

will be the virgin fathers of souls. From the Pontiff down to the humblest soldier-priest in the ranks of that guard of honor, faith in Christ the Adorable and love of Mary the Immaculate are the only watchword of all the days, and the battle-call and the triumph-cry. That watchword never changes. 'Tis forever ringing down the ranks.

What though sometimes a traitor deserts? Another soldier takes his place, and leaves no break in the line; and high over the ranks float, side by side, the glorious ensign of Jesus Christ and the beautiful banner of Mary. March on, true soldiers of the cross! You never can halt here below. The enmity between Satan and the woman lasts forever, and between her seed and his seed. In battle for Christ, you battle for her. Jesus and Mary watch the everlasting conflict. March on in the bravery of faith, in the confidence of hope, in the enthusiasm of love; and fadeless crowns of victory shall grace your brows, when, stainless as the hour they were placed in your hands, and wreathed with a thousand glories, you enter in triumph the gates of heaven and lay at the feet of the Eternal Father the standard of Jesus Christ and the banner of Mary.

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ASPIRATION.

HOLY MARY, Mother of God! pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

PRAYER.

GRANT, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that Thy faithful, who rejoice beneath the name and protection of the ever Blessed Virgin Mary, may, by her holy intercession, be delivered from all earthly evils, and reach the eternal joys of heaven.

NINTH DAY.

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The Flower of the Vow.

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"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 and Him they shall adore."—*Psalm, xlv.*

CALMLY went on the days in the home of Joachim and Anna.

It was the happiest home earth ever had. What cared the holy couple about the great noisy world without them? They never had mingled in it much; and now since Mary had come to bless the evening of their days,—and the mornings and evenings of all days;—and they had a beautiful world of their own, little thought they of the great world lying without. A journey to Jerusalem, a visit to the Temple on the Feast days of the Law,—a brief stay, and a hurried return were the only things to interrupt the quietness of their life.

They had been childless so long that Jerusalem wondered much when it heard of Mary's birth. They would ask Joachim about his little child; but unlike the aged, Joachim was not garrulous. He kept his own counsel. His words were few, and his questioners saw that somehow he seemed shy of speaking about her. Two years passed away. The child had begun to speak. I wonder what was the first word lisped by the child's pure lips? Seldom did the feet of strangers or visitors

pass the threshold of that secluded home. But, betimes some would come. But whoso came, went away in wonderment of her beauty; and somehow they were moved by a something in her face and ways and words difficult to divine. It was as if they had caught a glimpse of Heaven, or seen an angel in earthly form. They went their way carrying in their hearts the memory of the lovely child. And so Jerusalem heard of her wondrous beauty and began to busy itself about the child's future. Marriage was the dream of the maidens of Judea,—as marriage is the dream of most of their Christian sisters. To be the mother of the Messiah,—to bring forth Him who was to be King of Kings forever and to save their nation,—this was the unspoken thought and intense desire of their hearts. And who could blame the Hebrew maidens whose souls were the shrine of a desire so pure and holy? But ah! how little they and their priests knew of the ways of God! Their idea of the Messiah was carnal. They looked for Him coming in the pomp of secular glory. The clearness of the meanings of prophecy had grown dim. True, they read or heard read the words, but their spiritual significations were hidden from their minds.

Joachim belonged to one of the priestly orders,—so around the temple courts where, after the evening sacrifice had been offered, the priests and their children congregated, there was frequent talk of Joachim's designs about his beautiful child. Is it curious or not, that world-talk seldom touches God's thoughts? Little did those talkers know the future of Joachim's Mary. In her home there was a stillness about her like the silence in the Holy of Holies. She spoke not often; and when she did, her voice was very low as if she were afraid to

let it speak,—lest it might tell some secrets hidden as yet down in her heart,—and its tones were tremulous with a sweetness indefinable. And how she loved her holy parents; nor was child ever loved as she was loved by them. She learned the prayers prescribed by the Law. In morning and evening times she would kneel down beside her mother, with her face lifted like an angel's, towards the heavens, and pray as none had ever prayed before. Did the angels hush their songs in heaven when the breath of her prayer ascended? Did new, strange glories, never by the hosts of heaven seen before, gleam from the face of the All-beautiful God, as He listened to the child-prayers of His future mother? And did the Father feel a divine impatience for the coming of the hour when He was to send Gabriel, the Angel of the Throne, with His prayer to the Virgin?

Sometimes, as quietly as the sunshine, she would steal away into the garden that surrounded the house,—and breathe her prayers where the flowers were blooming and the roses were resting,—but sweeter the breath of her lips than the breath of their leaves. Ah! happy flowers that heard her prayers! Ah! blessed roses that felt the touch of her pure hand!

