomprehensible, I own. But faith would be destitute of merit, if they could be explained by human reason. *Blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed.* John xx. 29.

From the stars, to the meanest flower, every thing is a mystery for you in nature. These mysteries of nature you cannot comprehend, and yet you wish to comprehend the mysteries of God.

We are eager to penetrate without veil into the things which relate to God, whilst our conception of earthly things always remains limited and imperfect.

We must not compare the weak and limited faculties of the human mind with the power and works of a being who is omnipotent, incomprehensible, and infinite in all his perfections.

Almighty God would not be what he is, if we could fathom his divine essence, and comprehend his whole being.

: To believe what the eyes cannot see, nor reason comprehend, is offering a perfect homage to the Sovereign Truth.

: O my God! it is not by my own narrow lights that I will judge, but by thine, which faith has imparted to me.

Thou demandest of me, not only the sacrifice of my heart, but also that of my mind, which can be done only by faith.

I hope to gain heaven, where every thing will be unveiled and discovered. But in heaven itself, I shall never entirely comprehend thy infinite perfections and wonderful works; because thou shalt always be infinite, and myself always limited.

I do believe, O Lord, help thou my unbelief. Increase my faith. Mark ix. 23. Luke xvii. 5.

Thou wilt not refuse me the gift of faith, which is the source of all other gifts, if I ask it of thee as I ought.

I solicit this particular grace of thee, through the intercession of that Virgin, who, by the submission and merit of her faith, beheld in herself the accomplishment of those things which were spoken to her by the angel.

Give me an universal faith, a lively faith, without doubts, without waverings, without exception or reserve.

To doubt, is not to believe. To except one article, is to reject them all.

Give me a faith animated with charity, that I may live conformably to the truths which faith teaches.

I do not ask the power of working those miracles which through faith several of thy saints performed. But I earnestly beg of thee that faith which made them saints.

CHAP. XVII.

Of the ardent Desire of receiving Jesus Christ in holy Communion, with which the Christian Soul ought to be animated.

MARY.

MY son, the mystery upon which you have been meditating, can also furnish you with reflections which have not occurred to your mind.

DISCIPLE.

Queen of Heaven, vouchsafe to be thyself my instructor. *Speak, for thy servant heareth.* 1 Kings iii. 9.

MARY.

Before I received the visit of the angel, I had often, after the example of the saints of Israel, besought the Almighty to ordain the heavens to shower down the celestial

den, and to grant to the earth the *Just One*; but I should have never presumed, that I was myself to be the Virgin of whom the Saviour of the world was to be born.

However, when I was assured that I was chosen to be his mother; annihilating myself at the thought of so high and sublime a dignity, with what religious sentiments was I not penetrated? What joy did I feel to possess my God in my womb?

The same God who vouchsafed ^{to him} such an intimate union with me by his incarnation, desires also, O my son, to unite himself to you in the blessed eucharist. But how backward are you in your desires to receive him?

Do not listen to the various pretences which indolence or a mistaken humility will suggest, to keep you at a distance from the sacred banquet.

You alledge fear and respect. But fear and respect ought to be subordinate to love, and serve only to render your love more vigilant and attentive.

To keep at a distance from communion, under pretence of respect, is to deprive Jesus Christ of the pleasure of dwelling with in you.

He has declared how much he wished it, when he said, *My delight is to be with the children of men.* PROV. viii. 31.

You say, that your failings are too frequent to allow you often to approach the Holy of Holies. But, my son, whatever may be the frailties of a soul, if she strives her utmost to correct and amend them, Jesus always comes to her with pleasure.

You say that you abstain from communion, because you are sensible of your great unworthiness.

You should say: I will endeavour, as much as it lays in my power, to render myself worthy of communicating, in order to participate in the graces which Jesus grants to the pious souls who unite themselves to him by communion.

Alas! your communions are rare, only because you are afraid of constraint and regularity.

You are afraid of that pious and fervent life, which is required of those who communicate frequently.

You complain of the infirmities and weakness of your soul. Make use then of the efficacious remedy which is offered to you in the *bread of life*.

Jesus in his gospel invites to his banquet

the weak and the infirm, the poor and the blind.

He knows your miseries, and he presents to you in his sacrament a life-giving food, to relieve, support, and fortify you.

To communicate, it were indeed to be wished that you had a perfect sanctity : but Jesus does not require it.

Were this sanctity absolutely necessary, notwithstanding his pressing invitations, how very few could be admitted at his table.

To say that it is necessary, is to require as a *disposition for communion*, what ought to be the fruit of it.

Approach to communion with a thorough consciousness and unfeigned confession of your unworthiness ; especially approach to it with a great purity of heart, or at least with a sincere and strong resolution of leaving nothing undone in order to acquire it, and then you will make a worthy communion.

Remember that we never communicate worthily, without deriving some great benefit in our souls.

If by your vigilance and fidelity, you were animated with the disposition requisite for frequent communion, you would be already much advanced in the ways of perfection.

A soul that longs after enjoying the presence of Jesus in heaven, makes all her delight upon earth consist in possessing him by communion, as often as in her power.

CHAP. XVIII.

Of the Sentiments which ought to animate the Soul who possesses Jesus by Communion.

MARY.

MY son, when you have received Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist, and when he reposes in your heart, imitate the sentiments I was animated with when I bore him in my womb.

DISCIPLE.

O ! Mary, neither the human mind can conceive, nor any human language express, what were then the sentiments and transports of thy holy soul.

Faith, humility, zeal, gratitude, love, in short all virtues were thy habitual and actual sentiments during the nine months which the Word of God passed in thy chaste womb.

MARY.

My son, if you well comprehend the value of the grace which Jesus bestows upon

you, when he gives himself to you in his sacrament, and what are his sentiments in your regard, can you be destitute of gratitude and love towards him?

The creature is visited by the Creator; a poor beggar by the King of Glory; a distressed soul by the heavenly Comforter; a man who is nothing but sin, by him who is sanctity itself.

Humble yourself most profoundly before him. Exalt his goodness infinitely above all your conceptions.

Detest your past ingratitude; implore his assistance for the future, and promise him an eternal allegiance and fidelity.

Abandon yourself to the transports of the purest joy. Beseech the angels and saints to offer for you to Jesus acts of thanksgiving, which may, if possible, bear some proportion to the most precious gift which he has conferred upon you.

Conceive the most ardent desires, that a God so good, so bountiful, and so amiable, may be loved and glorified upon earth, as he is in heaven.

Open your heart, and sincerely wish, that it may be consumed with the flames of his love.

Offer to him, as a token of your gratitude, and as a supplement of your ex-

treme weakness, all the sentiments of pious souls, who receive him with devotion and love in the same sacrament.

Above all, offer to him the sentiments with which, through his infinite mercy and grace he penetrated my soul, when by his incarnation he united himself so intimately to me.

Reflect on the virtues of which he gives you so great an example in the blessed eucharist, especially on his humility, and ask of him the grace of imitating it.

In this adorable sacrament, not only his divinity, but his humanity also, is hidden under impenetrable veils. It is only by the eyes of faith that Jesus can be there discovered. Beg of him to make you love an humble and hidden life, to shun the honours and distinctions of the world, and to perform all your actions without any intention of being seen and esteemed.

In this sacrament, Jesus is the object of the contempt of many : and how many also are there who entertain for him only sentiments of indifference, because they are fond of the world, and entirely full of themselves. Beg of him the grace of bearing with patience injuries and contradictions.

This is a sufficient matter to occupy your thoughts when you communicate ; and dur-

ing the whole day in which you have enjoyed the happiness of possessing Jesus in your heart.

CHAP. XIX.

Of the Dryness which some Souls experience during their pious Exercises, and even at the Time of Communion.

DISCIPLE.

O Holy Virgin! who next to Jesus, art my help and counsel, I most gratefully thank thee for the instructions thou hast been pleased to give me.

But, alas! notwithstanding the care I take to be animated with the sentiments with which the reception of the body and blood of the Lord ought to inspire me, I find but too frequently, my mind and heart cold, dry, and languid.

O! could I then feel that tenderness of love, and sweetness of devotion, which so delightfully penetrated thee while thou hadst Jesus in thy womb, and which pious souls enjoy at the time of communion.

MARY.

My son, when you are in a state of dryness in approaching communion, humble yourself, acknowledging that you deserve

this painful state by your infidelities : bear it with patience, in expiation of your sins ; but never give way to discouragement.

If you have reason to believe that this state of privation is a punishment, correct yourself. But if it be only a trial, make it by your resignation a subject of merit.

The fruit of a good communion is not necessarily a sensible relish of communion itself. This fruit is a constant fidelity in the performance of our duties.

A heart may sincerely and entirely be united to God, and yet feel no relish and attraction for the things of God.

Many souls who walk with the greatest fervour in the ways of perfection, are tried by aridities in their prayers, and even when they receive the blessed eucharist.

Sensible sweetness and attractions are not a necessary appendage of virtue.—Nay, sometimes it may be feared lest the soul should be too strongly attached to them.

The divine Spouse knows what is best for his beloved. He grants to some sweetness and consolations which he refuses to others, for motives which these ought to adore, without seeking to comprehend them.

A tepid or negligent soul ought not to expect the bounties of Jesus. But a

faithful and fervent soul ought not to be sorry to have opportunities of proving to Jesus, that she serves him for himself, rather than for his gifts.

Do not therefore think yourself rejected by God, when you feel nothing but disgust in his service. Do then with fidelity, in order to please him, what you would do, if you felt the greatest comforts in his service.

Go to God, my son, rather by faith, than by your senses. Endeavour to please him in all things. If you succeed, you have found out the happiness which the saints sought after and enjoyed.

A state of dryness is a state conducive to sanctification, if you know how to make a profitable use of it, by corresponding to the designs of God.

The design of God in putting you in such a state of privation, is to compel you to seek yourself no longer, and teach you to find your felicity in his will, and draw merit from your ready submission to his good pleasure.

DISCIPLE.

Unworthy of consolation as I confess myself to be, I submit, O holy Virgin, in this case, as well as in every other, to the will of my most merciful Master and Saviour.

If he be pleased to put me in the number of those souls whom he favours with sensible devotion; let him be blessed: but let him also be praised if he think proper to refuse it me.

I solicit no other consolation from Jesus, but to be faithful to him for ever and ever.

I will always esteem myself infinitely happy to sacrifice the satisfactions of my heart to the good pleasure of Jesus, my Saviour and my God, and to accomplish all my duties without feeling any other comfort but of accomplishing them to please him.

CHAP. XX.

Of the Fruit we ought to reap from Communion for the Regulation of our Life.

DISCIPLE.

MOTHER of pure love, thou wast undefiled and holy from the first instant of thy existence. But since the incarnation of the divine Word in thy chaste womb, how rapidly didst thou advance in sanctity.

The presence of Jesus within thee during nine months, left impressions of sanctity which lasted thy whole life.

The thought of that signal favour rendered thee extremely solicitous and careful

to find out the means, and to improve every opportunity of testifying to him thy gratitude and love.

MARY.

My son, my example is your confusion. You receive in the blessed sacrament the God of all sanctity; and you are still far from being a saint.

One single communion should be sufficient to inflame you with all the fervour of the saints; and your communions always leave you with the same weakness and tepidity.

You always act with reserve towards Jesus, whilst he has none in his goodness for you.

When you have received him, it is true that his presence inspires you with great sentiments of virtue. Nay you make him fair promises: but promises and sentiments soon vanish.

You would not behave so towards the great of the world, had they honoured you with a visit.

When we are sincerely grateful for the benefits which we have received from a friend, how eager are we to give him testimonies of our gratitude: love cannot breathe till it has found means of expressing its sentiments.

Are you destitute, my son, of those occasions of practising virtue which the saints so faithfully improved after communion, in order to testify to Jesus how sensible they were of the grace which they had just received.

Above all he requires an exact vigilance over our affections, that all without exception should tend to him.

If you watched carefully over yourself after communion, you would preserve the sentiments of devotion you felt when you communicated.

This watchfulness after one communion, is the best disposition for the next.

DISCIPLE.

Blessed Virgin, model of all virtues, prostrate at thy feet I am ashamed of my weakness, tepidity and ingratitude.

Intercede for me with Jesus, that he may never come into my heart but to regulate all its motions, by turning and directing them all to him.

May he be pleased to tear from me this wretched heart of mine so unworthy of him, and to create in me a new heart, and give me one like thine, that is, a heart as full of fervour, generosity, tenderness, and constant love for him, as his divine heart is always animated towards us.

CHAP. XXI.

Of Charity towards our Neighbour.

DISCIPLE.

IT was not without design, O most fervent Virgin, that thou didst leave thy solitude of Nazareth. The spirit of charity animated thee.

Happy the hills which felt the impression of thy steps! Mountains of Judea exult for joy.

Worthy Mother of the God of charity, scarcely had the angel informed thee of the situation of thy holy cousin Elizabeth, than thou didst immediately set off to visit her.

Thou didst go *with haste*, says the Gospel, because the Holy Ghost requires promptitude in the execution of the holy designs which he inspires.

The length of the journey, the steepness of the mountains, the difficulties of the roads could not stop thee. Charity fulfils its duties with generosity and courage.

Thou didst leave for a time the comforts of thy solitude. Charity sometimes commands duties to which we must sacrifice our love of pious practices.

Thy charity was not the result of a tran-

sient affection. Thou remainedst with Elizabeth during three months, in order to attend and help her in her wants.

What happy effects did this visit of charity produce? Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost; and John the Baptist was sanctified in his mother's womb.

Elizabeth and Zachary already lived in the practice of virtue: but they learned from thy example to practice it with still greater perfection.

MARY.

My son, if you love God, you will love your neighbour, for whom he came down from heaven, was made man, and died upon a cross.

Do not confine yourself to feelings. Let your charity be effective. Many of your fellow creatures stand in need of consolation in their afflictions, and of assistance and support in their poverty and distress.

God has permitted that there should be a great number of unfortunate upon earth, that they should be sanctified by their resignation and patience, and you by your benevolence and charity.

When you can oblige quickly, use no delay; delays always lessen the merit of charity.

Let your charity be liberal. Give as much as is in your power.

A want of readiness and alacrity in the services which we render to our neighbour, is rather eluding, than performing the duties of charity.

When you cannot oblige or assist your neighbour in his necessities, interest yourself for him with others. At least solicit for him the favours of God.

In your neighbour, do not consider the man, but God. Then, whoever may be the man who claims your assistance, you will refuse him nothing, because you would refuse nothing to God.

If we do good to men only according to their merit and good qualities, we shall seldom do it.

O! my son, love the works of charity which *cost* to nature. Love to practice charity at the expence of self-love.

God teaches us by his example to do good to all men,—even to the most undeserving and ungrateful.

Give, said Jesus, and it shall be given to you. Give temporal riches, and God will give you eternal.

Assist your neighbour by your advice in his doubts, that he may be delivered from them; and God by his inspirations will enable you to be delivered from your perplexities.

Speak consoling words to the afflicted; and *the God of all consolation*, by the words of his grace, will support you in your afflictions.

CHAP. XXII.

Of the Greatness of God.

LET us, O! my soul, listen to Mary, who in holy transports celebrates the greatness of God.

Let us enter into the sentiments with which she was penetrated, and join our praise to hers.

Let us with her *magnify the Lord*, the *God Almighty*, who *does the greatest things*, whenever he pleases; and whose holy name deserves the adoration and homage of all the earth.

Who hath shown, and ever does show, might in his arm, to scatter the proud in the conceit of their heart; puts down the mighty from their seat to exalt the humble; and fills the hungry with good things, and the rich sends empty away.

In effect, to whom do praise and glory properly belong, but to thee, O my God?

The greatness of men is limited, frail, frequently borrowed from others, and de-

pende on our particular notions; nay it is often imaginary and false.

But, O my God, *of thy greatness there is no end*; (Ps, cxliv. 3.) thou holdest it of thyself alone; every other greatness is obliged to bend and submit to thine.

The greatness of kings ends with their life. The noise of their fall is soon followed by an eternal oblivion. But for thee, O Lord, *thou remainest for ever*. Ps. ix. 7. Thy glory is limited neither within the bounds of the universe nor of time.

Of what could thy creatures glory? All the power and riches which they may enjoy, they hold from thee. Without thee they can do nothing, and without them thou canst do all things.

Thou alone art great by thyself. Thou needest not a foreign power for the execution of thy designs. To will, and to do, is for thee one and the same thing.

Without going out of thyself, thou findest in thy essence, without limits and imperfections, all the perfections of which all beings visible and invisible are susceptible.

Thou alone possessest essentially all possible perfections, because thou art the only being self-existent, and possessing existence and life in their plenitude.

The great of this world deserve our respect, only because they are the image of thy greatness, and because thou hast been pleased to commit to them a portion of thy power. But what are they before thee? Dust and ashes as the rest of mankind.

Let therefore all worldly grandeur vanish and disappear from before thee. There is no true grandeur but that which can receive neither augmentation nor diminution.

O Lord God of Hosts who is like to thee? Thou alone deservest the adoration of heaven and earth, because thou alone art the God truly great, always great, and infinitely great, in all things and every where.

Great in all thy works, in the smallest as well as in the most marvellous, in the flowers of the field as in the stars of heaven.

Great in wisdom, in power, justice and goodness. O! great God, who will ever be able to speak of thy grandeur in a manner worthy of thee?

I confess my inability; this confession redounds to thy glory; for it is paying an homage to thy infinite greatness, to acknowledge that it is infinitely above all praise and expression.



CHAP. XXIII.

Of the Mercies of God.

DISCIPLE.

HOW much do I like, O Mary, to hear thee celebrate the mercies of the Lord, with that same voice which celebrates his grandeurs.—What a high and exalted idea of them thou givest me.

If with thee I trace the series of them *from generation to generation*, I see that all those who fear the Lord, have felt their beneficial effects.

If he strike sinners in his wrath, if he inflict on them dreadful punishments, it is only after having tried by his benefits to bring them to a sense of their danger, and inspire them with his love.

The ingratitude and infidelities of his people could not dry up the source of his bounties: he opened to them the bosom of his mercy, with the tenderness of the most indulgent parent.

He had promised to Abraham and his posterity that he would send them a Saviour. Rather than to fail in his promises, he sought in the fidelity of the parents, motives to induce him to bestow on the chil-

dren, favours of which they were unworthy.

This Saviour has appeared. And it was impossible for men to remain ignorant of the love which he bore to them.

He has stretched forth a helping hand to all the unfortunate. The sinners themselves, far from being excluded from his benefits, have been the chief object of his zeal.

It is with regret and bitter grief that he saw himself forsaken by so great a number of ungrateful men, who preferred a false liberty before the precious advantage of being his disciples and friends.

And in order to shew the excess of his inexhaustible charity, he would be nailed to the cross, where he shed the last drop of his blood.

Men witnessed him in this suffering state, and still continue to behold it, without their obdurate hearts being moved with gratitude and love. The lightning which should strike and destroy them, is not as yet hurled on their guilty heads. His mercy and the voice of his blood are still crying in their favour.

I am myself, O holy Virgin, a striking proof of his patience in waiting for the sin-

ner, and of his indulgent facility in receiving him.

As a wandering sheep, I have been brought back to the fold by this divine shepherd. Nay he has vouchsafed to carry me on his shoulders, lest I should be over-fatigued on my return.

Shall I ever forget the happy day, when this tender parent, beholding his prodigal son returning to him, embraced me, bedewed me with his tears, and pressed me so lovingly against his paternal bosom.

O how good and merciful is our God ! At the sight of an humble and contrite heart, he forgets that he is a judge, and remembers only that he is a father.

O, compassionate virgin, Mother of the God of mercies, who hast interceded for my conversion, obtain for me the grace of perseverance.

Thou knowest what has been the instability of my desires during my whole life. Preserve in me, fortify, improve, through thy protection, these new desires of sanctity, with which grace has inspired me.

Thy charity for me shall not be inferior to my confidence in thee. Can the enemy of my soul be more powerful to contrive my loss, than thou to promote my salvation ?

Vouchsafe therefore, O most charitable, most tender and amiable of mothers, vouchsafe to obtain for thy child a lively contrition for the past, an exact fidelity for the present, and an unshaken constancy for the future; and I will sing throughout all eternity, the mercies of the Lord, and thy goodness towards me.

CHAP. XXIV.

Of Gratitude to God for his Benefits.

O God! infinitely good, and infinitely merciful, who hast bestowed upon me so many temporal and spiritual graces, I offer to thee, as a token of my acknowledgment and thanksgiving, all the sentiments of gratitude which Mary felt for thy benefits during the whole course of her life, but especially when she entered the house of Zachary and Elizabeth.

Elizabeth gave to Mary the praise which she so justly deserved: but Mary wished Elizabeth to forget the person who had received the benefit, to think only of the supreme benefactor.

She most earnestly desired, O my God, that all creatures would join her to bless

thee, for the singular gifts with which thou hadst favoured her.

She esteemed herself happy, only because the Almighty had vouchsafed *to regard the humility of his handmaid*, to shew forth his mercy and greatness from generation to generation.

Alas! instead of seeing in me, O Lord, these pious sentiments, after so many proofs which thou hast given me of thy love, thou beholdest in my heart nothing but sin and ingratitude.

All the blessings which I enjoy, I receive from thee alone; and yet to men I return my thanks. When my projects and undertakings succeed, to my industry and abilities I attribute the success.

But above all, who am I, or what can I do of myself in the great concern of my salvation? Yet I think not of offering my grateful thanks to thee, for the light and assistance thou givest me to succeed in this important affair.

If there be any thing in me that can be acceptable in thy sight, I hold it from thee, and without thee I cannot preserve it.

It is true, I co-operate freely with thy grace. But my co-operation itself is an additional subject of gratitude. For it is thou, O my God, *who workst in us both*

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to will and to accomplish, according to thy good will. Philip. ii. 13.

The misery and weakness of my soul are extreme. If thy grace were to forsake me, into what shocking errors and vices should I not fall by my corrupt propensities.

There is no other safety for me, but in the conviction of my weakness, and in my gratitude for those daily graces with which thou continually supportest me.

O! my God, do not permit that I should ever by my infidelities render myself unworthy of thy benefits, or forget them through ingratitude.

The constant inclination of thy heart is to do good. But the vice of ingratitude is the greatest impediment to the effusion of thy graces and mercies.

I have deserved a thousand times to be deprived of them. But thou wouldst triumph over my heart by dint of favours and blessings.

O sovereign Lord of all things, I will no longer oppose any resistance: I will be henceforth entirely thine: as it is through thee alone that I live, for thee alone I am determined to live.

But as my wants, and thy benefits towards me are continual, grant me the grace

of passing my whole life in imploring thy goodness, and in thanking thee for the wonderful effect of it which I incessantly receive.

CHAP. XXV.

Of Visits.

THE example of Mary in the visit she paid to her cousin Elizabeth, ought to be the rule of our conduct in the commerce of civil life.

Although the Mother of God, this humble virgin did not wait to be prevented by Elizabeth; condemning thereby the false delicacy of so many people zealous of their rank, who are always on the punctilio and disputing on precedence.

But what was the motive which induced Mary to pay that visit? It could only be from a motive of religion.

Curiosity, vanity, self-love, are the motives of almost all the visits which are paid and received in the world. It was not so with the most pure and faithful of all virgins. She was actuated by the most holy motives.

In the visits which they make, and

which the world considers as duties of society, virtuous people always act with virtuous intentions.

Piety, charity, the advancement of the glory of God, directed the steps of Mary. She went to a house where God was served and loved. She went to congratulate Elizabeth for those graces which God had bestowed upon her, of which she had been informed by the angel.

She paid her a visit, in order to help and comfort her ; and to strengthen the bands of the holy friendship which united them.

Piety does not forbid us to fulfil the duties of society : but it sanctifies the accomplishment of them by Christian motives.

As it seeks to turn every moment to advantage, it retrenches, as much as possible, all useless interviews, all visits of mere pleasure.

The only visits which pious souls like, are those in which they hope to be edified.

All other visits they dislike, because it is only in the society of virtue that virtue can find pleasure. Any other visit even fatigues them ; they suffer as being out of their element.

The saints know how to render conducive to the glory of God, the edification of their

neighbour, and their own perfection, actions which appear the most insignificant in themselves.

If we imitated them, and if our visits were guided by the same spirit; what fruit should we not reap from this intercourse of civility, which makes a part of the duties of society?

We should enjoy a thousand innocent pleasures unknown to worldlings. We should reciprocally animate one another to the practice of virtue.

We should not leave our acquaintances with that weariness which always attend the tiresome visits of the world, but return home with that interior peace and holy joy which are the recompense of virtue.

Recall therefore, O Christian souls, recall frequently to your mind the model which I have just traced out for you. Like Mary, leave your solitude but seldom, and never form any connection but with virtuous people.

Like her, seek only the glory of God, and the edification of your neighbour; and turn to your own profit the intercourse which you may be obliged to entertain with your fellow creatures.

CHAP. XXVI.

Of Conversations.

I REPAIR to the house of Elizabeth, when Mary paid her a visit.—What lessons of modesty, humility, discretion and charity, do I not there receive.

Elizabeth acknowledged Mary to be the *Mother of her God*: she bestowed upon her the greatest encomiums and blessings; she exalted her grandeur, and congratulated her for her glorious prerogatives.

Mary, instead of being dazzled with the splendour of her dignities, referred to God all the honour which was offered to her, and glorified the Lord.

She did not disown the *mighty things* which the Omnipotent had done in her; but she referred all the glory to him; and though being actually the Mother of God, she did not forget that she was his *hand-maid*.

She was animated with a sincere humility, entirely divested of that false modesty, which is too often only a veil to cover secret pride.

In effect, how many are there who reject the praises that are given them, only to

obtain more. Thus making, by a refinement of self-love, modesty itself subservient to vanity.

It is of God, of his greatness and of his mercies, that Mary and Elizabeth converse. Both penetrated with his divine love, their whole delight is to entertain themselves of the wonders of his wisdom, power and goodness.

When the gifts of God are the sole object of our joy, God is the sole object of our thanks and praise.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Your whole conversation is of the world and its vanities. It is but a too convincing proof that you love only the world, (*Matt. xii. 34.*) and that your heart is enamoured with its deceitful charms.

They are of the world, said the beloved disciple, *therefore of the world they speak, and the world heareth them.* 1 John iv. 5. If they were of God, they would speak of God, or at least speak of nothing but according to God.

Remember that at the judgment seat of God, you will give an account of every idle word. What a subject of fear for you!

Oh! how few conversations are there, even among those who make an open profession of piety, which will not increase

the account they shall have to render to God!

What is the most usual subject of our conversations? News, popular reports, trifles and vanities. Even such conversations are reckoned the most innocent.

Moreover it seems that we cannot hold a conversation without speaking of the defects of our neighbour. Conversation languishes, if not kept alive by the shafts of censure, and even of malignity.

Consider as a duty of conscience, never to speak ill of any one. If you cannot prevent others from detraction; shew them at least by your silence that you take no part in their criminal conversation.

Woe to you detractors, whose tongues always sharpened as those of serpents, take your delight in tearing to pieces the reputation of the absent.

Woe also to those who take pleasure in listening to them; for whoever freely and deliberately listens to detraction makes himself an accomplice of it.

Entertain the greatest horror of whatever might be contrary to modesty. Never smile at those words which the world calls jokes, but which are too often the language of passion.

Above all, regard as an honour and your

glory to be esteemed as a man, before whom no one dares speak against religion or piety. Rebuke the impious with a holy liberty ; and if you have no means to hinder others from uttering their impieties, testify at least by unequivocal signs, what judgment you form of them.

Be always true, modest, and reserved in all your words ; but at the same time, be affable with every body, and taking part with simplicity in every innocent relaxation and amusement. Virtue not only allows, nay sometimes commands it.

The more exposed you are to commit sins of the tongue, the more careful ought you to be to avoid all the faults of which it is the baneful principle.

If you love to commune with God in the secret of your house, when obliged to appear among men, it will be then attended with much less danger.

Before you enter into company, beg of the Lord, *to set a watch before your mouth*, (Ps. cxli. 3.) and during your conversation think that God is present and hears you. Speak interiorly to him from time to time, and raise your heart to him by frequent and short aspirations.

When the conversation is over, call yourself to an account, in order to thank

God, if you have acted as you ought, or to correct the faults into which you discover yourself to have fallen.

Thus you will acquire that reserve and discretion in words, so much recommended by the masters of a spiritual life, and which they look upon with so much reason as a point of great perfection.

CHAP. XXVII.

Of true Friendship.

DISCIPLE.

A Faithful friend is a rich treasure, says the Scripture, and they that fear the Lord shall find him. Eccl. xiv. 16.

O! Mary, the Almighty granted thee this precious treasure in Elizabeth; and he made also Elizabeth partake of it by giving thee to her for her friend.

Both you offer to us a model of a most holy and perfect friendship, entirely divested of all those weaknesses and imperfections which so usually corrupt human friendships.

A happy conformity of religious sentiments and inclinations, formed the bands of your reciprocal affection. Virtue and

grace thou didst esteem in Elizabeth, as Elizabeth esteemed them in thee.

Your conversations together were frequent, you were emulous to advise and help one another; there was no secret nor reserve between you, your two hearts were but one and the same heart; and all those marks of friendship had only one and the same end, the advancement of the glory of God.

Indeed Elizabeth must have felt that her heart, since it was united to the heart of Mary, conceived for God more lively sentiments of gratitude and love than before.

As for thee, O holy Virgin, thou madest as rapid progress in holiness in the house of Elizabeth, as if thou hadst remained in thy solitude at Nazareth.

Happy in your union, your separation did not occasion the least change or alteration in your reciprocal love. When virtue unites two hearts together, friendship is not subject to inconstancy.

MARY.

My son, do not flatter yourself to enjoy the sweet comforts of friendship, unless you seek them in virtue.

We are daily deceived in the choice of friends. We ought to give our confidence

only to those, on the fidelity and religion of whom we can rely.

You will find enough of those *common* friends, who will be ready to give you exterior marks of attachment, but expect nothing more from them.

They will be your friends as long as they will derive some advantage from your prosperity. But if you fall into some misfortune, their friendship will vanish.

They will endeavour to correct you of those vices, the shame of which might rebound to themselves. As for those which Christianity condemns, but which the world approves, they will be the first to countenance and excite you to gratify.

