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THE  
DEVOUT CLIENT  
OF  
MARY

INSTRUCTED IN THE MOTIVES AND MEANS  
OF SERVING HER WELL

BY

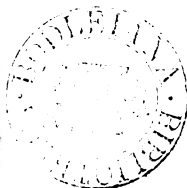
**Father Paul Segneri**

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS.

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*Translated from the Italian Edition printed at Orvieto. 1851.*

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**ENTERED AT STATIONERS' HALL.**

TO THE HOLY PATRIARCH  
**ST. JOSEPH,**  
WHOM JESUS HAS RAISED TO A THRONE OF THE  
HIGHEST PROMINENCE AND DIGNITY IN HIS CHURCH  
AND  
WHOM WE DELIGHT TO INVOKE,  
AS THE FOSTER-FATHER OF OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE,  
AND PATRON, NEXT TO JESUS AND MARY,  
OF ALL THAT WE UNDERTAKE,  
THIS TRANSLATION IS DEDICATED,  
IN HONOUR OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION  
AND OF THE  
MOST GLORIOUS PERFECTIONS  
OF OUR  
QUEEN AND MOTHER,  
HIS OWN MOST HOLY SPOUSE  
**MARY.**





A. M. D. G.

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

The virtues and talents of Father Paul Segneri of the Society of Jesus, and the merits of his little work, "Il Devoto di Maria," of which this is a new translation, are perhaps too well known to most Catholics even in England to require the introduction of a preface: it may be well however to present a few remarks for the sake of those who have not the same knowledge of the Author and his writings.

Father Segneri was born in the Campagna of Rome in 1624, and died at the age of 70. The last 27 years of his holy life were spent almost unceasingly in giving missions in different parts of Italy; in all of which his Apostolic zeal and extraordinary austerities were rewarded with an abundant harvest of souls. He composed a variety of devotional and ascetic treatises of which the present is one of the best known; though all continue to be prized and studied especially in his own country. With his name is inseparably connected that of Father Peter Pinamonti, a religious of the same So-

ciety, who was united with him not only by the ties of a tender mutual affection, but by actual participation in his labours both as a Missionary and as an Author; and the beneficial influence of this cooperation is visible in their writings, as it was in their ministry. Their lives form one of the earlier volumes of the Oratorian Series.

The reader must not expect to find an elaborate theological work in the compass of these few pages; though there is really matter enough in them to fill several volumes. The treatise is indeed remarkably short, considering the completeness of the view which it places before us of the rank and prerogatives of Mary; but it is admirably adapted to the wants of the devout Catholic, who without being able to study the theological questions connected with the subject, is ready to ponder the great and pregnant truths which concern her, whom, in common with all the faithful, he delights to honour, and whom he knows to be the first of all created beings. And seldom, it may fairly be asserted, have these glorious truths been more clearly set forth than in this striking work.

It will be perceived that a certain quaintness of style has been purposely retained in this translation, as corresponding better with the peculiar colouring of the original, which belongs to the manners and modes of think-

ing prevalent in the time and country in which Segneri lived. And it need not surprise the reader, who is aware that scientific discovery was then in its infancy, and that fanciful and false ideas on matters belonging to natural philosophy are current in all cotemporary writers, to find such notions taken for granted in some of the various illustrations employed by the Author. In some instances, where from this cause the illustrations seemed likely rather to weaken than strengthen the argument to a modern reader, they have been either considerably modified or altogether omitted. By these remarks it must not be understood that any apology is intended or required for any portion of the actual doctrine contained in this work—which is at once sound, and solidly established by a chain of proof, profound enough to rival learned treatises, and yet open to the comprehension of simple minds. All Segneri's thoughts and conclusions are brought forward with an artlessness and simplicity, which are well suited to the real grandeur of his subject, and which, though not uncommon in devotional works of a later date, were a proof of originality at the time at which he wrote. This simplicity of style, observable throughout the work, might well disarm the suspicions and prejudices even of Protestants, although there may be many assertions as to the glory and preeminence of the Blessed Vir-

gin, which most Protestants would find great difficulty in accepting. We do not intend to say anything here in defence of these truths : we leave them to maintain themselves on the strength of that immoveable foundation, which Father Segneri has proved to have been laid for them in the eternal decrees of the Almighty Himself.

But there is one passage, occurring in p. 86, where the author quotes and adopts an expression of St. John Damascene, that "Mary should enjoy what belongs to her Son and *be adored by all*;" with respect to which it may be as well to remind the reader that the term "*adore*", like the Latin *adoro* and corresponding words in other languages, has the general meaning of paying homage and expressing submission to a superior being, and varies in intensity according to the particular degree of honour due to the person to whom it is applied. It would be easy to quote passages from books written in our own language, as well as from the original text of Scripture, where the same word is thus used to express different degrees of reverence. But it may be enough to refer a Protestant to the Common Prayer-Book of the Establishment, where a similar word "*worship*" is applied in the Marriage-Service to honour paid by the man to his wife. When Father Segneri or any Catholic writer speaks of paying *adoration* to the Immaculate Mo-

ther of God, he intends that particular degree of reverence, which is due to her, and which the Church has always actually paid her, and not that very different kind of worship which is due to God alone.

May she, who is here extolled by her devout Client, and who obtained for him those powers which he so worthily employed in her honour, receive into her most sovereign love and protection all who peruse this little work with attention and earnestness; and may they learn from it to follow in the footsteps of the pious Author in devotion to her, whom to love and venerate is among the most hopeful signs of predestination to glory.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS.

---

Introduction	...	...	...	...	...	...	PAGE XV
--------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	---------

## PART THE FIRST.

### THE MOTIVES WHICH MAY HELP US TO OBTAIN TRUE DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE FIRST MOTIVE IS THE SPECIAL LOVE WHICH GOD HIMSELF BEARS TO HER.

SEC.	PAGE
I.—God loves the Blessed Virgin alone more than He loves all other creatures	3
II.—The Blessed Virgin is first-born in the order of Nature	6
III.—The Blessed Virgin is first-born in the order of Grace	12
IV.—The Blessed Virgin is first-born in the order of Glory	22

#### CHAPTER II.

##### THE SECOND MOTIVE IS HER GREAT DIGNITY.

I.—The dignity of the Blessed Virgin is above that of all other creatures	26
II.—The Maternity of the Blessed Virgin considered as a material fact	32
III.—The Maternity of the Blessed Virgin considered as a moral fact	34
IV.—The Blessed Virgin obtained her dignity of Mother by merit of congruity	40

#### CHAPTER III.

##### THE THIRD MOTIVE IS HER SANCTITY.

I.—The Blessed Virgin was made the most worthy of all love and honour	45
II.—The fulness of her sanctity inferred from the end for which it was bestowed	46
III.—The fulness of her sanctity inferred from the source whence it was derived	54



SEC.	PAGE
IV.—The fulness of her sanctity inferred from her own cooperation with Divine grace ... ..	63
V.—The Blessed Virgin confirms to Suarez the truth of this opinion	82

## CHAPTER IV.

THE FOURTH MOTIVE IS THE HONOUR PAID TO HER  
BY THE WHOLE CHURCH.

I.—Honour paid by the Church is a sure proof of merit ... ..	84
II.—The antiquity of that honour ... ..	85
III.—The universality of that honour ... ..	91
IV.—The sublimity of that honour ... ..	95
V.—Instances of that honour ... ..	100

## CHAPTER V.

## THE FIFTH MOTIVE IS THE BENEFITS RECEIVED FROM HER.

I.—The Blessed Virgin by being the Mother of Christ is the material cause of all our blessings ... ..	104
II.—She is thus also the moral cause of all our blessings ... ..	108
III.—She still continues to concur in the bestowal of all graces ... ..	111
IV.—Her liberality in the distribution of her favours ... ..	120

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE SIXTH MOTIVE IS THE GREAT LOVE SHE BEARS US.

I.—The difficulty of expressing the greatness of Mary's love for us	126
II.—Her love is inflamed by looking upon herself as appointed to be our mother ... ..	127
III.—Her love is inflamed by looking upon the miseries of her children	130
IV.—Her love is enkindled by the fire of the Divine love ... ..	136

## CHAPTER VII.

THE SEVENTH MOTIVE IS THAT THIS DEVOTION IS A  
MARK OF PREDESTINATION.

I.—Devotion to Mary is a sure sign of predestination ... ..	139
II.—The honour of Mary is the secondary end of our predestination	143
III.—Mary is the secondary cause of our predestination ... ..	147
IV.—The glory of Mary does not detract from the glory of God ... ..	156

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

xiii

PART THE SECOND.

THE MEANS WHICH MAY HELP US TO OBTAIN TRUE  
DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

CHAPTER I.

SEC.	PAGE
THE FIRST AND SECOND MEANS.	
I.—The first means is meditation ... ..	163
II.—The second means is spiritual reading ... ..	166

CHAPTER II.

THE THIRD MEANS IS FREQUENTLY TO INVOKE HER IN PRAYER.	170
Prayers for each day of the week ... ..	172—181

CHAPTER III.

THE FOURTH MEANS IS TO OBSERVE SOME SPECIAL PRACTICES IN HER HONOUR. ... ..		188
I.—To choose the Blessed Virgin for our mother ... ..	184	
II.—To reverence her in her pictures and images ... ..	185	
III.—To visit her churches devoutly ... ..	187	
IV.—To recite daily her office and rosary ... ..	188	
V.—To make a novena before her principal feasts ... ..	190	
VI.—To pay special honour to those Saints who were more nearly re- lated or particularly devoted to her ... ..	191	
VII.—To have Mass said, or to hear it in her honour ... ..	193	
VIII.—To fast or practise some other works of penance on the vigils of her feasts ... ..	195	
IX.—To give alms in her name ... ..	196	
X.—To receive Holy Communion upon her solemn feasts ... ..	197	
XI.—To imitate her virtues ... ..	198	
XII.—To abstain from some sinful action for her sake ... ..	200	



## INTRODUCTION.

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### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE DEVOTION TO OUR BLESSED LADY.

The more precious a coin is, the greater generally is the danger of its being counterfeited. No wonder therefore that the devil, as the father of lies and deceit, and the grand ringleader of all false coiners, has ever been, and still is most industrious in counterfeiting that precious gold of devotion towards the Blessed Virgin, which is so acceptable to the Divine Mercy, and always current in the bank of Heaven.

To you then, christian reader, it will be a matter of no small importance to procure a faithful touchstone, by which to test the purity of this noble metal, in order that, at the great day of reckoning, you may not be like those negligent and imprudent bankers, who at the closing of their accounts find themselves bankrupt, when they thought that their credit was good and the balance in their favour. And I earnestly wish you to engage in the pursuit, with the same zeal and resolution that I myself feel in my desire to direct you, through the help of this little work, until you come, by the shortest and easiest way, to find out this precious touchstone, which, if it be only turned to good account, you may justly value as the choicest of jewels. What therefore is this devotion to the Blessed Virgin ?

It is natural enough for every one to represent things to his own imagination, not as they are in fact, but as he himself would wish them to be. When, for instance, the Abyssinians represent an angel in a picture, they paint him with a black face, because their own is of that colour: and so, because sinners have their heart blackened with the filth of sin, the idea which they entertain of this devotion to our Blessed Lady, is a very dark one; while, at the same time, they magnify it beyond measure, and extol it above all other devotions. As if, forsooth, a murderer, an adulterer, or a soul stained with the loathsome spots of sin, the very sight of which is enough to move her to indignation, might pretend to pass for her devout client. But as we cannot pronounce the waters of a rivulet to be good and wholesome, unless we taste them at the fountain-head; so we cannot form a right idea of this particular devotion, of which I am about to treat, unless we understand what devotion in general means.

Devotion in general, according to St. Thomas, is *a readiness of the will in undertaking and performing every thing that belongs to the service of God*.<sup>1</sup> A man may be truly said to be devout or devoted to his prince, who is ready to undertake anything for his glory and interest; or devoted to his country, who upon all occasions is ready to serve his country. And so, in respect of Almighty

<sup>1</sup> Voluntas quædam prompte tradendi se ad ea, quæ pertinent ad Dei famulatum. S. Thom. 2. 2. q. 82. art. 1.

God, the children of Israel were properly called devout or devoted to His service, when, being invited to contribute to the erection of the celebrated tabernacle in the desert, they all came with incredible alacrity and cheerfulness, to bring for that purpose the most precious things they had, their silver and gold plate, their necklaces of pearl, their jewels, and all their richest ornaments.<sup>1</sup>

According to this standard, what must be true devotion to our Blessed Lady? It must be a readiness of the will to undertake, and carry into execution, whatever is pleasing to her, or conducive to her honour. And therefore rigorous fasts, long prayers, and still longer pilgrimages, performed in her honour, are not properly to be called devotion to the great Virgin Mother of God; but are either the effects of it, if they proceed from this readiness of the will to serve her, or at least a means towards it, if they conduce in some manner to its acquisition. As long as they are neither such effects, nor such means, they are only a mask of devotion; because they neither suppose this readiness of the will, nor give it. When this is the case, they are not that genuine coin we are speaking of, and which finds credit wherever it is known; but a sort of metal, which resembles the true one, in as much as it bears the same stamp, yet falls far short of the real value of it, and which will therefore, instead of being laid up in the treasury of Heaven, be thrown out upon the dunghill.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xxxv. 20, 26.

<sup>2</sup> Aurum illorum in sterquilinum erit. Ezech. vii. 19.

This being supposed, how can those be looked upon as devout clients of the Blessed Virgin, who are in so many ways disobedient to her will, and who content themselves with some slight exterior profession of worship towards her, while they refuse her the very thing she most of all desires, namely, that they should abandon their sins? Have such persons as these a readiness of will to serve her? Do they endeavour to please her, or to seek her glory? On the contrary, their whole aim, if well considered, seems to be only to deceive her.