How mysteriously shy the little child was growing day after day, as if she were hiding a mystery in her soul!

In the long, calm evenings, resting on her mother's breast,—still as a Host upon an altar, she would listen with a rapt attention even in her far-off look to her father's voice while he spoke of the history of their race and explained the prophecies announcing the coming of the Messiah. And when he would speak in tones full of pathos of the growing wickedness of even the chosen

people and of the fearful, wide-spread idolatries of all the nations, the little child would nestle closer in her mother's arms with such a look of infinite pity in her eyes. And she would ask questions of strangest kind that made them marvel much. And when he would speak of the days of the exile in Egypt; and of Bethlehem, the birth-place of David his royal ancestor and of Jerusalem where factions were dividing men and almost breaking to fragments the old inherited faith, she would sometimes startle, as if strange presentiments, like clouds across skies, were moving over her soul. Who will ever know how much she knew in those the first days of her life? And who will ever know if what, she did know, was in her soul clear as a ray or dim as a shadow?

They sometimes saw the mist of tears in her eyes,—and they wondered why. In her sleep they heard her sometimes sigh,—and they were sad.

But she often smiled and then the very light of heaven shone upon her face. Only Joachim and Anna and the child Mary in that humble home? No more?

Ah no! The Archangel of the Throne, Gabriel, hovered unseen round his ward, with ceaseless vigilance;—and hosts of other angels were with him there. That home was a very Heaven, for its Queen was there. She had not won her crown as yet,—but she will surely win it. Did she ever see them? If she did, she made no sign. And, meantime, her sinless soul was ascending higher and still higher in the immense sphere of grace.

Those were still days on earth. The mystery kept its hiding place. But those were grand days in Heaven. To the clear vision of the angels, as from the Face of God, come new revelations of glory hour after hour in

the cycles of eternity,—so to them came from the soul of Mary, day after day, new unfoldings of ineffable beauties.

And so went on the days. Did you ever see a golden cloud in the summer sky, full of water by the heavens purified, and all wrapped round with the robes of the sun? And in its waters floats the very life of the flowers of the earth. And the cloud bends low in love for the earth. And it opens its heart and the rain comes down with the warmth and the light of the sun in its every drop. And they fall on the flowers and on the trees and the humble grasses,—when lo! a new life comes into them all. And though they were nearly a-dying, they brighten again and are filled with joyous, abounding life, by the beautiful baptism of Nature. So, in those days, Mary's soul was the golden cloud that had risen on high from the earth, robed with the rays of the Sun of Justice,—and containing the very waters of life eternal. Wait awhile,—and the golden cloud will open its bosom,—and bend down to earth again, and out of it will come, the pure human-divine drops of the mercy of the blood of Jesus Christ.

It was a long day in the ending of summer. She was never demonstrative,—but all that day she was hovering around her parents. Her very heart seemed to be going out of her to them. A new strange expression shone on her face. And it was a day of many questions too, about God and the Messiah. She looked as if she were going to reveal something. They remarked it wonderingly. But the day passed,—and not a word. When the twilight's shadows fell around their home, Joachim and Anna and Mary entered the garden. She was holding her father's hand. They went into the garden to pray.

With their faces towards the Temple they said together the evening's prayers;—and ah! how fervent were their blended voices when they besought the God of their fathers to remember the Promise and send the Messiah!

The prayer over,—then spoke the voice of the child in trembling way. Her hand was resting in her father's hand. She asked them to give their consent to her desire to dedicate herself by the vow of virginity forever to the service of God. They did not feel surprised. It was as if they had expected it. Silence fell between them just a little while. Ah! how deep and full of mystery is silence! Did the flowers listen for her father's answer? There was listening in heaven then such as had never been before. At last, Joachim spoke,—and his voice was firm; and he with Anna gave full and glad consent. Like the Eternal Father's: "Let light be made:" was Joachim's words to Mary: "Child! let it be so." But like the Eternal Father in Creation,—though swift to give his glad consent,—he moved slowly to fulfill it. He must wait awhile. He must lay the matter before the High Priest, and the priests of the Temple. Their consent was necessary. And that night a wondrous spiritual happiness filled that home. Joachim fell a-dreaming about the olden words of prophecy. Anna's soul was full of joy. And the second great ecstasy after the Immaculate Conception was filling Mary's soul with rapture. And the expectant world went on just the same as ever,—not knowing that the second step in the Redemption was made, on earth—and by the feet of a little child.

