

TENTH DAY.

The Flower of the Espousals.

"I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners."—*Psalm, lxxxiii.*

THERE was Feast in the Temple courts. Sweet melodies of many harps were sounding, and voices of holy widows and innocent maidens were chanting canticles of joy. Many lights were glowing on the Altar of Perfumes. And in the Temple and around it gladness was reigning everywhere. What feast? Only a Birthday Feast. The sun of the eighth of September shone in a sky all-cloudless, all day long. Came the High Priest,—the priests of inferior order and the Levites to grace the Feast with their presence, and to bless the day with their blessings. On that day Mary was fourteen years old. It was her Birthday Feast. Zachary and his spouse, holy Elizabeth were there. And Simeon came, and many of the kinfolds of the Child. For eleven years, Simeon had watched Mary, with now and then strange presentiments which he could hardly define.

With a shyness, that puzzled many, she listened to their congratulations. There were holy faces there, and saintly souls and hearts with grace's high consecrations (for we must not think that the grand Old Covenant had no saints in its Vesper time) but amid them all, like a dream of God, moved Mary in her beauty. In that covenant of beautiful shadows how many wonder-

ful women, figures of her, had come and gone, and left to Israel memories of virtues and of grace! Miriam, Ruth, Judith, Esther, the mother of the Machabees and others are the glories of that olden Dispensation. But Mary was its crown.

There was that in her face, that day, which was in none other there,—a something indescribable; and in her eyes an infinite calm; and in her voice the very tones of heaven's music; and in her every movement an unconscious grace, which, somehow, wove a spiritual spell on all who looked upon her. "How like an angel!" they whispered low to one another.

But,—"all the glory of the King's daughter is from within."

Her wondrous, natural beauty was but the transparent veil through which shone the interior, ineffable beauty of her soul, that, for fourteen years, in constant and closest union with God, had far surpassed the transcendent sanctities of all the angels; and was rising, hour by hour, up towards the inaccessible heights of God's supremest grace.

In after days, that Birthday Feast was long remembered, with new and added meanings, by those who had come to celebrate it.

All day long the Feast was kept until the hour of evening-sacrifice. Then to the Temple all repaired: and the evening-song was sung,—and the sacred censor was swung, while the white smoke of the Sacrifice ascended from the altar. Begun in joy and with glad-some song, that day closed in the hush of holy prayer. All had gone, but Mary still knelt and prayed. The Spirit of God was on her. Silence filled the Temple with its own strange holiness. The shadows,—and did

they tremble? folded her kneeling form. Strange emotions moved through her heart. "Coming events cast their shadows before;"—and, somehow, she felt, as if the gates of her Eden in the Temple were about to open for her to pass through, and to move on to some other act of God in the which she was to take part. In her cell, that night, she held long converse with her angel. He bade her follow the wishes of the priests, revealed to her a secret of Eternity and bade her not to fear.

The priests held council about the child. What to do with her was the question that disturbed them. The last words of Joachim, and the dying pathetic pleadings of Anna lay on their minds.

When she leaves the Temple, in whose charge will they place her? In spite of her vow they decided to give her in marriage.

But to whom? She was of the royal race of David; where find for her in his line a fitting companion? They had not long to think,—nor far to go. There was a man named Joseph who belonged to the royal line and had the same ancestor. "And he was a just man." He was getting on into age; and the priests had often wondered why he had never chosen a bride from among the fair daughters of Sion.

Though his ancestors had been prophets, princes and kings he was only a poor carpenter; but his were the riches, better than those of earth, of great graces. He lived up in Nazareth, loved and respected by all who knew him. A tall, stately man,—very silent, with a singular tranquillity about him, he was wont to be seen in the Temple, on the Feasts of the Law, presenting his humble offerings to the altar, with the mild look of one of the ancient patriarchs; and he was pointed out

to the people as a model of the faithfulest observance of all the sacred ordinances.

He lived alone a life of daily toil. Why he had never married, no one knew. He had his own secret; and he kept his own counsel. He was known of all for his knowledge of the words of the Lord, for his deep faith in the promises; for his love of His chosen race; but above all for his humility. When he came to the Temple,—not into the first seats did he enter,—but down near the Temple's door he might be seen, sometimes standing,—sometimes kneeling and sometimes prostrate in prayer.

Of his ancestry he did not speak. He belonged to none of the various conflicting, noisy sects into which, unfortunately, the Hebrews had become divided. Apart from them all he stood, bewailing their enmities towards one another, and sighing over the olden Faith that was a-breaking into fragments. This was the man,—"the just man" selected by the priests to lead to the Altar of Marriage Mary of the Temple.