The Gabaonites, to exempt themselves from the sentence which was being executed with great rigour upon the inhabitants of the Land of Promise, deceived Josue by appearing before him with their clothes all in rags, their victuals dried up, their pitchers empty, and their shoes worn out, as if they had made a long journey to find him, whereas they had in fact scarcely stirred from home to look for him.<sup>1</sup> This is just what these sinners and pretended clients of the Blessed Virgin do. They have no other design than to stave off that dreadful sentence of condemnation, with which the Divine Justice is continually threatening them, and which, from time to time, it actually executes upon their fellow sinners. With this view they present themselves before the Blessed Virgin, full of respect, and with a sort of penitential garb more apparent than real; that is to say, with certain acts pious in themselves but merely exterior, such as a small

1 Josue ix. 3, 15.

alms given for her sake, a few psalms recited, or a fast upon a Saturday kept in her honour. And by these they would fain persuade her that they have made long journeys to find her out, whereas they have really taken but very few steps towards her, and perhaps have not set foot out of doors; that is, have not quitted the inveterate habits of sin, in which they have passed the greater part of their lives. But in vain will they try to deceive Mary, as the Gabaonites deceived Josue. For though he was imposed upon, and cheated into a league of friendship with them, because he *consulted not the mouth of the Lord*,<sup>1</sup> yet there can be no danger of any such surprise to the Blessed Virgin, who, seeing all things in God, knows the deceitful heart of those false clients. It is evident then, that where there is not a will, and a ready will, to please the Blessed Virgin, there can be no true devotion to her.

But, that by this rule we may not altogether deprive either sinners of that confidence, which they have placed in the Blessed Virgin, or Mary of that worship which she receives from sinners, I propose to make the following distinction. Some are sinners, and are resolved to continue such still, thus adding to the evil of their wounds the sinful obstinacy of neglecting their cure. Others are sinners, it is true; but yet they would willingly become just, and therefore sigh after some pious Samaritan, to pour the healing balsam into their wounds, the smart of which they now begin to feel. This second class, how-

1 Os Domini non interrogavit. Josue ix. 14.



ever, may be of good heart. For, though they have not yet reached true devotion to our Lady, since they have not that ready disposition of will absolutely to quit their sinful state for her sake; yet they are in the way towards it, since they have a desire at least of abandoning sin, though this desire is, as yet, but very weak. Those early streaks of light, which the sun sends before him from under the horizon, are only the break of day, not the day itself. But give him time to mount above the horizon, and it will not be long before the bright day will appear in its full glory. Let those poor sinners, miserable as they are, continue to recommend themselves to the great Mother of God, and earnestly beg of her every day to break the heavy chains of slavery, under which they still groan; <sup>1</sup> and then, after such a dawn, it cannot be doubted but that the Sun of Justice, of which she is the forerunner, will one day rise in their souls.

It is peculiarly the office of the Blessed Virgin, to lead sinners to God. *My Mother*, said our Saviour to His beloved St. Catherine of Sienna, *is a most delicious bait with which I draw sinners to me.*<sup>2</sup> But that multitude of obstinate sinners, who will not so much as admit a thought of surrendering their hearts to repentance, and *who will not set their thoughts to return to their God:*<sup>3</sup> shall they, do you think, be reckoned amongst the devout clients of our Lady? They neither belong to that happy

1 Solve vincla reia. Hymn. Eccl.

2 Mater Mea dulcissima esca est, qua ad Me peccatores traho. S. Cath. Sien. Dial. c. 4.

3 Non dant cogitationes suas ut revertantur ad Dominum. Osee v. 4.

number, nor are they ever likely to do so. On the contrary, they are so far from being her true clients and faithful servants, that they could not be more absolutely her enemies, than they already are. They pretend indeed to honour her, but what is their design? Is it not to continue, as long as it shall be in their power, to offend her Divine Son, and then to hope for mercy by her means? What treachery can be imagined greater than this, or what folly more extravagant?

*Spare me my son Absalom,*<sup>1</sup> was the order King David gave to those loyal soldiers, who would not depart from their allegiance to their lawful sovereign, when all the rest revolted against him. The same charge, we may reasonably imagine, has been given by the Blessed Virgin, to all those who have enrolled themselves in her service, under her royal standard. *Spare me my Son Jesus. Do not ill-treat Him, ye faithful, do not insult Him: but shew Him that respect and that reverence, which are due to Him far beyond what was ever due to the rebel Absalom.* Now if, notwithstanding all this, there should be found a rash Joab, who, after having cruelly pierced the heart of that Innocent Son, comes directly to His afflicted Mother with his three lances reeking with the blood of the Son, not to cast them and himself at her feet in grief and confusion, nor to humble himself before her, but to give them a sharper edge under her very eyes, and prepare them for inflicting deeper

1 Servate mihi puerum meum Absalom. 2 Reg. xviii 5.

wounds; shall such a monster as this, I ask, be looked upon as a faithful servant and devout client of so great a Mother? Yet this is really the state of the impenitent sinner. Faith teaches us that mortal sin has once already been the cause of the death of Jesus. And it would be so again, if the power of the sinner were equal to his boldness and malice. For, as the learned Cajetan says: *The evil or guilt of sin is such in its own nature, that if God could lose anything of His goodness, it would take it from Him; just as, on the other hand, the love of friendship towards God is such in its own nature, that if God were capable of any new perfection, it would bestow it upon Him.*<sup>1</sup> How can any one then, with sword in hand, that is, with a deliberate resolution of daily offending Jesus Christ more and more, presume to boast of fidelity and devotion to His Blessed Mother? How can he, under the garb of a true client, presume to confide in her protection, to hope for preservation, and even one might add, expect to be rewarded by her for his insolence? No, no: this is not to honour the Blessed Virgin, but to offend her all the more, and to offer her a more grievous insult. Let me ask these sinners this question. Either you believe that the Immaculate Virgin is not displeased at your sins, and thus you make her as guilty of them as yourselves:<sup>2</sup> or you believe that they are displeasing to her, and if so, who can sufficiently

1 *Malum culpæ, quantum est ex se, est privativum boni Divini, si esset privabile: sicut amor amicitie erga Deum est positivum boni Divini, si esset possibile.* Cajet. 1. q. 19, art. 9.

2 *Abominabiles sicut ea quæ dilexerunt.* Osce ix, 10.

express the insult which you offer her, when you flatter yourselves, that by your pretended homage you can prevail upon her to authorise your crimes? Do you think those services or duties, as you call them, can be acceptable to her, while they are intended by you only to increase that very evil of sin, which she so much abhors? I know indeed that Christ has placed the Blessed Virgin in this world, not only as a bait to allure to Himself the softened *hearts of flesh*,<sup>1</sup> namely those sinners who begin to think of amending their lives; but also as a loadstone to draw *the hearts of steel*, that is, of sinners hardened in their sins, as was revealed to St. Bridget. But O the malice and perverseness of these wicked sinners! Not only do they refuse to suffer themselves to be drawn towards God by this heavenly loadstone, but on the contrary, they endeavour to pervert the order of Divine grace, by drawing the loadstone to themselves; and instead of yielding their hearts up to her, as a conquest which she is most ambitious to make, they would, if possible, oblige her even to stand by them in their wickedness, and second their sacrilegious designs. Now! what can be imagined more insolent than this, or more injurious to her honour? *Knowest thou not*, says the Apostle, *that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?*<sup>2</sup> The husbandman would never think it worth his while to take pains with fens and marshy grounds, if it were not for some prospect he has of making them good land

<sup>1</sup> Ezech. xxxvi. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ignoras quoniam benignitas Dei ad pœnitentiam te adducit. Rom. ii. 4.

in time, and of rendering them fruitful, by draining off the waters. In the same manner, the Divine Mercy can never display itself towards sinners with any other design, than in order to drain off from their hearts, choked up as they are with the mud and mire of sin, those filthy waters of iniquity, which they have drunk so plentifully, and which have drowned in them all sense of piety and devotion; nor with any other hope, than that of disposing them by this means to repay with interest the losses of their former sterility, by bringing forth *fruits worthy of penance*<sup>1</sup> for what is past, and a great abundance of good works, for the time to come. If mercy towards sinners did not propose to itself some such good end, it would not be mercy, but insensibility and folly, nay even wickedness.

This being so, it may very reasonably be concluded that the Mother of God has not, upon earth, any more insupportable enemies, than those who shield themselves under her favours, that they may sin with greater confidence. For such persons seem resolved to snatch from her by force, the most beautiful star she bears in her crown, her title of Mother of Mercy, as she is daily styled by the faithful. She will be obliged at length to lay aside that title of tenderness and compassion, when she finds her mercies abused to such a degree, as, contrary to her intentions, to increase the number of sinners, instead of diminishing it. Or rather, if she sees that those gentle drops of heavenly dew, which she pours down so

1 Matt. iii. 8.

liberally upon all mankind. have no better effect than to nourish such vile and venomous insects, she will be forced both in honour and justice to change that dew into storms and tempests, and, instead of the gracious title of **Mother of Mercy**, to take upon her the dreadful one of **Mother of Wrath**. She will be forced, I say, to declare open war against them, to pursue them with fire and sword, to put them to confusion, to pass sentence of death upon them, and in a word, to crush with her own sacred feet the heads of this accursed brood of vipers, which are eager to suck in the precious milk of her all-merciful breasts, only in order to make their own poison the more deadly.

What then must come of these miserable sinners? Is there no remedy for them? Must they leave off those few prayers and devotions, that they have been wont to offer up to her? Must they lay aside all those fasts, those alms, those pilgrimages, and other pious practices, the outward expression of honour and reverence towards her? God forbid! Let them continue them. But then they must remember to raise their intention to a nobler end, that their pious practices and devotions may not be altogether without fruit. Let them profess to the Holy Mother of God, that they have no other aim in their devotions, than to move her to obtain for them of Almighty God, strength and resolution enough to abandon their sins. And if their case is so desperate, and the mortal distemper of their souls has gained by long continuance, such hold over them, that they now lie, as

it were bed-ridden, in the corruption of their evil habits, without even the desire of recovering their spiritual health; let them beg of her this very desire, in which they are so wanting. And this desire will be a certain sign of approaching health, or, to speak more correctly, will be the actual beginning of it: since it is a known axiom, that to desire to be cured, is almost half the cure.

*Pars sanitatis est, velle sanari.*

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# PART THE FIRST.





THE  
DEVOUT CLIENT OF MARY.

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PART THE FIRST.

THE MOTIVES WHICH MAY HELP US TO OBTAIN

TRUE DEVOTION

TO THE

*Blessed Virgin Mary.*

I question not, dear reader, but that, from the description I have now given you of some, who, while they pretend to be devout clients of our Lady, are far from being really such, you will easily distinguish true devotion to the ever Blessed Virgin, from that which is a mere shadow of it, without substance; and that you will not suffer yourself to be deluded by that false appearance, which the devil sometimes gives to it by his own colouring. I shall now proceed to propose some of the principal, and most efficacious motives, which should animate you in its pursuit; for the endeavour to obtain it, and the effectual acquisition of it, are not many steps asunder.

B

If it be true that devotion always proceeds from love, as its immediate cause, if it be a flame of that noble fire, a ray of that sun, a rivulet from that fountain; it follows, of course, that the same motives which induce us to love the Blessed Virgin, will also be able to kindle in our hearts a sincere devotion to her, by stirring up in us a readiness of the will to do whatever she requires of us, either for her honour or for her service. Now, any object is amiable, or worthy of being loved, either because it is good in itself, or because it is good with reference to us. So likewise in all our love, we may reckon two sorts of affection, from which it may derive its strength: one *essential*, which is called an appreciative love, or love of esteem; the other *accidental*, which may be termed a love of tenderness.

And therefore, as I have taken upon myself to be your guide, not to any inferior devotion to our Blessed Lady, but to that which is most perfect, and most agreeable to her, I shall make it my chief study, to represent to you in her person a Virgin, who is the most perfect of all pure creatures, in all kinds of limited perfection, and worthy of love in every respect, both in herself, and with reference to us. And on the other hand I shall endeavour to inflame your heart with such an affection for her, as shall always be accompanied by the highest esteem of her merits, since nothing but true merit can justly claim the rational tribute of our affections. I reduce the motives we have for loving the Blessed Virgin to seven, and I designedly choose this number, in order that you may

be furnished with sufficient matter, either for meditation, or for reading, as you find most convenient, on each of the seven days of the week. The subjects indeed are very different, but you will find them all of use to you, and equally adapted to keep alive within you an ardent affection towards the Blessed Virgin Mary. The fire of this affection requires such fuel ; and, however strong it may be, it is very soon extinguished, if we are not most careful to supply it with new matter to feed upon.

## CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST MOTIVE OF DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS THE SPECIAL LOVE WHICH ALMIGHTY GOD HIMSELF BEARS TO HER.

### SECTION I.

GOD LOVES THE BLESSED VIRGIN ALONE MORE THAN HE LOVES ALL OTHER CREATURES.