Learn to know a true friend. He will assist you in your wants; comfort you in your troubles; enlighten you in your doubts; guide you in your affairs; deliver you from your errors; correct you from your faults, and support you in all difficult circumstances. But above all, he will, both by his words and example, animate you to the faithful discharge of your duties.

But it is very rare to find such a friend; because in the choice of a friend it is very rare to consult virtue.

Love virtue, and it will make you disco-

ver a friend worthy of you, and who will be another yourself.

Many friendships appear at first strong and sincere, and yet are soon broken, because they connected together only vicious hearts.

As much as it depends upon you, let your friendship be a commerce of edification, in which you reciprocally give and receive good example.

Comply with your friend's desires as far as conscience permits, but no further.

Never require of him, but what is just and reasonable; and above all, never flatter him, in order to be flattered in your turn.

CHAP. XXVIII.

Of Confidence in God, and Reliance on his Providence.

CONFIDENCE in God is the best homage we can offer to his perfections. The more unreserved it is, the more it honours him.

By this confidence we acknowledge him for the Supreme Being who can do whatever he pleases, and whose good will is equal to his power.

It is one of the most powerful means of

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obtaining from heaven the most signal favours and graces.

How many examples of this virtue has not Mary given us? Her committing to God alone the care of her reputation, is undoubtedly a most striking one.

The Spouse whom he had given her to be the guardian of her virginity, conceived a suspicion unfavourable to her. He sought to leave her secretly.

Mary, however, shewed no anxiety. Full of confidence in God, she waited with submission the moment of his providence.

In effect, this moment soon arrived. Joseph was enlightened from above; his doubts were removed; he could no longer remain in suspense; penetrated with veneration for the virtue of his chaste consort, he resolved to attach himself for ever to her.

We see thereby how advantageous it is to trust in God, and commit all our concerns into his hands.

Every thing is promised to confidence; the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth; the advantages of time, and the blessings of eternity.

The man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, shall be like tamarick in the desert, and shall dwell in dryness in a land not inhabited. Jerem. xvii. 5.

But the man that trusteth in the Lord, the Lord shall be his confidence; he shall be as a tree that is planted by the waters, and it shall not fear when the heat cometh. And the leaf thereof shall be green, neither shall it cease at any time to bring forth fruit. Jerem. xvii. 8.

Every thing ought to inspire us with confidence. The goodness of God, his power, his promises, his fidelity, the knowledge he has of our wants, our own weakness, and the daily experience we have of the impotency of men, and even of their perfidy.

Whatever may be your troubles and afflictions, have recourse confidently to his providence. You complain that God does not assist you in your distress; but he waits till you come with confidence to ask for the help of which you stand in need.

Undoubtedly he knows the melancholy situation in which you are placed; but if you do not declare with confidence your afflictions to him; he acts towards you, as if he were actually ignorant of them.

You abandon yourself to trouble and despondency, as if there were no God in Israel. 4 Kings i. 10.

Alas! we often give ourselves up to trouble, solicitude, and alarms, whilst an

act of confidence would restore peace and tranquillity to our souls.

In your dangers, perplexities, and afflictions, ask advice, and take the measures the best calculated to extricate you from your difficulties and pains. But before all, let God be your first resource.

It is from God alone that men derive all the power, wisdom, and good will with which they can help and assist you ; and they cannot do it, but in proportion as they receive these gifts from him.

Provided your confidence in God be not presumptuous, it can never be excessive.

Man left to himself is the weakest of all beings ; but he becomes strong by the assistance of God in whom he trusts.

The accidents which have deprived you of health, have not lessened the power of him who alone can restore it to you.

Death hath snatched from you the generous benefactor who was your support ; but you have not lost him who directed and animated his friendship in all that he did for your welfare.

If we would but reflect, we should acknowledge that we have never been destitute of the assistance of God, except when through diffidence we had rendered ourselves unworthy of his favours.

CHAP. XXIX.

Of Obedience.

MARY and Joseph, being of the family of David, went from Nazareth to Bethlehem, in order to be enrolled there, according to the decree of Augustus, who wishing to know the whole extent of his power, had ordained a general enrollment of all the subjects of his empire.

Whether the pride, in the law which he enacted, was actuated by views of interest or vanity, they do not examine. The order is given, they know it, they immediately submit.

If Augustus had known Mary, he would have said to her what Assuerus said to Esther: *Such a law is not made for thee.* Esth. xv. 13. But that law included her as well as others; therefore she obeyed it as others, and even much better: because she did it without murmuring, with humility and patience.

In the order of the prince, Mary considered only the will of God. This order appeared to her a disposition of Providence, to which she blindly submitted.

Obedience knows neither reasoning nor delay, it always acts with simplicity: simplicity is its character. Nothing is more contrary to the spirit of submission, than the prudence of the flesh, which always wants to see and examine.

What would become of subordination, if the orders of those who have a right to command, were to be submitted to those whose duty is to obey?

If the temporal master who commands, does not of himself deserve your obedience, the Sovereign Master whom he represents deserves it.

It is true, that he who commands may be deceived; but when he commands you nothing contrary to the law of God, your obedience to him, in such a case, for the sake of God, cannot be subject to error: and it is always very meritorious before God.

It is the doctrine of the saints, that it is more advantageous to do little things out of obedience, than to perform wonders from our own will.

Worldly wisdom laughs to scorn the humble simplicity of obedient souls; because it perceiveth not the things that are of the Spirit of God.

But what do the judgments of the world signify for those who take the gospel for their rule?

Every act of obedience is not meritorious. When you obey on account of the good qualities of him who commands, your obedience is merely natural. You cannot expect a recompense, but from men.

Even when your obedience refers to God, it is often mixed with many imperfections and defects, which deprive you of a part of its value and merit.

To obey with readiness and alacrity, only in those things which gratify our inclinations, is doing our own will, rather than that of another.

The man truly obedient, allows himself neither delay in the execution of the thing commanded, nor murmuring against the authority of him who commands.

The holy Scripture teaches us *to be subject to our masters with all fear ; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.*
1 Pet. ii. 18.

We should not find obedience so hard, were we to think less of the man whom we obey, than of God for whom we ought to obey.

According to the testimony of the holy

Scripture, *an obedient man shall speak victory* Prov. xxi. 28.

Self-will is a source of error and vice ; but obedience, by purifying and sanctifying our motives, saves us from many faults and regrets, and obtains for us the approbation of God.



THE

Imitation of the Blessed Virgin.

BOOK II.

IN WHICH ARE CONSIDERED THE LIFE
AND VIRTUES OF THE BLESSED VIR-
GIN, FROM THE BIRTH OF HER SON AT
BETHLEHEM, TILL THE MOMENT SHE
SAW HIM SACRIFICING HIS LIFE FOR
THE SALVATION OF MEN ON MOUNT
CALVARY.

CHAP. I.

Of the Happiness of the Poor.

DISCIPLE.

I Contemplate with delight, O holy Vir-
gin, that perfect peace which thy soul
enjoyed in the stable of Bethlehem, where
thou wast delivered of thy only Son the di-
vine Jesus.

The contempt and refusals with which
thou didst meet when thou wast seeking
for an abode, could not alter it.

The Queen of Angels saw herself with joy surrounded by poor shepherds. The Mother of the Supreme Disposer of all things was delighted to see herself exposed in a stable to all the inclemencies of the most severe season in the year.

Thou wast a thousand times more satisfied in that stable, and in the state of want and poverty in which thou wast left, than the rich of Bethlehem in the midst of all the comforts of their affluence.

MARY.

Learn from this, O my son, what little value you ought to set upon the goods of this world. And if deprived of them, learn to esteem your state.

In effect, can the poor consider themselves as unhappy, when they reflect that Jesus would have his Mother to be poor ; and that himself at his birth had no other cradle but a poor, mean, and wretched manger ; that during his life *he had no where to rest his head* ; and that at his death he had no other bed but a cross.

He did not choose his apostles among the rich and the learned, but among the ignorant and the poor.

It is more particularly to the poor that he came to preach *his gospel*. And as a testimony of his love for them, he openly

declared, that he will consider *as done to himself whatever shall be done to one of these his least brethren.* Matt xxv. 40.

The rich despise the poor; but the same God who says, *Wo to you that are rich,* (Luke vi. 24.) *calls the poor to his supper,* xiv. 21.

Blessed, says Jesus, are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matt. v. 3. These words are applicable both to the poor who love their poverty, and to the rich who have no attachment for their riches.

The poor therefore ought to consider their situation, not by the meanness and abjection which it exhibits in the eyes of the world, but by that greatness and glory which the gospel makes us discover in it.

Were the poor animated by faith, and would consult it, none would exchange their forlorn state for the enjoyments of the rich and happy of the world.

My son, in affluence we cleave to the earth, and forget heaven : temptations are strong, and falls frequent : therefore to wish for riches, is wishing for what is most dangerous to salvation.

In vain do we heap up immense treasures during life, at our death we shall not carry them away with us.

When death comes, virtue is the only good which remains ; and a state of poverty furnishes us with many opportunities of practising virtue.

The rich man, mentioned in the gospel, *was buried in hell*, whilst Lazarus, whom he had despised and neglected, *was*, after his death, *carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom*. Luke xvi. 22.

DISCIPLE.

Thou hast just taught me, O holy Virgin, that poverty is preferable to riches. Obtain then for me, that I may henceforth place all my affections in the blessings of heaven, and disdain and contemn all the riches and advantages of the earth.

CHAP. II.

Of voluntary Poverty.

DISCIPLE.

WHAT hadst thou not to suffer in thy poverty, O Virgin Mother of God ! yet thou never madest any complaints, consequently men never thought to assist thee.

But why didst thou not represent to Jesus the rigour of thy situation ? The Mother of God had only to speak ; her divine Son would have refused her nothing.

Moreover, thou couldst make use of the angels, who would have thought themselves highly honoured to procure thee all the help and assistance thou wast in need of.

MARY.

My son, he who possesses Jesus is rich enough. A soul who loves God as her Sovereign Good, looks with an indifferent eye on all the riches of the world, and willingly consents to be poor.

I saw Jesus the King of Heaven, the Sovereign Lord of all things, who being rich, became poor for your sakes; that through his poverty you might be rich. And it was my glory to imitate him.

Happy the voluntary poor, who imitating this divine modesty, renounce all the riches of the world, to devote themselves entirely to acquire the riches of his love, and the blessings of heaven.

Happy if, like Jesus, they willingly suffer the effects of poverty, and if their heart be entirely disengaged even from the things, the use of which is granted them.

But many of those who have embraced that state of perfection, are yet far from the perfection which their state requires.

Sometimes their heart is as much attached to the little comforts which they can procure to themselves, as they could be to

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the greatest affluence, were they actually to enjoy it,

Can it be said with truth, that a person has made himself poor for Jesus' sake, when without having the trouble of riches, he wishes for all the conveniences which they afford.

Jesus born at Bethlehem, living at Nazareth, and dying at Mount Calvary; this is the model which all those who made themselves voluntarily poor for Jesus' sake intended to imitate.

Nay, he is the model which every Christian should try to imitate, by disengaging his heart and affections from the love of riches.

The Holy Ghost says not to all: renounce your riches. He does not require of all this degree of perfection: but he says to all: *Set not your heart upon them.* Ps. lxi. 11.

God cannot establish his kingdom in a heart attached to the perishable goods of the earth.

When Jesus came into the world, he did not choose a life such as the world would have judged comfortable and happy. He despised all its riches. Therefore they must be contemptible.

The goods of this earth are false and

deceitful, nay even very hurtful, except when we purchase with them the goods of eternity.

CHAP. III.

Of Charity to the Poor.

MARY.

MY son, love the poor: avail yourself with zeal of every opportunity to assist them in their distress.

Thus you will prove yourself a worthy child of God, who in his holy Scriptures expressly declares himself the Advocate of the poor; and who has not only advised, but positively commanded us to give alms, as much as it lays in our power.

DISCIPLE.

Thy example, august Virgin, has also confirmed thy instructions. One of thy most devout servants* tells us, that the poor had a share in the precious gifts offered to the new-born Saviour by the wise men who came to adore him.

It seemed natural that thou shouldst have made use of them, to relieve thee in that great distress in which thou wast at

* St. Bonav. Vit. Chr. Med. c. 9.

Bethlehem. But thy painful situation was dear to thee, on account of the resemblance it bore with thy divine Son.

Thou didst prefer it to all the conveniences and comforts thou couldst have procured. Though issued of the family of David, thou wast desirous of remaining in the state of indigence and obscurity in which the Almighty had caused thee to be born.

It is an admirable example both of disengagement and charity, to have employed for the assistance of the poor, what might have been of very great help to thee in thy poverty.

MARY.

My son, the best use you can make of your abundance, is to assist the poor.

If you have riches, remember that divine Providence has established you his steward, with regard to those who are destitute of them.

Do not imitate those rich misers, who always keep their hearts callous to the necessities of their fellow creatures, and prefer to see them dying for want, rather than give the least trifle to relieve them.

Their sole occupation is to heap up treasures for this present life; but the moment shall come, when passing from time to

eternity, they will feel that they have *slept their sleep, and found nothing in their hands.* Ps. lxxv. 6.

Imitate rather those compassionate and charitable rich, who are the fathers of the poor, and who never fear to grow poor themselves, by increasing their alms and charities.

How many blessings do they not receive upon earth? But those which await them in heaven, shall far surpass their most sanguine desires.

The Lord often restores them a hundred fold, even here below, for what they have so charitably bestowed to assist the poor. As for their reward in eternity, it shall be equal to the promises of a God infinitely good and bountiful in all his gifts to the children of men.

Had they by their sins shut against themselves the divine tabernacles, by alms-deeds they can open them again. *By alms-deeds they may redeem their iniquities.* Dan. iv. 24.

Consider it therefore always as a duty to assist and comfort the poor and distressed. Do not listen to cupidity which is never satisfied.

You are allowed to use economy; but be not hard-hearted nor avaricious. What a com-

mendable economy is that, which has for its object the relief of our neighbour.

Unless you be poor, do not believe that you may be dispensed from giving alms. Give according to your abilities.

If you have much, give abundantly. If you have little, take care even so to bestow willingly a little. Job iv. 8.

O my son, what confidence will the merciful have before the tribunal of the *God of Mercies*.

CHAP. IV.

Of the Necessity and Advantages of Meditation.

DISCIPLE.

O Cave of Bethlehem, repeat what were the thoughts and feelings of Mary, when the shepherds came to adore Jesus laid in a manger; or rather disclose it to us, O Virgin Mother of God.

MARY.

My son, the striking sight of an infant God laid in a manger, and wrapt up in swaddling cloaths, was for me an inexhaustible fund of reflections.

I was constantly meditating on this great mystery. I was incessantly pondering in

my heart all that I saw and heard ; and these considerations left in my soul the deepest impressions.

I was admiring, much more than the shepherds, the wonderful miracle which had been just accomplished. All the powers of my soul were occupied and entirely absorbed on it.

Hence, all the tender affections which were continually flowing from my heart. Hence the praises and thanksgivings which I was constantly offering to the Almighty.

If you wish to be moved, my son, by the great truths which faith teaches, you must seriously reflect, and meditate on them with the greatest attention.

The faith of many Christians is but cold and tepid, because they neglect to entertain and fortify it by meditation.

What is the source of all the crimes and disorders which overspread the earth ? The forgetfulness of eternal truths.

It is by frequent meditation on the perfections of God, and frequent reflections on the nothingness of human things, that the saints disengaged their hearts from creatures, and raised all their affections to the Creator.

It is in this holy exercise that they learned to esteem and prize only what is great

and estimable in the sight of God ; and that their hearts were consumed with the flames of divine love.

Therefore, never pass a day without nourishing your soul with some of the awful truths of religion : it is thus that you will learn the science of the saints.

Do not say, as so many do, to excuse their tepidity, that you cannot spare any time for meditation : it is not time that is wanting, it is will.

You have in reality but one affair during life ; the affair of your salvation. It must be of very little value in your eyes, if you think it not worth your reflecting upon every day.

You find time enough daily to reflect on your temporal concerns : but are there any concerns so highly interesting and important for you as those of eternity ?

You plead, as an excuse, that you do not know how to meditate. You are capable of reflecting on a thousand vain and frivolous things : but when you have to meditate on the great objects of eternity, you alledge your incapacity.

It can only proceed from a criminal indifference for God and your salvation, that such a powerful means of sanctification is so easily neglected.

My son, your life will always be well regulated, if you daily take some time to examine before God, whether your dispositions towards him are such as they ought to be.

You will never be surprised by death, if you learn daily to die well.

Were you to pass every day a quarter of an hour only in meditating at the foot of the altar, or of your crucifix, on the grandeurs of God, his mercies, threats, and promises, you would acquire a science far superior to that of so many learned men, whose works teach every thing, except the science of salvation.

What will it avail a man to have adorned and enriched his mind with all useful and honourable knowledge according to the world, if he have not acquired that knowledge of the saints, and which makes saints.

The desire of acquiring virtue will not suffice to render you virtuous. You must seriously study, and employ with perseverance the means calculated for it.

Earnestly beg of Jesus, to grant you the grace of overcoming your repugnance for an exercise, from which the devil tries to divert you, because he well knows how

important is the practice of it for the salvation of your soul.

By perseverance, you will derive the greatest advantages, not only for your own conduct, but also for the direction of those who may be more particularly committed to your care.

CHAP. V.

Of observing the Law of God.

MARY conceived through the operation of the Holy Ghost. She became a mother without ceasing to be a virgin. The birth of her son rendered her still more pure than she was before. Therefore the law of purification could not regard her.

However, though not included in the law, she would observe it, with the utmost regularity, and without omitting the least circumstance.

The example of Jesus, who had submitted to the law of circumcision, did not permit her to avail herself of her privilege.

Moreover the law made no exceptions. Therefore Mary obeyed without delay or reserve.

By offering her son in the temple according to the law, it seems that she confounded him with the other children of men.

The law ordained that mothers should offer in the temple their first-born son. The heavenly Father shall, whenever he pleases, manifest the glory of Jesus. Mary, in the meanwhile, thought only of obeying.

This is an example very capable of confounding our languor and remissness, when we have to obey the law of God; and sufficient to refute the vain excuses we seek and alledge in order to be dispensed with quick and punctual obedience.

How strange is it, that we should refuse to God a submission, which we exact from those who are subject to us?

Dust and ashes, dare you say to the greatest of Masters, to God himself, that you cannot obey, and that his law requires too much of your weakness? What audacity! what rashness!

Oh shame! we find the yoke of the Lord too heavy, although he himself assures us that it is *sweet and light*; and we prefer the yoke of the world notwithstanding its tyranny.

In order to obey the world, we give whatever is most precious and dear: bloom of youth, vivacity of mind, tenderness of

heart, activity, strength, abilities and talents, we sacrifice all without repining. As for the Lord, we destine a future time in which, as we pretend, we shall obey his will.

That is to say, we destine for God the dregs of our life, the refuse of our affections, in short all that the world will one day disdain and reject.

In order to please the world, we daily submit to its capriciousness, and adopt the most ridiculous and painful fashions. But in order to please God, this gentle and amiable Master, by blind obedience to his laws, we find submission too hard; nay, we seek too often for opportunities to shake off his sweet yoke.

If you consult the world or yourself before you resolve rendering to God the obedience which you owe him, you will not obey; because the law of God is contrary both to your inclinations and the maxims of the world; or if you do obey, it will always be with some restriction or reserve.

Neither flesh and blood ought to be consulted in the things which concern the law of God. Nature can only incline us to remissness, and the world to revolt.

O! supreme disposer of all things, who alone hast a right to command, without our

having on our side any right of asking the reason for thy will and injunctions, *open my heart to thy law.*

Thy justice is justice for ever; and thy law is the truth. Let it distil into my heart as the dew.

Thy prophet declares to us in one of his Canticles, that they that love thy law, and keep thy commandments, will enjoy abundance of peace; that thy law gives wisdom to the little ones, leads to true happiness, removes sadness from the heart, and dissipates darkness from the mind.

That it is more desirable than gold and precious stones, and sweeter than honey and the honey-comb.

I make to thee, O Lord, a new promise, never to transgress it for the future. Do, O thou who art the giver of all good gifts, do strengthen this my resolution.

Yes, I will observe thy law and keep thy commandments to the last moment of my existence. I esteem them as the most valuable inheritance, and will observe them with the greatest care. Yes, they shall be for ever the object of my earnest desires, and the chief subject of my joy.

CHAP. VI.

Of good Example.

MARY observed the law of purification, in order to avoid being a subject of scandal to those who were not informed of her virginity.

She submitted to this religious rite, to give to Joseph her holy spouse, as well as to those to whom God Almighty might have revealed this mystery, an example of generous and blind obedience.

Therefore do not omit an action, although not strictly obligatory, when its omission might scandalize others.

Were you, even for this purpose, obliged to leave the sweetness of contemplation, do not balance for a moment. It is leaving God for God.

He who loves God, endeavours to gain hearts to him. But the surest way to succeed, is to teach others by good example how he is to be loved.

Exhortations to virtue inspire the love of virtue. But if practice be joined to exhortations, it persuades much better. The examples of the saints make saints.

The virtuous actions of the apostles and

first Christians, were no less powerful than their discourses and miracles.

Oh ! how few Christians are there in our days, who by their good example diffuse *the sweet odour of Jesus-Christ*.

It seems that men entertain an intercourse together only with a view to contribute mutually to their reprobation, by the bad example which they give to one another.

If you are determined to damn your soul, do it alone : but do not cause *your weak brother to perish for whom Christ died*.
1 Cor. viii. 11.

To rob your brother of the riches of the earth is a heinous crime. What is it then to rob him of the goods of eternity ? It is rendering yourself an agent and instrument of the devil.

Above all, those who are invested with some authority, ought to be particularly careful to give good example, because their dependants do not fail to imitate their conduct.

This attention is especially commanded to the great of the world. If they be without respect for the law of God, and the ordinances of the Church, they will soon have imitators, who will imagine that it is glorious to follow such models.

Are they greater than Mary, who, as the Mother of God, had all the titles of grandeur, which, next to God, a mere creature can enjoy.

They ought to learn from this Virgin Mother of God, to avail themselves, for the advancement of the glory of God, of the high rank in which he has placed them.

Does grandeur confer a title, or give a right of being a more imperfect Christian? Indeed, a greater elevation, if justly appreciated, is only a greater obligation.

CHAP. VII.

Of the Love and Merit of Humiliations.

IT must have been, O my God, a great humiliation for thy Mother, to observe the law of purification; a law which had been made for common mothers.

The splendour of that virginity, of which she was so zealous, when an angel announced to her the mystery of thy incarnation, was in some degree obscured by that religious ceremony.

But she was not ignorant of the ignominy and abjection which were one day to be thy lot; and by performing this ordinance,

she was happy to bear some resemblance with thee.

The more thou hadst distinguished her from other women, the more earnest was she to annihilate herself, and hide her glorious prerogatives.

A soul, who, like Mary, seeks only to please God, attaches but very little importance to the esteem of men, and is little moved by their praises.

She prefers, according to the words of a prophet, the abjection of the house of the Lord, before all the pomp and magnificence which surround the children of the world.

In effect, virtue is much more secure in a humble and abject state, than in the midst of honours and distinctions.

If it remain obscure and hidden in the eyes of men ; it is more brilliant in the sight of God.

A person truly virtuous has no other desire, but to draw upon her the regards of God. Nay, to be unknown and even despised, she considers as a greater happiness.

Divine Providence watches over the just, and often leads them by the way of humiliations to the term of merit and glory.

Self-love, undoubtedly, suffers to see it-

self humbled. But this shows how necessary humiliation is.

The saints thanked God, as for a great and special favour, when they had ignominies to suffer.

If I be not animated with the same sentiments, it is because I am still a carnal man, and not seeking God alone.

Even, there have been saints who solicited great humiliations, so ardent was their desire of perfection.

If I do not feel the same courage, I should at least receive with submission those which God sends me for my good; though I do not ask for them.

I can glorify God much better by a humiliation borne with resignation to his adorable will, than by the highest gifts.

The Son of God humbled and debased himself, as the apostle says: such is the model I ought to imitate.

To have horror of humiliations, is to have horror of the resemblance which they make us bear with Jesus.

If God be pleased to multiply them, it is a proof that he is willing to perfect in me the image of his Son.

I ought to receive an humiliation with the same pleasure and gratitude which I should

feel if any one were to make me a present of some part of the holy cross.

CHAP. VIII.

In what Manner we ought to make to God the Sacrifices which he requires of us.

DISCIPLE.

THE offering which the Jewish mothers made of their first-born children to God in his temple, cost them little. But the offering of Jesus, was for thee, O Holy Virgin, a real sacrifice.

Thou knewest that he was one day to give his life for the salvation of mankind; therefore thou didst offer him to God as a victim.

For it is properly in this quality of a victim, thou didst offer him, as he offered himself to his eternal Father.

It was, seemingly then, the first beginning of all the sufferings which thou wast to endure till the last breath of Jesus.

Thy soul began then to be pierced with that sword of grief, which the just Simeon had mentioned to thee, whilst he was holding Jesus in his arms.

Mothers generally love their children: but they do not fix upon them all their af-

fections. How many do they not reserve for vanity? How many for themselves? But thou didst love Jesus, and with thy whole heart, and him alone.

He was thy only Son. Thou hadst just begun to feel the sweet comforts of being a mother, and Mother of Jesus.

Nevertheless, when the *days were accomplished* to offer him to his Father, thou didst immediately set off for Jerusalem.

A worthy daughter of Abraham, and heir of his faith, thou didst stifle all the sentiments of nature, to hear and obey the voice of God, who asked of thee the sacrifice of what thou hadst dearest in the world.

MARY.

After my example, my son, be resolute and generous, when Almighty God asks any thing of you, whatever it may be.

Alas! he required of me to sacrifice to him the object I had so much reason to love. But of you, what does he usually require? The sacrifice of what you ought to hate.

If you love God, generosity must be the chief characteristic of your love. A narrow and selfish heart does not know what it is to love.

To decline the least hardship, to be dis-

couraged at the sight of the difficulties which we may have to encounter in the service of God, is this a specimen of love?

True love signalizes itself in afflictions and troubles. Effeminacy and weakness are incompatible with the sentiments and profession of a disciple of Jesus.

If you wish to render your sacrifices agreeable to the Lord, make them readily, and without examining how much they will cost you:

The world requires of its favourites the greatest sacrifices. It has only to speak, and it is immediately and unreservedly obeyed. Will the Almighty be the sole master, to whom we shall sacrifice nothing, without first examining if he does not require too much?

O! my son, how little do we love God, when we prescribe to ourselves certain limits in the testimonies of love which we give him.

To the world, which is governed by caprice, and never loves but out of selfishness, we should not dare present such a heart, as many Christians are not ashamed to offer daily to their God.

A son, who contents himself with obeying the strict commands of his father; a spouse who cares not to displease her consort, whenever compliance with his desires

cost her something, do not, certainly, give proofs of love, of which their friends ought to remain perfectly satisfied.

God, undoubtedly, is infinitely good towards his creatures; but, at the same time, he is a *jealous God*.

He is not served as he requires and deserves, unless he be served *with a perfect heart, entirely obedient to his will*.

Be ashamed of being so remiss and negligent in his service. Be ashamed of doing so little for him, after all that he has done for you.

You find sometimes, that he enjoins you precepts hard to be accomplished. Oh, my son, be not discouraged, and expect that he will continue to put to the test your obedience and love; for we ought, by our fidelity, prove ourselves deserving of his rewards.

Fortune, rest, reputation, health, nay your very life, he could require of you; because he has an imprescriptible right to all that you possess.

Do not wonder, if in proportion as you give him, he asks still more of you. He does so, in order to dispose you to receive from him greater favours upon earth, and make you merit a greater recompense in heaven.

CHAP. IX.

In what Dispositions we ought to receive the Evils with which we are threatened.

MARY.

MY son, what is the subject of your sighs and tears?

DISCIPLE.

Alas! Queen of saints, I was beginning to enjoy some tranquillity, and I am on a sudden assaulted by fresh alarms.

Injustice, calumny, ingratitude, are again contriving schemes against me. O! charitable mother, grant to thy child help and protection.

MARY.

You are, my son, nearly in the same circumstances in which I was myself, when I heard the prophecy of Simeon.

After having announced to me the future grandeur of Jesus, the holy old man foretold me also, that he would be *for a sign, which should be contradicted*, and that in ^{my own} your soul a sword should pierce; in short, that I should have a share in all the calamities which my son was to endure.

Moreover, I had learned from the testimony of the Holy Scripture, that Jesus was to suffer. Abel murdered, Joseph sold,

David persecuted, the immolation of the Paschal Lamb, were as many figures which foretold what was to happen to him.

Every day of my life what anguish penetrated my soul, at the thought of the torments and death of Jesus, which I had incessantly present before my eyes.

What sighs and groans issued secretly from my heart, when holding Jesus pressed against my bosom, I reflected that he was to save the world by the most cruel death.

Every time I saw in the temple a lamb slain, or a dove immolated, thus, said I to myself, thus one day my Jesus is to be sacrificed.

DISCIPLE.

I conceive, O Virgin Mother, how acute must have been thy sufferings; and that it is with great propriety, that the Church calls thee *Queen of Martyrs*.

The martyrs were beheaded, exposed to wild beasts, drowned, or burnt alive: but usually their torments did not last long. As for thine, they lasted during thirty-three years.

And during this long period, animated with more courage and fortitude than all the martyrs together, thou beheldest in the most heroic manner all the sufferings which the Almighty was preparing for thee, and especially those which thou wast to endure

on Mount Calvary. As for me, I feel but weakness and discouragement at the prospect of the sufferings which threaten me.

If thy grief was incessantly renewed by the thought of the torments which Jesus was to undergo; thou also incessantly wast renewing the sacrifice thou hadst made of him in the temple.

Thy soul was plunged in the most profound grief, but its peace remained unaltered; thou didst consent with the most perfect submission to whatever Almighty God was pleased to ordain.

As for me, I shudder and tremble when I consider the new crosses which he destines for me. There is no longer peace and tranquillity for me. I feel revolts in my mind, and complaints in my heart.

MARY.