A few days afterwards Joachim turned his face towards the Holy-City. He sought the High Priest and

placed his child's desire before him. He assembled the priests. Zacharias, the father of the future John the Baptist was present,—and so also was the aged Simeon. The High Priest laid the request of Joachim before them. He told them it was the desire of Joachim's child,—and that she was not yet three years old. Some of the priests objected on account of the tenderness of her age. But up rose Simeon,—and he spoke almost like a Christian priest, as if he were inspired. His words moved all in the assembly, and all gave consent to receive the child Mary.

Joachim returned to his home, and brought the glad tidings of a great joy to Mary. And now Anna begins to make preparations for her child's departure. Human sorrow and spiritual joy often live together in the same heart. It is a mystery hard to be understood by worldlings. But God's saints know it. To part with her child was a grief beyond words;—but to give her to God and His service was a joy—the greatest of her life. Joachim was man; and though he could not feel, as the mother felt; still a quiet, deep pain lay on his heart shadowing the gladness that was in it for giving his Mary to God. September passed. They quietly kept the third birth-day of their child. October came and went with falling leaves and fading flowers. Closer and closer grew the bonds of tenderest human love between those three hearts as nearer and nearer drew the hour of separation. A part of our October and November formed the eighth month of the Hebrew year. In November, Joachim and Anna, accompanied, by many of their kinfolds who were in amaze at Joachim's folly, went up to Jerusalem, with Mary.

And no one else? St. Germanus, the Patriarch of

Constantinople, describing that journey to Jerusalem, says that hosts of unseen angels surrounded and accompanied Mary. The world may laugh at this as a fable. Let it laugh. For us are the testimonies of the saints. They presented her to Zachary the father of John the Baptist.

And before the Altar of Perfumes she silently made the vow of virginity. Did the Royal Prophet, her ancestor sing to her across the ages: \**"Hearken O Daughter,—and consider, and incline thine ear, and forget thy people and thy father's house, and the King shall love thee for thy beauty; for He is thy Lord and worship thou Him?"*

Did the singer of the song of mystical love, chaunt for her Presentation-Feast when he sings: †*"Rise up my Love, my fair one, and come away, for lo! the winter is past, and the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land."*

The vow was made. Then the temple sounded with gladsome song. Aged priests, young levites, all the assembled people, Joachim and Anna swelled the canticle with their voices. Mary's lips were moving in silent prayer.

Then came the parting moment. She knelt before her parents for their blessing,—and then arose. She clasped her arms around their neck,—first Joachim's. He was weeping tears of sorrow and of joy. And then she clasped her arms around her mother,—and lingered longer in her embrace; while from the eyes of Mary fell such tears as are seldom shed. They are the most tenderly human who have gone deepest into the divine.

\* *Psalm*, xlv.

† *Cant.*, ch. 2.

Her parents went away; she remained the little prisoner of divine love in the Holy Temple.

Her vow was the coronation of her Immaculate Conception.

Ah! child of grace! these words I write have set my heart a-dreaming and wakened memories of far-off happy days! And there are eyes, that will read my words unworthy, sure, of thee; and when they read them, they too will look from the page before them back to olden, golden days, of which they formed a part with me. Sweet St. Mary's of the Barrens in Missouri's wilds! thy children never can forget thee! Ah! well do they remember thy Presentation Feast when thou didst dedicate thyself to God. The great High Altar, in that seven Altared Church was radiant every year with lights and fragranced with flowers; and the setting sun shone through the western window, the while thy Litany sounded before the Benediction. And then the names of many who yearned to be priests of Thy only Son were placed in the silver heart hanging from thy statue's neck in promise made to thee that they, like thee, would leave their fathers' house and dedicate themselves to the service of the Temple!

Ah me! how many names were shrined within that silver heart! Many are dead and gone;—but a few are living still; and who would have thought, that long gone evening when my poor name was given into thy keeping, that I, so unworthy, would dare to dream of weaving a crown in thy honor?

Farther from the world—nearer to God. Now began the hidden, unrevealed life of Mary in the Temple. Around it with its courts and surroundings there was a circumference of half-a-mile.