As, under the Old Law, no weights were reckoned just, or lawful to be used, but such as had been accurately examined in the famous balance of the sanctuary ; so, in order that the value which we set upon things, or the weight, so to speak, which we give them in our judgments, may be just and true, it must be brought to the infallible test of the Divine Judgment, and there weighed by the esteem in which Almighty God Himself holds them ; since His Infinite Wisdom, and that alone, is the great *Primum Mobile*, or First Cause, which both in heaven, and upon earth, ought to be the measure and standard of

all things that are moved. If then I can shew, that the love, with which Almighty God regards the Blessed Virgin Mary, is inconceivably great, I shall prove, at the same time, that she deserves to be loved by us beyond all that can be expressed. Now, what a high place this heavenly spouse holds in the affections of her Divine Solomon cannot be better understood, than by comparing her with others among His creatures, who are known to be themselves high in His favour. *My young maidens*, He says in the Canticles, *are without number*. But, *One is my dove, my perfect one is but one, she is the only one*:<sup>1</sup> she is alone, she has no equal. And therefore, without going in search of many proofs, I might sum them all up in this one, and boldly affirm, that this glorious Queen alone is dearer to her Divine Spouse, than all the rest of His heavenly court together. And in saying this, I should say no more, than what has been expressly asserted by St. Bonaventure,<sup>2</sup> St. Anselm,<sup>3</sup> and St. Augustine,<sup>4</sup> amongst the Holy Fathers; and amongst modern divines, by no one more confidently than by the devout and learned Suarez, when he says, that *God loves the Virgin alone, more than all the other Saints together*.<sup>5</sup> What other proof of the proposition before us could I undertake to produce, that is not already contained in this? For, if Christ loves every one of the elect in

1 Adolescentularum non est numerus. Una est columba mea, perfecta mea una est. Cant. vi. 7, 8.

2 In Spec. Mar. C. 6.

3 De Excel. Virg. C. 4.

4 Apud S. Bonav. loco cit.

5 Deus plus amat solam Virginem quam reliquos sanctos omnes. 3. p. 1, 2. Diop. 18. sec. 3.

particular, more than all the elect together can possibly love Him, as is undoubtedly the case, what an excess of love must that be which He bears to the Blessed Virgin Mary? For He loves her more, than He loves all the Apostles, all the Patriarchs, all the Prophets, all those millions of Martyrs, who have suffered such cruel deaths for His sake; more than all the Angels, all the Archangels, all the highest Choirs of Seraphim: in a word, more than all the whole Church, whether militant on earth, or triumphant in heaven. So that if, to make an impossible supposition, He were under the necessity of losing either the Blessed Virgin, or all those I have mentioned, and millions more, He would sooner part with them all, than with her. However, though what I have now said is, in fact, the sum of all that can be advanced upon this subject, yet, as distances are measured step by step, better than by the eye alone, so we shall be more able to conceive the prodigious extent of the love and esteem, which Almighty God has for the Blessed Virgin, if we consider it under different heads in detail, than if we endeavoured to embrace the whole under one general view.

I say then that the Blessed Virgin Mary is that great first-born in the order of Nature, in the order of Grace, and in the order of Glory, who, in each of these three characters, enjoys most justly, not only the largest portion of the inheritance of Almighty God, but also the best and greatest share of His paternal affections: *My perfect one is but one: she is the only one.* And first let us test the

truth of this assertion in the order of Nature, since it is reasonable to speak of that first, to which the first place really belongs,

## SECTION II.

### THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS FIRST-BORN IN THE ORDER OF NATURE.

The first time the Eternal Word ever spoke in the distinct formation of things, He called forth light: *Be light made.* And He called it with that loud voice, which is heard and obeyed even from the deep abyss of nothing. *God said; Be light made. And light was made.*<sup>1</sup> So that, in a manner, light may be said to have come *out of the mouth of the Most High, the first-born before all creatures*, since it was the first production of this Almighty voice. And if so, what wonder that it should be beautiful above everything that was afterwards summoned into the world, by the same all-powerful voice? It is neither spirit nor body, but a something between the two, expressly contrived to be the channel of that constant correspondence and mutual communication of influences, which was afterwards to be maintained between earth and heaven. And here, who does not see that the Uncreated Wisdom intended, from the very beginning of the world, to represent to us under this admirable emblem of light the ever-glorious Virgin Mary? She is indeed a creature, and in that respect infinitely inferior to God: but

<sup>1</sup> Dixitque Deus; Fiat lux. Et facta est lux. Gen. i. 3.

yet so immensely exalted above all the rest, that she might almost be said to belong to a middle state, between human and divine. Because she was created for no other end, than to be the channel of communication between heaven and earth, and the immediate instrument for joining together the two natures Divine and human, God and man, in the closest possible union. With much more reason therefore may she say of herself: *I came out of the mouth of the Most High, the first-born before all other creatures.*<sup>1</sup>

It is certain that the Blessed Virgin was not absolutely the first-born amongst creatures in the order of time, since her actual birth was many ages later than the formation of the world. Yet she is said to be the first, and even to have been created *from the beginning and before the world:*<sup>2</sup> because, though she was not first in the execution of the divine decrees, yet she was first in their intention; and, being the highest in rank of all the pure creatures that God's Omnipotence was to produce, she was, in a manner, the end of all the rest of His creation. *For her,* says St. Bernard, *the whole world was made.*<sup>3</sup> Not indeed for her as its final end, for that can be no other than God Himself: but for her as the secondary end of this vast universe, designed by its Creator with this very intention, that it should be subject to her as its Queen. If any one is surprised at what I here advance,

1 Ego ex ore Altissimi prodivi, primogenita ante omnem creaturam. Eccl. xxiv. 5.

2 Ab initio, et ante sæcula creata sum. Eccl. xxiv. 14.

3 Propter hanc totus mundus factus est. Serm. 7. in Salve Regina.



he shews himself to be little acquainted with the merits of Mary. Our Blessed Saviour, speaking one day to the seraphic St. Theresa, told her, as if to cool the vehement flames of the love He bore her, *If I had not already created this world, I would create it for thee alone.* After this, can there be any exaggeration in saying that the Divine Word has actually done, out of a special regard for His own Blessed Mother, that which, had there been occasion, He would have done for a poor handmaid of that very same Mother, and for her alone? No doubt we may freely say to the Holy Virgin, without danger of saying too much: *All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*<sup>1</sup> All that is good in nature, all is for you, great Lady, and all belongs to you, as you belong to Christ, and Christ to God.

It was anciently a custom with the Kings of Persia, to divide between the chief cities of their dominions the charge of providing all that belonged to the immediate use of the royal consort, that thus all might share in the honour of serving their queen. One city was to furnish all that was requisite for her toilet, another her necklace and bracelets of pearl, another her crown, and so of her robes, her sandals, and jewels, in short of her whole attire. So we may say that Almighty God ordained all the different orders of creation, as peopled cities, for the use and service of Mary. Whilst she was an inhabitant of this lower world, all created things vied with each other in serving her; not indeed for the decoration of her body,

<sup>1</sup> Omnia tua sunt: tu autem Christi: Christus autem Dei. 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

which she never thought worthy of her care, but for that of her soul, each one supplying her with new motives for praising her Lord and Creator, for admiring Him, and for raising herself above them all to the most sublime contemplation of His Greatness. And in this manner they served the Blessed Virgin better, and were of more use to her, than ever they have been before or since to all the rest of mankind. Nay, I may safely say, that she is the only one in whom they have perfectly attained the end for which they were made, which was, that they might serve as a ladder of so many steps, by which we may gradually rise to the perfect knowledge and love of God. For she alone ascended much higher by contemplation than the whole world besides, and never was she known to descend again, by the abuse of any grace bestowed on her, as all others do by sin, and thus depart from the highest good by those same steps, which should have raised them nearer to it. But now that leaving our world, where she spent her life as one unknown, she has ascended her throne in heaven, with far greater homage do all creatures serve her. With regard to her, they form the kingdom wherein she reigns supreme: as to ourselves, they are figures representing by all the beauty they possess the untold perfections of that soul, which to the Divine Architect was a created idea, upon which He designed to model this stately universe. I do not make use of this term *created idea* unadvisedly; for, on the one hand, the idea of the divine workmanship is no other than the Uncreated Word Himself, it being impossible

for God, when He produces anything *ad extra*, or externally, to imitate any other original than Himself; yet, on the other hand, we find the Blessed Virgin expressly asserting, that she took part with her Maker in constructing the whole frame of the universe: *I was with Him forming all things.*<sup>1</sup> From which it seems to follow, that she cooperated in that great work, either as a secondary end for which, or as a model according to which, He has produced it; unless we would rather say, perhaps with greater accuracy, that she took part in it in both these ways—as the end, and also as the model. When therefore Almighty God *prepared the heavens, when with a certain law and compass He enclosed the depths, when He established the sky above, and poised the fountains of waters, and balanced the foundations of the earth;*<sup>2</sup> when He produced the sun, moon, and stars; formed the minerals, vegetables, and living creatures; in a word, when He established and arranged all that beautiful variety of nature, of which this world is composed, He meant that it should serve only as a copy, in the different parts of which should be exhibited separately all those eminent prerogatives and perfections, which He intended to unite, at the appointed time, in the person of His own Virgin Mother, as in a nobler world than that which He at first created.

This interpretation agrees exactly with what St. Bernard writes, in his sermon upon the Blessed Virgin, that

1 Cum eo eram cuncta componens. Prov. viii. 30.

2 Quando præparabat cœlos, aderam &c. Prov. viii. 27, 30.

Almighty God has created two worlds, one for man, which is the earth we now inhabit, and the other for Himself, which is the soul of Mary. And this latter, as the more exact copy of the Uncreated Idea, served as a kind of original, after which to model the other. If this be allowed, we shall not be inclined to question the truth of another opinion, no less sublime than pious, proposed by St. Bernardine,<sup>1</sup> who does not hesitate to affirm, that, if Almighty God, after the notorious disobedience of our first parents in the terrestrial Paradise, did not immediately destroy the world which He had so lately created, it was in a very special manner for the Blessed Virgin Mary's sake. And here God seems to have acted like the prudent husbandman, who spares an old withered oak from the axe and the fire, that he may not disturb a swarm of bees, which he discovers in the hollow of it. And indeed the thought bears every mark of probability. For if Almighty God created the world a little before out of that particular regard which He had for His Blessed Mother, what wonder if, out of that same regard, He should likewise save it? It seems as if He wished to proceed with those faithless prevaricators, as we read that Solomon did, some ages after, with the ungrateful priest Abiathar. You deserve, said he, a thousand deaths, it is true; but I change the penalty of death, which according to your merits you should suffer this very day, into that of banishment, because I respect the sanctity of that ark, which you have so often borne upon your shoulders. *Indeed thou art*

1 Bernardin. in quodam sermone.

*worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou didst carry the ark of the Lord God.* <sup>1</sup> In the same manner we may imagine Almighty God to have spoken to those first ringleaders of rebellion: If I were to punish you as you have deserved, I should this very moment destroy you both, as I would crush the heads of two deadly venomous serpents, and extinguish in you at once the seed of your whole posterity; for they, infected with the poison of your example, will only learn to transgress My laws, as you have done. But I foresee that from your blood will one day be born a Virgin, wholly unlike yourselves, who shall be the living ark to receive within her virginal womb a Son, at present within My own breast; and therefore I consent to change the sentence of death, which otherwise I should now pronounce against you, into that of perpetual banishment from this place of delights, where rebels like yourselves are so unfit to dwell.

### SECTION III.

#### THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS FIRST-BORN IN THE ORDER OF GRACE.

Thus we have already entered insensibly upon what we may call the noblest part of the estate in this great primogeniture, or birth-right of the Blessed Virgin. It would have been no great honour for her, that the world had been at first created, and afterwards preserved from

<sup>1</sup> Equidem vir mortis es, sed hodie te non interficiam, quia portasti arcam Domini Dei. 3 Kings. ii. 26.

destruction for her sake, if she had not been as especially privileged in the order of Grace, as she was specially beloved in the order of Nature. Tertullian calls man *the care and solicitude of the Divine Wisdom*; <sup>1</sup> as if it were then only, when He had man to create, that Almighty God employed His whole Omnipotence. How much less hyperbole would there be in this, if applied to Mary. The grandeur of the result in a manner leads us to conclude, that the whole creative energy of the Great First Cause was called forth in order to produce her. When He made the heavens, they are said to be the work of His fingers: *I will behold thy heavens, the works of thy fingers.* <sup>2</sup> But when He afterwards shewed to the world that masterpiece of His divine art, His own most Blessed Mother, He is said even by herself, humble as she was, to have exerted the whole strength and power of His arm. *He hath shewed might in His arm.* <sup>3</sup> So magnificent a work was it, to have designed and created the Immaculate Mary.

Let us now study God's very first design in the profound volumes of Predestination, where it is certain that Mary holds the first place, and is the first predestinated to grace, amongst the ranks of all pure creatures. *I came out of the mouth of the Most High, the first-born before all creatures.* For the groundwork of such a primogeniture as this, we must remember that the Blessed Virgin never

1 Curam Divini Ingenit.

2 Videbo celos tuos, opera digitorum tuorum. Ps. viii. 4.

3 Fecit potentiam in brachio suo. Luc. i. 51.

occupied any other position in the designs of Almighty God, than that of Mother to this same God, and this is the rank that she has possessed from all eternity. When the Apostle St. Paul, speaking of Christ our Lord to the Romans, tells them, that *He was made of the seed of David according to the flesh*, as being the Son of Mary; he immediately adds, *Who was predestinated the Son of God.*<sup>1</sup> What could the Apostle mean by placing the temporal birth of Christ, in which the Blessed Virgin is so nearly concerned, in the same context with His eternal predestination, except to shew that these two predestinations, of Christ and of Mary, were inseparable one from the other, and that, as Christ never appears in the decrees of eternity, but as the Son of Mary of the seed of David, so Mary never appears in the same decrees, but as the Mother of Christ? This Pearl and this Shell are so firmly united together, that all the powers in nature, or even above nature, can never keep them apart, and we cannot possibly look upon the one without seeing the other in the same glance. *If Christ were not flesh*, says St. Ephrem the Syrian, *to what purpose was Mary brought into the world?*<sup>2</sup> By which he would give us to understand, that Mary was a work of the Divine Power purely intended for the Word Incarnate; and that, as she could not have attained the end of her creation without Christ,

1 Qui factus est Ei ex semine David secundum carnem, Qui prædestinatus est Filius Dei. Rom. 1. 4.

2 Si Christus non esset caro, quorsum Maria in mundum introducta? Sern. de Transfig.

so, if He were not to have become Man by taking flesh from her, she herself would never have been created. Nor is this all. Not only was the predestination of this Mother included by a necessary connection in the predestination of this Son, but they were both wrought as it were upon the same pattern; and as Christ resembled no one so closely as He did His Blessed Mother, in the composition of His body, and the features of His face, so Mary resembled no one so closely as her Divine Son, in the perfection and in the features of her soul. All this I am the more inclined to believe, because the Church does not hesitate to apply to the Blessed Virgin those very terms which, in the book of Proverbs and elsewhere, are certainly intended by the Holy Ghost to be understood of the Uncreated Wisdom, her Divine Son Himself.<sup>1</sup> And what confirms still more this opinion is, that in the sacred Canticles Christ Himself so often calls her *His Sister*; as if to make us understand that she is the first and only copy of that first and only Original; and that she and Christ, if I may be allowed to use the expression, were both born at a birth in the Divine decrees. As therefore Christ is the first-born by nature, so also the Blessed Virgin is a true first-born, but in an order less sublime, and only by adoption.