My son, God will not suffer you *to be tempted, tried and afflicted, above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it.* 1 Cor. x. 13.

Listen to his grace which already speaks to you. Correspond with its inspirations. The more crosses Almighty God prepares to a soul, the more abundant means of supporting them he prepares for her.

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Crosses are the richest gifts which God can bestow upon his creatures. And when they willingly accept of them, it is the most acceptable sacrifice they can offer to their Creator.

Are the crosses which he destines for you very heavy? It is because he has great designs of sanctification over you. Would you put any obstacle to the execution of the designs of God?

Your troubles and complaints will not remove those crosses. Do what you please, you must bear them. Therefore, what is the best thing for you to do?

To submit, my son, to all God's appointments over you. God, ought you to say, *is the Lord and Master. Let him do with me as he thinks best.* 1 Kings iii. 18.

Then, you will see that God, moved with compassion at your compliance and submission, will render lighter than you imagine those crosses, which, at a distance, appear to you so heavy and insupportable.

Nay, he will render them so light, that you will say: *As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also by Christ doth our comfort abound.* 2 Cor. i. 5.

DISCIPLE.

I thank thee, august Mary, for the lessons which thou givest me. They reanimate my courage.

It is to thee that I am indebted for that new strength which I feel in my soul, to encounter with fortitude those crosses which I could not look at, but with fear and dismay.

Blessed be the Lord, who, by the instructions of his most holy Mother, *teacheth my hands to fight, and my fingers to wage a war*, in which, without that assistance, I should certainly be conquered.

CHAP. X.

What must be the Sentiments and Conduct of a Soul who cannot comprehend the Ways of God in her Regard.

GOD suddenly informed Mary, through St. Joseph, who himself had learnt it by the ministry of an angel, that they must fly into Egypt, to save the infant Jesus from the fury of Herod.

But, had not God, whose power is infinite, a thousand means to change the heart of this prince? Is it not unworthy of

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God, to fly before a weak and mortal man?

Cannot God renew in favour of Jesus, the plagues with which he struck the Egyptians, to save his people?

But Mary did not seek to comprehend the designs of God in his conduct in her regard.

The will of God equally deserves our submission, whether we comprehend his reasons or not.

Whether she will find means of subsistence in a long journey through vast deserts, and in that foreign land where she is sent, Mary did not examine.

The same God, who commanded her to leave her home, was powerful enough to make her find wherewith to subsist, although she did not see it.

Whether she is to remain always in Egypt, she did not enquire. She will return home, when God will make her know, that the proper time is come.

Had Almighty God given her injunctions still more incomprehensible, her soul would not have lost her peace.

What could a soul, that is persuaded that the Almighty is her conductor and guide, be anxious for? Is there a safer protection than that of Providence?

Thou commandest me, O Lord, to walk through a road unknown to me, that is enough. Thy will is for me light and reason.

I do not know where I am going, but I am well assured that, if I let myself be conducted by a guide as wise as thou art, I shall never be led astray.

Although in the midst of darkness, I walk with security, because I am sure that thou wilt not forsake me.

And what could my weak lights and limited understanding avail me, in a road which thou art pleased to open before me, and which thou commandest me to follow with blind obedience? As soon as thou hast spoken, I must act, without listening to myself.

We abandon ourselves entirely to the conduct of a man whom we judge to be prudent and enlightened! And should I entertain the least diffidence, O Eternal Wisdom, when thou guidest me!

Thy providence is often pleased to attain its end, by ways which seem the most contrary to it.

Therefore, how incomprehensible soever thy designs be over me, I am content, and

I adore them. Thou canst do much more than I can comprehend.

Although thy conduct over us be hidden, it is no less adorable. All thy works bear the character of supreme wisdom, though their secret influence remains undiscovered to us.

I will have therefore, to thy commands, even when I the least can comprehend their motives, the same submission, which I have for the truths which thou hast revealed to me.

Although I do not comprehend these truths, I am as well assured of them, as if I clearly saw them, because it is thou, O Lord, who hast spoken.

CHAP. XI.

Of the Care of Providence over the Just.

DISCIPLE.

I Represent to myself with delight, obedient Virgin, the equality and peace of soul which thou didst preserve, when thou wast obliged to fly into Egypt.

Thou wast persuaded that God, to the conduct of whom thou hadst abandoned thyself, would watch over thee in the

journey, and would not forsake thee when arrived at the place he had himself pointed out to thee.

In effect, could he remove his eyes from thee, and the sacred deposit committed to thy tenderness and care.

Oh ! no, no. Thou hadst nothing to fear, *neither from the terror of the night, nor from the arrow that flieth in the day, nor from any snares of the enemy.* For God had given his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

He had commanded them to remove every danger from thee, and *even, if necessary, to bear thee up in their hands,* Ps. xc. 10, 11.

Nay, were the road which thou wert to follow, infected with poisonous reptiles, or wild and ferocious beasts, thou *shalt walk upon the asp, and the basilisk, thou shalt trample under foot the lion and the dragon.* Ps. xc. 11, 12, &c.

MARY.

My son, in many passages of the holy Scriptures, we see that the Almighty has promised his protection to those who trust in him.

Therefore, never give way to trouble and anxiety on account of the orders which you receive from God, how difficult soever

they may be to execute. Hope in him, and he will help you.

Although obedience to his will should reduce you to the greatest indigence, cast all your care on him. Under the protection of his bountiful providence you shall want nothing.

Were you to remain exposed to the raileries, insults, or persecutions of the wicked, do not lose courage ; the Lord will be your protector in the time of trouble. *Ps.* xxxix. 40.

The confidence which the just had in him, was for them a sure pledge of his protection. If he seems to forsake them for a time, he will at last restore them peace and comfort.

The inhabitants of Bethulia were no longer expecting any help from the God of their fathers, whilst the eye of his providence was watching^{ing} them with more attention than ever.

The chaste Joseph was not forsaken by him. Condemned to linger on in a dark dungeon, he was loaded with chains. And all on a sudden, he delivered him, to be raised to the highest honours, and to partake in the sovereign power.

However, Providence does not always deliver the just from all fear and danger,

and provide for all their wants in the manner they wish and ask.

But his conduct is no less admirable ; either he rescues them from indigence, or he leaves them under its pressure ; either he protects them from the injustice of men, or permits they should be their victims.

God grants them the grace of patience in their distress ; and thus he bestows upon them a more precious gift, than if he were to raise them to the highest pitch of prosperity.

How many Christians are there in the greatest need, and nevertheless seem to want nothing, so happy are they in their state. They are continually blessing divine Providence, and would not change their lot for all the comforts and enjoyments of the most happy people in the world.

Have recourse therefore to the Lord, in all your wants and necessities, and rely on his goodness.

The assistance which you will receive from him, though not always sensible and striking, will be no less real, nor less consoling to your heart.



CHAP. XII.

That there is no State, nor Situation in Life, in which we cannot serve God, provided he calls us to it.

MARY.

MY son, whence all these complaints on the state and situation of life in which you are placed? You say that it is impossible for you to serve God in it, as he ought to be served.

Yet heaven is peopled with saints, who became saints in your very state and circumstances of life.

Provided we preserve every where the grace and friendship of God, we ought to be contented every where.

I found God in Egypt, where I was obliged to go, as well as I did in Judea; and I endeavoured to serve him there with the same fidelity.

Undoubtedly it cost me, as well as Joseph my spouse, to leave the land of Judea. Yet we shewed neither trouble nor affliction.

When we were recalled back to our native country, we felt no other pleasure, but the pleasure of ~~accomplishing~~ the will of

God, which in all things was our sole rule and guide.

My son, if you do not seek to do your own will, but the will of God, your heavenly Father, then satisfied and happy in the state and circumstances he will be pleased to place you, you will wish for no other.

The Almighty has pointed out to every one of us the road in which we ought to walk, in order to attain holiness. It is a delusion, to pretend that we shall be able to work out our salvation by following another path.

We cannot become saints without the assistance of grace: this grace God gives to every one as he stands in need, in the state of life to which he calls him, and according to the functions which he will give him to discharge.

He who lives in solitude, ought not to regret the world which he has left. He who is engaged in the world, ought not to say that he cannot save himself in it. The most secure situation for both, is that to which Almighty God has called them.

In short, whatever our circumstances may be, our salvation depends on our fidelity to grace.

John the Baptist sanctified himself near the river Jordan, where God had com-

manded him to reside. He did not go to another place. The manner of life of the apostles who accompanied Jesus, and heard his doctrine, did not appear to him more favourable to sanctity.

No, the state of life in which you are, is not of itself an impediment to your sanctification. It is neither the place nor the employment which can sanctify man, but man ought to sanctify them.

It is often less from the love of virtue, than from restlessness, that we wish to have embraced a state of life different from that in which we are placed.

What will you gain by changing? Will you become better? A change of place or condition does not alter our humour and character.

We carry our vices every where with us. It is yourself, my son, not your state or condition, you ought to change.

In the state of life in which God has placed you, sanctify your occupations by referring them to God. And then, you will not complain that they are for you an occasion of dissipation.

The multitude of occupations which unavoidably attend the government of a large kingdom, did not prevent David from devoting himself to prayer and singing the

praises of God seven times in the day.
Psal. cxviii. 164.

A multitude of occupations was far from preventing the saints from becoming saints: it is their sanctity itself which enabled them to fulfil well all their obligations.

Sanctity does not consist in serving God as we like, and where we like, but in a perfect conformity to his adorable will, with regard to the place and condition in which he will have us to live.

You will glorify God better laid on a bed of sorrows, if he has laid you upon it, than if you were to exhaust your strength by continual labours and exertions to gain souls to him.

CHAP. XIII.

Of Fervour in the Service of God.

DISCIPLE.

IN all the circumstances of thy life which are come to my knowledge, thou givest me, holy Virgin, great and continual examples of the most fervent piety.

It was that fervent piety which made thee go every year to Jerusalem at the solemn day of the Pasch. Luke ii. 41.

Although the obligation of being present

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at the celebration of that great festival, concerned only Joseph thy holy spouse, nevertheless thou didst consider it as a duty to accompany him.

Thy love for God was too generous, to be contented with the bare performance of strict and indispensable obligations.

Alas! base and ungrateful soul that I am, how different, till now, has my conduct been towards God!

Notwithstanding all his favours and blessings, I have had for him only a cold and contracted heart. In order to obtain my obedience and homage, he was forced to command me as my sovereign Lord and Master.

MARY.

My son, a heart which loves God, neglects nothing that can please him.

You know but very imperfectly what the Master whom you serve deserves, if you use reserve in his regard.

Consider what worldlings do for the world; and learn from them what you ought to do for God.

Behold their eagerness. In its service they spare neither troubles nor fatigue. In order to please it, they condemn themselves to a thousand painful subjections.

But to please God, to give the sovereign

Lord of all things testimonies of your gratitude and love, frequently appears to you too great a restraint. To require of you to be sedulous and attentive to please him, is to impose upon you too great a slavery.

Is it not shameful, that it should be deemed necessary to propose to you the example of worldlings, and to send you to their school, in order to learn how you ought to serve God.

Do not let yourself be overcome in generosity by the children of the world. Do not suffer that the world could boast, in being served by its lovers with more zeal than the God of Christians is, by those who make a profession to belong to him.

Therefore, for the future, do not imitate those Christians who think themselves animated with great piety, when they barely accomplish those precepts of the law which they could not omit without certainty of punishment.

Do not they manifest by their conduct, that they would without difficulty consent to lose the grace of God, were they secured of impunity? At least they fear God more than they love him.

Fear him, O my son, this God so terrible in his punishments. But above all things,

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fear lest you should not love this God, so good, so amiable, and so bountiful, in his rewards.

Pray, were you to do for your friend only what friendship necessarily commands, do you think that he would look upon you as a very warm and zealous friend?

Love is a noble and generous sentiment. It never confines its exertions to the bare accomplishment of duties strictly obligatory. When it is sincere, it seeks every opportunity of pleasing the beloved.

If you felt for God the most ardent love, all you could do for him would always appear to you unequal to your desires.

Love with ardour. Love will alleviate all your pains, and remove all your difficulties. Love pours forth into a fervent soul a secret unction, which makes her find the greatest delight in the very things, which she has a greater difficulty to fulfil.

DISCIPLE.

O! my most tender Mother, obtain for thy son that fervour, which thou hast been explaining to me, and of which thou hast given me so bright an example.

I confess it with confusion, I am stopped by the least difficulty. I yield to the first

temptation of weariness and disgust: and human respect often prevents me from executing the inspirations of grace.

Thou seest how much I stand in need of being animated and encouraged. May thy holy and salutary instructions kindle in my heart that ardent love, with which the God of charity deserves to be loved.

CHAP. XIV.

What a Misfortune it is to lose Jesus.

JESUS was twelve years old, when he accompanied Mary and Joseph in their journey to Jerusalem, at the solemn day of the Pasch, according to the custom of the feast.

After they had fulfilled the days, when they were returning to Nazareth, the child Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and his parents knew it not. And they had already travelled a day's journey, when they perceived his absence.

What an affliction did they feel then! how disturbed and grieved was not Mary in particular, at the loss of the beloved of her heart!

Yet, O my Saviour, it was not through her fault that Mary had lost thee. Thou

hádst stolen away from her sight, to occupy thyself about *thy heavenly Father's business*.

As for me, who have lost thee so many times by my sins, and so frequently forced thee to keep at a distance from me, can I ever feel too bitterly the misfortune of such a loss ?

Mary had lost only the corporal presence of Jesus. She always preserved his friendship. As for me, I have lost all that men ought to hold most dear in the world, the grace and friendship of Jesus.

Can ever the world and its pleasures, which I have loved more than Jesus, make amends for the loss which I have sustained?

Happy are those from whom Jesus never removed himself, and who have always possessed him within their souls ! They alone know and can say what is a paradise upon earth.

To be with Jesus ! what a happy society ! Tender friendship, sweet intercourse, divine enjoyment ! all that can penetrate and inebriate the soul with delight is there to be found.

But to feel one's self far from Jesus ! It is a frightful solitude, the darkest night, excessive misery. Alas ! it is an anticipated hell.

He who has lost Jesus, were he sensible of his misfortune, would give all the riches, honours, and pleasures of life, in order to find him again.

We shed tears for a temporal loss ; sometimes we are inconsolable. And we remain insensible to the loss of God ; it does not draw tears from our eyes. Yet, can a Christian ever suffer a greater loss ?

We cannot lose the least thing without regret. Thou alone, O my God, thou the infinite and sovereign Good, art the only object which men lose without being moved at their loss. Oh, how little do they know thee !

Can a spouse, unless she be destitute of feeling, remain tranquil and indifferent, after having lost the most tender and affectionate husband ?

Can a son, unless he be a monster of ingratitude, be free from grief, after having lost the best of fathers ?

Father of Mercies, restore thy friendship to thy poor child. Divine Spouse of our souls, restore me thy love.

Be moved by the tears which flow from my eyes night and day. They will flow as long as I live, because I feel the unspeakable value of all that I have lost.

I have horror of myself, when I reflect

that I have deserved to lose thee, who hast given me so frequent and striking testimonies of thy love, and so forcibly shewn me how much thou art pleased in seeing me closely united to thee.

My heart is too contracted, to detest ^{my} ~~any~~ ingratitude as I ought. No, were my poor and wretched heart to contain all the sentiments which can animate the hearts of all men together, my sorrow would be still inadequate to bewail and detest the misfortune I have fallen into, in losing thy friendship by my iniquities.

But as my ingratitude has been without bounds, it is thy infinitely great mercy which I implore. Alone it can supply the deficiency of my contrition and penance, and thus fulfil the sincere desire I have to repent as I ought.

Yes, I would that my repentance could equal the faith which now enlightens me, and has taught me that I ought to hate and abhor sin above all things, and love thee without bounds.

I am fully sensible of the indignity of my conduct, and I acknowledge that the sense I have of it, is an effect of thy infinite goodness.

Alas! my long ingratitude could not exhaust thy patience; thou hadst expected

me with a condescension which I cannot comprehend, and which I shall never be able sufficiently to acknowledge.

In the deplorable state in which I am, what hopes could I indulge, but from thy infinite goodness itself? O Jesus, my Saviour and my God, shew forth how far thou canst carry thy friendship, by putting me again into the number of thy friends.

I know that I have deserved the severest strokes of thy justice. Do punish this rebellious child of thine, but restore to him the place which he held in thy paternal heart.

Take away from me, I willingly consent, all that can still attach me to the world; fortune, honour, reputation, esteem, and friendship of men, I give up all. But do not permit that I should be so infatuated and unfortunate as to lose thee again.

May I repair for the future, by the fidelity and fervour of my love, all the time I have lived far from thee.

Vouchsafe, O Jesus, to grant me again a free access to thee. Thy merciful heart is always the same, always open to receive us, notwithstanding our errors and infidelities.

It is there, in thy loving heart, that I dare seek an asylum and place of safety. O

may I never leave it, may I dwell in it throughout all eternity.

CHAP. XV.

How and where the Soul is to seek Jesus, after having had the Misfortune of losing him.

MARY had no sooner perceived the absence of Jesus, than she immediately went in search of him with the greatest eagerness ; first among her relations and acquaintances, then in Jerusalem, where she had the happiness of finding him again.

The joy she felt at the sight of her beloved son, was equal to the grief which his absence had caused her.

You have lost Jesus, O my soul. Imitate the tender solicitude of this affectionate Mother. After her example, leave all, in order to find him again.

Let your regret and tears ask him of all creatures, of heaven and earth, of the light of the day and of the darkness of the night.

We often seek Jesus, and do not find him, because we do not seek him as we ought. By the manner we seek him, it seems that we should be sorry to find him.

Shew by your readiness in seeking, and your lively solicitude in finding him, that you have been sincerely and deeply afflicted at your loss.

Where will you find him? In the midst of the world? Jesus is its declared enemy.

Do not also flatter yourself that flesh and blood will help you to find him. *Mary did not find him among her kinsfolks and acquaintance.*

Consult the gospel. Interrogate the saints. Inquire of the ministers of the Lord. They will tell you where he can be found.

You will find Jesus where Mary found him. In the temple, in the house of prayer, among the exercises of religion, in the company of his ministers and disciples.

You will find him also in solitude, and especially in the solitude of the heart; that is, in recollection, and in the silence of the passions.

It is there that he himself invites you to resort, to listen to his voice, and hear the words which will proceed from his divine mouth.

It is there that he was, and is every day sought and found by all those who sincerely wish to be reconciled with him. Either they have entirely lost him by the infideli-

ties of a criminal life, or only lost the ^slight of him by remissness, tepidity, or voluntary distractions.

When you shall have found him again, O my soul, what a sweet peace you will enjoy ! Oh ! at a distance from Jesus, is it possible to enjoy any happiness ?

Whoever has found Jesus, comprehends, by his own experience, that so great a treasure well deserves the trouble of seeking after it.

CHAP. XVI.

What must be our Conduct after having found Jesus again.

DISCIPLE.

THOU hast then found Jesus again, O Mary. Thou bringest him back with thee to Nazareth. How great is thy happiness. The angels themselves are jealous of it.

With what maternal solicitude wilt thou watch ^{on} ~~on~~ this precious treasure ? What incessant care of his life and person wilt not thou take ?

MARY.

Yes, my son, to find Jesus again is the greatest happiness, and nothing is to be neglected to preserve the possession of him.

DISCIPLE.

Vouchsafe, O holy Virgin, to teach me what I must do, never to be deprived again of this Sovereign Good.

MARY.

My son, examine with attention what has removed Jesus from you, and how you have lost his grace, and made him your enemy.

Did you not begin by growing remiss in his service, and committing a thousand negligences which have cooled his friendship?

For it is by reiterated negligences that a partition wall is raised between Jesus and the Christian soul.

Have you not indulged some dangerous passion, instead of curbing it as soon as you felt its first motions in your heart.

When the Almighty asked of you the sacrifice of some attachments and affections which were too human, did you not refuse it him?

By the refusal of the sacrifices which he requires, we deprive ourselves of the protection of a special Providence, which is a safeguard against dangers, and would prevent us from falling into any very grievous fault.

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If you discover that some of these causes have occasioned the absence of Jesus from you, go to the principle of the evil. It is only by removing the cause that we may remove the effect.

Watch over yourself with more care than ever. *With all watchfulness keep thy heart,* (Ps. iv. 23.) and guard it against all possible danger.

The heart cannot be even slightly wounded without peril. On the preservation of the heart depends the very life of the soul.

Be faithful in little things, for fear of being unfaithful in great ones. He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little.

Jesus rejects a divided heart. He made your whole heart, he wishes to possess it whole and entire.

Those slight faults which, after the example of so many tepid souls, you pardon yourself so easily, lessen insensibly your love for Jesus, and the love of Jesus for you.

They are not, it is true, an open rupture or breach of friendship with him; but they dispose to it. He considers them as signs of coldness, and this coldness diminishes the number of his graces.

Constant fidelity maintains the tender intercourse of the heart of Jesus with the heart of the just.

Do with Jesus as you wish him to do with you. You wish him to bestow upon you all the riches of his love. Give him therefore your whole heart.

Restrictions with him shew a very narrow heart. The affection which is reserved for any other but him, inspires him with a sort of jealousy.

The least word which comes from a beloved friend is always well received. Receive therefore, with the same dispositions of love and fidelity, the inspirations of Jesus; either he points out to you the means of avoiding sin, or increasing in virtue.

DISCIPLE.

O blessed Virgin, who knowest so well what is love and fidelity, I hope that through the grace of Jesus, which thou wilt ask for me, I shall make a profitable use of thy instructions.

But give me leave, O merciful Virgin, to disclose to thee one of my fears. Weak as I am, alas! shall I not again have the misfortune of losing Jesus, and even of losing him for ever?

MARY.

My son, it is very right to dread such a

loss; and were you destitute of fear, I should endeavour to inspire you with it.

However, your fear must not be attended with trouble and anxiety. On the contrary, it must be moderated by confidence.

Do on your side, all that depends upon you to persevere in the love of Jesus: and expect from his goodness the grace of perseverance.

DISCIPLE.

What a distressing uncertainty for a soul, to fear above all things not to persevere, and nevertheless to remain ignorant whether she shall persevere.

MARY.

This uncertainty, my son, is the lot of all those who are still on the road. God has ordained it, to prevent you from falling into presumption.

It ought to keep you in humility, inspire you with a holy diffidence of yourself, and make you *work out your salvation with fear and trembling*.

It is in heaven only that we shall be free from all anxieties and fears, and enjoy the happy assurance of being always with Jesus.



CHAP. XVII.

That a faithful Soul ought not to be discouraged in Dryness and Aridities, and when it seems to her that Jesus has abandoned her.

ALMIGHTY God holds sometimes towards the just a conduct which alarms and troubles them. And when he wishes to try their fidelity, he withdraws from them for a time his sensible presence.

It is thus that Jesus acted with regard to his holy Mother. He had foreseen the grief which his absence would give her: yet he absented himself for a time, and remained in the temple without her knowledge.

Christian soul, if it please this merciful God to try you in the same manner, do not give way to trouble, arm yourself with courage, wait with patience for his return.

Although he is always near you, to grant you his assistance when you ask for it: nevertheless, it is advantageous, that he should seemingly leave you now and then, to make you comprehend how miserable you would be, were you to lose him entirely.

When he favours a soul with his consolations, it is to support her in her troubles. When afterwards he tries her by aridities and desolation, it is to prevent her from growing proud for the goodness which he has shewn her.

Almost all his friends have experienced these vicissitudes of joy and sadness, devotion and disgust, peace and temptation.

When Jesus seemed to retire from them, and abandon them to themselves, they felt then all their weakness; but they were not discouraged; because they knew that if his presence is not always sensible, they were no less assured of his assistance.

They knew that God has foreseen the pains which we suffer, and consequently that he has prepared the means by which we can improve and turn them to our advantage.

When his grace supported you by sweetness and consolations, you walked with ease and pleasure; but do not imagine that it was then that you were making greater progress.

You have advanced much more in virtue, when tried by aridities; you have borne with patience, humility, and submission, that state of dereliction in which God seemed to leave you.

Such a state is very painful, it is true, because we have always some reason to fear that it is less a trial than a punishment.

However, Christian soul, when you meet with such trials, instead of losing confidence, always hope, firmly hope, that you will soon see again the Beloved of your heart, as amiable and merciful as before, and that like Mary, your trial will not last long.

Imitate the eagerness of this holy Mother to recover her divine Son.

Go in search of him, as she did, with a holy desire and impatience of seeing him again.

But do not yield to murmurs and complaints. Jesus owes you nothing. Or if you allow yourself to form any complaint, let it be, after the example of Mary, a complaint of love.

My son, said she to him, *why hast thou done so to us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.* Luke ii. 48.

Say to him also, O my Jesus, why hast thou so severely tried my poor heart? Thou knowest how much I suffer from thy absence.

Is it some infidelity which had engaged thee, thus to withdraw from me?

If I have drawn down upon me this privation, by something in my conduct which has displeased thee, forgive me, O Lord; I will be henceforth more careful to avoid whatever might displease thee.

But whatever may be the motive of thy conduct towards me, I submit and consent to be tried in the manner and how long thou wilt be pleased to ordain, provided I preserve thy love always in my heart.

CHAP. XVIII.

Of a hidden Life.

DISCIPLE.

VOUCHSAFE, O holy Virgin, to explain to me the mystery of that obscure and hidden life which thou wast pleased to lead at Nazareth? By appearing abroad thou couldst have gained many hearts and homages to Jesus.

MARY.

My son, it was my whole glory to imitate Jesus himself, who would be for a long time upon earth a *hidden God*. Ps. xlv. 15,

He came into the world in order to teach man by his doctrine, to shun splendour and to be humble. And by his hidden life at Nazareth, he gave the example,

before he could teach him by his instructions.

The heavenly Father wished to be glorified by the obscure life of Jesus, and Jesus preferred this obscurity before all the miracles he could perform.

Thus he taught us that merit and perfection for the generality of men, do not consist in doing great things for God; but, when it is his will, in working with their own hands, and being occupied in mean and abject employments, according to the world.

He would also undeceive men, from the false idea they have even of sanctity itself, generally esteeming it only when it manifests itself by splendid virtues.

But above all, he thereby condemns that great eagerness and desire which most men have, of pushing themselves forward, and of being esteemed, praised, and honoured.

My son, love to be hidden, unknown, and forgotten. Provided you be approved by God, what does the approbation of the world signify? The world passes rapidly away, and every thing with it.

At Nazareth, I possessed Jesus; I loved him; he loved me: What more could I wish for to be happy?

A little corner of the world where you

would live entirely unknown, having no other riches than your crucifix, ought to appear to you preferable to all the palaces of kings.

There you will find tears of compunction, to wash away more and more all your iniquities.

It is there, that uniting yourself more familiarly with Jesus, you will feel in his love a foretaste of the pleasures of heaven.

A hidden life appears to you sad and gloomy, because you have never tasted its sweetness.

Had you begun to enjoy it, you would find that the honours and riches of the world are but vanity : and that those who long and seek after them, are still more vain and perishable.

It is true that in such a life, we shall have often to undergo the raileries of worldlings, who cannot conceive that their amusements and diversions are slighted and despised. But these very raileries are of very great advantage, because they attach us still more strongly to Jesus, who is the only object of our longing desires.

There are but few men who enjoy peace ; and are truly spiritual and interior ; because there are very few who like to withdraw from the crowd, and live alone with Jesus.

Nay, there are some who make a profession of virtue, among whom nevertheless there is seen scarcely any sign of solid piety; because they love too much to go abroad, and shew themselves in the world.

All spirituality, with regard to them, consists in words. Indeed it is easier to speak of it, than to practice it.

The grace of God does not remain long in a dissipated soul, nor in the heart of those who desire to fix the attentions of any other than the heavenly Spouse.

Beg of Jesus to give you those heavenly lights which he granted to his saints, and which made them understand and feel the happiness of a life *hidden with Christ in God*. Colos. iii. 3.

CHAP. XIX.

Of an interior Life.

IT is especially to Mary that this testimony of the Holy Ghost is applicable. *All the glory of the king's daughter is within.* Ps. xliv. 14.

What we know of her exterior actions, is nothing in comparison of what passed in her interior.

Represent to yourself this Virgin Mother

in her house of Nazareth. Penetrate into her interior, and study it.

But who could express her affections, feelings and desires? Who could ever say—what passed in this august sanctuary?

Thou alone, O my God, didst occupy all the powers of her soul. Thou alone wast the principle and end of all her actions.

Thou wast incessantly present to her mind. She saw thee in all creatures. Nothing could divert her thoughts from thee, because thou wast every thing to her.

Her judgments were regulated according to the maxims of thy eternal wisdom; her steps directed by thy spirit, her conversation animated with thy love.

Remote from a profane world, Mary was taken up only with God and her domestic occupations, which she performed with the liberty of a soul disengaged from human thoughts and views.

Notwithstanding the uncontrouled empire she had, through a special grace, over all the motions of her heart, nevertheless she took the most scrupulous precautions to shut up all its avenues to any foreign object.

She would have reproached herself with any affection, intention, or desire, which

had not tended to God, or could not be referred to his glory.

From this model we may learn, in what an interior life consists. It consists in watching over our hearts, that all our affections may be for God: over our minds and senses; that every thing may serve to raise all our thoughts to God.

That vigilance is like an eye, always open to distinguish what comes from nature, in order to repress it; and what comes from grace, to correspond with it.

By that vigilance we obtain the grace and strength of which we stand in need, in order not to be directed and influenced in our actions by natural motives.

Without that vigilance we commit great faults, and suffer much loss. But with it, without doing outwardly any thing extraordinary, we can practise frequent and sublime acts of virtue.

How many holy solitaries and virgins have obtained the first rank among the blessed, by the sole merit of an interior life.

An interior man knows how to possess himself. As he watches over himself that he may guard his soul against those attachments which strongly agitate and hold it captive; he preserves the peace of his

P

heart, even in those occurrences which habitually shake off and stagger a man of ordinary patience.

An *exterior* man, on the contrary, busies, agitates, and hurries himself for a thousand trifles unworthy of his research and cares; and loses thereby his tranquillity and repose.

An interior man knows no other wisdom but that which, discovering to him the nothingness of earthly things, raises his thoughts and desires towards the contemplation of heavenly things.