The High Priest summoned her to his presence; and after prayer—for those old Hebrews believed—(and some of them with greater faith than many Christians) that prayer brought light from heaven in difficulties and doubts,—Mary was told of the decision of the Priests.

She made no dissent. She simply obeyed, for she, too, had her secret, and kept her own counsel.

And then they sent for Joseph to come to Jerusalem.

Any command that went to him from the Temple was as if it came from God. Down to the Holy-City he came; and they offered him the Virgin Mary for his bride. He heard their proposal,—nor did he seem sur-

prised; and made the promise to take her into his keeping. Little did the priests of the Temple know what strange mysteries, from them hidden, they were touching. It is always so. Men,—and at times those who seem the most unlikely, work out God's secret designs. And God never had a more secret and mysterious design over any creature, than He had over Mary. Joseph had a part in that design,—though what and how great a part he did not know.

The Hebrew Prophets had foretold the Messiah's coming; and now the last of the Hebrew priests, unknown to themselves, are preparing His way. It was the law that the Hebrew maidens should be married from their father's house. Mary had no home but the House of God,—the Holy Temple. Hence, and is there not a mystery in it? her marriage with Joseph was celebrated in the Temple, the sacred house of the olden promise and later prophecies.

The day came at last. Accompanied by his and Mary's kinfolks Joseph went down to the Temple. The marriage canticles, with the accompaniment of many harps rang gladly through the holy place. Before one of the priests (many think Zachary the father of John the Baptist) stood Joseph and Mary. The priest lifted up his hands towards the heavens, and prayed over them; and then with the beautiful Hebrew ritual he united Joseph and Mary in the holiest marriage earth ever knew,—a marriage which was to veil with secrecy the purest mystery and the deepest of all time,—the conception and birth of Jesus Christ.

How near we sometimes are to God's mysterious works without knowing it! We almost touch Him when He is at His great works;—and we are unconscious of

His presence. He passes right before our eyes and we see Him not. Who, in that Temple, that day dreamed in looking on the face of Mary, of the Woman of Genesis. Yet there stood the Woman of Genesis, forty centuries old by promise, in the form of a maiden a little more than fourteen years of age. There stood the "Virgin" of Isaias' prophecy; there stood the living realization of all the predictions,—a pure, young girl, in the mystery of a human marriage which was to conceal a more mysterious marriage in her womb,—the espousals of human nature to divine nature in Jesus Christ, her Son.

Back in the eternal predestinations lay the strange vocation of Joseph. He was to be the Eternal Father's visible shadow on earth,—and like a shadow, he was to shroud, for a time, the earthly conception and birth of the Son of God; as the eternal generation of the same is hidden forever in the glory of the bosom of the Father. Holy Joseph! sacred shadow of God! "the virtue of the Most High will overshadow" Mary in the time of her Divine Conception; and thou shalt be the shadow to shield her honor and that of her Divine Offspring in the face of the world.

Sorrow is the sister of joy,—and they walk the world closer together than many think. For:

"Tears are the Vespers of Gladness,—
Life's *Matin-Laudate* scarce ends
Ere a psalm all a-thrilling with sadness
From the lips of the singer ascends."

The Temple was to lose its angel-child. How lonesome it would look without her! Ah! through all those eleven years, how she had grown to be almost a necessary part of the holy service! In a sense unknown

to them, she was a necessary part. Somehow the Temple would not be the same. It would be as sad as a sky that loses its brightest star. Far brighter than the lights on the altars was the light in the temple of Mary's soul. Never mind! Temple! your child will come back, and bring before your altar the Light of the World! Tears in the eyes of the saintly widows,—tears in the eyes of the priests,—tears in the eyes of the young maidens,—when with her hand in Joseph's she passed through the gate of the Temple, and wept as many another bride has wept in leaving her father's house. Because she was perfect she was most human. Our nature lost the perfection of its humanity when it lost divine grace. Hence it is hard, rough, ungentle, untender. Its tears fall when they ought not to fall; and it does not weep when it ought to weep. As Christ was most human because He was divine; so His Mother was most human because she was perfect and sinless. So Mary mingled her tears with those of her companions in the Temple when the hour of her departure came.

The Temple's loss was Nazareth's gain. It was a journey of three days to Joseph's humble home. They left Jerusalem and pursued their way by the city of Naim,—along the valleys at the foot of Mount Hermon, and by Mount Thabor. As was the custom, Joseph and Mary were met on their entrance into Nazareth, by young maidens who sang canticles of joy and praise to God. If the virtues of Joseph had won the reverence of Nazareth,—the singular beauty of Mary, at once, charmed the hearts of all.