This being granted, who can express or even conceive the degree of preference, which the Blessed Virgin possessed in the Heart of Almighty God, above all His

<sup>1</sup> Ego sapientia &c. Prov. viii. 12. ix. 5. Ab initio et ante sæcula &c. Eccl. xxiv. 14, 20. In festis B. M. V.



other Saints and favourites? *There are young maidens without number. My perfect one is but one.*<sup>1</sup> The other Saints, if compared with the Blessed Virgin, are like stars in the presence of the sun. They are in the firmament, it is true, but they give no light, for the excessive brightness of the sun not only outshines them individually, but even obscures the whole collected light of their rays. She is that great first-born, to whom all the rest must give place. Nay it may be said, that the other Saints were so far from claiming any right to the primogeniture in the divine ideas, that they did not appear there even in the character of children, but rather as enemies to God, and slaves of the devil. For, in the eternal foreknowledge which Almighty God had of them, He saw them sinners, before He saw them just. The Blessed Virgin alone never appeared in the character of a sinner. Her first beginnings were in greatness, sanctity, and glory. She sprang forth from the divine ideas, like the pomegranate, with a crown upon her head, as Queen and Sovereign of the whole glorious multitude of the elect. She alone was always perfectly deserving of love in herself, and perfectly beloved by Almighty God; since she was that only object of the Divine Love, which, having never been guilty of the least sin, had never the least mixture of anything repugnant to that love. Hence also it belongs to her alone, by a special prerogative, to glory, with truth, that Almighty God has always enjoyed

<sup>1</sup> Adolescentularum non est numerus. Una est perfecta mea. Una est. Cant. vi. 7, 8.

the actual possession of her. The other Saints indeed have always belonged to God by right of His Sovereign dominion: but He has not always had the actual possession of them, since they have all without exception been for some time in the power of the infernal enemy, who by the fall of Adam robbed man of his original justice, and God in a manner of the possession of those created to His own likeness. So that the Blessed Virgin alone can say with truth, *The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways*;<sup>1</sup> because the sovereign dominion, that Almighty God had over her, and His actual possession of her by grace and adoption, were never separated one from the other, not even for the briefest moment of time. The other elect were afterwards redeemed by Christ by a sort of *reparative* redemption, whereby they were rescued from a slavery, to which they were actually subject: Mary, as the first-born of all, and enjoying the peculiar privilege of her birth-right, was redeemed with another more perfect sort of *preservative* redemption, which specially prevented her from ever falling into that slavery at all. In this Christ our Lord displayed such an excess of love towards her, as even to hasten His coming into the world, in order to redeem her in this perfect manner. Hasten, do I say? St Bernardine<sup>2</sup> tells us, that He not only hastened it, but actually brought it about for her sake; since He came into the world more to redeem Mary alone, with that nobler sort of redemption just men-

1 Dominus possedit me in initio viarum suarum. Prov. viii. 22.

2 Bernardin. Serm. 51. de Conc. c. 3.

tioned, than to redeem all the rest of mankind. And this perhaps is the meaning of St. Ildefonsus, when he calls the Blessed Virgin not only the greatest, but the only work that God had in view, when He designed to take upon Him human flesh. <sup>1</sup> Not that God, when He became Man, did not absolutely design the redemption of all mankind without exception: but because the redemption of all other human beings, if compared with that of the Blessed Virgin, might be called in some manner a less studied work of God. Mary indeed was an object worthy of having an infinite treasure, such as the Blood of Jesus, expended for her redemption. For her were well spent all the grievous Sufferings of Christ, for her were well lavished on the earth those copious streams of Bloody Sweat, in fact, on her Christ, out of the treasury of His richest Merits, has conferred incomparably more grace and glory, than He has done, not only upon men, but even on all the Angels themselves. And in order that a more overflowing measure of that inheritance, which comes from the common capital, the Redemption, should fall to the lot of Mary as the first-born of grace, we observe united in her those same noble qualities, which in others are not only separated, but mutually incompatible. Thus, as in order to render the earthly Paradise more charming, the contrary beauties of Spring and Autumn were harmoniously blended together into one season; so we find, that to enrich this heavenly Queen

<sup>1</sup> Virgo; Mater Dei, solum opus Incarnationis Dei mei. Ildefons. L. de Virgine Maria. c. 10.

with more abundant grace, there are combined at once in her the purest virginity with the most fruitful maternity, the most rapt contemplation with action the most energetic, the tenderest compassion with the most heroic soul, but above all, humility the most profound allied to the sublimest dignity. Whence it is, that, when I behold this lovely Spouse amongst the chosen ones of God, she appears to me like a spotless lily, that beautiful queen of the garden, which towers above the crowd of common flowers, for I see her modestly bending her head beneath the glory of her royal crown.

But we shall have a better opportunity hereafter, to reckon up the sum of Mary's riches with greater exactness. For the present, were it allowed me to put a construction of my own upon the Blessed Virgin's words, I would say, that she is so exceeding great in the order of grace, that she even *magnifies* her own Maker. *My soul*, she says, *doth magnify the Lord.*<sup>1</sup> But in what sense does she say this? She means not that she magnifies her Maker in Himself; who could suppose it? But yet she does magnify Him to our perceptions, just as the intervening atmosphere magnifies the orb of the sun to our eyes. This she has done more particularly in two respects. First, she has given to Almighty God the greatest prerogative, and the noblest title that He possesses, next to His own essential attributes, which is, to be the *God of God Himself.*<sup>2</sup> For before she became the

1 Magnificat anima mea Dominum. Luc. l. 46.

2 Deum de Deo. Nic. Symb.

Mother of His Son, He was only the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of all the just; but now, by her means, He is truly the God of Christ, and consequently the God of God Himself. In the second place, to qualify the Blessed Virgin for such intimate companionship with so great a Son, and to make her, as St. Augustine says, *Dignam Digni*—the only Mother worthy of such a Son, as Christ was the only Son worthy of such a Mother, far greater treasures of grace were expended, than were ever employed for the sanctification of all the other Saints. And, as the greatness and power of the cause is evinced in proportion to the greatness of the effect, so we may truly say, that Mary magnifies her Lord and Creator in this way also; since He appears much greater in the soul of Mary alone, than in all those other pure souls, that He has called into existence. With truth therefore may she entone her Magnificat, *My soul doth magnify the Lord*, and we with equal truth may answer in full choir, in the words of St. Peter Chrysologus, *Yes, for so great is the Virgin, that he must be ignorant indeed of the greatness of God, who does not wonder, yea more, is not filled with admiration at the greatness of this Virgin's soul.*<sup>1</sup> This, in my opinion, is said of the Blessed Virgin, with as much reason, as it was formerly said of Solomon, that no one, who had not looked upon the glory of the Temple which he built, could have comprehended the immense extent of his riches,

1 Tanta enim est Virgo, ut quantus sit Deus satis ignoret, qui hujus Virginis mentem non stupet, animum non miratur. Chrysol. Sermon. 140.

though so much celebrated by fame. In a word, I find that when the holy Doctors of the Church would measure the sanctity of Mary, they observe no other rule, than that of a certain proportion between the Mother and the Son. *Would you know*, says St. Eucherius, *what the Mother is, consider what the Son is.*<sup>1</sup> This is the balance, which that holy Father puts into our hands, as the only suitable one for estimating the especial sanctity of Mary. It is a common practice among jewellers, to put the same price upon the jewel and the enamel, in which the jewel is set, but in the case before us, this would not be just, for the Son of Mary is a jewel of such infinite value, that no enamel whatever can equal it. So that, in order to make such a deduction on the Virgin's side as truth requires, I shall ever adore this Son as infinitely superior to this Mother; but I shall also always honour this Mother, as incomparably superior to all the other Saints, and I shall ever acknowledge her to be the first-born before them all, in the order of grace,—the only Mother specially chosen for that only Son,—the delight of the Divine Heart, tenderly loving her Divine Spouse, and tenderly beloved by Him. And indeed, if this mutual love were not, in some sense, infinite on both sides, how could she glory as she does, without any distinction, saying, *My Beloved to me, and I to Him.* It would surely be too great arrogance, thus to place herself, in a manner, on a level with her Beloved; if what she said were not true,

1 Scire vultis qualis sit Mater, cogitate qualis sit Filius.

for, as St. Bernard argues most admirably on the words, My Beloved to me and I to Him : *either the Spouse glories of herself immensely too much, or else the Spouse is immensely beloved.* <sup>1</sup>

#### SECTION IV.

##### THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS FIRST-BORN IN THE ORDER OF GLORY.

Finally, if Nature be intended for Grace, and Grace for Glory, it will be reasonable to infer that, as the Blessed Virgin has been shewn to be the great first-born in the two former orders, so she must also be in the third, and not only the first-born, but the only-born of her kind, privileged above all, head and chief of all: *My perfect one is but one, she is the only one.* In the kingdom of Glory there is no seat for any other creature, high enough to serve even for a footstool to her throne. *Between the Mother of God and the servants of God,* says St. John Damascene, *the distance is infinite.*<sup>2</sup> So that the Blessed Virgin is exalted in Heaven, to a greater height above the highest Seraphim, than the Empyrean is raised above the other celestial spheres, and she thus forms a choir by herself alone, giving light to others, and receiving it from no one, but only from the very Fountain itself of all light. <sup>3</sup> Oh! if that kind angel, who so many ages ago,

<sup>1</sup> Dum dicit, Dilectus meus mihi, et ego illi, aut sponsa in immensum gloriatur, aut sponsa in immensum diligitur.

<sup>2</sup> Inter Matrem Dei et servos Dei, infinitum est discrimen. S. Joan. Damas. Orat. 1. de domit. Virg.

<sup>3</sup> Suar. in 3. p. tm. 2. disp. 21. Sect. ult.

in that truly fortunate Island of Patmos, invited St. John to contemplate her glory, with the joyful words, *Come and I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb,*<sup>1</sup> would one day call us also to be spectators of this glorious object, what beauties should we not then behold, such as *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived.*<sup>2</sup> We should perceive that the dignity of this lovely Spouse, in the glory to which she has been assumed, is so very far beyond the reach of human understanding, that, though raised to the top of a *great and high mountain,* still is it unable to make a full discovery of her greatness. If she will be known, she must descend much of the way herself, to meet them, *coming down out of Heaven from God.*<sup>3</sup> We should see her appearing in her new and richest attire, befitting the quality and dignity of her Divine Spouse: *prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,*<sup>4</sup> or, as other interpreters understand it, *with her husband,* as if He Himself were her greatest ornament, and, as it were, the nuptial garment of her heavenly espousals. Other Saints are clothed indeed with light, but the Blessed Virgin is clothed with the sun, from which their light proceeds. They, being made only to receive, and not to give to Almighty God, are adorned with heavenly endowments and supernatural gifts; but the ever Blessed Virgin, who was made not only to re-

1 Veni et ostendam tibi sponsam uxorem Agni. Apoc. xxi. 9.

2 I. Cor. ii. 9.

3 Et sustulit me in spiritu in montem magnum et altum, et ostendit mihi civitatem sanctam Jerusalem descendentem de caelo a Deo. Apoc. xxi. 20.

4 Paratam sicut sponsam ornatum viro suo. Ib. xxi. 2.



ceive, but also to give to Almighty God, is adorned even with the Giver Himself of all those gifts. In a word, if this glorious scene were disclosed, and the curtain drawn from before our eyes, we should see the beautiful Spouse of the Lamb of God, *having the glory of God*,<sup>1</sup> shining more brightly than a thousand suns, with the light and splendour of God Himself. But the time has not come for us to soar so high, nor are we able, in this mortal state, to fix our weak eyes on so dazzling an object. Let us then respectfully cast them down, and, for the present, instead of the clear and happy assurance of sight, let us be content with the obscure yet meritorious evidence of Faith.

How indeed can we better spend this life, than in honouring, to the utmost of our ability, this heavenly Queen, and in admiring so stupendous a work of the Divine Power, in which God Himself appears so great,—this spotless Virgin always worthy of love and always beloved,—this beautiful rainbow of our safety, formed by the purest rays of the Divine Sun of Justice,—this mirror of His power—this temple of His grace—this theatre of His glory, not only made, as are other pure creatures, according to His Image, but so exact a copy thereof that nothing can resemble Him more,<sup>2</sup> formed out of the rib of the second Adam, that is, nearer to Christ's heart than all the rest of the world, and consequently, better qualified than any other to be His inseparable companion,

1 Habentem claritatem Dei. Apoc. xxi. 21.

2 Opusc. de Chart.

whether on earth or in Heaven ; in a word, His Mother, His Sister, His Spouse, His only-beloved Virgin Mary. We can never be mistaken in loving her, since God Himself, the Author of all love, shows us how we are to love her, and it cannot but be a great honour for us to follow His Divine example. <sup>1</sup>

1 Gloria magna est sequi Dominum. Eocl. xxiii. 38.

## CHAPTER II.

THE SECOND MOTIVE OF DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED  
VIRGIN IS HER GREAT DIGNITY.

## SECTION I.

THE DIGNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS ABOVE  
THAT OF ALL OTHER CREATURES.