An *exterior* man consults but the prudence of the flesh. Whatever does not seem consonant to it, is in his eyes a want of knowledge, and even sometimes a folly.

The one is always upon his guard against the illusion and seduction of the senses. The other judges and directs himself in all things by the senses, and refers all to them.

Make all your delight consist in thinking of God, serving God, and referring all to God, and then you shall have the kingdom of God within you.

Then you shall be one of those adorers of whom Jesus speaks, *who adore God in spirit and in truth.*

Why are most men always in trouble,

always complaining? Because they lead a life wholly exterior, and occupy themselves only with the things of the earth.

There are even some people, who, by their way of living, seem to be always with God, and who nevertheless are far from being what they appear. Their heart is divided by a multitude of useless affections, and their minds distracted by a multitude of vain thoughts.

The exterior ought to be regulated by the interior: but many destroy this order. In them the exterior regulates and prevents the interior.

God alone occupies the thoughts of an interior man. God alone occupies and engages his attention and heart, all the rest, how shining and splendid soever it may appear, makes no impression upon him.

Learn therefore to dwell within yourself, lending yourself to outward things only as much as God requires it.

And even when your state of life commands it, follow the attractive grace which recalls you within, to examine your affections and intentions.

Do not think that an interior life is fit for certain times and circumstances of life only.

It is compatible with your condition

whatever it is, nay with the most troublesome cares.

You may lead such a life in good as well as in adverse fortune ; in sickness as well as in health ; in action as well as in repose ; in times of storms and trials, as well as in seasons of calm and peace.

There is no situation which can prevent us from entering into ourselves to examine what we are.

But above all, devote yourself to the exercises of an interior life, if Almighty God calls you to the functions which require zeal and courage. If you neglect those means of perfection, you will be too much entangled in exterior actions, and seek yourselves more than God.

Moreover God will not employ you to contribute to the advancement of souls in virtue, because we cannot make others practice what we ourselves scarcely know.



CHAP. XX.

Of Silence.

DISCIPLE.

IT is to thee, Queen of virtues, that I address myself, that I may learn when to speak and when to be silent.

Thou hast practised the virtue of silence in so perfect a manner, that thou canst, better than any other, teach me how to practise it myself.

The Gospel relates only a few words of thine; and I see that thou never spokest but from some virtuous motive.

What love for purity, what humility, what submission in the words which thou didst address to the angel who came to salute thee in the name of the adorable Trinity.

In the house of Elizabeth thou spokest to thank God for his favours. When thou hadst found Jesus in the temple, it was to express to him thy maternal tenderness; and at the wedding of Cana, to supply the want of others, which thy charity had made thy own.

Yet thou didst remain silent in some cir;

cumstances in which it might have seemingly been proper that thou shouldst communicate thy sentiments to those who surrounded thee.

A witness of the wonders which happened at the birth of Jesus, thou didst hear all that was said to those who first came to worship him. Not one of their words escaped thee. But according to the remark of the Evangelist, *thou kept all these words pondering them in thy heart.* Luke ii. 19.

In the temple where thou didst present the infant Jesus, thou didst remain in a silence of admiration, which the Evangelist has not omitted to relate, because it was to serve for our instruction.

Afterwards, thou didst follow Jesus to Mount Calvary, thou wast standing at the foot of his cross; thou didst receive his last breath.—As for thee, during all that time thou didst keep a silence of patience and resignation to the will of God.

MARY.

My silence speaks to you, my son; all pious souls perfectly understand it.

My silence in all the circumstances, in which neither glory of God nor charity towards my neighbour, did require of me that

I should speak, was inspired me by the spirit of recollection. Grace was its principle.

It teaches you that, in order to be recollected and interior, you must speak little, speak with reflection, and in some degree only according to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, who dictates in the bottom of the heart, what the person who consults him ought to say.

To love to speak much, is the sign of a restless heart, and dissipated mind: and that restlessness and dissipation are of themselves a great evil.

Sentiments of piety easily vanish away in useless conversation. Silence preserves and fortifies them.

Very few people you will find who repent for having been silent; and many on the contrary repent for having spoken too much.

A wise man will hold his peace till he see opportunity. That is to say, when it would be wrong, or improper not to speak. *Eccl. xx. 5.*

As a city that lieth open, and is not encompassed with walls, so is a man that cannot refrain his spirit in speaking. *Prov. xxv. 28.*

In the multitude of words there shall not

want sin; but he that refraineth his lips is most wise. Prov. x. 19.

A constant experience shews that, where, there is more silence, there is more innocence.

Never forget this maxim. It is always advantageous to be silent, when there is no necessity to speak.

There is a great art in seasonably speaking and being silent. One may be very skilful, and have acquired great experience in many things, and nevertheless be very ignorant on this article. Grace will teach it you better than all the lessons of men.

My son, the less you speak to creatures, the more God will speak to your heart.

Consider all the vain things which are the ordinary subject of conversation in the world, as an obstacle to the holy communications which the Almighty is wishing to establish between you and him.

Above all things, speak little to men of your afflictions and troubles. Men do not take so much concern for you as you may imagine. But discover them all to God, he is always ready to console you.

Never speak of them without a real necessity, if they come from your neighbour. You might often have to reproach yourself with having said too much.

CHAP. XXI.

Of the Union of the Soul with God.

DISCIPLE.

O GOD of love and charity, be thou for ever blessed for those intimate communications which thou wast pleased to entertain with that pure Virgin, whom thou hadst chosen for the Mother of our Saviour.

And thou, O holy Virgin, receive the praise which thou deservest for having faithfully corresponded to the graces of God.

I am in a constant admiration of thy sublime virtues, but what particularly excites it, is that close and continual union which thou didst preserve with thy God.

Thy heart, disengaged from all affections to creatures, was as a sanctuary and an interior heaven, where the Lord was pleased to dwell, and where thou didst enjoy with peace his divine presence.

Sleep did not interrupt this sweet intercourse, and thou couldst say, like the spouse of the Canticles: *I sleep, but my heart watcheth.* Cant. v. 2.

Would to God that I might be united to

him in the same manner; and hold to the earth only by the bands of the body!

MARY.

My son, never to lose the grace of God, was a very great grace which he granted to me.

If you long after the same favour, begin by disengaging your heart from every terrestrial affection, and from whatever is not God.

Undoubtedly it will be hard to nature; but for the price of your efforts and sacrifices you cannot pay too dear.

Avail yourself of all around you to raise your thoughts to God. On all sides you will find a thousand subjects for praising and glorifying him.

The heavens which move with so much majesty over your head, proclaim his glory; the brightness of the stars his splendour; the vast extent of the seas his immensity.

All beings scattered over the universe speak of his perfections. All, nay the meanest flower of the fields, is a book constantly open before your eyes, which always recalls you to him.

Without going out of yourself, you can find God. Life, motion, existence you

hold from him, and in him, and through him alone you enjoy them.

It is he who enlightens your mind, and directs your will, knocks at the door of your heart, and asks it of you in the most tender and affectionate manner.

It is this God, infinitely good and bountiful, who watches over your preservation, and commands nature to supply your wants without interruption.

It is not therefore necessary to seek him far from you. Enter into yourself. Attend to his holy presence, he will render it sensible to you in many different ways.

Sometimes it will be by a lively light, sudden illustration, pious sentiments, or by loving reproaches for your infidelities.

Beware of putting an obstacle to these different operations of grace, by levity of mind, or any voluntary disgust.

Practise the exercises of devotion which more powerfully bring you to God : but do perform them with a true spirit of religion.

In ordinary actions, and in the functions of your state of life, conform yourself to the views of providence, which has appointed for you your daily task.

Do nothing with eagerness. Precipitation even in holy things is always injurious

to that interior spirit which unites us to God.

In joy as well as in grief, do not give way to the motions of nature. Pour forth your whole heart before God, but not with creatures.

Love to speak to him of every thing which happens to you, either afflicting or joyful. Look upon him as a most indulgent and tender friend, in the bosom of whom you can with confidence deposit afflictions or joys.

It is especially by this unbounded confidence that we shall win his heart, and advance in that holy union which is, for a Christian soul, the sweetest charm and enjoyment of life.

CHAP. XXII.

Of the Duties of our State of Life.

GOD very seldom requires of us to manifest our love for him by brilliant actions. This love appears by a constant fidelity in the accomplishment of the least duties of our state of life.

By this fidelity, Mary acquired merits which raised her above the angels.

She remained during thirty years hidden

at Nazareth with our Saviour. There, her chief care was to bring up her divine Son, deserve daily more and more the confidence of her chaste spouse, and supply her family with the necessaries of life, by working according to her strength.

Learn from her example what you ought particularly to do, in order to attain holiness.

It is a great illusion, to neglect the duties of our condition, to attend to and fulfil practices which do not belong to it.

When our state of life is according to the order of Providence, the greatest perfection is, to love and to discharge its obligations, how common and mean soever they may be.

A labourer who earns his livelihood by the sweat of his brow ; the father of a family, who lives without ambition, in the obscurity of a small income, work out their salvation, as well as those who are in a higher station ; and even as well as those who perform the most holy functions ; and often with much less danger.

The best condition of life for you, is not that which appears to you the most perfect ; but that in which the Almighty has placed you.

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It is an illusion, to pretend that we shall become saints according to our own ideas, and not according to the will of God. Our actions are perfect, only when entirely done out of obedience, and with conformity to the will of God.

The merit of our actions depends less on the nature of the things we do, than on the spirit which animates and directs them, and on their conformity to the will of God.

God requires of you a continuance of small actions, and you wish to perform great ones. The consequence will be, that you will perform well neither the former nor the latter.

Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things. Luke x. 41. You are deceived by wishing to do more than God requires. Be content to do well what he requires of you, and do it with the same fervour as if it were something very important.

What great and extraordinary things did the wise woman mentioned, and so highly praised, in the holy Scripture perform? She was occupied at her spindle and in the care of her house.

To pass a long time in the Church and in mental prayer, to go and visit the sick, and comfort the afflicted, are certainly excel-

lent good works. But if you accomplish them, when the duties of your state command other things of you, can you say that you do the will of God ?

We must pray often, and always, if possible. But if you abandon your domestic duties, to apply yourself to *prayer*, your prayer is not acceptable to God.

How many good works are lost for heaven, because self-will was their principle !

But what treasures of merits are acquired in the exercises of a common life, because they were influenced and dictated by submission to the divine will.

There are many happy people who do not appear to you to gain great merits, who will be nevertheless exalted to a higher rank in heaven than you imagine, on account of their fidelity to the duties of their state, a fidelity which you do not perceive.

The Lord mentioned in the gospel, does not say to his servant, *Enter into the joy of thy Lord*, because he had done great things, but because he had been faithful over a few things. *Matt. xxv. 21.*



CHAP. XXIII.

How we ought to sanctify our Works and daily Occupations.

MARY.

THE duties of your state, my son, cause you much anxiety. But when you accomplish them, you never think on God.

DISCIPLE.

O Virgin always *faithful* and vigilant, vouchsafe to teach me how to imitate thee, and unite myself to God, when I am at work, and in the exercise of the functions of my condition.

MARY.

My son, manual labour, and the hardest and most perplexing occupations, in a man truly interior and spiritual, are not capable of suspending his union with God.

A soul habitually recollected, has a wonderful facility to recall to her mind the thought of God in those very occupations which would seemingly dissipate her.

Her purity of intention in every one of her ^{actions} ~~actions~~, and the offering of it she makes to God, makes her avoid a dissipation to which less attentive souls too often give way.

A spirit of faith and religion ennobles, sweetens, and sanctifies all. What is done in this spirit is pleasing to God, and deserves his rewards.

Do for God what so many others do for the world, or some temporal interest. Do all what your condition commands, but do it from Christian motives. It will be working both for time and eternity.

If you apply yourself to work from inclination, caprice, constraint, custom, or any other motive merely human, God not being the principle of what you do, you will pass whole hours without giving him one single affection of your heart.

Do not say that you cannot think on two things at once. A loving soul has soon said to God what she wants to say to him.

Martha, who was so busily occupied to prepare every thing for the reception of our Lord, was not diverted from her work, when she spoke to Jesus.

In the midst of your occupations, you speak of them to those around you. Do the same with your God, who is always present to whatever you do.

His *conversation*, far different from the conversation of men in general, *has neither bitterness nor tediousness*. Wisd. viii. 16. On the contrary, it has this peculiar advantage,

that in every kind of work and occupation we may enjoy its sweetness and comforts.

One may become a great saint, by doing only ordinary things, provided they are not done in an ordinary manner.

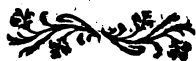
It is merely from necessity that most men do what they do. But to do it because God commands it, or with an intention of pleasing him, it never occurs to their mind.

As for you, my son, when you are at work, tell him that it is your delight to do his will; and that in order to please him, you will not diminish your application to your work, although it should be harder and more painful than it is.

Offer to him your labour, in union with all the labours which Jesus underwent for your salvation.

If your work succeed, bless him who gives you the success. If not, submit to this mortification which God permits, to try your patience.

By such an union with God in all your actions, the smallest, and apparently the meanest, will make you obtain a higher degree of glory in heaven.



[CHAP. XXIV.]

Of the Love we ought to be animated with for Jesus.

DISCIPLE.

HOLY Mother of Jesus, whilst thou wast living at Nazareth with Jesus, men did not know him ; they despised and abandoned him. But he had the consolation of being sincerely, ardently, tenderly, and constantly loved by his chaste Mother.

Knowing his divinity, and his infinite perfections, thou lovedst him more than all the saints in heaven have loved, now love, and ever will love him.

Thy love had something far more excellent than the love of ordinary mothers. Thou lovedst in him a Son both God and Man together.

Hence that ardent desire of seeing him loved by all reasonable creatures, as much as thou didst love him thyself.

It is the characteristic of pure love to seek to communicate itself, and to wish that all hearts may be consumed by its own flames.

In order to love Jesus as thou didst, we should know him as thyself knewest him.

In order to speak worthily of thy love, we should have in our power to read in thy heart thy feelings for this sole object of thy affections.

Do thou open to us that heart of thine, that heart which loved with so much perfection. Discover to us all the purity, tenderness, ardour, and generosity of the sentiments with which it was animated.

MARY.

My son, I should not have been worthy of being the Mother of Jesus, had I not loved him more than all other intelligent creatures.

I increased every day in his love, because every day I discovered new perfections in my divine Son.

I felt no comfort, no pleasure, no felicity, but in this love. It was my food, my life, my repose, my joy and delight.

I lived at Nazareth a poor and an obscure life; but I was superabundantly recompensed by the treasure which I possessed in the person of Jesus. With him, one ought to think one's self richer than the most powerful kings.

O happy, a thousand times happy the hearts which live in the love of Jesus, and wish and sigh for him alone.

The love of Jesus only can afford a

solid and lasting joy and peace to the heart. Without this love nothing can please long.

What real pleasure can he feel in this world, who feels not how sweet and amiable Jesus is.

The more we love Jesus, the more we shall feel how delightful it is to love him who is truly and infinitely worthy of love.

Whatever your calamities in this world may be, there is none comparable to the misfortune of not loving him.

He who does not love Jesus, has never applied himself to know him. He can never know how amiable Jesus is.

Jesus unites in himself all the perfections of grace, and it is from its plenitude that all men derive all that they have.

Jesus unites in himself all natural perfections, in a most admirable and incomprehensible manner.

Jesus unites in himself all the perfections of the Deity, who dwells in him substantially.

He is powerful from the power of God, beautiful from the beauty of God, wise from the wisdom of God, holy from the holiness of God.

DISCIPLE.

Were it possible that Jesus should not be amiable in himself and by himself, he would be so for his infinite love for me. Above all, what has he not suffered to show me his love?

MARY.

Add, my son, that the excess of his sufferings did not exhaust the desire he had to suffer. Love never says, It is enough. But the most ardent, the most eager to manifest itself, was the love of Jesus.

To work out your salvation, Jesus would have done even more than he did, had it been in his power to give more than himself.

O my son, if ever you can find any object more worthy of your affections than Jesus, he consents that you should love it.

But if he deserves your heart before and above any creature, will you dare refuse it him?

DISCIPLE.

Oh ! let all the world vanish from before me. Henceforth no creature will I love, and even now I love no other but Jesus.

MARY.

In effect, whoever is acquainted with Jesus, despises all the rest. The world is no-

thing for him who has once tasted the sweetness of his love.

DISCIPLE.

I can have Jesus for my friend, if I wish. Were I to neglect to procure to myself this great happiness, I should well deserve to be most miserable.

MARY.

Yes, my son, give your love to an object which can never be for you an occasion of disappointment and regret; which cannot be liable to vicissitude and change; and which, instead of being taken away from you by death, shall become on the contrary at the moment of your death your eternal possession.

Jesus is a constant and faithful friend, who will never fail, when all other friends will abandon you.

One single word of this heavenly friend brings consolation into an afflicted heart. All other friends are frequently but *troublesome comforters*. Job xvi. 2.

What disgust and grief can you feel? And who can hurt you, if your heart be animated with the love of Jesus?

If Jesus reigns in your heart, you are the richest, the happiest, and most powerful man, who is and ever can exist upon earth.

The love of Jesus is a blessing which abundantly compensates the privation of every other good and comfort. For, Jesus possesses in himself all that can satisfy the most extensive desires of the heart which loves him.

DISCIPLE.

O my Jesus, I humbly beseech thee, through the love which thy holy Mother had for thee, grant me the grace of loving thee in such a manner, that I may henceforth love nothing above thee, nothing as much as thee, nothing but the love of thee.

I cannot love thee as much as thou deservest, but with the assistance of thy grace, I will love thee as much as it lays in my power, and then I shall love thee as much as I ought.

Kindle in my heart all the love with which thou commandest me to love thee. I wish I could be burnt, nay even consumed with this divine fire.

To know how amiable Jesus is, and not to be able to love him as he deserves, is a martyrdom which nothing can assuage and mitigate, but an incessant desire of loving him more and more every instant of the day.

CHAP. XXV.

That we ought to study Jesus, and propose him to ourselves as our Model.

MARY.

MY son, are you not one of those Christians who speak much better than they do? In a moment of fervour, the feelings are commendable; but afterwards the conduct does not correspond with them.

We say to God that we love him; and sometimes it seems that we actually feel this love; because when his grace makes a sensible impression upon us, we shed a few tears of sweetness. But it is not as yet a proof of a sincere and true love.

The testimony which Jesus expects from your love, is conformity to the examples of virtue which he has given you.

DISCIPLE.

O thou, Model of all perfection, such was the object of thy constant application during all the time thou livedst at Nazareth.

We read in the Gospel, that thou didst listen with the greatest attention to all the words of Jesus, observe all his actions, meditate upon them, and *keep them all in thy heart.* Luke ii. 51.

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MARY.

Yes, my son, to study Jesus, was my chief occupation, and to imitate him, my principal care. Let it also be your chief study to meditate on the life of Jesus, in order to imitate his virtues.

Direct towards this object all your eagerness and application. There is no true knowledge, but the knowledge of Jesus. Let him be therefore your only master.

Jesus is a king who deserves all your homages; and the chief homage which he requires of you, is the imitation of his virtues.

Compare yourself with your heavenly model, before you are examined according to this very same model at the tribunal of God.

It is the love which Jesus has for you, which prompted him to give you so many examples of humility, patience, and obedience. Therefore, imitate them for his sake. And if you meet with difficulties, keep his love constantly present to your mind and to your heart, and nothing shall be capable to daunt your courage.

In all and every where, propose to yourself to be his faithful copy, as much as it lays in your power.

If you pray, represent to yourself his re-

collection at his prayers. If you go to the temple, let it be after his example; in a spirit of religion and sacrifice.

If you converse with men, reflect in what manner Jesus comported himself; with what modesty and sweetness.

That you may imitate Jesus meek and humble of heart, do not murmur at your sufferings; but return good for evil. Shun the honours of this world, and love to be forgotten, unknown and contemned.

Jesus did not seek *to please himself*. Rom. xi. 3. Let the glory of God, and the accomplishment of his will, be the principle, the end, and the main-spring of all your actions.

Every situation and circumstance of his mortal life, is, for his true disciples, an inexhaustible fund of instruction.

Jesus is *the way, the truth, and the life*. John xiv. 6. You can find only in his example the way in which you should walk, the truth you must hear, and the means of entertaining the life of your soul.

In all the circumstances and occurrences of your life, ask yourself what Jesus would have said and done, and conform yourself to the model which he offers you both in his words and actions.

You know what were his inclinations, de-

sires, and sentiments. Examine what are yours. Compare and amend. But remember that your reformation, which ought to produce in you some resemblance with Jesus, is not the business of a day.

Jesus is so perfect a model, that its perfection can never be attained. But we should try every day of our life, to imitate some of its heavenly features.

But as we cannot obtain the happiness of imitating Jesus, without the grace of Jesus himself; every day we ought to ask for it.

CHAP. XXVI.

Of the Happiness of a virtuous Family.

THE holy family which dwelt at Nazareth, when Jesus lived there with Mary and Joseph, was the object of the admiration of the whole court of heaven.

What must have been its union and peace, since all unruly passions were there unknown; and since it was the abode of all virtues.

Whilst Jesus was *increasing in age and wisdom before God and men*, Mary had her eyes continually fixed upon him, to form herself according to this pattern.

Joseph was no less attentive to profit by

the examples of the Mother and of her divine Son.

In that blessed family every thing invited to God. Every thing was done for God. The sole presence of Jesus penetrated the hearts with joy, and his divine discourses inflamed them with love.

The submission of Jesus, and his obedience, filled Mary and Joseph with the most lively sentiments of admiration,—not knowing how to express it, they annihilated themselves before God.

O God! infinitely good, infinitely holy, thou wast adored there in spirit and truth. And how agreeable were to thee the homages which were there offered to thee.

It is impossible to recall to our mind the image of that family, without envying its happiness. What a happiness for all Christian families, were they regulated and governed after this excellent pattern.

Oh! if the love of God reigned among them, as it did in the humble cottage which was the abode of Jesus, Mary and Joseph: then we should see also reigning among us, order, peace, and union of hearts.

The two consorts would enjoy the sweet comforts of conjugal union. The children would be brought up in the fear of the

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Lord, and the servants would receive only examples of virtue.

Jealousies, dissensions, and their melancholy attendants and consequences, would be unknown, and those scandalous scenes so frequent in our days would never be heard of.

Instead of making prosperity subservient to luxury and pride, it would be employed to assist and relieve the poor and distressed; and sanctified by thanksgiving and Christian moderation.

A wise economy would preside over the management of all temporal concerns, and the sordid savings of avarice, as well as the profusions of luxury, would be entirely banished.

Adversity would excite neither complaints nor murmurings against Providence. Either in indigence or mediocrity, in affluence or elevation, God would always be equally praised and blessed.

The head of the family would exercise his authority without austerity and haughtiness. The mother assisting and promoting the intentions of her spouse, would watch with sedulous care over all domestic affairs, and both would have the consolation of seeing their children docile to their in-

structions, and imbibe from their most tender years the love of virtue.

What an advantage for the whole society of the faithful! What an amiable simplicity of manners! What innocence, candour, union, charity, edification, in short what admirable fruits of holiness!

All the days of our life would pass in tranquillity and sweet enjoyments: and when summoned to depart from our terrestrial abode, we should be the more ready to make a willing sacrifice of our life, as we could then give to ourselves the consoling testimony of having lived in justice and in the love of God.

CHAP. XXVII.

Of the Efficacy of Prayer.

AT the marriage-feast of Cana, where Mary was present with Jesus and his disciples, the wine failed. Mary moved at the confusion to which the married couple were exposed, and full of confidence in her divine Son, represented their wants to him.

God has always attached to prayer the effusion of his graces. He is always ready to grant them, and invites us to ask them of him with an unshaken confidence.

Want of confidence is usually the sign of weak faith. Hence so many barren and unsuccessful prayers.

To offer to him the tender of our homage, and lay before him our desires and wants, it is not necessary to watch for a favourable opportunity. Our God is always well disposed to hear us. *Ask and you shall receive. Whoever asketh, receiveth.*

Being disciples of a God so good as to reject no one, and so rich as to be able to give to all more than they want, how can we be so loath and careless to ask his favours, either for ourselves, or for others, after the example of Mary.

The prayer of Mary is short, far different from men; God does not require of us far-fetched prayers, and long and studied meditations. To treat with him, there is no need of subtlety or eloquence.

A prayer made with simplicity, in which we confine ourselves to beg of him what we know to be conducive to the advancement of his glory, and our sanctification, or at least which contains nothing contrary to either; such is the prayer which is acceptable before him, and to which he will be propitious.

It is not the motion of the lips, but the

sentiments of the heart which obtain his favours.

A few sighs from the heart of Samuel's mother, obtained for her, not only a son whom she wished for, but in that son a prophet and a judge of Israel. *Anna prayed in her heart.* Kings i. 13.

Jesus seemingly answered Mary in such a manner, as to give her no hope. Yet she continued to hope. And she obtained what she petitioned for.

We seldom pray with perseverance without being heard. Importunity fatigues and displeases men. As for you, be not tired of praying to the Lord, and the Lord will not be tired of hearing you.

How fervent soever your prayer may be, sometimes Jesus will seem to say to you, as he did to Mary, that *his hour is not yet come*. But if your confidence remains unshaken, that hour shall come.

We render ourselves unworthy of the favours of God, when we fix for him a determined time to make us feel their effect.

However, it is true, that notwithstanding our reiterated prayers, God does not always grant our petitions. But then, he grants us what is still more necessary than what we ask for.

St. Paul begged to be delivered from a

temptation ; yet he continued to be molested by it. But on account of his prayer, God granted him a grace, with the assistance of which, he gained great merits. Was he not then heard ?

You have been for many years begging of God to be cured of a corporal infirmity ; God has not granted your request : but a greater patience to bear has been the effect of your prayer. Have you not then been heard ?

Very frequently a thing which appears to us a great good, and which we solicit of God, would be a great evil were he to grant it us. He refuses us, because he loves us.

We should set a far greater value on graces of sanctification and salvation, than upon merely temporal graces. God grants these to his greatest enemies ; but the others he reserves for his elect.

CHAP. XXVIII.

That Virtue is not incompatible with Civility and Decorum,

IT was only through a motive of charity, that both Mary and her divine Son con-

sented to be present at the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee.

Undoubtedly she would have preferred to stay in her house of Nazareth, and enjoy there all the delights of contemplation. But she would not grieve by a refusal the married couple who had invited her.

Virtue therefore is not incompatible with civility. On the contrary, it commands the observance of its rules. Nay, it alone teaches how to perform them with holiness.

But in order to imitate Mary in every thing, represent to yourself her behaviour on that occasion. What reserve in her words, and modesty in her looks!

The wisdom of her conduct teaches you the decency and discretion you must preserve even in the midst of virtuous and innocent pleasures.

There is a wide difference between the laws of society and those of the world. Virtue is under the obligation of fighting against the latter. As for the former, it observes them, as far as possible, because they have nothing contrary to the laws of God.

To refuse ourselves every sort of relaxation, would be, in some degree, doing an injury to piety; because it would confirm

the false prejudice so prevalent in the world, that virtue makes men unsociable.

No; true piety is not of that character. And we may, without deviating from its holy maxims, conform ourselves to all the rules of civility and decorum.

Moreover, true piety ennobles the most indifferent actions, by the sanctity of the end and the purity of its motives.

Never give yourself entirely up to any amusement, how innocent soever it may be; only lend yourself, if we may speak so.

In the relaxations and amusements of which civility commands you to partake, in order to avoid too great a dissipation, be careful to recall your mind to the presence of God from time to time.

Behave with the same modesty and reserve, as if you were in the company of Jesus and Mary.

When there is no harm, appear to act as others do, after the example of the angel with Toby. But use, as he did, an *invisible food*, for the support and delight of your soul.

Send up your thoughts to heaven; wholly entertain yourself with the unspeakable felicity of the saints, which they obtained as a reward of their indifference for the pleasures of the earth.

Raise your mind and heart towards the Lord, by assuring him that all the enjoyments of the world will never make you forget the pure delights enjoyed in his service.

Tell him, that to obtain the least degree of his love, you are ready to make a sacrifice of whatever is dearest to you in this life.

CHAP. XXIX.

How sweet it is to hear the Voice of Jesus, and how zealous a Soul ought to be to receive his Instructions.

MARY enjoyed the presence of Jesus, and the sweetness of his conversation during the thirty years she dwelt with him at Nazareth.

It seemed that she had then nothing more to do than to meditate in silence and retirement, the lessons she received from him, without any necessity of following him in his evangelical excursions.

However, St. John tells us, that she *remained not many days* with him at Capernaum, *John ii. 12.* Undoubtedly to profit of his instructions.

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The other evangelists inform us, that on another occasion, as she could *not come at Jesus for the crowd* who surrounded him, to hear his doctrine, she desired to speak to him. *St. Matt. xii. 46.—St. Mark iii. 31.—St. Luke viii. 20.*

No one knew better than she did the value of his divine lessons ; no one relished so much the charms of his conversation.

In effect, how sweet it is for him, who knows how to distinguish the voice of Jesus from that of man, to hear the *words of life*, which come from him.

A soul who has once relished and loved Jesus, can live no longer without Jesus. A thousand times she has heard his voice, and a thousand times more she longs to hear it again.

Every place is disagreeable to her where she cannot find her beloved. Every voice but his is unpleasant.

How fastidious and tiresome the discourses of men appear to her ; she finds in their conversation nothing but vanity. The words of Jesus alone are for her, *spirit and life*. *St. John vi. 64.*

As soon as she hears him speaking, she banishes all other thoughts, to give her whole attention to his divine word, because

it is more agreeable to her than the most charming and delightful discourse she could hear upon earth.

There is nothing she hears with more joy, remembers with more fidelity, meditates upon with more application, and which bears more abundant fruits of sanctification in her, than the words of Jesus.

If she falls asleep as the Spouse of the Canticles, like her also she awakes immediately at the first hearing of the voice of her Beloved. Lo, I hear *the voice of my Beloved, behold he cometh.*

She cannot be mistaken nor deluded: When Jesus alone is loved, his voice is immediately distinguished from any other.

The world, with all its vanities and pleasures, speaks a very different language: a faithful soul hears it against her own will, and as soon as it strikes her ears, she abhors and detests it.

When Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalen after his resurrection, she knew him not; but as soon as he spoke, her heart felt that it was Jesus.

O Jesus, O my Saviour, remove from me all those worldly discourses, which have so often prevented me from listening to thy divine words—I will hear no one but thee.

All the vain amusements, and frivolous

objects which have so many times distracted and hindered me from hearing the voice of Jesus, henceforth I renounce; to remain with him alone is my desire.

To enjoy the happiness of hearing thee, my divine *Master*, *I will follow thee whithersoever thou shalt go.* Matt. viii. 19. If I cannot hear thy voice at Nazareth, I will go to Capharnaum and Jerusalem.

But wherever I am, I may enjoy the happiness after which I long. Speak, O Lord, do not cease to speak to my soul, *I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me.* Ps. lxxxiv. 8.

Blessed is the man whom thou shalt instruct, O Lord, and shalt teach him out of thy law, that thou mayest give him rest from the evil days. Ps. xciii. 12, 13.

Thy ministers often speak to me of thy law; many books which I read with pleasure speak of thee: but if thy voice do not speak to me, what impression will they make upon my mind?

What they say is true; what they say is pathetic. But if thy grace be not united to their words, truth is not well imprinted in my mind, and my heart not properly moved.

Let thy voice sound in my ears, O thou the heavenly spouse of my soul, that mine

may be heard by thee! Speak to my heart, that it may speak to thine.

Thy voice will teach me more in an instant, than I could learn for many years in the schools of the learned of the world.

It is from the knowledge which they had acquired in their intimate intercourse with thee, that people, *unlearned, simple*, according to the world, learned to speak in the most ravishing and sublime manner of divine love and of thy greatest mysteries.

CHAP XXX.

That we ought not to seek the Glory of this World, nor the Esteem of Men.

DISCIPLE.

THOU wast exceedingly pleased, undoubtedly, O Mary, O happy Mother, at the sight of the honours paid to thy divine Son, on different occasions during his predication; but it was for his sake alone, and without the least reference to thyself.

Thou didst never show the least appearance of self-complacency and pride; because God had made choice of thee to give to the world him, who by the splendour of his miracles, and the sublimity of his doctrine, excited the admiration of all men.

Animated with sentiments widely different from those of other mothers, who openly boast of the merit of their children, and wish to have a share in their glory; when thou didst follow Jesus, it was to penetrate thy soul with his instructions, and not to derive any glory from the praise and blessings bestowed upon him.

In the midst of every thing that could draw upon thee the attention and homages of men, thou always preservedst the most profound humility.

Thus thou condemnest our eagerness after the glory of this world, and our love of the esteem of men, a deadly poison which infects all our actions.

MARY.

My son, it is true, that through the grace of God, I was always preserved from what you call so justly a deadly poison.

To God alone glory belongs. And has the creature any thing it can glory in which it does not hold from the Creator?

Almighty God had already distinguished and honoured me so much by choosing me to be the Mother of the Messiah! Could I then seek after the distinctions and honours of the world?

He who seeks God alone, sees nothing great but God. All the honours of the world,

and whatever men value the most, are in his eyes but vain and frivolous objects.

My son, consult your faith, consult your reason; and you will be no longer so desirous of praise and honours.

Your ambition being directed to a nobler end, you will only desire the glory which God reserves for his saints.

If you be forgotten, and accounted as nothing, instead of being grieved, you will rejoice; because there is no surer way to obtain a high degree of elevation in heaven, than humiliations accepted in a spirit of religion.

Leave therefore to the lovers of the world, all those vain titles and distinctions of which they are so fond: aspire to a more solid and real glory.

After the example of David, often beg of God *to turn away your eyes that they may not behold vanity.* Ps. cxviii. 37.

Many have been lost for having made the world their idol. Do not increase the number of those infatuated men who daily offer their incense before its altars.

DISCIPLE.

I will profit, O holy Virgin, of thy lessons and example: I will, for the future, seek no other glory but that which may attend the imitation of thy virtues.

But as my heart is weak and easy to be diverted from its best resolutions, I implore thy assistance; obtain for me the fortitude I stand in need of, to raise myself above the contempt of the world, and its perfidious allurements.

CHAP. XXXI.

That the Defects of our Neighbour ought to be borne with in a Spirit of Charity and Mildness.

DISCIPLE.

BLESSED Virgin, whose mildness is far above that of all mere creatures, thou teachest me by thy conduct towards so many ungrateful men to whom Jesus Christ addressed his heavenly instructions, and in favour of whom he wrought the greatest miracles, how I ought to bear with the defects of my neighbour.

For, if sometimes Jesus received praises and blessings, how often had he not to suffer the most violent contradictions?

Envy and jealousy raised against him enemies who calumniated his doctrine, treated his miracles as impostures, and represented him under the most odious colours.

How often hast thou not witnessed these excesses ? Nevertheless, after the example of thy divine Son, thou didst entertain for his enemies only sentiments and *thoughts of peace*. Jerem. xxvi. 11. Thou hadst the greatest horror of sin, but thou didst always love the sinner.

Only moved at the offence committed against God, thou never allowedst thyself to form the least complaint against the guilty. Nay, thou pleadest their excuse with Jesus.

Thou didst behave towards them, as thou hast done towards me for many years.

I am the most ungrateful of thy disciples. However, thou bearest with me with the greatest goodness, and obtainest for me every day some new favours from God.

Mother of the God of peace, obtain for me the grace of *never grieving any one by an evil word*. Eccl. xviii. 15.

O thou, whose name alone excites in the soul sentiments of meekness, ask for me that amiable virtue, that spirit of peace, which entitles us to the glorious name of children of God.

MARY.

I will intercede for you, O my son, but on your side correspond with the graces which I shall obtain for you. Grace does not

remove difficulties, but helps us to overcome them.

I know that your neighbour is often troublesome to you by the unevenness of his temper, the particularity of his behaviour, the inconsistency and strangeness of his ideas and fancies ; but grace, if you be docile to its influence, will teach you to overcome all your repugnances, and thus enable you to acquire great merit.

The occasions of practising heroic acts of virtue did not occur every day to the saints ; but every day, by bearing patiently with defects of their neighbour, they added a fresh lustre to their crown.

The life of a Christian is a life of sacrifice ; and the defects of our neighbour incessantly affords us opportunities of multiplying our good works.

In many things we all offend. James iii. 2. Therefore we ought to avail ourselves of every means to atone for our sins. But, to bear with our neighbour in a spirit of penance, is one of the most powerful.

Moreover, my son, there is no man without defects. The most perfect is he, who has less than the rest of his fellow creatures.

You will find defects in them ; they, on their side, will find many in you. For

you are not one of those who imagine themselves perfect, and who on that very account have the greatest of all defects.

Your brethren support you such as you are ; do you also support them with the same indulgence.

In bearing with your neighbour, use the same patience of which you stand in need to bear with yourself, in the defects which you are forced to acknowledge yourself guilty.

You have been labouring for this long while to amend your bad inclinations, and your labours have, as yet, had but little success. How then can you flatter yourself to correct others as you please ?

All the complaints you make on the trouble which you have to suffer from those who displease you, are of no avail, and will not correct them.

In such circumstances, the best thing you can do, is to beg of Jesus his assistance, that you may profit by them, both to try yourself, and confirm you in the practice of virtue.



CHAP. XXXII.

That we are to acquiesce in all to the Will of God, even in those Things which are contrary to the Advancement of his Glory.

DISCIPLE.

WHAT a subject of grief was it not for thee, O Mother of Jesus, to see the little fruit which the Jews reaped from his instructions.

His heavenly doctrine, supported by the most splendid miracles, did not convert a thousand sinners obstinately bent to remain in their blindness.

Like men who refuse the hand of the physician who wishes to heal their wounds, these infidels rejected the salvation which was offered them.

What were thy sentiments on these occasions? Thou bewailedst the blindness and obstinacy of these infatuated and corrupt men; but without losing the ^{place} ~~grade~~ of thy soul, thou didst persevere in begging of God their conversion.

MARY.

Undoubtedly, my son, I wished more than any one that Jesus should be known. My zeal for his glory made me feel very

deeply the obduracy of the Jews? But why should I have lost the peace of my soul?

I knew that God often renders the wicked subservient to the execution of his designs: that he often draws good from evil: and therefore, I adored in silence that infinite wisdom which sometimes permits the triumph of iniquity.

DISCIPLE.

Thy patience, blessed Virgin, shall be my model in all the occurrences of my life; but especially in those which might stagger my faith.

MARY.

Yes, my son, when you see iniquity happy, triumphing and insulting innocence, do not give way to the motions of bitter zeal, indignation, and wrath. Religion forbids it.

Why would you not suffer what God himself suffers? He could prevent what is perhaps for you a subject of scandal. He permits it. He has his designs. As for you, it is your duty to adore them.

Nothing happens in this world without his permission. Every thing, evil as well as good, enters into the views of his providence. At present you cannot penetrate

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them. The day will come, when you will acknowledge their justice and wisdom.

Certainly you ought not to be insensible to the evils of religion ; it is right for you to grieve at the sight of them ; even you are allowed to present your complaints to God in sentiments of love and resignation.

But to be scandalized at them, so as to endanger either your faith, or the peace of your soul, would be no longer zeal, but the abuse and excess of it.

One virtue is not destructive of another. Submission to the will of God in the events which he permits, is compatible with true zeal for the glory of God.

There are evils which demand your tears and sighs ; but tears to be shed at the feet of the Lord, and sighs uttered in his paternal bosom.

Speak to him of your troubles. Conjure him to put an end to the subject of your affliction. Nay, say to him, with a holy liberty, which will not offend him : *Arise, why sleepest thou, O Lord ? Arise, why turnest thou thy face away, and forgettest our want and trouble ?*

It is to thyself that the impious dare declare war. It is thy holy name which is

insulted. It is thy religion which they blaspheme. It is thy own work which they wish to destroy.

Defend thy own cause. Suffer no longer the triumph of iniquity. It is the interest of thy glory.

Thus, my son, you will do what a sincere zeal for the glory of God and religion require of you. And in the mean while, you will wait with patience, till the Lord is pleased to come and comfort you.

CHAP. XXXIII.

Of the Character of true Sanctity.

A Certain woman from the crowd lifting her voice said one day to our Saviour: Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the paps that gave thee suck. But he said: Yea, rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it. Luke xi. 27.

Jesus, by these last words, makes us to understand that the dignity of Mother of God is not that which honours Mary the most, but her constant fidelity in the practice of all the duties of religion.

Her merit did not consist in the prerogatives of her maternity, which she held from God alone; but in her sanctity,

which, next to God, she obtained from her correspondence to his graces, and from her good works.

What in some sense deserves the rewards of God, is not what he does for us, but what we do for him.

The merit of the faithful servant mentioned in the gospel, did not consist in his having received five talents, but in his having turned them to profit.

You glory with justice in the quality of son of God, which you have received at your baptism. But reflect, that this quality will not secure you a place among the saints, unless you maintain it by the sanctity of your life.

Among the saints, there are some who had raptures and extasies ; but it is not on account of these extraordinary gifts that you ought to envy their lot.

They were constantly faithful and obedient to the will of God. This is that you must endeavour to imitate.

You have embraced a holy state of life. But it is not the sanctity of that state which ought to inspire you with confidence ; but your fidelity and vigilance in performing all its obligations.

Judas, very likely, worked miracles, and yet he died a reprobate. We do not read that St. John Baptist worked any ; never-

theless, the Son of God praised him in the most splendid manner.

Without sanctity of life, we may have some share in the esteem of men. But in the esteem of God we are nothing, unless we be saints.

And we cannot be saints, but by practising works of sanctity. This alone will be for us, as it was for Mary, the solid foundation of our glory.

Persuade yourself therefore that God has not attached your salvation to extraordinary gifts, either of nature or of grace; but left, as it were, your salvation at your own disposal, by making it, next to him, depend on your own self.

*Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle?
... He that walketh without blemish, and
worketh justice. Ps. xiv. 1.*



THE

Imitation of the Blessed Virgin.

BOOK III.

IN WHICH ARE CONSIDERED THE LIFE
AND VIRTUES OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN,
FROM THE CRUCIFIXION OF HER DI-
VINE SON ON MOUNT CALVARY, TO
THE DAY OF HER ASSUMPTION.

CHAP. I.

*That the Soul who loves Jesus, ought to go
up with him to Mount Calvary, and suf-
fer with him.*

MARY.

JESUS goes up to Mount Calvary. Come,
my Son, he invites us to accompany him
thither. If you love him, certainly you
will not forsake him.

Would our love for Jesus be worthy of
him, were we to abandon him alone in his

sorrows, and when all men deny and laugh him to scorn?

We cannot give him any assistance; but at least we shall partake in his sufferings, by mixing our tears with his blood; and we shall give him the consolation of seeing that we are ready to suffer for his love, whatever he will be pleased to ordain.

DISCIPLE.

But, O generous Virgin, is it only in sufferings that we can shew to Jesus our love for him? Can we not do it also in tranquillity and peace?

MARY.

My son, in tranquillity and peace, it is easy to give testimonies of our love. But it is only in time of difficulties and troubles that we can form a true estimate of its solidity.

Jesus said: *Whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.* Luke. xiv. 27.

You ought therefore to reckon among happy days, those in which you have an opportunity of suffering something for his love.

Many Christians love the divine Benefactor, only on account of his benefits, and are like those worldly friends, who are utter strangers to disinterested love.

They say that they love Jesus with their whole heart. Nevertheless, they have not courage enough *to watch one hour with him in his agony*. St. Matt. xxvi. 40.

They assure him that they would follow him every where, and even that they are ready to die with him. But the fear of sufferings soon weakens the ardour of their love ; and if they follow him, it is but at a *distance*.

As for you, my son, if you love Jesus, you will love his cross. And if you love him with all your heart, you will embrace with all your heart the different crosses he will think proper to send you.

The Christian who does not require to be forced, like Simon of Cyrene, to take up his cross ; but, on the contrary, willingly participates in the bitterness of the gall which was presented to our Saviour on Mount Calvary—this is the only one who truly loves Jesus.

The fire of tribulations tries the gold of love. *Eccl. ii. 5.* It purifies and perfects it.

Jesus lived in tears. Can you expect and resolve to live in delights ?

A true Christian is a man made conformable to Jesus, *suffering, dying, and dead* on the cross.

You find him so amiable, when you re-

reflect on the sufferings which he endured for your sake. How much therefore should you not love what renders him so worthy of all your tenderness; and even esteem as a favour these very sufferings in which he makes you partake, only because he loves you?

Man redeemed through the cross should consider the cross as his share and glory.

It is only through sufferings that Jesus *entered into his glory*, (Luke xxiv. 26) there was no other way open to me, nor to the saints. You must walk in it, if you wish to attain the same end.

DISCIPLE.

O Virgin Mother of God, if thou didst bear with so many sufferings, and hadst so great an esteem of them, it is because thou lovedst God more than all the martyrs and saints together.

Help me, through thy intercession, to overcome my delicacy, sensibility, and the natural horror which I have of the cross, that my heart, my mind, and all that is in me, may prove to my God that I do sincerely love him.

Thou wast the most holy of all virgins, and yet the most afflicted with sorrows. I consent to participate in thy sufferings,

provided I may also participate in thy love.

Obtain for me the grace of loving the cross of Jesus, of putting all my delight in the cross, that at my death Jesus on the cross may be my strength and consolation.

MARY.

In effect, how can you at the moment of your death embrace a crucifix with confidence, if you have lived an enemy to the cross?

When we die, instead of regretting to have been often laid on the cross, we shall then desire to have always been on it, because we should have had the advantage of resembling Jesus, particularly in those things in which he will have us to be conformable to him.

My son, if exposed to contempt, ill usage, and bloody persecutions, you endured them with submission, patience and constancy, then I should discover in you a ravishing image of Jesus.

And I would love you, my son, still more than I do, because bearing a nearer resemblance with Jesus, you would then become a son more worthy of your Mother.

DISCIPLE.

O my Mother, the motive which will henceforth animate and console me in all my sufferings, will be to think that I carry my cross with and for Jesus; but at the same time what an advantage for me to reflect, that my ^{adversities} ~~circumstances~~ and dispositions will draw in a particular manner upon me, thy protection and love!

CHAP. II.

Of Conformity to the Will of God in Sufferings.

DISCIPLE.

In the melancholy situation I am in, I have recourse to thee, *Comforter of the afflicted.*

Vouchsafe to teach me what sentiments I ought to be animated with, in the calamities which I endure, and at the prospect of those which threaten me.

MARY.

Be animated, my son, with sentiments of an unreserved and perfect conformity to the will of God, who ordains and regulates all things for your salvation and the advancement of his glory.

At the approach of any affliction, when

you lay under it, when it continues, increases, and is followed by some other, repeat over and over again : My God, *let thy will be done.*

The thought of that divine will, fortified and comforted me in the temple of Jerusalem, when Simeon foretold me that Jesus should *be for a sign which should be contradicted* ; and that *my own soul a sword should pierce.* Luke ii. 34, 35.

It fortified and comforted me especially on Mount Calvary, when I saw Jesus hanging on the cross, and expiring in the agony of the most excruciating pains.

As my love for Jesus was without bounds, my sorrow was also the same, but my resignation was equal both to my sorrow and to my love.

In all your adversities, banish from your mind all reflections, except that which is included in these words : *It is the will of God.*

Any other reflection will only aggravate your troubles, and render you more miserable.

O my Son, when you reflect that it is God who sends you this affliction, would you dare say that you will not accept it ?

If the intentions of a wise man be always directed to what is good, what ought you

to think of God, who is infinite wisdom itself?

It is true that God neither commands nor approves the sin of those who contribute to your afflictions, but he wishes to draw his glory from your patience in supporting them.

He permits the sins of your enemies, and will have their consequences to be subversive to your sanctification.

In Semei, David did not consider a subject who outraged and insulted him, but in him he considered a just God, who made use of that vile instrument to humble him and make him atone for his sins.

Jesús himself, speaking to his apostles of the chalice of his passion, did not mention the ingratitude of the Jews who meditated his death; but of the will of his Father who had so ordained it.

In the garden of Gethsemani, he said to Peter, who did not understand as yet that a Christian under sufferings, oppression, and persecution, ought to defend himself with no other arms but those of patience and submission:—*The chalice which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?* John xviii. 11.

However, you must not conclude that you are forbidden to beg of God to be de-

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livered from your calamities: but if it be Almighty God's will that you should drink the bitter chalice, you ought to say: *O my Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* Matt. xxvi. 39.

O Lord, my God, pay no attention to my excessive repugnance for sufferings, but as far as the advancement of thy glory and the execution of thy designs may permit.

Then if your sufferings, instead of diminishing, increase, and grow harder and harder, say; *Yea, Father, I submit to these new afflictions and troubles, for so hath it seemed good in thy sight.* Matt. xi. 26.

Thou wilt have it so: let it be so. Thou ordainest it: I consent. I must be crushed: I yield. I must die: I willingly resign myself to death.

Nay, may the rigour of the strokes I receive from thee, or with thy permission, from the hands of others, hasten the happy moment which will make me enjoy throughout all eternity the unspeakable sweetness of thy presence and love!



CHAP. III.

Of Patience:

WHAT must have been the sufferings of the Mother of the *Word made flesh*, when she saw him become the *Man of sorrows*, given up to the powers of darkness, dragged before the tribunals, treated as a seducer, and struck by an unmerciful rabble.

When she beheld him, cruelly scourged, crowned with thorns, judged more criminal than Barabbas, loaded with his cross, and sinking under it.

When she heard the noise of the hammers, which drove the nails into the hands and feet of her dear Son; when she saw him hanging on the cross in the midst of two thieves, insulted by his enemies who were triumphing at his death, and who had nothing to offer him to quench his thirst, but wine mixed with gall. In short, when she saw him expiring on the cross, and the soldier piercing his side with a spear in order to ascertain his death.

In these unheard-of sufferings, Mary displayed the most heroic patience. She was not heard making the least complaint.

She imitated on Mount Calvary the silence which Jesus had kept in the house of the high priest. Surrounded with false accusers, he *held his peace*, because in vain he would have spoken in his defence, and moreover he was unwilling to avert the sentence of death to which he had devoted himself for our sake.

Christian souls, such is your model. In your afflictions, if it be necessary for you to defend yourselves, speak with meekness and in a spirit of peace. If they will not hear you, suffer in silence; and to injustice oppose only patience.

But remember, that it must be a Christian patience, proceeding from a spirit of religion; and not a patience merely human, such as it is sometimes, the effect of interested views, or the consequence of our natural dispositions.

Those who humble themselves under the hand of God; who adore his justice and mercy in the afflictions and troubles they undergo, and who endeavour to imitate the patience of Jesus and Mary; they alone suffer like true Christians, and it is thus you ought to suffer.

To bear our crosses with impatience, is to render them more heavy, and add sin to our afflictions.

The way of the cross is the road to heaven. All the saints have walked in it. All the just upon earth do the same. They pass *through many tribulations*, (Ps. xxxiii. 20.) because God prepares a rich crown for their patience.

Woe to those Christians who contrive their loss by the very means which were destined to secure their salvation. Thus resembling the wicked thief who died on Mount Calvary by the side of the Saviour of mankind, and who by blaspheming on the cross, from that very cross descended into hell.

If in our afflictions we do not revolt against God; yet murmur at the crosses which he sends us; we thereby deserve that God should for our punishment take away from us this powerful means of sanctification.

And we often importune heaven to be delivered from our crosses; because *we do not know what we ask for*. Matt. xx. 21. These crosses are an abundant source of merit for us.

No where were exhibited such admirable fruit of sanctity and excellent virtues, as under the shade of the cross, and on Mount Calvary.

By patience we acquire more merit in a

few days, than we could ever gain during many years in the course of a life consecrated to the exercises of a tranquil devotion.

How often does it not happen that self-love insinuates itself in actions of piety? But in a life of afflictions we merit so much the more, as there is nothing agreeable to nature, and that all is for God.

Christian soul, any cross different from that which you bear would not be for your good. God knows much better than yourself what is advantageous for you. Were it left at your own disposal to choose your crosses, you would unavoidably be mistaken in your choice.

When God sends you a cross, he proportions it to your wants, your strength, and to his designs over you.

CHAP. IV.

That God sometimes reserves the greatest Sufferings, for his most faithful Servants.

WAS it not enough, O my God, for Mary to have carried for thirty years in her mind, the excruciating image of the torments which her Son was to suf-

fer? Was it still necessary that she should be an eye-witness of his death?

Thou didst not require that Sara should be present at the sacrifice of her son Isaac, which thou hadst ordered Abraham to offer to thee.

But I understand it, O Lord; it was necessary that Mary, who was to be one day the Queen of all saints, should enter more intimately than all saints into that *fellowship of sufferings* spoken of by the apostle, and which thou hast established, between Jesus and all the elect.

Therefore I must not wonder at seeing that the afflictions of many saints increase in proportion with their fidelity in thy service.

I ought to consider the great sufferings under which they sometimes labour, as great graces which thou bestowest upon them, and as signal testimonies of thy favour and love for them.

Thou rewardest what they do to please thee, by sufferings which render them more conformable to the divine model which thou hast exhibited to their view on Mount Calvary.

Those whom thou lovedst the most, and who had for thee a more lively and tender

love, were on Mount Calvary close to thy cross.

It is a very great happiness to be judged worthy to participate, in a particular manner, in the sufferings of Jesus.

Every disciple shall be perfect if he be as his Master ! Luke vi. 40. Jesus, our Master, the perfection of whom we ought to endeavour to attain, underwent the greatest tribulations.

We shall find only few souls of an eminent virtue, who were exempt from severe trials.

They began by the practice of virtue: and afterwards thou gavest them in some great adversity the means of becoming perfect.

Because thou wast acceptable to God, said the angel to Toby, *it was necessary that temptation should prove thee.* xii. 13.

Yes, O my most adorable Saviour, we testify to thee a more generous love in sufferings, than in the exercise of the most active virtues.

It is, indeed, a most consoling reflection, when we can say with St. Peter, *O Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.* Yet, nevertheless, we scarcely know what it is to love thee, when we have not as yet learned to suffer for thee.

However, O my God, we ought not to believe, that cruel affronts, long and painful diseases, chains and dungeons are necessarily the constant lot of thy saints on earth. But thou knowest to provide for them other crosses which, without that terrifying appearance, teach them equally to die to themselves.

One cannot imagine all the violent struggles which, in this state of probation, the souls whom thou wishest to purify from every defilement, and callest to a high sanctity, have frequently to encounter and subdue.

Whilst they exteriorly appear to enjoy the most desirable peace, they have often to bear with the hardest assaults.

If thou dost not excite the elements and the wickedness of men against thy faithful servants, thou permittest the angels of darkness to exert their rage against them.

Their faith grows stronger and increases, O thou supreme Lord of the universe, by adoring thy will, with a submission growing daily more perfect, and by acknowledging in thee a most tender and wise parent, *who chastiseth whom he loveth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* Heb. xii. 6.

It is for their sanctification that thou permittest they should be proved by such

trials. And the more they fight, the more is their virtue purified and perfected.

Their hope daily becomes more lively. Knowing thy infinite goodness, they are well assured, that far from abandoning them to the fury of their enemies, thou wilt come and assist them. They are animated to fight, from the hope that *our present tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

Their charity is more lively and disengaged from creatures; they live only for him who is the God of their hearts, and their portion for evermore. *Ps. lxxvii. 26.*

It is then, more than at any other time, that their fidelity honours thee. In the midst of consolations and spiritual sweetness, we serve thee sometimes out of selfish motives. But when in affliction, and distress of heart, we remain faithful to thee, it is giving thee an evident proof of a strong and constant love.

Alas! O my God, I have sometimes said in my distresses, that according to appearances thou didst not love me. But henceforth I will say, let us return our thanksgiving to God. This adversity is a gift of his love.

His faithful servants, his friends and

saints, have suffered pains much greater than mine, because they were more worthy of his friendship and favour.

Let us, therefore, suffer with the patience and resignation of the saints, that we may obtain the grace of bearing with alacrity the greatest sufferings.

CHAP. V.

That we ought to wonder and be alarmed at the Repugnance which we interiorly feel for Sufferings.

DISCIPLE.

I Address myself to thee, O blessed Virgin, in the trouble of my soul, at the sight of the cross. I feel within me the greatest repugnance for sufferings. Such a disposition alarms me.

MARY.

My son, our natural repugnances do not render us guilty in the sight of God. Nay, they are an occasion of gaining greater merits, if you always remain resigned to his will.

When it is said that the saints loved sufferings, it is not meant that they had a natural inclination for them. ~~Our~~ Nature repined; but the Christian re-

joiced. Nature resisted ; but the Gospel overcame nature.

Do you think that on Mount Calvary my sensibility was not carried to the highest degree ? If every mother feel all the pains and sufferings of her child, what must have been the feelings of the Mother of Jesus, when she saw him in the most excruciating torments, and overwhelmed with ignominies !

To comprehend the excess of my sorrow, it would be necessary to love Jesus as I loved him.

Jesus himself, in the garden of olives, let his own heart feel the fear of torments and death.

He would not permit that his divinity, which gave an infinite value to his passion, should remove this painful feeling.

My son, provided you sincerely resign yourself to the will of God in your afflictions, do not give way to anxiety and trouble, for what you may involuntarily feel within you.

Even when you yield to nature, be not discouraged : it would be adding impatience to human frailty.

It is a secret pride which is the cause of our trouble at the sight of our imperfections. You are weak, and God knows

your weakness. You are man, and not an angel.

Man cannot pass his life without being guilty at least of some little faults, though he can and ought to avoid every one in particular.

You were not conceived in innocence as I was, consequently you are not free from all propensity to evil, and from all the weaknesses which are the appendage of humanity.

If some murmurs escape you unawares, immediately beg pardon of God for your fault. Promise him to be more upon your guard another time. For that intention implore the assistance of his grace; recover the peace of your soul, and act with more vigilance than ever.

Whatever may be the fault which you may have committed, one of the best means to repair it is to accept willingly the humiliation which attends it.

When you are in heaven, my son, and in the company of the saints, then you will be impeccable.

DISCIPLE.

O, Queen of saints, when will that happy day come! When shall I be delivered from that fear so cruel to a loving heart, the fear of offending my God?

X

Come at least to my assistance, O Mother of grace and mercy. Let thy powerful protection be an impenetrable bulwark against all the assaults of the enemies of my salvation.

CHAP. VI.

That the Consideration of Jesus on the Cross is a most encouraging Motive to suffer with Fortitude and Confidence.

DISCIPLE.

AT the death of Jesus, the earth quaked, the sun was eclipsed, the rocks were rent, all nature was in agitation and dismay; but another object strikes me more than all these wonders.

It is thou, O Mary, most blessed Mother, who continuedst standing by the cross; renewing at every moment the sacrifice of thy most beloved Son Jesus which thou hadst made to the eternal Father.

How couldst thou bear such a sight? Whence came thy unexampled fortitude? Vouchsafe to tell me, a weak soul, whom adversity, if it be any way considerable, is sufficient to cast down.

MARY.

I had before my eyes the most powerful

example; Jesus crucified, who spoke only words of peace, suffered with the most perfect resignation to the will of his Father, and asked of him, through the merits of his blood, the salvation of his very executioners.

My eyes were constantly fixed on that divine model; I penetrated into his heart, and endeavoured to be animated with his sentiments.

Beholding him sacrificing with such generosity his life for the salvation of mankind, in the midst of the most cruel torments, I learned myself to make to God a generous sacrifice of what I had most dear in the world, the sacrifice of Jesus himself.

My son, you will find at the foot of the cross, as I did, support in your troubles, strength in your weakness, and a courageous resignation in the sacrifices which God will require of you.

When you are in affliction, you seek consolations among men; but you are not long without perceiving that their compassion is soon exhausted.

They at first sympathize with your pains; but they soon are tired of hearing the recital of them, and even weary of your presence.

If then you are abandoned to yourself

and your own reflections, your pains increase; and often your endeavours to pull out the arrow which pierces you, make it sink deeper and deeper into the wound.

But, my son, in those days of trials and struggle, arm yourself with the image of the cross. In those dark and stormy days, let your crucifix be your first resource.