The High Priest did not live there. He had a dwelling of his own in Jerusalem. But many priests and levites did live within its precincts. The Scriptures and many holy Doctors give us to understand, that near and around the Temple, within the walls, dwelt devout women in cells apart, separated from the men whose duty it was to pray before the gate of the Tabernacle, to assist at the sacrifices of the morning and evening—to meditate on the law of God night and day, and to make the vestments of the priests. According to the testimony of St. Ambrose, St. Cyril of Alexandria, Origen and others, only widows and maidens were admitted and allowed to live within the Temple's precincts. And all this was a shadow of the consecrated cloisters of the virgins of our Holy Church. In those days, the aged widow Anna, was a dweller in the Temple. The High Priest appointed those who were to take charge of and train the young maidens. They were taught to sing the canticles of the Lord. Their every day was regulated as to their duties. Like the nuns of our Holy Church they lived in separate cells. The rules were strict. To be dismissed from the Temple-service was considered an ignominy. It was a world within a world,—a world of peace and prayer and silence and song and gentle labor.

Into that world went Mary. Her cell, according to tradition, was the nearest to the Holy of Holies. And with her went God and His angels. The Temple was her solitude. In the din of the noisy world God's voice is but faintly and vaguely heard. The world is a loud talker but a very poor thinker. It lives on words—very poor food,—and on noises,—very poor music. It does not understand that solitude is the home of great

thoughts and aspirations. It will not see, that even mere human greatness makes a solitude for itself amid the little littlenesses around it in order to achieve future triumphs. But so it is.

But sanctity which is the greatest greatness, even still more, has need of solitude, for growth. Read the lives of the saints. Even while in perpetual action,—and while in conflict with the world around them,—their souls were solitaries. They lived within themselves a wondrous separated life, even when in daily contact with the tumult all about them. Our Holy Church, in inner life, is as much a hermit to-day, as when with cross in hand she began the pilgrimage of time.

Mary spent eleven years in the Temple. Meanwhile Joachim and Anna died and "went to their fathers." She was alone,—an orphan in the world. The Temple was her only home,—and the Eternal her only Father; and the Priests of the Old Covenant became the guardians of the Mother of the Christ of the New Dispensation. Beautiful, by her sinlessness in the supernatural order, her natural beauty went on towards its perfection day by day. She was a living picture of God's beauty on earth.

Her companions loved her,—and in their love there was a strange reverence for her person. When they sang together the canticles of the Lord, her pure voice sounded like an angel's.

And she was the humblest one of them all. She was the mystery of the Temple. Many ancient writers and holy Fathers tell us that in her cell,—she held converse with the angels,—and that they were wont to bring her food. This, will you say, is only a beautiful imagination? And why only that? Ordinary laws,—common

rules are for all of the children of our race, because we are ordinary. But hers was an uncommon life—and her destiny extraordinary. Canisius says that once she prolonged her prayers to the hour of midnight, when through the Temple's silence sounded the words: "Thou shalt bring forth My Son." And she rose and in wonder, went to her cell.

Christian imagination, glowing with the light of Faith and full of Faith's inspirations, can never conceive the superhuman facts in which her life in the Temple was folded.

In the material world around us what innumerable beauties are lying unrevealed. We see Nature's surface but not her sanctuaries. And if what we do see fill our eyes with rapture, do we not know that all that visible beauty is a veil concealing the invisible beauty beneath it.

Yes,—“in the world of Nature, as in Super-Nature's realms, there is that which no eye can see,—nor heart conceive, nor human mind understand.” And of every human life given to God, the same is true. We read the lives of the saints,—but never know but half. And her life, the saint of saints,—the Mother of the life of the Christ of the saints, of it we know only the least little part. And why? Because in her life, the greater part is above and beyond any imitation. It was a life unique, absolutely exceptional,—a life that could not be lived by any one but Mary. And this is why her Temple-life of eleven years has not been revealed to us. It is inimitable,—and therefore gives no outward sign. It is strangely like the life of God before the Creation. God's was a life unknown and of infinite silence until He spoke:—“Fiat Lux:” “Let there be light.” And Mary's life before Redemption was a life unknown,—

and silent,—till she broke its silence in answer to the angel: “Fiat mihi:” “Be it done unto me according to thy word.”

Ah! Child of Grace! while thou didst pray in all the days of those eleven years for the coming of the Messiah, thou didst also breathe thy all-fervent prayers for the sinners He was coming to save. Pray on,—sweet child; and ah! 'tis joy to know that we too here gathered in thy honor had a place in thy heart and a part in thy prayers;—and who knows? a deeper place and a greater part, because we wreath to-day in thy queenly crown the beautiful Flower of Thy Vow.

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ASPIRATION.

“THY kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!”

PRAYER.

MAY the humanity of Thy only begotten Son be our succor, O Lord; that Jesus Christ, our Lord, who, when born of a Virgin, did not diminish, but did consecrate the integrity of His Mother, and may the same humanity adorable, deliver us from our sins and make our petitions acceptable.