All the worth and value of mother-of-pearl is the rich pearl itself which it contains, and which, by the secret influence of the heavens, it conceives and engenders, so to speak, within its bosom, open to this precious treasure alone, and inviolably closed against everything else. In like manner, the only true standard, by which to take the proper measure of the honour due to Mary, is that most Divine Fruit, which she conceived, by the mysterious operation of the Holy Ghost, within her virginal womb; not however to keep her treasure to herself alone, like that covetous shell, but to bestow it liberally upon the world, for the common benefit and restoration of mankind. This is the plummet, as we may call it, which St. Thomas makes use of to fathom the great dignity of this incomparable Virgin. *The Blessed Virgin*, says this Saint, *by being the Mother of God, possesses a sort of infinite dignity, derived from the infinite perfection of God, and in this respect, nothing superior to her can be made,*

*since there cannot be anything more perfect than God.* <sup>1</sup>

For the Holy Virgin to increase in dignity, it would be necessary for God to increase in perfection, but until we can find a God greater than Him whom she bore in her womb, we must not expect to find a mother greater than the Mother of God. In making her, the Almighty has put forth the highest exercise of His Infinite Power. He can, when He pleases, and that with a single word, make a firmament more spacious, than the one above us, and can adorn it with brighter stars. He can make a mountain higher than any known, an ocean more vast than that on which we sail, or an earth more fruitful and delightful than the one which we now inhabit. All this, and infinitely more, He can do with a finger, or with a breath of His mouth. But it is beyond His Infinite Power, to make a greater mother, than the Blessed Virgin. In creating this Virgin Mother He has already conferred upon the order of pure creatures, the utmost dignity of which they are capable, so long as they remain in the condition of creatures. So that, could we suppose the number of Mothers of God to be increased in the world, as would be the case, if the other two Divine Persons were to borrow human flesh, from two other Virgins, even then the world would not be raised to a higher degree of excellence or dignity, than that which it at present enjoys. This is the sentiment of St. Bernardine, who, when making the supposition, does not hesitate to

<sup>1</sup> Beata Virgo, ex hoc quod est Mater Dei, habet quandam dignitatem infinitam ex bono infinito quod est Deus; et ex hac parte non potest aliquid fieri

affirm, that *no additional dignity would hence accrue to the world.*<sup>1</sup> In Mary the world actually possesses, if not in number, at least in weight, as much of worth, excellence, and dignity, as it is capable of receiving.

It must therefore be acknowledged, that this august title of Mother of God is an abyss of perfection, and that from this abyss, as from a never-failing source, must flow those rich streams of honour and praise, which we may well say are due to Mary without any measure or limit. For, as His being the natural Son of God is the origin of all the extraordinary honours that are due to Christ, so her being the natural Mother of God is the origin and source of all the extraordinary honours that are due to Mary. And consequently, who can undertake to set a just value upon her incomparable merits? No one truly, but that God Himself, who made her so great, for, as St. Bernardine again assures us, *so great is the perfection of the Virgin, that the knowledge of it is reserved for God alone,*<sup>2</sup> and therefore it would be rashness and presumption in us weak men, to fix our gaze upon so dazzling a light. What eye is strong enough to look steadily upon a well polished mirror, when the sun darts its rays full upon it, and fills it with its own light? None certainly, except that of the sun itself. Such torrents of reflected light would be as insupportable to any other eye, as even the direct rays of that luminary itself. And so the An-

mellus, sicut non potest aliquid esse melius Deo. S. Thom. 1. p. 259. 6. ar.

1 Nihil inde cresceret orbi nobilitatis. S. Bernardin. tom. 1. Serm. 61.

2 Tanta est perfectio Virginis, ut soli Deo cognoscenda reservetur. S. Bernardin. Serm. 52. de Conc.

gels even with their clear sight and penetrating understandings, must never hope to arrive at a full comprehension of Mary. Mary is, in a manner, as incomprehensible to any created intellect, as that Divine Sun Himself, who, shining directly upon her in His meridian glory, fills her with the boundless fulness of His Divinity. Observe those very Angels, and mark how they seem to be in equal amazement at the gorgeous triumph of the one and of the other, of the Mother and the Son, on their entrance into the glories of Heaven. *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with His dyed garments from Bosra, this Beautiful One in His robe, walking in the greatness of His strength?*<sup>1</sup> This is the exclamation of the Angels in their amazement at the triumph of Christ. *Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved?*<sup>2</sup> This is the way in which these same Angels express their astonishment at the glorious triumph of Mary. The only difference observed by these Angels between Christ and Mary is, that Mary is *leaning upon her Beloved*; whereas Christ *walks in the greatness of His own strength*. In other respects, the magnificence, pomp, and splendour in which they appear, are so exceedingly great, that the Angels seem equally surprised at both. For the light of that glorious Sun, darting all His rays at once upon that spotless mirror,

1 Quis est Iste, qui venit de Edom, tinctis vestibus de Bosra? Iste formosus in stola sua, gradiens in multitudine fortitudinis suæ? Isa. lxiij. 1.

2 Quæ est ista, quæ ascendit de deserto, delictis affluens, innixa super Dilectum suum? Cant. viii. 5.

and the light of that mirror reflecting back again the same rays, are accumulations of light too strong even for the eagle-sighted Angels. But why speak of the Angels? Even Mary herself, great as she is, cannot comprehend her own greatness. For, although she conceived and lodged within herself a God made man, yet she could never conceive with her understanding how great a thing it was to bear a God within her womb. And therefore, when gratitude obliged her to make a thankful acknowledgment of the great honour to which she found herself raised, she could not find words to express the height of her own dignity: *She herself*, says St. Augustine, *was incapable of expressing what she was capable of receiving.*<sup>1</sup> She was forced to sum up all in the general term of *great things* wrought in her, by the Almighty: *He that is mighty hath done great things to me;*<sup>2</sup> which was as much as to say, that it was in vain to seek for any other measure than that of the Divine Omnipotence, to take the true dimensions of so great a temple of the Divinity, as she herself was. And perhaps this is what the Angel alluded to, when, in announcing to the Blessed Virgin the eminent degree of which we are now speaking, he used that expression: *The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee.*<sup>3</sup> For he did not say absolutely *obumbrabit te*, as if that immense light, which was to overshadow the Blessed Virgin, would render her

1 Nec ipsa explicare potuit, quod capere potuit. S. Aug.

2 Fecit mihi magna qui potens est. Luc. i. 49.

3 Virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi. Luc. i. 35.

invisible even to God Himself; but he said *obumbrabit tibi*, that is, *te tibi*, to denote that the overshadowing was to be such as to hide her from her own eyes, so that she would not be able to know herself. Just as when a person is environed with a bright flood of light, the stronger the light that surrounds him, the less can he see of himself within it.

Now, though the dignity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is thus in a manner infinite, so that it would be presumption in us to pretend thoroughly to comprehend it, since *whatever is infinite is also unintelligible*, yet it is only very reasonable that her true clients should endeavour to attain to as perfect a knowledge of her as can be gained by human industry, in order that this very endeavour may be their first contribution to the tribute of honour, which they desire to pay to her great merits. Let us therefore divide the whole subject into different heads, and by considering each separately, endeavour to turn to the best account the little that we can comprehend of so sublime an object of contemplation. The slight knowledge of the heavens and stars, which astronomers have gained by experiments, is of more use to them than has proved to geographers the larger stock which they have acquired concerning the earth, with direct evidence before them.



## SECTION II.

THE MATERNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN CONSIDERED  
AS A MATERIAL FACT.

The maternity of the Blessed Virgin may be considered either as a *material*, or as a *moral* fact. The former is the lowest view to take of it, and yet even in this light the dignity is so sublime and immense, that no human thought can reach high enough to comprehend it. For it is a fact too certain to be disputed, that some part of the virginal body of Mary was hypostatically united to the Divine Person, both in the original formation of Christ's body by the Divine Power, and in the first augmentation of it, by the nourishment it received from the Blessed Virgin. This being so, it is highly probable, for several reasons, that that first substance which Jesus borrowed from His most pure Mother is still remaining in His now glorious Body, increased indeed but not changed. *The flesh of Christ*, says St. Augustine, *is the flesh of Mary, and although it was raised to great glory in His Resurrection, yet it still remained the same that was taken from Mary.*<sup>1</sup> And after him St. Peter Damian, diving still deeper into this mystery, and rapt in an ecstasy of admiration, does not hesitate to affirm that God was in Mary by *identity*. *Whereas*, says this Saint, *God is in other things in three diffe-*

1 Caro Christi caro est Mariæ, et quamvis gloria Resurrectionis fuerit magnificata, eadem tamen mansit quæ assumpta est de Mariæ. Sermon de Assumptione, c. 5.

*rent ways, by His essence, by His power, and by His presence, He was in the Blessed Virgin in a fourth special manner, namely by identity, as being one and the same thing with her. At this let all creation be silent*

*and tremble; for who can venture to gaze upon the immensity of such a dignity?*<sup>1</sup> It is the opinion of some, that the heart of the child in the mother's womb has properly no motion of its own, but is moved only by the motion of the mother's heart. Though I do not look upon this to be true, it is certain that the child in the womb has no respiration, and therefore it may be truly said to live by the mother's breath. Consequently, as long as the Blessed Virgin bore the Incarnate Word within her womb, she was in some manner His life, because she gave Him breath; and for the same reason the Word Incarnate, during the time that He remained thus confined within her, might acknowledge her to be His life and His breath, and thus He was *idem cum ipsa*, one and the same thing with her, one life and one breath. This is also the opinion of St. Thomas, who looks upon the child in the womb and its mother as but one thing, in the same manner that the tree and the fruit upon it are one. And for this reason he dates the commission of our Guardian Angels, to guard and defend us, not from the time of our conception, but from our birth, when the

1 Cum Deus in aliis rebus sit tribus modis, in Virgine fuit quarto speciali modo, scilicet per identitatem, quia idem est quod ipsa. Hinc taceat et contremiscat omnis creatura; quis enim audeat aspicere tantæ dignitatis immensitatem? Serm. de Nativ. Virg.

fruit, now thoroughly ripe, drops from the tree. <sup>1</sup> According to this doctrine it might be truly said, that this ever-blessed Fruit of this incomparable Mother was *one and the same thing with her*, since He was truly *Fructus ventris*, the Fruit of her womb.

### SECTION III.

#### THE MATERNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN CONSIDERED AS A MORAL FACT.

He can have no soul, who does not feel himself wholly lost in admiration at such wonders; and yet, as I said before, the maternity of the Blessed Virgin, considered as a material fact, is the least wonderful part of the subject. What will it be then, if we consider it as a *moral* fact, that is, as involving all those prerogatives that naturally belong to it? I confess that the very thought of these prerogatives astonishes me, and that I am bewildered in contemplating them. For the dignity of Mother of God, in this moral point of view, is absolutely the highest rank to which a pure creature can be raised, without exceeding its own proper limits. It is the very closest possible union of a creature with the Supreme Uncreated Good. It is so near an approach to Deity, notwithstanding the infinite distance between God and any created thing, that St. Thomas could not find more appropriate terms in which to express it than by saying, that *in its operation it comes closer than any thing else to the limits of the*

<sup>1</sup> S. Thom. 1. p. q. 113. Art. 5. ad tertium.

*Divinity*.<sup>1</sup> And in this sense he styles our Blessed Lady, *Affinem Deo*, that is, according to Cajetan, *bordering upon God*; though no doubt she might also as properly be said, in the ordinary sense of the word *affinis*, to be a *kinswoman* of God, since she truly is, and ought to be called, His Mother. For this reason likewise, there is a peculiar species of worship due to her, which belongs to her alone, and is superior to all that may be granted to any other Saint. For her dignity as Mother of God is of a rank far superior to that of all other Saints or Angels, and belongs in some manner to the dignity of the hypostatical union, on account of its necessary connection with it. Hence the Blessed Virgin, as I have already observed, forms a choir by herself in the Kingdom of Glory, and is exalted to a greater elevation above the other choirs in the empyreal, than the empyreal itself, though made to be the court and palace of God, is raised above the lower heavens, which were only designed for the use and benefit of men.

O that I could express to thy honour, great Mother of God, the sentiments which I have conceived of thee in my heart! But alas! I fear that my words will fall far short of what my thoughts suggest. Perhaps however the following illustration may, in some measure, help me to make myself understood. We all pay, with good reason, great honour to the renowned mother of the Machabees, for having given the world seven such

1 Operatione sua fines Divinitatis propinquius attingit. S. Thom. 2. 2. q. 103. Art. 4. ad sec.

brave and heroic champions, who despised the barbarous cruelty of Antiochus, and even defied that fierce and haughty tyrant. Suppose then, that this mother had given the world, not only that small yet generous band of martyrs, but also that legion, who were crucified for the sake of Christ on the famous Mount Ararat, where, sprinkling with their blood those otherwise barren mountains of Armenia, they clothed them with nobler palms, the tokens of their victories, than Palestine could ever boast. How great an increase of honour would not this have brought to her! Again, if she had been the mother, not only of that legion of ten thousand glorious martyrs, but of that vast host of full eleven millions, whom Genebrard<sup>1</sup> computes to have suffered in the Church from its beginning down to his own days, what should we say then? But once more, if to all those millions of martyrs we were to add far greater numbers still of confessors, anchorets, prelates, preachers, doctors and virgins, who have no less adorned the peaceful ages of the Church by their learned writings and virtuous actions, than the martyrs have immortalized the days of persecution by their glorious combats, sufferings and blood; and if we supposed that this heroine had been the mother of them all, would not such a mother well deserve that the Holy Ghost Himself should take up the pen, with much more reason than He did for that happy woman, who was mother only of the Machabees, and should, for an ever-

<sup>1</sup> In his Sacred Chronology. He was Archbishop of Aix, and died in 1597.

lasting monument of her glory, write this high commendation to all future ages, that *the mother was to be admired above measure, and worthy to be remembered by all good men?*<sup>1</sup> And yet, even though we supposed her to be the mother of all the Blessed in Heaven, and, were it possible, of all the Angelic Hierarchies also, still what would such a mother as this be, in comparison with the Mother of God? She would not be worthy of being called even her handmaid. Judge then how great is that honour which must be due to Mary.