How dejected soever you may feel yourself, you will find strength at the sight of the cross. Whatever may be the bitterness of your heart, the cross will sweeten it.

If you suffer from the wickedness of men, behold on that cross the best of fathers most outrageously insulted; the most indulgent of masters most contemptuously treated; the most faithful of friends most ungratefully abandoned, and, of all the just, the most barbarously persecuted.

If you suffer from the powers of darkness, behold on the cross Jesus given up to all their rage and fury.

Will you dare complain that you are treated with too much rigour, when you consider the rigour which the heavenly Father has used towards his most beloved Son.

If it be in punishment of your sins, that God sends you temporal pains, what are they when compared with those which Je-

sus suffered, to deliver you from eternal misery?

By looking at your crucifix, you will say, I have been redeemed, by the unspeakable sufferings of a God. Oh! is it not right, that a soul redeemed through such sufferings, should bear some resemblance with her Redeemer.

My son, you resemble Jesus very little by your virtues: but your crucifix will teach you that it is consoling to have at least a faint resemblance with him by sufferings.

Have, therefore, recourse to the cross in all your misfortunes, in all your sorrows, in all your temptations.

Kiss it then with love; bedew it with your tears; press it close against your heart.

Imagine that you are on Mount Calvary, and that it is allowed you to embrace the feet of your God suffering and dying for you.

Speak to him of your sufferings, unite them to his, and beg of him to help and relieve you.

Beseech this merciful Redeemer to address to you from his cross some words of comfort, to help you to support the rigour of yours.

X S

Tell him that you will not leave him, till he has re-established peace and tranquillity in your soul, and fortified it by the unction of his grace.

If you be faithful in this holy exercise, your tears will soon be dried up; peace will be restored to your heart, weakness will disappear, and fortitude will animate you. Nay, the cross will no longer appear so bitter to you, and even its bitterness will be changed into sweetness.

And if you have still to suffer, at least you will suffer in sentiments of patience, love, and resignation, and say with the apostle: *I take pleasure in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake.* 2 Cor. xii. 10.

CHAP. VII.

Of the Sentiments with which we ought to be animated towards our Enemies.

MARY could not have greater enemies than the Pharisees and the Jews, who had conspired against her divine Son, and caused him to be condemned to death.

But united by a perfect conformity of sentiments with Jesus, who loved his enemies so far as to give up his life for their

salvation, she said sincerely after his example : O my God forgive them.

She saw these merciless enemies of Jesus, boasting of the success of their crime : she heard their maledictions and blasphemies against him.

Any other Mother but the Mother of Jesus, would have solicited the vengeance of heaven against these cruel and sacrilegious wretches : but Mary, instructed in the school of the God of Peace, was animated with quite a different spirit.

Jesus hanging on the cross cried to heaven only for mercy in behalf of his persecutors and the authors of his death : and Mary standing at the foot of his cross, offered for them the adorable Victim which they were sacrificing.

Alas ! could the Jews have known the sentiments of charity and tenderness of Jesus and Mary towards them, it would have been enough to soften their hardened hearts, and change their horrid and criminal dispositions.

It is from these two hearts, so full of love for those who persecuted them, that we must draw that spirit of charity and peace towards our enemies, which the gospel so forcibly commands.

Jesus and Mary gloried in forgiving in-

juries. Did they not understand in what true glory consisted? Can there be any weakness or shame in imitating these perfect models?

Whatever may be the nature of the offence committed against us, can it be compared with or equalled to the outrages committed against Jesus and his holy Mother?

Next to Jesus, Mary was the dearest object of the love of God. The offence committed against Jesus was of an infinite nature, that committed against Mary was the most atrocious that can be conceived, if you only except the crime committed against her divine Son.

However, with what readiness and love did not Jesus shed his own blood, and offer the value of it to his heavenly Father, to obtain the forgiveness of the guilty? With what charity did Mary conjure the heavenly Father to hear the prayers and the voice of the blood of her beloved Son in their favour?

Ought not the most inveterate hatred die away at the foot of the cross, when we behold Jesus and Mary interesting themselves so tenderly for the wretches who erected it?

The cross, that precious instrument of

our salvation, solicits of God our condemnation, if we dare approach it with animosity in our hearts.

O my God, the love of our enemies must be the effect of thy most powerful grace: I beg it of thee, through the merits of Jesus, and the intercession of Mary, the hearts of whom were so tenderly affected towards the most ungrateful men, and so charitable towards their cruel and merciless persecutors.

Adorable heart of Jesus, sensible and amiable heart of Mary, hearts so benevolent and merciful towards those who caused your unheard of sorrows, infuse into my heart all the generosity of your sentiments.

Henceforth, whenever I shall feel the motions of revenge rising in me, to these sacred hearts I will immediately unite mine.

And I will not cease to beg for help, till it has received the impressions of that charity, goodness, benevolence, and meekness, with which they are always animated.



CHAP. VIII.

What must be our Dispositions, when we see our Relatives and Friends under Sufferings.

SOMETIMES God afflicts us in the persons of our friends and relatives. Our attachment for them gives us a lively feeling of their troubles and sorrows.

What an affliction for a mother, to see her son stretched on a bed of sickness; or for a friend to witness the excruciating pains of his friend, without having it in his power to afford the least relief!

As long as it remains subordinate to the will of God, there is nothing blameable in such an affliction; but it is reprehensible when it is not perfectly resigned, and breaks out into complaints against Providence.

Who could be more afflicted than Mary during the passion of her Son, of whom she had received so many tokens of the most special and tender love.

How many times did she not say within her heart: *My son, my beloved son, would to God that I might suffer and die for thee?*
2 Kings xviii. 33.

If the daughters of Jerusalem, seeing Jesus passing by loaded with his cross, could not help shedding tears over him, into what an ocean of bitterness must not the heart of Mary have been plunged, when she saw him stretched out on the bloody altar on which he was going to expire?

At least, if she could but afford some relief to her son in his agonizing pains; if she could support his head, bending under the weight of excruciating torments, and quench the thirst with which he is devoured!

But no, far from being able to entertain the least hope that any humane bystander, moved with pity, will give her the means of accomplishing her ardent desires, she heard on all sides nothing but the impious taunts and blasphemies of the Jews insulting the power and divinity of Jesus.

We may feel a sort of comfort and sweetness in suffering for those whom we love. But how hard and painful is it to see them suffering, without having it in our power to procure them the least alleviation in their pains!

What will Mary do in such a distressing situation? Will she bear to the end the horror of this sight? Or will she retire, to

save herself the grief of seeing her son expiring in the most cruel torments?

Not like the mother of Ismael, who was resolved to abandon her son, in order to avoid seeing him die. Mary remained by the cross calm and resigned to the will of God, and offering to him the sufferings of Jesus for the salvation of mankind.

She remained there ; because God had so ordained it ; and even till the consummation of the sacrifice.

Her faith, submission, and love, make of her a second victim, which Almighty God accepts, in union with the holocaust, which is offered to him in the person of the Redeemer of Mankind.

Learn from Mary, whoever you may be, either a tender father or a dutiful son, a bosom friend, an affectionate spouse, when you are at the moment of losing the object of all your affections and comforts in this world ; learn from her to overcome your grief.

Remember, that if your loss is very great upon earth, your gain will be much greater in heaven.

Religion does not condemn your sensibility nor your tears : but if you listen to her voice, she will teach you to moderate and sanctify them.

She forbids you to yield to that excessive sadness, which refuses all consolation ; and as the most solid motive of comfort, she presents to you the accomplishment of the will of God.

Therefore, if it be necessary, relieve your oppressed heart by shedding tears. But at the same time turn yourself towards God ; adore his designs, and humbly submit to them.

He permits you to seek the means of relieving the pains of the person who causes your anxieties and alarms. He permits you even to ask of him his recovery ; but it must be with a perfect resignation to his appointments.

You may say to him : *Lord, all my desire is before thee. My heart is troubled, and my strength has left me.*

In thee, O Lord, have I hoped : thou wilt hear me, O Lord my God, and restore the health of the person for whom I implore thy goodness.

However, *Behold*, I am ready to do thy will, O my God. *I have* no other desire but to do and suffer what is most pleasing to thee. *Ps. xxxvii. 9, 10, 16. Ps. xxxix. 10, 11.*

CHAP. IX.

In what Spirit we must bear the Loss of those Persons who are dear to us.

JESUS died. Oh ! how long must the interval between his death and resurrection have appeared to Mary !

Jesus was no more ! Mary had lost the most amiable and most beloved Son.

The grief of David at the death of Absalom, the affliction of *Rachel* bewailing her children, represent to us but very imperfectly the sorrow of Mary, when she could see and hear Jesus no longer.

But this tender Virgin, who was the most holy and most pious Mother that ever existed, by losing Jesus had lost nothing of her virtue.

Her faith in the future and speedy resurrection of her Son, and her resignation for what God had ordained for his glory, and the salvation of mankind, were her support and consolation.

O you, whom Almighty God afflicts, by taking from you those whom you are so much afraid to lose. Tender mothers, who are bewailing the untimely death of a son in whom you had centered all your love and

hopes ; and you also, who in the prime of life are condemned to a melancholy widowhood by the sudden loss of a beloved spouse, do not remove your eyes from the model which is here offered to you.

Your tears are not to be blamed ; thus Joseph shed tears on the grave of his father Jacob, and St. Augustin at the death of Monica his mother.

But learn from Mary, to make to God the sacrifice of your grief, and how you ought to support it.

Death has just broken off the bands which united you to the person whom you regret. But have you no hopes of seeing him again ? Do you yourself expect to remain always in this world ?

Does not your faith teach you, that true Christians shall be united again together in the bosom of God ; and in a manner infinitely more perfect than they can ever be upon earth ?

One day we shall all rise again. Such is the sweet and consoling hope, which the apostle proposed to the first Christians, as a motive capable of drying up their tears, and making them bear with peace and resignation the loss of their friends.

Be not, therefore, sorrowful even as others who have no hope. 1 Thess. iv. 12.

But, shed tears as a Christian animated with a lively faith, who after having paid a tribute to natural tenderness, soon overcomes himself, and with whom reason resumes her empire.

Our holy and divine religion alone can furnish such solid motives of consolation.

Moreover, did that person whom you love and regret, constitute all your felicity upon earth ?

Did you love him more than God, who has permitted that separation for reasons which you ought to adore ?

That person was dear to you; but the will of God should be still dearer.

Your love undoubtedly was not confined within proper bounds; it was carried too far. Those bitter tears which nothing can dry up, are an evident proof of its excess.

Perhaps the object of your affection was a great impediment to your perfection. Therefore, by taking it away from you, God has treated you with mercy.

Turn this affliction to advantage, by disengaging your heart from every created being, and attaching yourself only to him, *the years of whom shall not fail.* Heb. i. 12.

Or, if you love any one with God, love him only because God permits or commands you to love him; and always sub-

ordinately to the love you owe to God. In short, love God in him.

When our love is actuated by such motives, whatever may be our repugnance and natural sensibility to part with the legitimate object of our affections, we shall always be ready to acquiesce to the will of God, whenever he may be pleased to ordain it.

On the day of the sacrifice, the heart will feel the severity of the stroke, it is true, and tears will be shed. Nevertheless, we shall have no other will but the will of God, and the thought that the loss we suffer is the accomplishment of the will of God, will moderate our tears, and alleviate our grief.

CHAP. X.

How we ought to be strengthened in Faith and Hope, when we meet with such Circumstances as appear most opposite to these Virtues.

THE apostles acknowledged Jesus as the Son of the living God. But notwithstanding, at the time of his passion, betraying their faith, they fled, and abandoned him.

Mary did not imitate their cowardliness and treason; she followed Jesus to Mount

Calvary, where she acknowledged him as her Redeemer, in the full and unshaken expectation of his resurrection, since he had said, that he would rise again from the dead.

After the death of Jesus, his disciples, at least two of them, mentioned by St. Luke, had but a faint hope of seeing the accomplishment of the predictions of their divine Master.

But Mary, without feeling the least doubt and anxiety, persevered to believe and hope firmly that Jesus, whom she had seen dying in ignominy, would rise again with glory, and subject the whole world to his gospel.

That faith of Mary unshaken in these trials, because it was grounded on the immoveable principle of the veracity of God himself, ought to be the model of yours.

If infidels or unbelievers, who are so numerous in the world, do not give you an occasion of confessing openly and defending courageously your faith, the enemy of our salvation will, by suggesting to your mind doubts against revealed truths, endeavour to shake and weaken it.

Be strong in faith. 1 Pet. v. 9. Resist with courage, without examining his suggestions, and *he will fly from you.* James iv. 7.

Reject before the *God of all truth* every doubt which may occur to your mind. By unshaken fidelity to this maxim, your faith will increase and be strengthened.

But it is especially in great adversities that the devil will try to overcloud your mind with darkness, and prompt you to call in question the justice, wisdom, power, and goodness of the God who afflicts you.

Recall then to your mind what Almighty God says in the holy scripture concerning the necessity of sufferings, the glory which will follow them, and the wisdom of his designs, when he sends afflictions to men, and even to his most faithful servants.

In God there is no change. What he said shall always remain true. His words are as immutable as himself.

Thus, in whatever state of temptation, grief, bitterness, aridity, and desolation, you may find yourself, propose for your rule, the generous hope and perseverance of Mary.

Instead of sinking under the weight of your trials, let your soul be supported by an unshaken confidence in the fidelity of God to his promises.

Hope against hope itself, as Abraham did, most fully knowing, that whatsoever

God has promised, he is able also to perform.
Rom. iv. 18, 21.

He is your Creator, and has declared to you, that he will never forget his own work, but always watch over you.

He is the sovereign Lord of all things. Nothing is hard or impossible to him.

God is the support of his servants, it is impossible to entertain the least doubt of it, if we will but reflect ever so little on his promises, and the conditions of his covenant.

Whatever may be your distressed and painful situation, can your hope be better grounded than on divine Providence and infinite Goodness?

How many times does he assure you by his prophets and his apostles, that he hears, supports, protects, consoles, and saves whomsoever hopes in him.

Therefore implore confidently his assistance : be fully persuaded that his mercy, either will deliver you out of your distressed situation, or that he will support and protect you, for the advancement of his glory, and for your salvation.

Sometimes God permits that we should be reduced to the greatest extremities, in order to show the admirable effects of a

strong and lively hope in him, and to signalize the paternal love which he bears to us.

Virtue severely tried, gains the love of God much better than tender devotion.

CHAP. XI.

That Consolation comes after Troubles; however, one ought to learn how to suffer without Consolation.

DISCIPLE.

REJOICE, Queen of Heaven, that the divine Son, whom thou didst bear in thy chaste womb, and whose death cost thee so many tears, is risen again from the dead, as he had promised.

Enjoy in peace the sweet and intimate communications which he will have with thee, in the day of his ascension to heaven.

It is just that thou shouldst partake more than any other in the benefit of his resurrection, since thou hadst a greater share in the ignominies of his passion.

What a joy, what an unspeakable consolation for me, to behold him in all the splendor and glory of his divinity.

Then all thy tears were dried up, the

deep wound of thy heart was healed, and all thy sufferings disappeared like a dream.

MARY.

My son, God is with his friends *in their troubles*, (Ps. xc. 15.) to fortify them by the unction of his grace; and when he pleases, he causes consolation to come after grief, and sweetness succeed to bitterness.

The Royal Prophet experienced it. *O Lord*, said he, *according to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, thy comforts have given joy to my soul.* Ps. xciii. 19.

If the Lord, says he again, abandons for a time, the just to the storm, he shall *sustain him, nor shall he suffer him to waver for ever.* Ps. liv. 23.

DISCIPLE.

Thou knowest, O blessed Virgin, all the troubles with which I have been so long afflicted, and that I have met with no comfort.

MARY.

My son, because you do not feel any sensible consolation, you must not say that you are entirely destitute of all consolation.

For is it not a very solid comfort, to reflect, that by your tribulations you bear some resemblance with Jesus, and thus are put in the safest road to heaven.

God has his designs, when he leaves his

servants in sufferings, without giving them those consolations which you mention.

There are saints who have passed through the most barren wildernesses, without tasting one single drop of that heavenly dew.

The friends of Jesus ought not to resemble the friends of the world, who are willing to take some trouble for their friends, only when they hope to be soon rewarded.

Commit all to Providence. If consolations be necessary or advantageous, you shall never be without them.

In your sufferings, you have the grace of Jesus for your support ; *and his grace is sufficient for you.* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

The saints whom Jesus left destitute of sensible consolations in their sufferings, found relief and support in that very privation, because they knew, that thereby their love became more disinterested and pure.

Wait awhile, for the effect of the promises which Jesus has made to those who suffer.

He prepares for you in heaven the abundance of all enjoyments and blessings.

Moreover, my son, can a sinner like you ask to be comforted ?

It ought to be a consolation for a penitent, to think that, by suffering without consolation, he atones more securely for his sins.

CHAP. XII.

That our Affections ought to be directed to Heaven.

AFTER thou hadst left the earth, O my Saviour, all the thoughts, desires, and affections of thy blessed Mother, tended to heaven.

She envied the situation of the angels, and of the saints, who enjoyed the presence of her beloved. She conjured them to tell thee, that she was pining away for being absent from thee.

Could the world offer any thing pleasing to her heart? When Jesus alone is loved, we wish and seek only for Jesus.

Yes, O my most amiable Saviour, he who considers as his most precious treasure upon earth, thy grace and friendship, has no other real grief but to be at a distance from thee, and deprived of the sweetness of thy divine presence.

Till my death, which alone can put an end to my languors, I will, after the example of Mary, continually send up to thee, O my Jesus, the aspirations of a heart which longs after thee, calls for thee, and shall always find thee too late.

Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest with thee. Ps. liv. 7.

How long shall I be deprived of that happiness? When shall I hear the Beloved of my soul saying to me: *Behold I come*, to deliver thee from all thy miseries? Apoc. xxii. 21.

The Spouse says, Come. Her sighs and wishes incessantly say: *Amen: come, Lord Jesus.* Apoc. v. 17, 20.

My heart hath said to thee: My face hath sought thee: thy face, O Lord, will I still seek. Ps. xxvi. 8.

I feel that I am created for something noble and great. And nevertheless, I am only crawling in this life. O Jesus, I am made for thee, and to possess thee eternally!

Inexhaustible treasure of unspeakable riches, where thou art, nothing is wanting. O Eternal Light! where thou art not, every thing appears to be buried in darkness.

Were I to possess all created goods, I should still remain poor and unhappy, if I could not say: *Jesus is my all.*

Jesus is my all. It is a word which says and includes every thing. But it is a word well understood only by those who love Jesus above all things.

Remove from my heart every affection

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of which thy grace is not the principal. O grace of my Jesus, incessantly kindle in my heart the sacred fire of his love. May I be burnt and consumed with it !

O, my Saviour ! if I cannot see thee as soon as I wish for, I will at least endeavour to compensate this great privation, by loving thee.

My love, which inspires me with a confident hope of possessing thee one day, will be my support in this vale of tears, and my consolation in this land of exile.

CHAP. XIII.

What we ought to do, to draw upon us the Effusions of the Holy Ghost.

JESUS had promised to send down the Holy Ghost to his apostles. To receive him, Mary went up to the house where the apostles, the relatives of Jesus, and the holy women who had followed him in his journeys, were assembled.

It was in retreat, in silence, and the exercises of prayer, that they disposed themselves to receive the sanctifying spirit.

All gathered together in the same place, and united in heart and soul. They formed the most ardent desires to hasten this coming.

Such good dispositions were very proper to receive the God of charity. He likes to communicate himself to fervent souls, who seek him far from the bustle and noise of the world, and who address ardent and sincere vows to him.

Mary, above all, most efficaciously solicited the coming of this Divine Spirit by the fervour of her prayers, the purity of her desires, and the longing ardour of her love.

All those who were in the same expectation, must have felt themselves most powerfully animated by the presence and example of that Blessed Virgin.

She was already *full of grace*; but the Holy Ghost wishing to enrich his spouse more and more with his gifts, she was in the holy dispositions which he required of her.

How abundant soever the effusions of the Holy Ghost may be upon a soul, she is always capable of receiving more.

Because she was faithful, she received many graces. If she persevere in her fidelity, God still reserves for her a greater number of favours. For the treasure of the gifts of God is never exhausted.

He who could know, as Mary did, the excellences of these gifts, would see nothing

estimable upon earth. These gifts would be the sole object of his desires.

What shall we think of the indifference of the generality of Christians on that regard; and of their coldness for obtaining that which is so worthy of their ambition?

Are they equally indifferent for the favours of the world? Alas! it is quite the reverse; to obtain them, they have recourse to all the means in their power: in short, they leave nothing undone, which can make them succeed in their undertakings and projects.

Whilst they consider indigence and poverty as disgraceful, they are not ashamed of their spiritual need and nakedness.

O Divine Spirit! make me know my extreme wants and poverty! Author of all grace, and *every perfect gift*, thou alone canst communicate to me true riches.

I acknowledge, with sorrow, that my resistance to thy inspirations renders me entirely unworthy of thy favours.

But to obtain them, I unite my prayers with those of the Blessed Virgin. Then they will be acceptable to thee, and render thee propitious to my humble and earnest request.

I implore the help of this Blessed Virgin herself, who is so powerful with thee;

and conjure her to intercede in my behalf.

Vouchsafe, O holy Virgin, and Spouse of the Holy Ghost, to ask of him for me the Spirit of Wisdom, that relishing the goods of heaven, I may feel repugnance and disgust only for the false goods and vain advantages of the world.

The spirit of knowledge and understanding, that I may be enlightened in this region of darkness, know the ways of God, and be guided by the light of the Eternal Truth.

The spirit of counsel and discretion, that I may discover and avoid the snares laid against me by the enemies of my salvation and perfection.

The spirit of fortitude and courage, that I may overcome my weakness, subdue my passions, resist the torrent of bad example, trample under foot the pomps of the world, despise human respect, and be strengthened in the practice of virtue, against the inconstancy of my own heart.

The spirit of godliness and fear of the Lord, that I may be directed and animated in the service of God, in the observance of his law, and in the worship which I owe and am obliged to offer to him, as to my Cre-

ator, my Father, my Judge, and my Saviour.

CHAP. XIV.

That every one, according to his State of Life, ought to be animated with Zeal for the Glory of God, and the Salvation of Souls.

DISCIPLE.

HOW much pleased am I, O Blessed Virgin, when I consider thee in the midst of that little flock of fervent souls, who were formed to all virtue by the care and preaching of the apostles.

In thee they had the most zealous and tender Mother. Who can say, how useful thou wast to the new Church of Jerusalem?

And when the apostles parted, to make the conquest of the world to the religion of Jesus, thy wishes and prayers attended them wherever they went, and helped them in their hard labours to encounter and overcome all obstacles and dangers.

In order to entertain faith and virtue in the primitive Christians amongst whom thou wast pleased to live, thy zeal applied itself especially to gain their confidence.

And could it have been possible that thou shouldest not have obtained it immediately from all those who had the happiness of approaching thee!

They admired with astonishment the affection which the Mother of Jesus had for them, the free and easy access thou gavest them, and even the great regard and attention thou hadst for their persons, and thy tender care to provide for all their wants and necessities.

If thy super-eminent dignity, thy virtues, and the divine and infused lights with which thou wast replenished, inspired the greatest respect; thy unspeakable goodness gained all hearts.

One single look of thine was sufficient to give comfort to the most afflicted soul.

Thy words animated with a divine fire, and supported by a supernatural strength, melted into tenderness the most obdurate hearts, warmed with zeal the most tepid, and inspired the most fervent with a fresh ardour to run in the ways of perfection.

To how many sick, didst not thou, very likely, procure the restoration of the health both of their bodies and of their souls?

If thy zeal had to bewail the persecutions which the Christians suffered at Jerusalem, thou hadst also many consolations, in be-

holding the rapid success of the apostles among the Gentiles, and especially of St. John at Ephesus, where thou hadst been obliged to take a refuge with him for some years.

In order to conceive what must have been the transports of thy joy at the sight of the progress of the Gospel, we have but to reflect on thy zeal and ardent concern for whatever might be conducive to the advancement of the glory of God.

Queen of apostles, obtain for me a spark of the sacred fire which inflamed thy heart for the glory of Jesus, and the grace of making him be glorified and loved by all men.

MARY.

O my son, how pleased am I to see you forming such a desire. Zeal for the advancement of the glory of God, is inseparable from the character of a Christian.

It is equally obligatory to a Christian as charity, of which it is a necessary consequence.

Some consider zeal as the particular and distinctive characteristic of apostolical men. But it belongs to every state of life.

There is none, in which it is impossible, and consequently in which it is not a duty :

in every circumstance we may, and therefore we ought to exercise our zeal, either by a seasonable advice, or comfort given to the afflicted; and especially by prayer.

The conversion of a sinner, is sometimes the effect of the desires and prayers, which a fervent soul unknown to the world, has poured forth before the throne of the Lord in the secret of her solitude.

In a moment of fervour and tender piety, you wish to be among idolaters to labour to their conversion. Those desires are holy, but necessarily inefficacious. You seek at a great distance what you have near at hand.

To relieve and comfort the sick and the poor, to teach the ignorant, to bring up children in piety, to make servants fulfil exactly their duties, to edify your neighbour by good works: this is the field in which your heavenly Father has commanded you to labour for his glory.

Is it possible to be indifferent to the salvation of our neighbour, when we reflect that Jesus gave for him his blood and life.

Many Christians shall be punished for having neglected the good which it was in their power to do. They shall be punished for the sins of those which they could and should have prevented.

If you love God, my son, can you ever shew him your love better than by causing him to be praised, honoured, and loved by his creatures.

There are but few who serve God with fidelity. As for you, not only glorify him, but use every means in your power to cause him to be glorified by others.

CHAP. XV.

In what a Christian Soul ought to seek her Comfort, in the Sufferings she has to endure in the Practice of Virtue, and in the Affliction she feels at the Duration of her Exile upon Earth.

DISCIPLE.

WHAT was thy consolation, O holy Mother of God, during the persecutions of the primitive Church, and of which thou wast not thyself exempt?

MARY.

I, as well as the other persecuted Christians, found our consolation, my son, in the remembrance of the sufferings of Jesus, which the glory of his resurrection and ascension never made me forget.

I visited the holy places, where the mysteries of our redemption had been perform-

ed : especially Mount Calvary, where I reflected on the virtues and benefits of Jesus, and on the ingratitude and insensibility of those who had crucified him.

When the Mother of Jesus thought on the cruel manner with which he had been treated by men, could she expect a quiet and tranquil life? Could she even desire it?

Consider also, my son, and often think on the conduct of the world towards your Saviour. You will find in these thoughts and considerations, a very great resource in the troubles and afflictions you may have to suffer from the world, because you are faithful to God.

Did not Jesus walk continually for your sake in a road where he met nothing but fatigues, contempt, outrages, and persecutions? When he called you to follow him, he forewarned you of what you would have to suffer for his sake.

It is to be feared that a virtue which suffers neither contradictions nor troubles from the world is not true virtue.

The lot of the most beloved servants of God, is to be much hated by the world.

But what a source of patience, and even of comfort, to be able to say : *The servant is not greater than his Lord : if they have*

persecuted Jesus, they will also persecute me? John xv. 20.

I suffer like Jesus, and with Jesus. He is my model: and he will be my strength and my reward.

DISCIPLE.

Queen of Saints, another kind of sufferings was reserved for thee; and thou wast destined to endure them more lively than any other saint.

For, in what state of languor wast not thou reduced by thy holy impatience to be united again to thy Son in heaven?

Jesus was reigning in all the effulgence of his glory, and his Mother was still in exile. It was for thee a continual death not to die, and thus to remain separated from the only object of thy tender love.

But the happiness which thou didst enjoy of daily receiving within thy pure soul Jesus by communion, was for thee an abundant source of consolation and delight.

St. Luke tells us in the Acts of the Apostles, (chap. ii. 42.) *that the faithful were persevering in the communication of the breaking of bread.* Therefore as thy love far surpassed theirs, there is no doubt that thou didst receive every day his most adorable body and blood.

MARY.

Truly, my son, it was from my communions that I daily derived a new strength, to bear with the length and sadness of my exile.

O sweet and delightful hours, when I possessed again in my soul him whom I had borne in my womb for nine months, and with whom I had enjoyed the happiness of living for so many years !

It is then, that with an ardour always more tender and lively, I conjured the beloved of my soul to shew me the place of his repose and triumphs. *Cant. i. 7.*

It is then that I entreated him to hasten the moment, when possessing him without clouds, I should enjoy the happiness of his presence during the whole eternity.

I adored the will of God, and I preferred the accomplishment of his designs to the completion of my most earnest desires. But communion was my comfort and strength in the continual struggles I had to bear.

For, if I felt the most ardent longings in my soul towards heaven, my submission moderated at the same time, and contained within due bounds the impetuosity of my transports.

Oh, my son, can true love be ever satis-

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fied during the absence of the Beloved ! Can we say with any truth, that we sincerely love God, when we ask him every day that *his kingdom come*, and yet never desire its coming.

A Christian who loves Jesus with all his heart, is a Christian who, notwithstanding his natural horror of death, is nevertheless ready to give up all that is dearest to him in the world, to go and be united with Jesus in heaven.

As long as he remains at a distance from his God, he languishes, groans and sighs. *He will be satisfied, only when thy glory shall appear.* Ps. xvi. 17. 5

In the incessant transport of his love, he cries out with the Royal Prophet : *When shall my banishment be at an end, when shall I come and appear before the face of God ?* Ps. xli. 3.

That delay is a kind of torment for a true Christian ; it is the most painful trial : and he finds no relief but in his submission ; and in the reception of the blessed eucharist, as often as he can obtain leave from him, who knows his interior dispositions, and whom Almighty God has appointed the guide of his soul.

Under the sacramental veils, his Beloved, as really present as he is in heaven, visits

and speaks to him. Both their hearts are united in the most intimate manner.

Ere long the veil shall be drawn off, *and we shall see Jesus as he is.* John iii. 2.

CHAP. XVI.

Of Preparation for Death.

THE whole life of the blessed Virgin was a continual preparation for death.

How many merits did she not acquire in a life of more than sixty years, entirely devoted to the exercises of divine love?

It daily increased, and was become so perfect at the moment of her death, that she died less from a decay of nature, than from an excessive transport of love.