And now began her life as St. Joseph's spouse. There is no mere make-believe in any of God's works. He

may hide much back of what He does,—but what He does is always real.

So the marriage of Joseph and Mary was a real, true and valid marriage. The alliance was sincere on the part of both. They each had made a vow of perpetual virginity to God,—and their very marriage was a mutual contract for the preservation of their virginites. Mary knew, by inspiration, that it was not the will of God, and that it would never be the will of Joseph to cause detriment to her virginity. In marriage there are three goods, as theologians say,—Sacrament (a mystery), Fidelity and Offspring. But the last is not essential either to the reality or validity of marriage. How many holy marriages there are—sacramentally and in beautiful fidelities, which are not blessed with children? The absence of the child, by no means, disproves the reality of the marriage,—it simply shows the incompleteness of the alliance.

But in the marriage of Joseph and Mary there was to be, by miracle, not through Joseph, but through the Holy Spirit the most glorious offspring,—Jesus Christ. In the old law when the oldest son of a family died without issue, the second brother espoused the widow and to the first born child the name of his deceased brother was given; and this for the purpose of preserving the direct line of descent of the ancestors of the Messiah. But does it not seem that it was also by a great mystery?

Mark,—this law is accomplished to the very letter.

For St. Joseph espouses Mary,—and we can well say he dies without a child of his own, for the vow of virginity which he had taken was a beautiful, mysterious death, by which of his own will, he laid down the life

of his body,—and became carnally dead. Then came the Holy Spirit treating Joseph as an elder brother dead, became the spouse of Mary, who else would be humanly childless,—and in her conceived Jesus Christ the Son of God whom Mary brought forth for our redemption.

To whom as His Father will Jesus Christ be attributed?

Not to the Holy Ghost, for He was not His Father, as He did not produce Christ out of His Divine substance. The glorious title will be and must be given to the Eternal Father alone together with Mary the true Mother. But in the world Jesus Christ will be called the Son of Joseph because He will be born of her who was Joseph's spouse. "Is He not the son of the carpenter?"—they said. Did not Mary His Mother, with deep mystery in her word, say to Christ: "Thy Father and I have sought Thee sorrowing?" Oh! glorious mystery, Joseph bears on earth to Christ the incommunicable name—Father!

Origen says that the Holy Spirit rendering Mary fruitful of Christ honored Joseph with the name of Father. Shadow-name!—sweet and beautiful cast on earth by the light of the substantial Name of the Eternal Father, concealing from men and demons the glorious mystery of the Incarnation, how Faith rests, and dreams, and prays and adores in thy presence,—as they of the Old Covenant did before the veil that hid the mysteries of the Holy of Holies.

Ah! the mysterious relations between Christ's reputed Father on earth and His real Father in Heaven! Who can describe or understand them? But between St. Joseph and the Holy Ghost there are also intimate rela-

tions. They were both spouses of Mary,—Joseph the visible and the Holy Spirit the invisible spouse. She was to bring forth a son who would be visible and invisible at the same time and always;—as man visible,—as God invisible;—and because her Son was to be visible and corporal, she had a visible and corporal spouse,—“the just man”—Joseph; and because her Son was to be invisible and purely spiritual in His Divine substance, she had an invisible and purely spiritual spouse,—the Holy Ghost.

And thus St. Joseph, like a sacred shadow, hides the Paternity of the Eternal Father,—conceals the Divine action of the Holy Ghost, invests Jesus Christ with a seeming human parentage;—and what else.

He stands before the world as Mary's necessary protector. Had she in the Temple been found with child;—or had she, out of the Temple, remaining in the eyes of the world a virgin, given birth to Jesus Christ,—think you they would take her at her word and believe her testimony? Think you when brought before the tribunal, where mercy hushed, and sternest justice gave decree, they would listen to her piteous cry: "Oh, no! my child is not of man,—it is born of the Holy Ghost! condemn me not to death?" No—no,—there was little of mercy in that law to which the Promise of Mercy gave all its meanings. They would have dragged her out of the gates of the Holy City,—to the great wide plain,—they would have taken up the stones of malediction to hurl them at the outcast; they would have cursed her, in the awful stoning, with the terrible curses of the Law,—until she fell dead before them; they would have branded her child Jesus with the dark ban of illegitimacy; and they would have regarded the

greatest act of God's love as the darkest crime against the Law.