Perhaps, however, you will say that this maternity is a high-sounding title, it is true, but still only a title, an empty name, and nothing more. Far otherwise. The maternity of the Blessed Virgin, so far from being an empty name, is rather like the shady groves of Libanus, where charming beauty and rich abundance loaded the branches of the verdant trees. The dignity of being Mother of God was not to the Blessed Virgin a dignity barren of fruit, but one that yielded her an ever ripening harvest; for it has conferred on her a dominion of highest excellence, not only over all the infinite treasures of her Divine Son,<sup>2</sup> but even over His very person itself, so that she could command Him with the full authority of a mother. Josue, the first commander of his age under the great God of armies, fearing lest the approaching darkness of night should rescue from his sword those enemies already so discomfited that not even flight could have

1 *Supra modum autem mater mirabilis et bonorum memoria digna.*

II. Mac. vii. 20.

2 Suarez in 3. p. to. 2. D. 1. Sec. 2.

saved them, with a confidence more than of man, commanded the sun to stand still, as though ambitious to detain him, his witness shall I say, or his companion in victory. The sun, to the astonishment of all nature, which, till then, had never seen so signal a departure from her established laws, immediately stood still in the height of his career: *The sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down the space of one day.*<sup>1</sup> O how much greater a miracle was to be seen within the walls of Mary's poor house in Nazareth, not for the space of one day only, but for full thirty years together! Here might be seen a glorious Sun now standing still, now in motion, obedient to the voice and command of a tender maiden, *the Lord obeying the voice of man.*<sup>2</sup> But there was this difference, that when God obeyed Josue, it was only because it was His own will and pleasure to do so; whereas He obeyed Mary because *He was subject to her,*<sup>3</sup> and had made it His duty to obey her. There are, as divines commonly observe, five kinds of service which all children are under the obligation of rendering to their parents, love, respect, assistance, gratitude, and obedience. Some are of opinion that Christ our Lord, on account of His sovereign dominion over all creatures, and consequently over His Mother also, was exempt from this last duty or obligation of obedience. But I know that there are others who hold the contrary.<sup>4</sup> And the reason they

1 Stetit itaque sol in medio cœli, et non festinavit occumbere spatio unius diei. Josue. x. 13.      2 Obediente Domino voci hominis. Josue. x. 14.

3 Erat subditus illis. Luc. ii. 51.

4 Vide Salazar in Prov. c. 8. n. 141. &c. et de Conc. c. 30.

allege is, that Christ as man was subject to all the laws and obligations of nature, and that consequently He must also have been subject to this of obedience and submission to parents; especially since this is a law of nature, on the one hand exceedingly commendable and pious, and on the other, in no way derogatory to the supreme dignity of Christ our Lord. For, as Aristotle observes,<sup>1</sup> the dominion of parents does not deprive their children of the smallest part of that liberty of inheritance, which gives them a right to the lordships, titles, and estates, to which they are born, nor does it make them less noble or dignified. And therefore Christ might very well be subject to the maternal power of the Blessed Virgin, and still retain His sovereign power; the more so seeing that, though born a king, He had not yet assumed the sceptre of universal sway which belonged to Him. But though we allowed that the Divinity of Christ had, if we may use the expression, emancipated Him from the maternal rule of Mary, it would, notwithstanding, be sufficient for the honour of the Blessed Virgin that He did obey her, without being bound, as if really subject to her. For He obeyed her, not once only, nor under one circumstance, but upon every occasion, as living really in subjection. Therefore St. Bonaventure, taking those words of the Gospel: *And was subject to them*, does not hesitate to say, *that Mary had God for her subject.*<sup>2</sup> And this in so strict a sense, that we may boldly lay down this great

1 Arist. Polit.

2 *Maria Deum sibi subditum habuit.* S. Bon. spec. Virg. c. 3.



truth, to the glory of the Blessed Virgin, that so greatly exalted was her dignity, that she would have been superior even to her Son, and superior in the fullest meaning of the word, had it not been that her Son was God. But in the meantime, dear reader, what emotions do you feel in your heart at the recital of such glorious things of this beautiful *City of God*?<sup>1</sup> If you cherish the very smallest spark of devotion towards her, you cannot hear of such wonders, without its spreading more and more within you, until, like the hidden fires of a volcano, it breaks forth into flames of the most ardent love. And yet I have not said all.

#### SECTION IV.

##### THE BLESSED VIRGIN OBTAINED HER DIGNITY OF MOTHER BY MERIT OF CONGRUITY.

Let us now add to what has been already said, that this dignity so exalted was not like a shower of gold, falling of its own accord into the Holy Virgin's bosom without her cooperation, but it was a treasure which she procured by her own industry.

For it is the universal opinion, that the Blessed Virgin truly merited this august character of Mother of God; not indeed, as we say in the schools, *de condigno*, by merit of *condignity*, since Almighty God has never promised a greater reward to human merit than that of everlasting life, but *de congruo*, by merit of *congruity*. That is to say, the Blessed Virgin, on her part, did in

<sup>1</sup> Pa. 86. 2.

fact bring such dispositions for receiving this extraordinary dignity, that it was very reasonable and becoming that Almighty God should confer it upon her.<sup>1</sup> And therefore we may observe, that when she appeared as the mystical sign in the heavens, she appeared, not merely as bright as the sun, but *clothed with the sun*, according to the expression of the Evangelist: *A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun.*<sup>2</sup> And what are we to understand by this, but that the sublime dignity, which presents her to the world alone in her splendour, as the sun in his, was shaped in perfect symmetry to her soul? It would certainly have been a very great honour if the sun had been merely suspended as a canopy over this royal Virgin's head. How great a wonder then, that he should envelope her even as a robe; for a robe must always bear some proportion to the stature, whether great or small, of the person who wears it. But, to speak without metaphor, would not the Blessed Virgin be worthy of the highest honour, if she had been exalted to the dignity of Mother of God gratuitously, and without any predisposing virtues? We must allow that she would. If then upon a Bethsabee,<sup>3</sup> because she had become the mother of Solomon, such great honours were conferred, although with so little merit, nay even with the stain of a shameful crime, how much more justly ought the most Holy Vir-

1 *Suar.* 3. p. to. 1. D. 10. Sect. 7. 8.

2 *Signum magnum apparuit in cœlo: mulier amicta sole.* Apoc. xii. 1.

3 *III. Kings,* ii. 19.

gin to be honoured and esteemed above all that words can express, seeing that she disposed herself so worthily for this great dignity, that she was invested with it *de congruo*, or, as we have seen, was clothed with it as with a robe which she had made her own, by adapting her whole life to it? *A woman clothed with the sun!* It is certain that the Church, in the congratulations which she addresses to the Blessed Virgin, constantly repeats to us, that she merited to bear Jesus in her womb: *He whom thou didst merit to carry is risen again.*<sup>1</sup> In whatever sense this high testimony is taken, it certainly implies a very great amount of sanctity and merit in the Immaculate Virgin. Accordingly several holy writers and Saints have called her a worthy habitation for the Most High to dwell in: again, a worthy tabernacle, and often a worthy throne for the Divinity: because if she did not actually come up to the merit of receiving God within her womb *de condigno*, she at least, as far as in her lay, disposed herself to receive Him on the high ground of condign merit,<sup>2</sup> which is the more probable opinion. And therefore St. Ambrose expressly says of her: *She was worthy, that the Son of God should be born of her.*<sup>3</sup>

In the order of nature, living creatures never propagate until they have reached their full growth. If this rule is observed in the order of grace also, who will be able to tell us, what degree or state of perfection was necessary

1 Antiphoni at Complin. Paschal time.

2 Suar. ut supra.

3 Digna fuit ex qua Filius Dei nasceretur. Ambros. l. 2. de Virg.

in the Blessed Virgin, in order to conceive and bring forth God, and that worthily? Hear how St. Bernardine answers the question: *For a woman to conceive God was the miracle of miracles. It was necessary therefore that the Blessed Virgin should be raised, so to speak, to a sort of equality with God, by being endowed with a kind of infinity and immensity of perfections, such as no creature had ever experienced before.*<sup>1</sup>

If you would have iron produce fire, must it not lay down its own nature in a furnace, and borrow that of fire? In like manner, if God is to be born of a creature, that creature must, as it were, lay aside the state of a creature, and become, I do not say a God, but divine: and this, if not in its own nature, at least by the most intimate and sublime participation possible in the divine nature. So great are the sanctity, purity, splendour, and other graces which are requisite to dispose a creature for so divine a work. And yet, after we have said all this, we only stammer like little children, and scarce speak intelligibly. It cannot be expected that our imperfect words should ever throw much light on the matter, when even our most exalted thoughts upon this subject are so very imperfect, and fall so far short of the objects presented to them. Therefore I shall conclude this chapter by imitating the wise precaution of those men

1 Quod fœmina conciperet Deum, fuit miraculum miraculorum. Oportuit itaque Virginem elevari, ut ita dicam, ad quandam quasi æqualitatem divinam, per quandam infinitatem et immensitatem perfectionum, quam creatura nunquam experta fuerat. S. Bernardin. tom. 2. serm. 61.

who were sent out by the Israelites to survey the Land of Promise, who, wishing to convince the multitude of the extraordinary fertility of that country, and at the same time despairing of being able to convey any idea of it by bare words, brought along with them the strongest proof of their assertions, in a sample of the best fruit that the country produced. *They cut off a branch with its cluster of grapes, which two men carried upon a lever between them.*<sup>1</sup> Behold here the best proof of what I have been saying, a Mother bearing a God—her own son—in her arms: *the branch with its cluster.* This is the only way to judge rightly in this matter. If you would know what Mary is, never contemplate her otherwise than in the company of her Son Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> Absciderunt palmitem cum uva sua quam portaverunt in vecte duo viri. Num. xlii. 14.

## CHAPTER III.

THE THIRD MOTIVE OF DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED  
VIRGIN IS HER SANCTITY.

## SECTION I.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN WAS MADE THE MOST WORTHY  
OF ALL LOVE AND HONOUR.

That double quality of *might* and *sweetness*,<sup>1</sup> which God makes the glory of His Divine Providence, would not be justly attributed to it, if, besides proposing ends to Himself with an efficacious will, He did not, with equal sweetness, adapt the means most suitable to those ends. Almighty God therefore, having designed that His glorious Mother should be the most tenderly loved, and the most highly honoured of all creatures, it must be presumed, that He has also made her the most worthy of such love and honour. By the light of this torch I design to guide you through the profound abyss of Mary's great sanctity, into which it is now time that you should be introduced. There you may freely expatiate, and give full scope to your pious thoughts, without danger of being lost in the labyrinth, as long as you have this light before you, and this thread of the divine method to follow, even though you should embrace the sentiments of those learned and zealous writers, who speak

1 Attingit a fine usque ad finem fortiter, et disponit omnia suaviter. Sap. viii. 1.

of her sanctity in terms so unwonted and so sublime, that at first sight you might suspect them to be erroneous, or at least dangerous exaggerations. Three considerations will help us to discover the fulness of grace and sanctity in the Blessed Virgin Mary, namely, the end of this grace, its source, or origin, and Mary's cooperation with it. Here however, before we proceed, I cannot but observe a remarkable difference between Mary and other Saints in this respect. Upon other Saints grace is said to descend as *showers falling gently upon the earth*; but upon Mary it comes down in torrents *like rain upon the fleece*:<sup>1</sup> where we may notice how properly the manner, in which Mary received this superabundance of grace, is compared to the wool imbibing water, without letting the least drop of it run off, as the earth often does. For no part of the grace, that Mary ever received, lay idle in her, or failed to produce the utmost effect for which it was given; yet it would be rashness to say this of any other Saint.

## SECTION II.

### THE FULNESS OF SANCTITY IN THE BLESSED VIRGIN INFERRED FROM THE END FOR WHICH IT WAS BESTOWED.

In the first place this fulness of grace may be inferred from the end for which it was bestowed, since it is usual with Almighty God to distribute His gifts and favours in proportion to the employments which He designs to

<sup>1</sup> Descendet sicut pluvia in vellus et sicut stillicidia stillantia super terram. Ps. 71. 6.

give. For this reason He conferred so many special privileges upon St. John the Baptist, because he was to be His Precursor; upon St. Peter, as Prince of the Apostles, and Head of the Church; and upon St. Paul, as the chief Preacher of the Gospel and Propagator of the Christian Faith. For this reason also, it was said to Moses: *I will take of thy spirit and will give to them*; <sup>1</sup> alluding to those seventy Elders, who were to succeed him in the government of the people, or rather to share that burden with him. For since Almighty God had divided that office amongst them, it was but reasonable that He should also communicate to them proportionable gifts and graces, to enable them to discharge its obligations. Recall now to your mind what was said a little above of the glories and high prerogatives, which the dignity of Mother of God carries along with it; how it enters into a rank superior to that of all other creatures, and is intimately connected with the Hypostatical Union: *and in its operation comes closer than anything else to the limits of the Divinity*; <sup>2</sup> then you will quickly perceive, that however exalted an idea you may form of the sanctity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it will always fall short of the truth, because it can never come up to the sublime dignity of the office for which God had designed her.

The height of an obelisk being known, any one acquainted with architecture will easily determine, by cer-

1 Auferam de spiritu tuo et tradam eis. Num. xl. 17.

2 Et in operatione sua fines Divinitatis propinquius attingit. S. Thom. q. cit.



tain rules of proportion, the proper dimensions of the pedestal, upon which it must stand. But O exalted height of maternity bestowed on Mary! If thou art in a manner infinite, what perfection of sanctity must be sought for in the base that will sustain thee! If I were to draw out a plan of a pedestal massive enough to support that Angel spoken of in the Apocalypse, who, Colossus-like, stood with one foot upon the circumference of the earth, and the other upon the surface of the sea,<sup>1</sup> would not our highest Alps and Appenines be too low for such a structure? And shall I presume to raise a basis for that great Virgin Mother, who could enclose within her womb the Creator of both earth and sea? Far from me be so great a presumption.