Imitate this glorious Virgin, by dedicating to God all the instants of a life, which he has given you, not to be rich, honoured, praised, and esteemed upon earth, but to serve him, and obtain in his service an immortal crown.

Were you to possess all the riches of the world; were you to reign over all the nations of the universe, what will remain to you at the moment of your death? You must leave all, and all must leave you.

At the moment of death nothing remains,

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but the good which has been done for God during life:

Become wise at the expence of so many Christians, who think of death only at the end of their life, and die with the acute and unavailing regret of having given only a few days, and perhaps a few hours, to the important affair of their salvation, an affair for the success of which it is not too much to work and labour all the time of our life.

The number of fools is infinite. Eccles. i. 15. Most men are like a traveller who would put off preparing himself for a journey till the moment of setting off.

They are like a criminal who would insult his judge, at the very instant of his being judged; or who would occupy his mind with thoughts of pleasure and projects of amusement, when they are going to drag him to the place of execution.

Live with this thought continually present to your mind, that your life shall soon end; and you will never be attached to it.

Pass your life with thinking on the eternity which shall follow it, and you will live in a Christian manner.

Many people remove from their minds the thought of death, because they fear it. But the surest means to remove our fears,

is to think on it frequently, and to prepare ourselves continually for that awful moment.

A holy life sweetens the thought of death: and the thought of death is conducive to a holy life.

Beware, lest the thing that causes you to rejoice to-day should give you grief at the moment of your death. In order to be consoled and happy at your death, make virtue the chief occupation, and all the pleasure of your life.

Were you to die to-day or to-morrow, are you ready to appear before your judge? What penance have you made? What merits have you acquired?

Turn to the best advantage the few days which are left to you. Time past cannot be recalled, but it may be repaired. And it is for that intention that God prolongs your life.

Whether you still have many years to live, or you will die in a few days, is unknown to you. At least learn that you shall die, says the Lord, *at the moment you least expect it.*

Since we may die at every instant of the day, therefore we must always be ready, by penetrating ourselves with the thought that death will decide our eternity.

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Beg of the Queen of Heaven to thank Almighty God for the time which he still grants you to prepare yourself for death, and conjure her to obtain for you the grace of making a holy use of it.

You are sure not to be surprised by death if you perform all your actions, as if each one were to be the last of your life.

In order to die holily, we must die in faith, hope, and charity. Therefore make frequent acts of these virtues during your life, and let them be your chief preparation at the moment of your death.

And remember, that then we shall scarcely know how to make and pronounce these acts, if we have not habituated ourselves to make them during our life time.

CHAP. XVII.

On the Happiness of the Death of the Just.

DISCIPLE.

TO form to ourselves some faint idea of the unspeakable delights with which Jesus penetrated thy pure soul at the moment of its leaving its corporal abode, it would be necessary, O Mary, to comprehend the love which he had for thee.

And to conceive in some degree the holy

and lively transports of thy heart, at the approach of the happy moment, which was to accomplish thy re-union with the only object of thy love, it would be requisite that we could feel some spark of that supernatural affection which thou hadst for Jesus.

Thou didst breathe thy last breath with as much tranquillity as if thou hadst fallen into the most pleasant sleep.

And, indeed, what could be at her death the fears of a virgin, who never loved any thing but God, and esteemed nothing but the things of God? Who all the time of her sojourning upon earth, put all her felicity in God, and had no other ambition but to please him?

MARY.

My son, if you wish at your leaving this terrestrial abode, to feel the comforts and delights of a happy death, do not settle your happiness in the goods of the world.

May I die the death of the just! (Num. xxiii. 10.) is a prayer made by all Christians. But few there are as sincerely disengaged from the enjoyments of this world as the just were.

The generality of men, though created for heaven, are only occupied with the things of the earth. Hence, when forced

to leave the earth, what hope can they have to go to heaven.

Jesus gives a share in his felicity only to those whose whole felicity was to love him.

How desirable and consoling is the situation of a just man, who at the end of a career filled with temptations and sufferings, enjoys the sweets of a calm and tranquil conscience !

Whilst the sinner at his death cannot consider Jesus but as an inexorable judge, the just man beholds in him the most tender and indulgent father.

It is true, that during his life he sinned, and even perhaps often and grievously : but he did not wait for the time of his death to do penance.

Moreover, the sacrifice which he makes of his life, a sacrifice which unites him in spirit with that of the cross, affords him the most solid grounds of confidence and hope in the mercies of his God.

From the first day he began to dedicate himself to his service, he constantly fought in order to remain faithful to him ; therefore, what can he expect but *a crown of justice* ?

How sweet and comfortable will it be for thee, O my son, to be able to say after the example of Jesus, *I leave the world and I*

go to the Father. John xvi: 28. I go to take possession of the inheritance which he has destined for me.

Father, I have glorified thee on the earth : I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, glorify thou me, and give me a share in that glory which thou wast pleased to promise to me.

When we have always kept our lamps trimmed up, we are not afraid to hear these words : *Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him.* Matt. xxv. 6.

I never thought, said a pious soul in her last moments, that it was so sweet to die.

It is especially at their death that Jesus makes those who love him feel how amiable and merciful he is.

When Jesus has been during life the only object of the affections of a soul, he does not permit that she should be dejected or degenerate from her fervour at the moment of death.

On the contrary, it renders it similar to a light, which at the instant of its being put out, casts forth a greater brilliancy and splendour.

Let, therefore, your life be animated with sincere love, and your death shall be attended with fervent love.

DISCIPLE.

My most indulgent Mother, the most precious of all graces which I can wish for, and obtain from God, is to die in sentiments conformable to thine.

After having lived, in love, from love, and for love, to die out of love, oh ! what longing desires, and pantings of heart, does such a kind of death excite in the souls of the just !

It would be the accomplishment of all my wishes. But can a sinner like me be allowed to carry them so far ?

At least I beg of thee to obtain from Jesus, who is all love for me, the grace of participating in some degree, in the comforts of that death from love.

To die, in loving Jesus, so that our last breath may be an act of love, is a happiness far transcending all the most ardent desires which a loving heart can ever form !

O my Jesus, my Saviour, and my God, grant me that great favour : I beg it of thee through that infinite love, which thy most adorable heart bearest to me, and through that more than human tenderness which the heart of thy holy mother always felt for thee.

CHAP. XVIII.

Of the holy Desire of Death.

DISCIPLE.

ALL the time which thou didst remain upon earth after the ascension of Jesus, was for thee, O blessed Virgin, a time of privation and desires.

Thou wast consumed by degrees in the pure flames of divine love. But it was too slowly for thee.

As for me, alas ! I cling too much to the earth, to conceive well that state of fervour and ardent desires, in which thou lovedst to the last moment of thy life.

If I can scarcely comprehend the consuming love of David, complaining that *his exile was still prolonged*, and of St. Paul amorously crying out, *that he wished to be dissolved, and to be with Christ*, what ought I to think of thine ?

If my heart had but a spark of that furnace of love, which was continually burning in thee, how contemptible would the earth appear to me ! and how ardently should I wish for the felicity of heaven !

Can a heart animated with the love of

Jesus, desire any thing upon earth but the possession of Jesus himself ?

Were I to be offered all the pleasures and advantages of the world, to make me the happiest of men, should I not always say : *To be dissolved, and to be with Christ, is a thing by far the better.* Philip. i. 23.

What are all the goods of the world, for him who knows and loves Jesus ? Jesus alone is the sovereign Good, and in him is contained all imaginable bliss.

To be with Jesus, this good and indulgent parent, this tender friend, generous and bountiful Master, this amiable and merciful Saviour !

To be with Jesus, to enjoy his sweet presence, to love him with my whole heart, and to love him for ever ! O Queen of Heaven ! can the world, and all therein, offer me any felicity or enjoyment comparable to *this* thee ?

Oh, may the happy mansions which he inhabits, and where he reigns, be soon opened to me ! Jesus alone can fully satisfy my desires.

It is true, that if I desire to die in order to be united to him, I also dread to appear before the tribunal of my Judge.

But I hope in the mercies of my Re-

deemer, and I trust also in thy powerful intercession, O my most tender Mother.

MARY.

Yes, my son, entertain a firm and confident hope. If Jesus is a formidable Judge, he is also a most merciful Saviour.

Preserve the fear of his judgments : but let hope and love always predominate over fear.

Fear, but love more than you fear. You cannot better testify your love to Jesus, than by wishing to behold him soon in his glory, and to leave this earth, where it is so easy to be seduced from the allegiance which we owe to him.

If you be animated with such sentiments, be assured, my son, that God will protect and defend you against all your enemies at the moment of death.

I will also implore his assistance for you. For at all times, and particularly at the hour of death, I watch with a truly maternal tenderness over my beloved children.



CHAP. XIX.

Of the Love of God.

DISCIPLE.

THOU didst expire therefore from love,
O Virgin Mother ; at last Divine Love
consumed the victim which he had been
preparing for himself from so many ages.

A soul so generous for God, so obedient
to his will, so faithful and so holy, could
not be separated from its body in any other
manner.

Far from wondering at seeing thee ex-
pire from love, I am surprised that the in-
tensity, liveliness, and continuation of the
transports of thy love, did not sooner ter-
minate thy existence.

Formed pure and undefiled by the hands
of the Creator, as soon as thou didst begin
to know him, his divine love was thy choice,
and thy only end. And thy chaste heart
was kept alive only by the ardour of the
very flames which penetrated it.

During thy whole life, love was the sole
object of all thy affections and desires,
thoughts, sentiments, words, actions, fear,
hope, joy, grief, all in thee tended and re-
ferred to love.

The more we know the infinite perfections of God, the more amiable we find him, and the more we love him. But among all pure creatures, who ever knew him better than thee?

Choirs of saints, you were animated with that love; but Mary had the very plenitude of love. Seraphims you are burning with love: but when compared with that furnace of love, yours is but a spark.

O thou, *the Mother of fair love*, (Eccl. xxiv. 24.) we should love like thee, that we might explain the extent of thy love.

Thou didst die from love! and we live without it! and even we labour not to procure to ourselves the happiness of dying at least in love!

MARY.

What are you doing in this world, my son, if you are not occupied with the only thing for which God has placed you upon earth? God created you to love him.

O unaccountable infatuation of men, who give their love to every object, except to that, which alone can make them happy here and hereafter; now and throughout all eternity!

Shake off, my son, that shameful cowardliness which stops you in the ways of di-

vine love. Scarcely have you begun to walk a few steps therein.

You are afraid of sacrifices : but there is no love without pains. A love which declares itself only when there is nothing to suffer for the Beloved, is a very questionable love.

Love God above all things; love him with an undaunted courage. Rather than to lose his grace, be ready to sacrifice all: and be resolved to undergo all sorts of trials, and suffer all calamities, rather than to commit the least sin.

If once you let your heart be conquered by divine love, nothing will appear impossible to you. Love knows no difficulties. *Love is strong as death.* Cant. viii. 6.

You have vices to correct, and passions to subdue. Love, and the work will be soon accomplished.

Love only what God loves. And when you love any other object with him, love it as he has ordained. In every thing we love, nothing ought to please us but what is pleasing to God.

True love is perfectly indifferent for every thing which cannot be referred to God, and is not God. It seeks for him alone, and in all things has no other will but his.

You will be happy, my son, under the empire of divine love. The longer you live under its sweet laws, the more you will be delighted to be subject to them. I confess that you will have to suffer; and that sometimes they will appear to you as a yoke and a burden: but that yoke shall be sweet, and that burden light. Nay, you would even be sorry not to have to bear them.

Therefore, let divine love be your treasure. In the greatest indigence and need, you will find in it an abundant compensation for the loss of all temporal blessings.

It is especially at the hour of death that you will feel how fortunate it has been for you, to have been directed by its holy impressions.

Death, that time of trouble and alarm for the generality of men, is for the Christian animated with divine love, the time of consolations and of the sweetest peace.

Therefore give yourself up to divine love. Let it be your guide, your soul, the main spring of all your actions. In short, endeavour to do every thing from love.

DISCIPLE.

Whilst I listen to thee, O blessed Virgin, I feel an ardent desire arising in me, to acknowledge henceforth no other master but divine love.

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Oh! since my heart may yet please my God, and even since he cannot be pleased but with the gift of my heart; it is no longer mine, it belongs no longer to creatures: I give it him, and consecrate it entirely to his service.

This my desire is an effect of his grace, which thou hast obtained for me. For without him and his assistance I cannot love him.

And since without his assistance I cannot love him as I ought, nor persevere in his love, pray continually for me, that I may be constantly animated with that love.

However, I tremble, because I know my inconstancy: but thou, who knowest it also, and so justly reproachest me with it, vouchsafe to be, through thy protection, my help and support.

Fly far from me, contemptible and perishable objects of this world, you are the death of my heart. For is it to live, O my God, to be without thy love?

Let creatures complain as much as they please that I forsake them, I will not mind it; for under the false appearances of kindness and concern, they deprive me of my happiness. I will pursue them with disdain and contempt, till they cease putting obstacles to, and thwarting my love.

O blessed Virgin, perfect model of love, by imitating thy life upon earth, and that which thou livest with the saints in the celestial mansions, my heart will become like heaven; I will love my God alone, with a confident hope of dying in his love, and loving him throughout all eternity.

CHAP. XX.

That the Glory of Heaven is promised to us as a Reward.

THOU art now, O blessed Virgin, in full possession of the glory which the supreme Lord of all things prepared as a reward for thy virtues and merits.

Oh! when shall I, in the company of all the angels and saints, behold and admire the splendour of thy glory!

When shall I join their heavenly concerts, and celebrate with them thy merits and praises?

The high dignity to which thou art raised in heaven, is not merely a favour which Jesus bestowed upon his beloved Mother: it is also a reward of thy fidelity in corresponding with the choice and designs of God.

No, thou wouldst have never obtained

it, if thy divine maternity had been a barren and useless title in thee; and if by a faithful imitation of his virtues thou hadst not borne the most perfect resemblance with thy divine Son.

Thy holy life was thy chief merit in the eyes of the God of all holiness.

MARY.

My son, you cannot enter into heaven but after having sanctified yourself upon earth.

It is neither to rank, riches, and talents, that God grants a place in the celestial abodes: but to the holy use which we have made of these gifts, and to the merits which we have acquired during life.

There is no respect of persons with God. He will render to every man according to his works. Eph. vi. 9.—Rom. ii. 6.

The souls the most elevated in heaven, were the most virtuous upon earth.

The judgments of God are widely different from those of men. They often decide from outward appearances. He alone is the just judge of merit and virtue.

He reserves great rewards for you: but he would have you deserve them. And that you may obtain them, he supplies you with help and graces; and if you improve them, he will accomplish all his promises.

It is true, that in crowning you, he will crown his own gifts; but at the same time he will reward your virtues and good works.

He keeps an exact account of all that is done for him. Were it but *a glass of cold water* given for his sake, this glass of cold water will have its reward.

What a consolation for you, my son, to work for a master so good, so liberal, and so magnificent.

The world, which the generality of men seek so much to please, rewards but very ill its favourites and lovers: but you can say, *I know whom I have believed, and I am certain that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him.* 2 Tim. i. 2.

I expect of his mercy an eternal crown, the brilliancy and splendour of which will depend on my fervour, and constant fidelity and attention to please him.

Now examine yourself; and consider what you do to gain and obtain the high prize which is proposed to you.

Where are your victories and good works? What virtues do you practise? That is to say, what merits have you to present before the tribunal of the Almighty?

DISCIPLE.

Alas ! I cannot reflect, without the greatest confusion, on the little I have done till now, to deserve the rewards of heaven.

MARY.

Do not be discouraged, my son ; it is still in your power to obtain them. Grace speaks to you, and solicits and presses you to begin. Be faithful to listen to its voice.

Pray, weep, labour, suffer, sacrifice, and walk on the footsteps of the saints. And you will, like them, obtain an eternal felicity.

DISCIPLE.

Under thy protection, I will endeavour to rouse myself from that state of sloth and languor in which I have lived till now. With thy help, I will therefore exert myself to the utmost to compensate by my fervour the unprofitable years which I have to bewail and regret.

Vigilance, tears, humility, mortification, patience in bearing tribulations, in short all the trials and calamities of this mortal life, would be superabundantly recompensed only by a few moments of that felicity, which the saints enjoy in the bosom of the Deity.

But above all, does not the master whom I serve, himself merit that I should

endeavour and seek constantly to please him?

Oh! yes, I will serve him, and do every thing in my power to please him, and still more for his own sake than for the infinite happiness with which he has promised to reward my fidelity.

THE END OF THE THIRD BOOK.



THE

Imitation of the Blessed Virgin.

BOOK IV.

IN WHICH ARE EXPLAINED THE SENTIMENTS OF RESPECT, VENERATION, ZEAL, LOVE, TENDERNESS, AND CONFIDENCE WITH WHICH WE OUGHT TO BE PENETRATED FOR THE BLESSED VIRGIN.



CHAP. I.

Of the Grandeurs of the Mother of God.

DISCIPLE.

WHATEVER may be our sentiments concerning thee, O blessed Virgin, they will never be equal to thy grandeurs; which will always be far above our highest conceptions.

To speak worthily of thee, it would be necessary for us to comprehend, who is next

to God, the greatest being, and the most admirable in grace, perfection, power, and glory.

It is of thee that Jesus is born. The gospel which teaches us this important truth, says no more in thy praise. Indeed, these few words contain the highest praises which can ever be bestowed upon thee.

Thy dignity of Mother of God, establishes between thee and the Supreme Being a sort of affinity. By thy divine maternity, thou hast approached the Almighty as near as can possibly be conceived.

That dignity made thee contract with God an alliance, by the virtue of which thou becamest the Daughter of the Father, the Mother of the Son, and the Spouse of the Holy Ghost, in that unspeakable manner which is proper to thee alone.

By the virtue of that alliance, thou art truly become the Queen of the World, as well as the Queen of Heaven.

To say that Jesus is born of Mary, is to say that Mary sees but God alone above her.

O Virgin Mother, the highest in grace and perfection among the angels, can only be put in the number of thy servants; the distance between him and thee always remaining so very great.

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I appreciate thy grandeurs by those of thy Son, which are necessarily reflected on thee. By the excellence of the Son, we know the Mother.

I comprehend without difficulty, that the august quality of Mother of Jesus, is the inexhaustible source of all the graces, prerogatives, and privileges with which it pleased Almighty God to adorn thee, and distinguish thee from all his other creatures.

I comprehend, that in that quality thou hast a sort of right over all the treasures of grace, of which Jesus is the supreme Lord and Disposer; and that thy intercession with him, is powerful far beyond our contracted ideas.

I comprehend that certain general laws, which are the punishment of original sin, could not concern the Mother of my God, that Mother so amiable, so much beloved, and destined from all eternity to bear this supereminent title.

I comprehend that God, having taken from thy pure flesh and blood, that body with which he has redeemed us; thou hast deserved to bear the title of *Mediatrix of Salvation*, without however derogating in the least from the incommunicable quality of our sole and only Mediator, which in its

proper sense belongs to thy divine Son alone.

But who can comprehend the elevation of thy dignity? All is so great and eminent in the Mother of God, that the seraphims themselves can only admire it.

In thy visit to Elizabeth, it was not in thy power to express all that God had done for thee, but in these few words: *He that is mighty hath done great things to me.* Luke i. 49.

The Catholic Church herself, notwithstanding her love for thee, and her zeal for the advancement of thy glory, is compelled to declare, that when she considers *that thou hast borne in thy womb Him whom the heavens cannot contain, she cannot find expressions sublime enough to celebrate duly thy praise.*

O admirable Mother of my God, I feel myself in thy presence penetrated to the very bottom of my heart with the sentiments of the most profound and sweet admiration.

At the sight of thy elevation and grandeurs, I am seized with a religious fear and respect, which hold me, as it were, annihilated at thy feet.

CHAP. II.

Of the Resemblance there is between Mary and Jesus.

DISCIPLE.

WHEN I consider, O blessed Virgin, thy nativity, thy life, thy death, and thy glory in heaven, I find between Jesus and thee, traits of resemblance which delight me more than I can express.

In the eternal decrees of Providence, thou wast united to thy divine Son. *The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, said the Eternal Wisdom in the holy scriptures, before he made any thing, from the beginning, from all eternity. Before he balanced the foundations of the earth, I was with him forming all things.* Prov. viii. 22, 29, 30. These sublime expressions belong properly to Jesus, but the Catholic Church applies them to thee.

How many promises and prophecies, figures and symbols in the old law, which foretelling Jesus, referred also to thee.

Jesus was impeccable by his nature; and thou having been delivered through a peculiar grace from the stain of original sin, hast been also exempt from actual sin, nay from the slightest imperfection.

Confined for nine months in thy chaste womb, the Word of God was, in some sense, but one and the same thing with thee.

During his infancy, he was fed with thy own substance, which became his.

In his hidden life he passed thirty years with thee. Habitation, fortune, exercises, sentiments, all was common between you both.

In his evangelical life, thou didst partake as far as possible, in all his labours; and in his suffering life, thou hadst also a share in his ignominies.

Jesus was the most humble, charitable, patient, and meekest of men. Thou also wast the most patient, charitable, humble, and meekest of women.

In Jesus were united all divine and created perfections, and in thee all ^{increased} accomplishments; but in such a supereminent manner, that all the perfections of angels and saints disappear before thine.

Thou wast, like Jesus, preserved incorruptible in the grave. Jesus, by his own power, rose again from the dead; and thou, by a special privilege which he granted to thee,

Thou ascendedst like him into heaven, both in body and soul. He sitteth at the

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right-hand of the Father, and thou next to him.

Jesus is omnipotent by himself, and thou canst do all things through him, who has been pleased to establish thee the dispenser of his treasures. He is the Lord of heaven and earth; and thou art the Queen of angels and men.

Wherever Jesus is adored, thou art honoured. Every heart which is consecrated to his divine love, is also devoted to thee.

In every temple raised to his glory, there is always some monument erected to thine.

Both on the lips, and within the hearts of true Christians, the sweet name of Jesus is inseparable from the sweet name of Mary.

The Church in her office often joins thy praise in the solemnities which she celebrates to the honour of Jesus.

She commemorates the mysteries of thy life, as she does the mysteries of the life of Jesus.

Jesus is the King of ages, the Author of grace, our Advocate with the Father, the Father of Mercies, the God of all Consolation, the Light of the World. And we call thee with the Church, Queen of the World, Queen of Heaven, our Advocate,

Mother of Grace, Mother of Mercy, Comforter of the Afflicted, and the Star which, during the storm, guides and conducts us safe to the harbour of salvation.

Eternal thanksgiving be rendered to Jesus, for having granted thee all the favours and privileges, which it behoved the actual Son of the Almighty to confer on his pure and beloved Mother.

Blessed Virgin, if the considerations which I have just made in thy presence, can any way redound to thy glory, they will replenish my heart, and all the hearts which love thee, with the sweetest consolation and purest delights.

CHAP. III.

Of the Glory of Mary in Heaven.

DISCIPLE.

REIGN for ever in heaven, O Blessed Virgin, above the patriarchs, the fidelity of whom thou hast greatly surpassed; and above the prophets and apostles, whose zeal was never equal to thine.

Reign above the martyrs, the constancy and fortitude of whom cannot be compared to thine; and above the virgins, whose pu-

rity always remained so inferior to thy immaculate chastity.

Reign above all the just, whom thou didst infinitely excel by thy profound humility, as thou didst surpass the angels in obedience, and the seraphims in love.

I admire thee and honour thee on that throne of glory, on which thou art raised, and where, through thy powerful intercession with God, thou art the refuge of sinners, the help of the just, the hope of the afflicted, and the resource of all nations.

I bless and praise the Lord for that unspeakable glory to which he has elevated thee, and which it has pleased him that thy chaste body should partake before the day of the general resurrection.

Indeed, that chaste body, in which God himself vouchsafed to become man, deserved to be exempt from corruption.

But who can ever comprehend that glory? If the eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him? (1 Cor. ii. 9.) shall we ever be able to comprehend what he had prepared for thee, who loved him more than all the saints together?

The glory which thou enjoyest, is pro-

portioned not only to the greatness of thy dignity, but also to the greatness of thy merit.

To appreciate that glory, we have only to consider that it is his own Mother that God has glorified.

But as in all the saints, the measure of their glory is regulated according to their merit; thus in thee, the degree of thy elevation must be estimated from the sublimity of thy virtues.

Thou art in heaven, in a place distinguished from all its inhabitants, thou art raised to a rank which belongs to thee alone: always indeed infinitely below God, but far above all other created beings.

It was just, that she to whom Jesus had given command over himself, should have a right to command all the angels and saints.

How emulous are they all to pay to thee the tribute of obedience, homage, and honour, which they owe to thee.

Overjoyed at the dominion which thou exercisest over them, they serve thee with an affection of heart, which pleases God himself.

They incessantly bless him for the singular privileges of grace, which he has bestowed upon thee, as well as for the super-

eminent prerogatives of glory, with which he continually honours thee.

With what acclamations of joy and rapture do they praise thee ! How tenderly do they love thee !

How ardently do they desire that thou mightest be as well known on earth as thou art in heaven ; that possessing the hearts of all mankind, thou mayest be honoured over the whole world !

Amiable Queen of the heavenly Jerusalem ! shall I ever enjoy the happiness of singing the praises of thy Son and thine ? Shall I partake one day of thy unspeakable delights ?

MARY.

My son, in order to animate and support you in the difficulties you have to encounter, and enable you to overcome all the obstacles which oppose your happiness, occupy frequently your thoughts with those eternal blessings which Almighty God prepares, as a reward for your courage and constancy.

Reflect often, that you labour to acquire a glory which will superabundantly compensate all sorts of denials and contempt, and secure to you the possession of a treasure which also will infinitely counterbalance all the miseries of the world.

Often think, that all your struggles will terminate in the undisturbed enjoyment of a repose and peace, which will reward you far above your labours and sufferings.

As God alone is great, God alone can give rewards truly solid and great. In hell he punishes as God, and in heaven he rewards as God.

O my son, if you can but succeed in the affair of your salvation, you will see, possess, and love God, without ever feeling the least abatement in the transports of your joy; because God being always the same with regard to himself, appears always ^{new} near to the blessed.

In the happy abodes of the heavenly kingdom, all is pleasure without pain, joy without grief, repose without trouble, peace without fear, and enjoyment without weariness or disgust.

In heaven there is no other will, no other love, but the will and the love of God. God is all in all. Every thing is found in him. The saints are rich, powerful, and happy with him, and like him. *We shall be like to him, because we shall see him as he is.* 1 John iii. 2.

To obtain this happiness, O my son, labour without intermission. Never say, I have fought so long, I have already gained

so many victories. Have I not done enough?
*He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall
 be saved. Matt. x. 22.*

DISCIPLE.

O merciful Virgin, who, next to Jesus, art my hope and life, obtain for me perseverance in the service of God, and the happiness of *seeing Jesus thy Son at the end of my exile.*

If the only unction of his grace, is a foretaste of heaven, and makes a soul feel how sweet and admirable Jesus is, what unspeakable bliss, to behold, possess, and enjoy him without fear of ever losing him !

CHAP. IV.

Of the Happiness of St. John, to whom Jesus gave Mary for his Mother, a Happiness of which all Christians partake.

DISCIPLE.

O Mother of my Saviour, what was the happiness of St. John, when Jesus chose him to supply in thy regard the place of Jesus himself !

He became thy son, thou becamest his mother. Indeed, it is with great propriety that, in the gospel, he calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. *John xix. 26.*

His love for Jesus, and his courage and fidelity in following him to Mount Calvary with thee, merited him this signal favour.

Could his divine Master, at his death, leave him a more precious inheritance? With what lively gratitude did John receive it?

The most profound respect in thy presence, an entire submission to thy will in all things, assiduity and care, he omitted nothing to answer the favour which Jesus had bestowed upon him.

On thy side, how many testimonies of kindness and affection didst thou confer upon him? At every hour of the day he felt and enjoyed the happiness of living in thy sweet society.

O! happy disciple of Jesus, O! happy son of the most amiable and holy of mothers; at the price of misfortunes and calamities, I would willingly purchase thy happiness; and thy glory, at the price of all humiliations; and thy treasure, at the price of all the crowns and empires of the earth.

MARY.

At the death of Jesus, the beloved disciple was not the only one who was given me for my son. When Jesus said to John, *Behold thy mother*, and to me, *Be-*

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hold thy son, John represented you and all Christians.

Indeed, my son, I have for you all the sentiments of love which the most affectionate mother can feel for a child the dearest to her heart.

Endeavour to correspond, like the beloved disciple, to the character of a son, by loving me with sincerity and perseverance.

Exert yourself by all the means in your power, but especially by innocence and sanctity of life, to deserve the tenderness of your mother.

DISCIPLE.

O my mother, if I forget thee, let my right-hand be forgotten: let my tongue cleave to my jaws, if I do not remember thee. Ps. cxxxvi. 6, 7.

What a happiness for me, that the Mother of Jesus vouchsafes also to be my Mother! I should be too happy, wert thou to admit me into the number of thy meanest servants.

But since thou hast, from goodness, consented to assume towards me the name of mother, I receive and will bear the name of thy son, with the greatest joy and the most lively sentiments of gratitude.

To be the child of Mary! Oh! I prefer this glorious name before all the ho-

nours and titles which the world can bestow.

Thou art my mother ! what inestimable advantages shall I not derive from this happy adoption ? I become thereby formidable to hell.

Having been so long ungrateful to my God, I deserve all sorts of punishments. I confess it, I merit neither pardon nor grace ; yet I hope every favour from his mercy, when I reflect that thou art my mother.

Thou hast truly proved thyself my mother, by obtaining for me the grace of returning to God, and being converted to him ; a conversion which, I confidently hope, will be sincere, and now, by obtaining for me the gift of perseverance, complete, I beseech thee, all that thy love has prompted thee to do for my salvation.

Treat me with the indulgent kindness of a mother, who always preserves sentiments of tenderness for her child, even when he does not deserve them.

O ! my mother, join thy prayers to mine, that the Supreme Giver of every good gift may be pleased to grant thee the consolation of seeing in me for the future a son, who by his constant love for Jesus

and for thee, may never be unworthy of thy maternal affection.