It was Joseph's vocation to be the shield of her honor, and the defender of her purity,—and to stand between her and the stones of curse. It was a mighty vocation,—but a mournful one. And besides, the Divine Conception of Christ and His miraculous birth needed a human witness, apart from the Mother; a witness of character unimpeachable,—of testimony which, perforce, must be taken and believed; and whose word stood higher, among priests and people, than the word of Joseph “the Just man?”

But he was so mild and gentle and silent. The gentlest are the bravest. What hidden forces are folded in the quiet, still cloud? On Calvary the gentle John was braver than all his co-Apostles. He stood by the cross, whence they fled. No wonder the dying Christ left His Mother in charge of such gentle bravery! Look on the quiet-faced water. What powers it conceals? Fire makes it brave and strong, and clothes it with an almost natural omnipotence; and then the great steamers cleave the waves, and brave the storms and sail across the seas; and then the long trains are borne over continents, by the gentle power of little drops of water, made strong by the furnace-fires in the locomotive. The gentlest Faith is always the most fearless. So Joseph stood between the Old Dispensation and the New Covenant to guard the honor of the Woman of the Promise, and to defend the Divine legitimacy of her Child, by standing before men in the position of His earthly father.

But more still! Listen. And let us pray! Oh adorable Bosom of the Father Eternal! Thou art the first Principle of the Blessing of all Thy creatures! We

adore Thee with all the Faith of our hearts, for having given unto us Thy own, only Son with all His Divinity!

Oh Virginal Bosom of Mary! Purest Breasts of Virgin-Mother! we glorify thee, as the second principle of our Redemption, for having given unto us, the same Eternal Son, in His holy Humanity! And blessed hands of Joseph, we honor you as the third source of our Salvation, for did not thy hands labor and toil, day by day, and year on year to nourish and strengthen and bring to perfection the Humanity of our Saviour!

He is the Word of the Eternal Father, begotten without effort;—but thy toils and labors for thirty years, procuring His earthly food, did give strength to Him and preserve His human life

Only a year did He draw nourishment from Mary's breast;—and all the rest of His years His life while thou didst live, went on nourished by the fruit of thy daily toil!

And in Nazareth there was an earthly Trinity,—as in Heaven a Trinity Divine. In Heaven three invisible persons,—and one God. In Nazareth three visible persons,—and one God,—Jesus Christ.

Through Mary's Espousals with Joseph, he was brought into closer relations with the Trinity and with the history of Redemption than any other saint. He stood nearest to the source of all grace. He was the shadow that hid the source. His was the heart, which, next to Mary the Virgin Mother, drew from the source the deepest stream of grace.

No wonder, that in our day, St. Joseph has been proclaimed by the Church,—her universal Patron. For Mary the Mother of Christ her Son is, by right, the mother of the Church, the mystical Bride of her Son.

And as Joseph was the foster-father of Jesus Christ, because he was the Spouse of the Mother of Jesus, is, by right, the Foster-father of the universal Church. And thus over the Church St. Joseph is united with the Holy Spirit as they were united in regard to the Blessed Virgin.

Holy Joseph! there are sorrows still before you, but God will give you light and strength! And Virgin Mother! thou wilt bless thy children to-day who weave into thy Crown the mysterious Flower of thy Espousals!

ASPIRATION.

THE just shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow up like the cedar of Libanus, planted in the honor of the Lord,—in the courts of the house of our God. It is good to give praise to the Lord,—and to sing to Thy name O Most High!

PRAYER.

VOUCHSAFE, Oh Lord! that we may be helped by the merits of Thy most Holy Mother's Spouse: that what of ourselves we cannot obtain, may be given unto us through his intercession!

ELEVENTH DAY.

The Flower of the Annunciation.

"Hail, full of grace;—the Lord is with thee."

NAZARETH was a little city in lower Galilee, built on the slope of a rocky hill, faces the southeast and surrounded by mountains. There began the new life of Mary in marriage with Joseph,—a marriage uncarnal, consecrated by two virginities,—a marriage of the sinless soul to the holiest soul in all Judea,—a marriage of purest heart to a heart more pure than any other known of God or man.

Nazareth had a poor reputation in and around Jerusalem. Among the people there was a by-word: "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" In that city of the taunting by-word, Mary and Joseph were dwelling. And by and by out of that city was to come the Infinite Goodness Himself.

The Ark of the Covenant was constructed in the desert-solitudes. It was made of the incorruptible wood of the beautiful Acacia tree, and it was covered on all sides with plates of purest gold. Over the Ark stood two Cherubim, with their faces turned towards each other and their wings expanded and joined so as to cover the propitiatory, which was the place of the special presence of Jehova among His people. There was not only the mercy-seat,—but also the place of giving responses.