However, not to be wanting in my endeavours to fulfil what I have promised, let me further observe, that in the immeasurable treasure of sanctity which was communicated to Mary, the dispensing Providence of Almighty God had two objects specially in view, one relating to ourselves, and the other relating to Christ; since He was preparing, at the same time, a Mother both for Christ, and for us.

And first as to what concerns us, the Blessed Virgin was not merely to give birth to two populous nations, like Rebecca, to whom the Angel announced as a great honour: *Two nations are in thy womb*; <sup>2</sup> but Mary was to bear the whole number of the elect: *Thy womb*

<sup>1</sup> Apoc. x. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Dux gentes sunt in utero tuo.* Gen. xxv. 23.

is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies.<sup>1</sup> And consequently, as the true *Mother of all the living*,<sup>2</sup> and the repairer of the losses caused by Eve, who in fact rather proved the mother of the dead, it was fitting that she should be invested with a certain preeminence and authority over all, not unlike that which, in the most strict and proper sense, belongs only to Christ. As therefore the grace which Christ received in this particular character of Head of all the elect, although not absolutely infinite—for no such grace can be conferred—was immense beyond expression; so it was reasonable, that the grace bestowed on Mary, for a similar, though inferior purpose, should have some share in the same immensity. The glorious Virgin, in her character of *Mother of the elect*, participates, as we said, with Christ in the dignity of being their head; and although this must be understood as possessed by her in a degree far inferior to Christ, yet it is with the most perfect resemblance to Him that can be conceived in any pure creature. It was therefore only just, that God should enrich her with graces in proportion to such a dignity; and this He did by collecting together, and uniting in one, in her soul, all those endowments and perfections, which are distributed in smaller portions among all the other Saints. Just as when He made the sea, He commanded all the different waters, which were before dispersed over the whole earth, to meet together: *Let the waters that are under the hea-*

1 Venter tuis sicut acervus tritici, vallatus liliis. Cant. vii. 2.

2 Gen. iii. 20.

*vens be gathered together into one place. And the gathering of the waters together He called seas.*<sup>1</sup> And certainly the heart of Mary may well be called a sea, which, however full, never runs over: *All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea doth not overflow.*<sup>2</sup> For all those qualities and perfections, united in that single heart, do not exceed the depth and capacity of their own channel, that is to say, the office and dignity which she so worthily sustains.

And now as to the other object, which we said that Almighty God had in view, when He was preparing the Blessed Virgin to be the Mother of Christ, it was but reasonable that this Mother should bear the most perfect resemblance possible to her Son, and approach as near to Him in every respect as was consistent with the nature of a creature, which we must always allow to be limited. Aristotle advises all legislators to pay particular attention to the government and education of women, on account of their future influence as mothers.<sup>3</sup> If this is so essential a part of good government, in a well ordered state, who will venture to say, that the Sovereign Lawgiver of the Universe Himself did not mould the soul of the Blessed Virgin to the utmost perfection, since in making her, He made nothing less than a Mother to the Eternal Word? And if that Divine Son, whom she af-

1 Congregentur aquæ, quæ sub cælo sunt, in locum unum....congregationesque aquarum appellavit maria. Gen. i. 9, 10.

2 Omnia flumina intrant in mare, et mare non redundat. Eccle. i. 7.

3 Arist. Polit. c. 8.

terwards brought forth, were not absolutely infinite, and thus incapable of division into parts, she might justly be said to be the half of Him. Mothers are, as it were, living moulds of their children, and, as it happens but seldom that children do not borrow from their mother the outward features of the face, so it happens much more rarely that the mother does not communicate to her children an inward resemblance to her temper, inclinations, habits, and whole character.

Imagine now that the Blessed Virgin had been chosen by Almighty God, not to be the Mother of Jesus, but only to be His nurse, and to give Him nourishment. What precaution could have been too great in the choice of such a nurse? When a person is to be selected to nurse a new-born prince, the heir apparent to a crown, how many conferences are held at court upon the subject; how many physicians called in, to consult as to the proper person to be entrusted with an office of such importance; what enquiries made all over the kingdom, and how much information required as to the health, temper, and all the good and bad qualities of her who is proposed? And all this care is too little, as Plato assures us, when he so highly commends the wise precaution of the Persians, who made it a law, that no one should be employed in an office which so much concerned the public good, except a princess of the noblest blood, and highest rank in the kingdom. They had good reason for this, if, as is generally supposed, the nurse's good and bad qualities, both physical and moral, may be as easily

communicated to the child, as her milk itself. Thus the Roman historians recount, that their Emperor Tiberius was a drunkard, because his nurse, who was much addicted to wine, would often mingle it with the milk she gave him. In like manner, they represent their Caligula as a monster of cruelty, because the person who reared him used often to present him her breasts imbrued with blood; as if she had been breeding up, not an emperor for the defence and preservation of Rome, but a tiger to tear it in pieces. If the Blessed Virgin Mary had been chosen to apply her virginal breasts but once in her life to the sacred lips of the Son of God, that she might nourish Him, not as a mother, but merely as an ordinary nurse, this, of itself, would have been sufficient cause, for very special communications of Divine Grace, in order to fit her for so great a charge. What then shall we say, since she alone was destined by Providence, to furnish the first materials for the formation of that Divine Body, out of the pure substance of her own, and since she alone was employed to give the Infant God His first natural food, by holding Him to her breast, and that not once only, but several hundred times?

Nor will it be to the purpose to tell me here, that it would be a vain and groundless apprehension, to imagine that any defect in the habits or inclinations of His Mother, could in any way affect the sanctity of Jesus, who was altogether incapable of contracting the smallest imperfection. For though all this be true, yet it does not happen in a connatural way, but by a particular dis-

pen- sation from the usual course of nature ; whereas every one knows, that in human affairs, when proper measures are to be taken for the success of any business, prudence requires, that we should chiefly consider what is the rule according to the natural course of secondary causes, and not what may possibly happen by accident, or in any other hypothesis that might be made. We know that lead cannot communicate the smallest atom of alloy to a diamond, yet what jeweller would ever choose to set a diamond in lead? Had you been the jeweller employed to set that matchless pearl, the wonder of the world, which Philip III. is said to have worn upon the hilt of his sword, would you not have chosen for that work the richest and finest enamel that could be found? Doubtless you would. For although a pearl of that enormous size, is more than rich enough of itself, yet it certainly seems to require an enamel of corresponding, though not equal value, so that both may in some measure mutually set off each other. In like manner, we may say that a corresponding, though certainly not equal sanctity, was intended between Christ and His Blessed Mother. As Christ, that Pearl of inestimable value, was an infinite honour and ornament to His Virgin Mother ; so His Mother, that beautiful and matchless enamel, was not indeed an infinite, but a very considerable honour and ornament to Christ her Son ; as it is said : *The glory of children are their fathers.* <sup>1</sup> At the same time we must always allow, that Christ stood in no need of any such honour or ornament.

1 Gloria filiorum patres eorum. Prov. xvii. 6.

## SECTION III.

## THE FULNESS OF SANCTITY IN THE BLESSED VIRGIN INFERRED FROM THE SOURCE WHENCE IT WAS DERIVED.

The second reason, from which we may learn the fulness of sanctifying grace in the Blessed Virgin Mary, is the origin of it, or the source from which it was derived, and this was no other than the love that Christ Himself had for her. To this love the sanctity of Mary corresponded most exactly, since, with God, it is one and the same thing to love a person, and, by that very act of loving, to communicate to the object of His love, all that is necessary to make him worthy of it. Now, to give you an adequate idea of this love of Christ towards the Blessed Virgin, it would be sufficient to remind you of what has been already said, that this Divine Sun of Charity looks upon this beautiful Moon alone, with a more favourable eye, than upon all the other stars together, although they are so bright and numerous: *God loves the Virgin alone more than all the other Saints.*<sup>1</sup> Like an intelligent merchant, who estimates things at their true value, when Christ laid down upon the Cross the whole sum of His Most Precious Blood, He had more in view the purchase of this one pearl than of the countless multitude of inferior jewels.

But although this were sufficient, yet since I have already set this lovely picture before your eyes, that you

<sup>1</sup> Deus plus amat solam Virginem, quam reliquos Sanctos omnes. Suarez.

might admire it at your leisure, why may I not endeavour to place it in a still better and more advantageous light, not to the original, which can receive no additional beauty from my efforts, but to yourself, that you may thus be enabled to form a better judgment of it? For this purpose then, let us consider more distinctly the different obligations of filial piety, by which Christ was bound in duty to love His Mother. We will first consider in general those ties by which He was bound as a Son, and afterwards those by which He was more particularly bound as *such* a Son. The greatest obligation which binds one thing to another in nature is that, under which all effects lie towards their causes. If the noble river for instance, which is continually flowing downwards, with so much precipitation, had sense to know its obligations to its fountain head, and could give expression to them, how often would it stop, in the midst of its rapid course, to look back and salute that never failing spring, which is always supplying it with new silvery streams? In like manner, if that beautiful daughter of a more beautiful father, the light by which we see, were sensible of the greatness of the favour bestowed upon it, in the bright existence, which it continually receives from the sun, how could it forbear giving its brightest rays back again, every hour of the day, as a mark of gratitude and homage?

And if this obligation, this dependence be so great in all natural effects, in return for the existence which they receive from their causes, it must certainly be far greater



in those creatures, which receive a more perfect kind of being. Hence it follows, that the obligation of a child to his parents can have no limits, for he can never make any return, equal to the benefit of life, which he has received from them. *To the gods and our parents*, says the Philosopher, (and St. Thomas highly commends the saying) *we cannot possibly make an adequate return,*<sup>1</sup> at least in this life; so great is the debt of gratitude which every man contracts with those, who have given him that state of being, which he possesses as a rational creature. And this general obligation of children to their parents, which binds all so strongly, seems to have been still stronger in Christ, than in any other, and this for two reasons.

The first is, because in His case the obligation was not divided between father and mother, as it is with all other children; for these are conceived by woman with the help of man, and may therefore be compared to the flowers of a garden, which owe their life, partly to the soil that produced them, and partly to the person who cultivated that soil. Whereas Christ was truly *the flower of the field,*<sup>2</sup> conceived and brought forth by Mary that pure and virgin earth without any cooperation of man. To Mary He owed His natural being on earth, and this is one sense, amongst many others, in which He could so often, and with so much truth call her His *only one*.

1 *Diis et parentibus parem gratiam referre non possumus.*

2 *Ego flos campul. Cant. il. 1.*

The second reason, why Christ may be said to have greater obligations to Mary, than other children have to their parents, is because she not only gave Him the first and best of gifts, that is, His earthly life, but she gave it to Him in the best and most perfect manner, namely by love. Other mothers know nothing of their children before they give them birth, and therefore since they cannot possibly love their children as such, before they have borne them, they cannot choose them in particular, nor single them out by any special preference, from amongst the infinite number of other children, which might as easily have been the fruit of their womb, as those of which they actually become mothers. And for this reason the benefit, which they bestow upon some, rather than upon others, is much diminished, because they bestow it more by chance, than by choice. I am much beholden to the kind heavens, which, whilst I am fast asleep, are carefully watching over me, with as many eyes as there are stars sparkling in the dark firmament, but how much greater would my obligations be, if those eyes, which are even now open for my benefit, had singled me out from the rest of mankind, to be the sole object of their whole attention! With the Blessed Virgin Mary this was really the case. She did not conceive this Divine Son in ignorance, but chose Him in preference to all others. To Him alone, as to a heavenly dew, this virginal shell opened her chaste womb, which would otherwise have remained, under the seal of a vow, eternally closed against the vast ocean of other creatures. And this was so pleasing

to Christ, that He would not let her ever have to say to Him, as all other mothers may say with truth to their children, *I know not how you were formed in my womb*; <sup>1</sup> but before He would descend into her womb, He waited until she had first given her express consent: *He would not take flesh of her, except as her own gift*,<sup>2</sup> that thus He might owe Himself still more to her heart than to her womb, though He was the true fruit of it. And when I say *owe Himself*, I say it in the strictest meaning of the words. For it is a special prerogative of the Blessed Virgin, that of all pure creatures, she alone can be said with truth, to have made God Himself her debtor: *She has the Lord of the Universe in her debt*.<sup>3</sup> Almighty God, it is true, makes Himself a debtor to other Saints; but how? By promise only. *He makes Himself*, says St. Augustine, *a debtor, not by receiving but by promising*.<sup>4</sup> But to the Holy Virgin Mary He became a debtor, by borrowing of her what before He had not, namely His Human Nature, and therefore she is the only person to whom the Apostle could not say, *Who hath first given to Him, and recompense shall be made him*.<sup>5</sup> For, if he were to put that question to her, she might freely answer, I myself, before He had any human will, gave Him the nature and being of a man, which He now retains. And I not only gave it Him, but I even antici-

1 Nescio qualiter in utero meo apparuistis. II. Mac. vii. 22.

2 Noluit carnem sumere ex ea, nisi dante ipsa. Gulliel. in cant.

3 Obnoxium habet sibi omnium feneratorum. S. Method. orat. de Purif.

4 Debitorem se facit non accipiendo, sed promittendo. S. Aug. in Ps. 83.

5 Quis prior dedit illi, et retribuetur ei. Rom. xi. 35.

pated the time of it, and hastened His coming into the world, by my sighs and prayers.