CHAP. V.

Of the Love with which we should be animated for Mary.

THE only rule of appreciating justly the value of a thing, is to judge of it according to the esteem in which it is held by God. His affections ought to be the invariable rule of ours.

That you may comprehend all the perfections of Mary, and how far you ought to love her, reflect on the marks of esteem and tender love which Jesus gave her during the whole time of his abode among men.

I have *spouses without number*, says the Holy Ghost. But among them all, there is one whom I have loved, and *made perfect above the others*. *Cant. vi. 7.*

Is it not therefore consonant to the principle of an enlightened piety, to believe that that spouse so particularly beloved by Almighty God, should, next to him, reign in our hearts, and possess all our affections.

The love of God for Mary induced him

to grant her the most honourable privileges which could be conferred upon a mere creature. Therefore our love for her must be a love of preference before all the objects whom we love, God alone excepted.

The love of Jesus for his Mother, made him give her the first rank in heaven and upon earth. Therefore there is no object in heaven and upon earth, God alone excepted, more worthy of our veneration, respect, and love.

Hence, in all their good works, the just gave the first place to the devotion to Mary, next to the incommunicable worship of adoration and dependence due to Jesus.

The holy fathers tell us, that in vain we flatter ourselves to love the Son, if we do not love the Mother; and that these two sentiments cannot be separated.

They make us consider our love for Mary as one of the most precious gifts of grace, and as the surest mark of predestination.

But shall not the love of Mary for us, inspire us also with love for her?

She studies our wants, feels our affections, prevents our requests, bears with our defects, and forgets our ingratitude. What

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therefore ought to be our eagerness to return her love for love?

Let us avail ourselves of every opportunity to please her. In her service nothing should appear to us little or mean. Indeed, whatever concerns the Mother of God and the Sovereign of the Universe, is great and sublime.

Therefore, let us be zealous to promote her honour, and whatever may be conducive to make her loved and respected.

Let us daily offer to her with punctuality the tribute of our praise, and the homage of our hearts; and let us glory to be in the number of her most faithful servants.

Let us frequently raise up our hearts and minds to the throne of her glory, either to admire her grandeur and perfection, or implore her patronage.

Our alms-deeds, and other works of mercy, as well as our fasts and mortifications, let us perform with the intention of honouring her by the imitation of her virtues.

Let us frequent the sacraments on her solemnities, in order to celebrate them more holily; and let us also, if possible, have the sacrifice of the altar be offered in thanksgiving for the unspeakable favours, with which it has pleased the Almighty to enrich and adorn her.

Let us often visit the temples erected to God in her honour. Let us respect her images, and the persons and places dedicated to her.

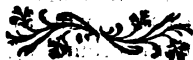
Let us assist with fervour at the public exercises of her worship. Let us hear with attention the discourses which treat of her virtues, her prerogatives, and of the devotion with which every Christian heart should be penetrated for her.

It is thus that a child of Mary applies himself to give her testimonies of his love, and seeks more and more to gain her tenderness and protection.

Powerful Patroness, and tender Mother of men, O Mary! thou readest in my heart, how sincere is my resolution to be faithful to these pious practices.

I thank the Almighty for the sentiments of love with which he inspires me for thee. It is a sure pledge of love.

I will try to imitate, and, if possible, to attain the fervour and piety of thy most zealous servants and devoted children. Nay, would to God that I could equal the angels themselves! But this happiness is reserved for heaven.



CHAP. VI.

Of the Zeal which a Child of Mary ought to have, to promote the Advancement of the Glory of his Mother.

MARY.

MY son, I am your mother, and I daily give you fresh proofs of it, by my protection and favours.

You are my child, and in this quality you offer to me a tender of your homages, implore my assistance in your temptations and troubles, and hope in my intercession with Jesus.

But among all the means of testifying your love for me, there is one which you very much neglect.

DISCIPLE.

Oh, let me know it, I beseech thee, my dearly beloved Mother; for I most sincerely wish to fulfil all my duties in thy regard.

MARY.

You have no zeal to promote my honour and glory. Nay, sometimes it even appears that you have a reluctance to defend my cause against those who attack me.

By your zeal in promoting the honour,

glory, and love of your mother, imitate my tender and zealous sentiments for you.

It is not enough to give me, next to Jesus, the first place in your affections, if you do not avail yourself of every opportunity which offers, to gain the hearts of others to me.

Consider, my son, all the means to which heresy resorted, and which it still employs, to destroy, or at least to weaken the devotion of Christians towards me. It belongs to you to repair these outrages as much as it lays in your power.

DISCIPLE.

It is true, O blessed Virgin, the powers of hell have always been furiously exasperated against thee. The name of Mary, that name so sweet and venerable to Christians, was always odious to the infernal spirits.

Thou art the *woman*, of whom the Lord spoke in the beginning of the world, who *was, one day, to crush the serpent's head*. This is the cause of the inveterate hatred of the devils against thee.

As they wish the ruin of mankind, they wish that no man should have recourse to thee: and were their power equal to their malice, they would entirely annihilate in our minds the high ideas which we entertain

of thy grandeurs, and especially of thy powerful influence with the Sovereign Lord of all things.

It is infinitely glorious for Mary, to have no other adversaries but heretics, and no other enemies but the enemies of Jesus.

Tower of David, upon which a thousand bucklers hang. Cant. iv. 4. The arms of thy enemies overthrown, shall always be thy trophies.

Moreover, the Almighty will ever raise up zealous defenders of thy glory. No, *the gates of hell shall never prevail against thee.*

What thanksgiving should I not render to God, for being born in the bosom of the Catholic Church, where I have the happiness of knowing and loving thee?

But, my Mother, if I love thee, I ought to defend thy interests, and improve every occasion of promoting thy glory.

I will therefore, for the future, endeavour to increase, as much as it depends upon me, the number of thy servants.

Whenever opportunities offer, I will suggest to my relatives, friends, and acquaintance, practices of devotion to thy honour; and it shall be my delight to speak of thy perfections with them.

If I cannot by my words revive in tepid hearts the love which is due to thee, I will

at least endeavour to animate them by my example.

Above all things, I never will suffer any one to offend thee in my presence. Who knows thee not, deserves not to be known. I will have no other friends, but those who love thee.

I humbly and earnestly beg of Almighty God to pour forth his grace into the hearts of men, that all may obtain the love of Jesus our Lord and Saviour, and learn also to know and love thee as their common mother.

Can it be possible that men should be destitute of sentiments of veneration and love for that spotless Virgin, who from all eternity has been the object of the love and complacency of God himself?

CHAP. VII.

Of the Power of the Blessed Virgin with Almighty God, in Favour of Men.

MARY is the beloved Daughter of the Eternal Father, the Mother of the Son, and the Spouse of the Holy Ghost. If you well conceive the sense of these words, you will be able to form an adequate idea of her power.

Spotless Daughter of the heavenly Father, and more perfect in his eyes than all pure creatures together, what must be the influence of Mary on his ^{heart} breast?

He has given her in heaven a power equal to the plenitude of grace, with which he enriched her upon earth.

Being as truly the Mother of God made Man, as the women of whom we are born, are our mothers, will she not be heard by her Son?

She can obtain by her prayers, whatever her Son can of himself bestow. This is the language of the holy fathers.

To doubt whether she has power enough with God, to obtain the grace of which we stand in need, is to doubt whether the Son honours his Mother.

Solomon said to Bethsaba, *My mother, ask: I must not turn away thy face.* 3 Kings. So, when Mary intercedes for us, can she receive any other answer from him, to the love of whom she has so many sacred and powerful titles?

When we ask some favour from God through the intercession of the saints, their love for him, and our confidence in their prayers, induce the Almighty to be propitious to our petitions; but when we request

it through the intercession of Mary, her rank itself, and the dignity of Mother of God, speak in our behalf.

Reflect that God condescended to be obedient to her upon earth. Will he have less regard for her now she reigns with him in heaven?

He has given her a sort of superintendence over all his treasures; and it is through her that he is pleased to distribute them to us.

In short, a beloved spouse has always the greatest power with her Bridegroom; Mary therefore, being the Spouse of the Holy Ghost, can interest this Divine Spirit in our favour, and obtain for us the greatest grace from him.

Moreover, God has established her the Queen of heaven and earth; therefore he has given her a power equal to her dignity.

A queen indeed would bear but a vain and empty title, if she could not relieve the distressed, nor promote the happiness of others.

Almighty God has sometimes performed the most wonderful miracles, in compliance with the prayers of the saints. Can we therefore imagine, that he will grant them with more difficulty at the intercession of

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that immaculate Virgin whom he has established their queen.

O holy Virgin, blessed by angels and men, fully persuaded of thy great power with God, I put myself entirely under thy protection.

Yes, thy protection never fails; always powerful, it overcomes every obstacle; it is universal, nobody is excluded from its benefits.

A guilty son towards my heavenly Father, and unworthy to be heard by him, I choose thee for my mediatrix with him.

Mother of my God, be pleased to watch over my conduct, and direct my steps every where and at all times, for I am surrounded on all sides by spiritual as well as by temporal dangers.

I implore thy protection, especially for that awful day, after which time is no more, and when I can no longer hope for grace: I implore it also for that critical and decisive hour which is to terminate my temporal pilgrimage, and begin my eternity.

I am far from thinking myself so secure of thy protection, as to imagine that I can henceforth live in a criminal sloth or neglect of my duties. Oh no, this is not the spirit of thy servants.

But helped with the grace of Jesus, which I beg of thee to obtain, I will correspond to thy tenderness and care, and labour earnestly and with perseverance, to attain to that eternal felicity, to which thou wishest to conduct all those who love thee.

CHAP. VIII.

Of the Goodness of the Blessed Virgin for us.

DISCIPLE.

BLESSED Virgin, Mother of mercy, we need only represent to thee our wants and miseries, and thou immediately employest for our relief thy powerful interest with Jesus.

And how couldst thou be indifferent to our welfare, when thou reflectest it is for our sake, that the Son of God took in thy chaste womb a flesh like unto ours.

Mother of Jesus, thou dost not forget the brethren, the members, and co-heirs of Jesus.

How melancholy and distressing soever our situation may be, thou art for us an infallible resource, for thy goodness extends to all.

The annals of the Church afford numberless testimonies and proofs of thy great power and maternal compassion.

Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God! Ps. lxxxvi. 2.

We often complain of the calamities which we suffer; but they would be still greater, if the justice of God were not appeased by thy entreaties.

Our distresses also frequently proceed from our neglect to implore thy assistance.

We think very little of what we lose; and yet the Church teaches us from our childhood to call thee, *the Comforter of the afflicted, and the help of Christians.*

Yes, thou deservest these honourable titles: for, who has ever invoked thee and can be so ungrateful as to say, that thou didst refuse to hear him.

If thy intercession does not always obtain from God the graces which we request, for reasons which we ought not to fathom; at least, it procures us always the grace of patience, submission, and resignation to the will of God.

When God created thee, he destined thee to be our advocate, our refuge, our comfort, and our mother. Therefore he gave thee an irresistible propensity to be

compassionate and merciful, much more than we can imagine.

Jesus did not dwell so long in thy chaste womb without communicating to thy heart the benevolent characteristics of his own.

A faithful image of this divine model of meekness and charity, whom thou hadst for thirty years constantly before thine eyes, thou, like him, lovest *to do good*.

On that throne of glory, on which thou hast been placed by the Supreme Being, thou imitatest his clemency. He sends down more frequently favours than punishments upon men, even upon the most wicked and ungrateful.

Blessed Virgin, in order to appreciate the goodness of thy heart, I have only to consult mine, and the sentiments with which I am penetrated, when in the silence of the passions I reflect on thy continual favours.

There is in the hearts of the faithful, a sentimental proof of thy goodness, stronger than all arguments.



CHAP. IX.

Of the Invocation of Mary.

MARY.

MY son, whatever may be the painful situation in which you are placed, call me to your assistance, and I will intercede for you.

In all your petitions, provided they be not contrary to God's will, and to your salvation, I shall always be ready to listen to you.

Ask me nothing but in conformity to the will of God. With these dispositions be persuaded that your prayers will be attended with fruit.

There are Christians who desire me to obtain for them what they well know is not according to the will of God. Can they expect to be heard?

Some there are who invoke me to procure them temporal blessings; as for spiritual ones, they are quite careless and indifferent.

If I pray for them, it is not to obtain from God what they ask, because it would be hurtful to them; but I solicit what they

think not worth asking; and what, I know, is for their advantage.

I ask for them afflictions, which, by disengaging their hearts from the earth, will make them think on heaven.

I solicit for them graces of conversion and salvation, and graces necessary to make them daily increase in virtue and merits. Such are the petitions which should be addressed to me before any other, and which I will always hear propitiously.

I never ask for temporal blessings in favour of those who invoke me, but when I see that they will be truly advantageous to them.

The gain of a law-suit, an abundant harvest, might be sometimes very fatal to those who ask them of God through my intercession.

Whilst men are in prosperity, they seldom think on eternity.

Many people in their sicknesses conjure me to obtain their recovery, and yet I ask only from God the graces of which they stand in need to sanctify their sickness.

I am not one of those mothers, whose blind tenderness prevents them from procuring solid advantages for their children. My son, my love for you cannot seduce me.

I intercede for you with Jesus only to obtain what may be most useful to you both in this world and for the world to come.

With this persuasion, implore my patronage with confidence. Have recourse to me in all your afflictions, troubles, and trials, of what nature soever they may be.

And as they are very frequent in this vale of tears, let my name, next to the name of Jesus, be continually on your lips, and engrave it deeply in your heart.

DISCIPLE.

Mary, O sacred and amiable name! When pronounced with confidence, it is always to our great advantage.

Happy is the man who often recalls it to his mind, pronounces it with devotion and love, and frequently invokes it with sincerity and confidence.

Next to the name of Jesus, *a name above every name*, there is no name so venerable, so sweet, and so dear to all true Christians, as the name of Mary.

At the invocation of this holy name, the sinner feels himself animated with hope in the divine mercy, the just obtains a greater charity, he who is tempted gains victory over his passions, and the afflicted and distressed find relief and consolation.

Yes, O my tender Mother, next to the

name of Jesus, thy name shall ever be my resource in afflictions, my strength in difficulties and struggles, and my guide in all my steps.

CHAP. X.

Of the Confidence we should have in Mary, a Confidence with which Sinners who wish to be converted to God, and obtain their Salvation, ought to be animated.

MARY.

MY son, you have not full confidence in me: sometimes you defer to invoke me in your wants; at other times, it seems that you entertain some diffidence of my good will towards you.

I wish you to have in me all the confidence which a child has in its mother, of whose goodness and love it is assured.

I recommend to you to address yourself to me at all times, in all places, in all your wants spiritual as well as temporal; both for your soul and for your body, and for your acquaintances and friends.

To have recourse to me from time to time only like some Christians, on my festival days, and concerning some important

affairs, or in urgent necessities, is it shewing me a great confidence?

Imitate the Catholic Church, who scarcely asks any favour of God, without interposing my intercession.

She has recourse to me, in order to impetrate all sorts of graces, as to an affectionate mother, through the intervention of whom God is pleased to communicate them to his children.

Her conduct is always conformable to the spirit of God. Let it be the rule of yours. Place all your confidence in me. Let it be unreserved, full of zeal and sincere affection.

Go to God through Jesus, and to Jesus through his Mother; I am the surest way to go to Jesus, and the most certain means of finding him, and being favourably received by him.

DISCIPLE.

Queen of heaven, I acknowledge thy power and great goodness: but is it not unworthy of thee to interest thyself for a sinner like me?

Can a virgin, so pure, so zealous for the glory of God, and adorned with so many perfections, look down upon me with a propitious eye?

MARY.

I am the refuge of sinners. I intercede for all those who, wishing to return to God, invoke me with confidence.

Almighty God, considering with mercy my concern for their reconciliation, never rejected my petitions.

Nay, I am even for many sinners their sole and last resource, and the only means which God gives them to recover his friendship.

For how many Christians have I not obtained the forgiveness of the most heinous crimes? They implored my protection, and besought me to avert from their guilty heads the justice of an irritated God; and by my intercession and earnest prayers, I reconciled them with their Judge.

But if a sinner is resolved to live in his sins, and yet flatters himself that I shall obtain for him the grace of not dying impenitent, it is a senseless and presumptuous confidence, which is very injurious to me.

As for the sinner who, groaning under the weight of his chains, sincerely wishes to break them off, and who knowing his weakness, puts his confidence in me, let him hope in my intercession; he will obtain graces of strength to subdue his pas-

sions, and the forgiveness of his sins shall be granted him. Oh! let him come; let him approach without fear: I will not reject him: on the contrary, I will receive him with compassion and love.

DISCIPLE.

Mother of my Lord and Saviour, *as soon as thy voice sounded in my ears*, my trouble was dissipated: and now my confidence in thee is stronger than ever.

Thou art to me, as the dove which appeared after the flood, with a branch of olive tree in its beak, a symbol of peace and reconciliation.

Receive under thy holy protection a sinner, confused, humbled, and penetrated with sorrow and contrition at the consciousness of the iniquities of his life, which he wishes he could wash away with his blood.

Obtain for me to bewail with bitter tears the sins of which I have been guilty, and to be ready rather to die than to commit again any one of them.

Through the *Holy One* who is born of thee, peace has been re-established between God and man. Oh! re-establish it also between myself and my conscience and my God.

O most powerful and compassionate Vir-

gin, what thanksgiving ought we not to offer to thee, for so many graces and favours which through thy intercession we have obtained from God.

May all hearts be for ever consecrated to thee! May all tongues publish and celebrate thy praise.

Let heaven incessantly proclaim to the earth, Love and glory to Mary! And let the earth incessantly answer to heaven, Glory and love to Mary, throughout eternity.

CHAP. XI.

Of the Prayer called the Angelic Salutation.

YOU recite every day this prayer to invoke the blessed Virgin: but do you pay any attention to its contents, how glorious it is for her, consoling and even instructive for us.

Do you sometimes reflect upon it at the foot of the altar, that when you recite it, you may perform this practice of devotion with the respect it inspires, and the attention it requires.

You *hail* Mary as *full* of grace. Have you well understood all the grandeur which

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these few words express. It is saying that she has been endowed with sanctifying and actual grace, with all supernatural virtues, and all the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

When you recite these words, rejoice at the fulness of blessings which have been bestowed upon her: and beg of her to solicit for you a little share in her rich treasure.

You say to her: *The Lord is with thee.* Indeed God was with Mary in a much more particular manner than he is with all created beings, and even with the just themselves. He was with her by a special protection, and by the direction of all the powers of her soul.

When you recite these words, form in your heart an ardent and sincere desire of partaking in the inestimable happiness of this pure virgin.

Ah! when we have the Lord with us, can we wish for any thing else? Have we not a right to entertain the most sanguine hopes? Could any thing still give us anxiety and grief?

You may congratulate Mary for her being *blessed among all women.* That is to say, for having been enriched with privileges which God never granted to any other.

Testify to her by the feelings of a loving heart all the joy you have, at beholding her so much beloved by Almighty God, and praised, honoured, and blessed in heaven and on earth.

You add with St. Elizabeth, that, *Blessed is the fruit of her womb.*

Indeed the Son of Mary is blessed, adored and glorified throughout the whole creation.

Enjoy all the pleasure which this consideration ought to penetrate a soul that sincerely loves Jesus.

Then the Church commands you to ask of the Blessed Virgin, *to pray for you a sinner.* She wishes you to understand thereby, that after all the sins which you have committed, **you are from yourself unworthy to be heard.** But that Mary's prayer shall not be rejected, if she prays for you.

Yes, God will hear her, because she is his Mother. It is for this reason that the Church invites you to invoke her under this title, which is so dear and glorious to her.

It is the same as if you said, *Holy Mary, thou art Mother of God.* Therefore thy power with thy Son is unbounded; and

this power, joined to thy goodness, is the foundation of my hope.

In fine, you ask of the Blessed Virgin, *to pray for you now and at the hour of your death.*

During our life we are continually exposed to the danger of losing our souls. Therefore are in a continual need of such a protection.

But at the hour of death, when your enemies will redouble all their efforts to accomplish your ruin, that powerful protection will be still more necessary for you.

The moment of death, undoubtedly, is an awful and formidable moment: but a true servant of Mary never died a reprobate.

CHAP. XII.

Of our Confidence in Mary during our Life.

DISCIPLE.

HOLY Virgin, I am surrounded by the enemies of my salvation. They strive to deprive me of the grace and friendship of my God. Defend me against their assaults. Obtain me the victory.

Daughter of the God of Hosts, if thou exertest thy power against my enemies, they shall immediately be put to flight.

Mother of him who commands the winds and the storms, speak but one word in my behalf, and I shall recover the peace of my soul.

Spouse of the Holy Ghost, the spirit of understanding and fortitude, obtain for me the grace of knowing and taking the proper means to subdue such formidable enemies.

In my troubles I cast myself into thy arms, as a child into the bosom of its mother when it is seized with a sudden fright.

Although I am a great sinner, Jesus commands thee to look upon me as thy child. Now this is the time to show that thou hast truly for me the sentiments of a mother.

I beg this favour from thee, not on my account, who do not deserve in the least thy tenderness and care, but through the love which thou bearest to thy son Jesus.

In their necessities, the poor apply to the rich; they ask, and obtain. Queen of heaven and earth, wouldst thou reject the prayer of a poor beggar who solicits thy goodness and mercy.

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But whilst thou prayest for me, that I may not fall into the snares of the enemies of my salvation; pray also that I may bitterly bewail all my former iniquities, and obtain forgiveness.

Impetrate for me both the accomplishment of the desire I form to serve for the future no other master but Jesus, and a hearty and deep sorrow of the crime of which I have been guilty in serving the world his enemy.

Do not consider what I am of myself and by my sins; but judge me by the price of the most precious blood through which I have been redeemed.

God required of thee to be witness of the death of Jesus on Mount Calvary, that thou shouldst inherit his merciful sentiments for sinners, and cry for mercy in their behalf.

Whilst thy tender heart was acutely feeling the ignominy and sufferings of Jesus crucified, he gave thee to me as a mother who would one day compassionate my wants and woes with a truly maternal affection.

Many sinners who are now enjoying the glory of heaven, would have been buried in hell for ever, hadst thou not interceded

for them. Ask for me therefore the grace of that penitent and contrite heart which thou didst obtain for them.

Thou didst never reject the prayer of a sinner, who acknowledging the grievousness of his sins had recourse to thee to obtain his forgiveness.

O Mary! how glorious is it for thee, that God makes in some degree the pardon of so many sinners depend on thy intercession.

If through thy kind patronage I can attain the object of my wishes, it will be conducive to the advancement of thy glory.

In short, O Blessed Virgin, vouchsafe to interest thyself for my perseverance in the fear and love of God! Procure me, I beseech thee, this most precious and inestimable grace.

The greatest virtues cannot deserve it. What therefore have I not to fear, who am nothing but weakness and inconstancy?

Thy name, the sweet name of Mary, is a name by the power of which we may hope for the most signal marks of the friendship of God.

Remember, I conjure thee, that if I have the happiness of dying in the fear and love of Jesus, there shall be in heaven one

soul more who will bless, adore and love him throughout all eternity.

CHAP. XIII.

Of our Confidence in Mary at the Hour of Death.

MOTHER of my Redeemer, O Mary, in the last moments of my life, I implore thy assistance with more earnestness than ever.

I find myself, as it were, placed between hell and heaven. Alas! what will become of me, if thou do not exert in my behalf thy powerful influence with Jesus.

Since he was pleased to deposit in thy hands the most precious graces, to shower them down upon men; do, now, bestow some of them upon me. It is now especially that I stand in the utmost need of them.

I am at the moment of being called to an account of my whole life. Speak in my behalf, before I am summoned before the awful tribunal of my Judge. As thou art his beloved Mother, thou wilt obtain for me a favourable judgment.

Star of the sea, be thou my pilot and

guide in the midst of the storms which threaten me with immediate shipwreck, and lead me safe to the harbour of salvation.

Heavenly light, dissipate the clouds which the spirit of darkness endeavours to spread into my soul. Appease my troubles and anxieties on the reflection of the sins of my past life. And obtain for me a lively and sincere repentance.

Model of all virtues, ask for me a strong faith, a lively hope, and a perfect charity.

I thank thee for all thy goodness towards me during my life, and even whilst I was not worthy of it: but couldst thou refuse me to day thy assistance when my confidence in thee increases with my wants.

Oh no, my sweet Mother, more tender mother than all mothers, thou wilt not abandon thy child at the moment of his departure. Thou wilt assist him till his last breath.

I die with submission, since Jesus has ordained it. But notwithstanding the natural horror which I have of death, I die with pleasure, because I die under thy protection.

I shall soon, I hope, contemplate the grandeurs, perfections, amiabilities and

triumphs of Jesus; and admire thee on the brilliant throne of thy glory.

My agony approaches; my tongue shall no longer be able to call for thy assistance: but my heart will always speak to thee.

I will pronounce interiorly a thousand times the sacred names of Jesus and Mary. And I beseech thee, O my sweet Saviour, to consider every breath, and every motion of my heart, as so many acts of love for thee and thy holy Mother.

Have mercy, O Lord; *I dare not say because I am thy servant.* Alas, I have been so great a sinner, and I do not know whether I have been so happy as to appease thy justice: but have pity on me, because *I am the son of thy handmaid.*

Thou hast granted me the grace of placing during all my life the greatest confidence in Mary. And I thank thee that it still increases at this decisive moment for my salvation.

My God, O God of infinite mercy, it is a new favour which thou grantest me, because thou wishest my salvation, and art always pleased to shew thy regard for the prayer and intercession of that blessed Virgin, whom thy Church teaches us to invoke at all times; but especially *at the hour of our death.*

CHAP. XIV.

Of the Devotion to St. Joseph, the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin.

IT is giving to the Blessed Virgin a testimony of love particularly dear and precious to her, to make her holy spouse Joseph, the first object of our devotion, next to that which consecrates us to her service.

What esteem ought we not to entertain of this great saint? Of a man whom God chose to be the tutor and guardian of the childhood of the *Word made flesh*; and the witness and protector of the virginity of his Mother?

Joseph was appointed to watch over the preservation of the true tabernacle of Israel. He carried, according to the circumstances of time, the ark of the true covenant; and to him was entrusted the sacred deposit of the price of the salvation and redemption of mankind.

What a glory to have been invested with a lawful authority during this life over the Queen of heaven and earth! Nay, over the *king of ages, immortal*, to whom *honour and glory belong for ever and ever*. 1 Tim. i. 17.

To form an adequate idea of the transcendent merit of Joseph, we have only to reflect that he is the spouse of Mary. The virtues of the one, enable us to appreciate the virtues of the other. God gave to Mary a spouse worthy of her.

But above all things let us consider that Jesus in his infancy reposed a thousand times on his bosom. What heavenly impressions did not this infant God make in his heart ?

Joseph lived with him who is the inexhaustible source of all graces, and with her whom God has appointed to be, in some sense, the channel through which they were to be distributed to mankind. What a treasure, therefore, of spiritual riches did he not receive ?

Patience, meekness, humility, love of God, and of our neighbour ; in short all virtues shone in him, and were carried to the highest degree of perfection.

Christian souls, who are desirous to dedicate yourselves to the exercises of an interior and pious life ; in order to succeed in your holy undertaking, have recourse with confidence to a saint, who constantly practised them in the most perfect manner.

The Church has erected temples to God in his honour ; and appointed a day to ce-

celebrate his festival. She invites her children, by practices of devotion which she has authorized, to consider him as one of their most powerful intercessors with God.

The name of Joseph is invoked with singular devotion by all the true faithful.

They frequently join it with the sacred names of Jesus and Mary.

Whilst Jesus and Mary lived at Nazareth, if we had wished to obtain some favour from them, could we have employed a more powerful protector than St. Joseph? Will he now have less power and credit?

Go therefore to Joseph, (Gen. xli. 55.) that he may intercede for you. Whatever favour you ask, God will grant it to you at his request.

In whatever condition or state of life you may be placed, that very state and condition furnishes you with motives of a particular confidence in him.

When Christians address themselves to him, and solicit his patronage, in order to remove their doubts; let them all, without any reference to their rank or circumstances, reflect on the distinctive characteristics of this great saint.

The nobles and the rich of the world,

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that Joseph is the grandson of the patriarchs and kings of Juda.

The poor, that he did not disdain their obscurity ; but like them lived in poverty, and worked during his whole life as a plain and common labourer.

Virgins, that he kept the most perfect chastity. Married people, that he was the chief of the most august family that ever existed.

Children, that he was the foster-father of Jesus, the tutor and guardian of his infancy.

Priests, that he often enjoyed the happiness of holding Jesus in his arms; and even that he offered to the eternal Father the first drops of the blood of Jesus, on the day of his circumcision.

Religious, that he sanctified his solitude of Nazareth, by an entire sequestration from the world, and by intimate conversations with Jesus and his holy Mother.

In short, pious and fervent souls, that no human heart, next to the heart of Mary, ever loved Jesus with so much ardour and tenderness.

Therefore go to Joseph in all your necessities; but especially to obtain the grace of a happy death. The general opinion that

he died in the arms of Jesus and Mary, has inspired the faithful with great confidence, that, through his intercession, they will have an end as happy and consoling as his.

In effect, it has been remarked, that it is particularly at the hour of death, that those who have been during their life careful to honour this great saint, reap the fruit of their devotion.

END OF THE FOURTH AND LAST BOOK.



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FINIS.

ERRATA.

Page	Line	For	Read
11	7	turn	run
42	15	man	men
ib.	20	ourself	one self
48	24	consist	consists
63	12	after vouchsafed add	to form
70	21	least	lest
95	5	so	no
99	25	after as add	if
123	16	an	a
131	8	agains	against
ib.	18	in your	my own
132	6	thoughts	thought
137	25	ends	end
138	21	equality	equanimity
140	21	after watching add	over
152	6	any	my
156	1	light	sight
ib.	22	on	over
184	23	notions	actions
186	2	she	we
192	13	after but add	for
202	9	after bear add	it
216	19	grace	peace
227	6	circumstances	distresses
271	10	by	thy
288	20	thee	this
305	18	created	increase
307	8	actual	eternal
311	14	near	new
319	21	after add	his
324	4	breast	heart



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