Tell me now, dear reader, if you can, before you pass any further, what grateful acknowledgements must have been returned by such a Son to such a Mother! If in return for a glass of water given Him on earth, He has promised the whole torrents of everlasting joys in Heaven, <sup>1</sup> what oceans of graces must He not have showered down upon her, who gave Him the blood of her own veins, converting it first into flesh for Him, when she conceived Him in her womb, and afterwards into milk for His nourishment, when she nursed Him at her own breasts! And if Jesus surrendered Himself even to those who took from Him His life, what must He not have bestowed on her, who gave Him that same life! Since therefore it cannot be doubted, but that Jesus had a Heart infinitely grateful, it must be considered certain, that what He has given to Mary, in exchange for what He received from her, is unspeakably great, nay altogether beyond the force of human eloquence to express. *How great was the effect of the ineffable grace of sanctification in the body of the Virgin, when the Word was made Flesh in it, is known to Him only, says St. Augustine, who borrowed nature from her nature.* <sup>2</sup> The full amount of that dowry which the Divine Word brought with Him, when He espoused the Blessed Virgin, is indeed known only to

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Ineffabilis sanctificationis gratia quantum in corpore Virginis valuerit Illi soli notum est, qui de ejus natura naturam suscepit. Aug. Serm. de Assum.

Him who brought it. This was the only occasion, on which God could ever exercise the rare virtue of gratitude, and therefore it was but fitting that He should exercise it like a God, by employing in it the whole strength of His all-powerful arm. Since the debt which He undertook to satisfy was so great, that if, when He became the Son of Mary, He had not been as truly God, as He was made truly Man, He would not have had in all His treasures an amount sufficient to discharge it. Amongst men this kind of gratitude, on the part of children towards their parents, is scarcely understood, at least the obligation to it is seldom considered as it ought to be, though certainly nothing can be more just. The reason is, because they are little accustomed to see any great examples of it put before them. Parents, commonly speaking, love their children, more than they are beloved by them. And though love is said to be a fire, yet in this case it does not follow the nature of fire, and ascend, as it should do, from children to their parents, but, on the contrary, it descends from parents to their children. But that most pure love, which Christ bore to His Virgin Mother, was like fire in its proper sphere, not dimmed nor intermixed with any of those qualities, which human love contracts from our earthly substance. Unlike all other children, He loved incomparably more than He was beloved; and He was resolved to adorn His Mother after His own Heart, and to endow her with sanctity to such an eminent degree, that, as St. Anselm expresses it, *No greater can*

*be imagined under God.*<sup>1</sup> This was His intention. He knew how to effect it, and He had power equal to His knowledge.

And what reason can there be to think, that the Divine Word would act otherwise; that while He alone had it in His power, to prepare and adorn to His own liking, the Virgin who was to be both His Spouse and His Mother, yet He should not have done it? Could then power be wanting to the All-powerful, wisdom to the All-wise, or gratitude to the fountain of all love? He gave a very different testimony of Himself, when He left written in the book of Proverbs: *Wisdom hath built herself a house.*<sup>2</sup> Let us minutely examine the expression. The Divine Word did not as it were hire a house, already finished, and furnished for a temporary lodging, by appointing any ordinary person to the office of being His Mother: but He *made one Himself*. Nor did He make this house without care, but He *built* it; He did not make it, as He made all other created things, by a mere word, and without any especial application of mind to what He was doing: *He spoke and they were made.*<sup>3</sup> But this He constructed with deliberation, upon a plan, and by rule. *He hath built a house.* He *built* it, and He built it *for Himself*; He did not build it for the use of any other, but specially for His own, and that it might be a house fit for God to dwell in. He built Himself a

<sup>1</sup> Qua nequeat major intelligi sub Deo. S. Anselm. de Excell. Virg.

<sup>2</sup> Sapientia ædificavit sibi domum. Prov. ix. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ipse dixit, et facta sunt. Pa. 148. 5.

*house*; He did not design it for a temple, in which to appear with the splendour and majesty of a God, but for a *house*, for His own private and daily habitation, for a place of retirement and repose: *Wisdom hath built herself a house*. This being the case, can we suppose, that He, who was the Eternal Wisdom, did not apply Himself to make this mystical building as complete as He could, and to furnish it with all the perfections, graces and privileges, that could make it most agreeable to Himself, and most suitable for His own use? Thus, then, let us conclude this part of the subject. If any one desires to make a correct estimate of all those immense treasures of grace, which Christ has deposited in the heart of Mary, let him calculate each separate amount by this golden rule of proportion, namely of God enriching His own Mother, and enriching her, first to satisfy His infinite love, and secondly to discharge the debt which He had contracted with her; the greatest and only one that He could ever contract with any of His creatures.

The great king Solomon, the richest of princes, never became impoverished until he began to love. But of Thee, great King of Glory, what shall I say? I will not say that Thou wast in the least impoverished, by discharging those debts to Mary, which Thy love alone had contracted. But this I will say, that if Thou wast not impoverished, it was not because Thou wast sparing of Thy liberality towards her, but because Thou art so much greater than Solomon, not only in wisdom, but also in

riches: *Behold a greater than Solomon here.*<sup>1</sup> And indeed what wonder that Thou art none the poorer for giving, since the treasures that come from Thy liberal hands, are not the treasures of an exchequer, as Solomon's were, but of a mine, a mine that can never be exhausted.

## SECTION IV.

THE FULNESS OF SANCTITY IN THE BLESSED VIRGIN  
INFERRED FROM HER OWN COOPERATION  
WITH DIVINE GRACE.

We come now to the third ground of this extraordinary fulness of grace in the Blessed Virgin Mary, viz., *her own cooperation*. Let us raise our thoughts then, as high as we can, above the Babylon of misery, in which we are still sighing, as exiles from our heavenly country, and let us fix our eyes upon this mystical Jerusalem, this holy City of God, the glorious Virgin, that we may observe with what diligence she exerted herself on her part, to improve to the utmost that amazing stock of grace, which was given her at first to traffic with. And then, full of admiration, we shall acknowledge, that if many other souls have heaped up great treasures of grace, she has certainly far exceeded them all: *Many daughters have gathered together riches: thou hast surpassed them all.*<sup>2</sup> But before we can understand the immense amount of these her multiplied gains, and to what an inconceivable sum they grew, we must first know what was the

1 Ecce plus quam Salomon hic. Matt. xii. 42.

2 Multæ fillæ congregaverunt divitias: tu supergressa es universas.

Prov. xxxi. 29.



grace originally communicated, as a capital, from which these vast revenues have been derived.

Take it then to be a certain truth, that the Blessed Virgin received more grace in the first instant of her Immaculate Conception, than any Saint upon earth, or Seraph in Heaven possessed, at the end of the time that was given them for merit. This, I think, cannot be denied without manifest injustice to the Blessed Virgin: partly because it is an opinion in which all divines agree,<sup>1</sup> and partly because Holy Scripture itself seems to give no small grounds for believing it. The royal Prophet assures us, that *The foundations thereof are in the holy mountains: the Lord loveth the gates of Sion above all the tabernacles of Jacob.*<sup>2</sup> Observe those exalted spirits and princes of the empyreal, the Angels. Mark how they rise like lofty mountains, and tower even above the celestial spheres. On the tops of those very mountains are laid the *foundations* of this stately edifice, the glorious Virgin Mary: she begins where the others end. And Almighty God takes more pleasure in the mere *gates*, that is, the very first beginnings of this noble and beautiful *Sion*, than in the richest tabernacles of Jacob, in all their splendour and perfection. If you are surprised at this, He Himself removes the wonder, by adding a greater wonder to it, when He declares that the reason of all this was, that *a man was born in her*, that is, that He Himself was made Man within her womb; and that

1 Vide Suar. 3. p. to. 2. D. 4. S. 1.    2 Fundamenta ejus in montibus sanctis: diligit Dominus portas Sion super omnia tabernacula Jacob. Ps. 86. 1, 2.

therefore the *Highest Himself had founded her*.<sup>1</sup> Whence it was only just and reasonable, that He should lay the foundations of her sanctity and greatness, with all the magnificence that was suitable to so great a King as Himself, for whom alone this noble structure was raised.

When Solomon built his famous temple, he did not throw into the foundations of it all sorts of stones promiscuously, as is commonly done. *The King*, we read, *commanded that they should bring great stones, costly stones, for the foundation of the temple, and should square them*.<sup>2</sup>

But what prodigality was this, to bury such rich materials under ground, and, as one might think, to so little purpose? Can we imagine that this great prince, who in all other things was so much wiser than the rest of men, intended to vie with nature, which hides the most precious metals in the bowels of the earth, and the choicest pearls in the bottom of the sea? To make such a suggestion would be to speak more in jest than in earnest. If I did not know, that the architect of this temple was in reality no other than God Himself, I should find it difficult to understand, how the costly nature of the foundations should not derogate as much from the praise due to its erection, as the lustre of its golden walls, and the magnificence of the rest of the building merited universal praise and admiration. In a word, I should be unable to reconcile so much prodigality in the useless costliness of the foundations, with so much wisdom and de-

1 Homo et homo natus est in ea: et ipse fundavit eam Altissimus. Ps. 86. 5.

2 Præcepit rex ut tollerent lapides grandes, lapides pretiosos in fundamentum templi, et quadrarent eos. 3. Reg. v. 17.

sign in the structure that was raised upon them. But there was a mystery in what was done ; and it was this. That ancient material temple was but a figure of another temple not inanimate, but living, in which the King of Glory was to take up His habitation, in a corporal manner, for the space of nine months, as in a palace in which He took the greatest delight : for it was a figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And therefore to represent the immense extent of that foundation of grace, if we may call it so, which, contrary to the ordinary course of Providence, she was to receive at the moment of her conception, for the ground-work of all her future sanctity, Almighty God ordained that, contrary also to the common practice, the foundation of Solomon's temple, which was an emblem of Mary, should be laid with the richest materials to be found. And thus we see how an expenditure, which might otherwise have seemed useless, could not be taxed with prodigality, when it contributed to so noble a design, as that of representing the sanctity of the Blessed Virgin, in its very first beginnings.

But whatever I may say of that immense capital of grace, which Mary afterwards improved with so much diligence, it will be impossible to give you any notion of its unspeakable value, unless we divide it into separate parts ; for very large sums never appear so great, when looked at in the mass, as when they are examined at leisure, and piece by piece. Let us therefore proceed as follows.

It is a truth which cannot be disputed, that the whole

number of the Angels in Heaven so far exceeds all that we can imagine, that there is no combination of figures, by which we could express it. *Is there any numbering,* asks one of Job's friends, *of His soldiers?*<sup>1</sup> How greatly would you be deceived, if you supposed that you could call those heavenly champions to pass one by one in review before you, within the narrow limits of your imagination! The great Areopagite, who must certainly have been well informed in this matter, since his master, the Apostle St. Paul, had been an eye-witness of what he described to him, assures us that not only the number of individual soldiers, but even that of whole battalions of these blessed spirits, drawn up, as it were, under so many different banners, is far beyond the reach of our weak understandings. *The blessed hosts of the heavenly intelligences,* he says, *are so many, as far to exceed the power of our weak minds to reckon them.*<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas follows this teaching, and asserts that the angelical substances exceed all material substances in number, in the same proportion that the higher material substances, the heavens, exceed those beneath them in magnitude;<sup>3</sup> and this is a degree of excess beyond expression. According to this calculation we must suppose the Angels to be more in number, than all the stars in the firmament, all the sands of the sea, and all the atoms of the air taken together.<sup>4</sup> There is this difference however, that though

1 Numquid est numerus militum ejus. Job. xxv. 3.

2 Sunt besti exercitus supernarum mentium, infirmarum nostrarum mentium numerum superexcedentes. 8. Dion.

3 8. Thom. 3. p. q. 50. art. ult. 4 Vide Suarez. l. 1. de Angel. c. 11. n. 18.

they are so very numerous, yet they are not a confused multitude, like atoms, or grains of sand, but their order is as remarkable as their number. They succeed each other, according to the Angelic Doctor, in regular gradation, and with a corresponding difference in natural perfection, the second surpassing the first, the third surpassing the second, and so on like a series of numbers; and thus they are all successively distinguished from each other, by the advantage of some greater perfection. Moreover, in Angels, the gifts and endowments of grace are all proportioned to those of nature; so that amongst those happy spirits, whoever is endowed with greater perfections in the order of nature, is also enriched with greater graces in the order above nature. But to what end, you will say, is all this discussion? Have patience a little, and you will see that I have only imitated the falcon, which spends some time in wheeling about, but loses none; since, by flying round and round, he gathers so much more strength to fall upon his prey. If the Angels, are innumerable, as we have argued, and every one of them in succession is still more perfect than the one below him; and again if each one, that is more perfect than another in nature, is in the same proportion richer also in grace, it necessarily follows that, however small a degree of grace we assign to the lowest Angel, there must be an incredible amount, corresponding to it, in the highest. If St. Michael, according to the common opinion, is the Prince and head of them all, he must possess at least as many degrees of grace, as there are

Angels beneath, and therefore inferior to him in natural perfection; that is to say, he must possess degrees of grace without number. But if we assign to the lowest Angel not merely one degree, but many thousands, as is only reasonable, considering the great natural perfections of any Angel whatever, think to what a prodigious height must that grace reach, which, according to the proportion that has been described, we must suppose to belong to the highest Angel, the captain and leader of all that glorious host. For this proportion is like the one existing in the division of degrees upon the circles, which Astronomers make use of, for their scientific observations. That degree in a great circle, for instance, which, upon the surface of our earthly globe, does not occupy above sixty miles, when transferred to a corresponding great circle of the highest heaven, will extend over a far greater space, than the strongest imagination is able to conceive. I have now reached the point at which I was aiming, and though I have gone some way back in my subject, I hope you will find that I have fulfilled my promise to give you some idea of the immense amount of the Blessed Virgin Mary's capital, or original stock of grace. Let it be sufficient now to remind you, that her first grace was greater than the last, or crowning grace of the highest of all the Angels. From this you may easily conclude, how plentiful a grace this was. Do not however ask me to tell you exactly, by how much it surpassed the other, for I am not ashamed to own that I could never answer such a question. If you would

know this, you must ask Him that bestowed, since He alone keeps account of it, nor can any one else compute it.

But here, while I flatter myself that I have already advanced a great part of the way, I find I am only just setting out. Follow me, however, in thought, while I resume the thread of the subject, for I intend to lead you into a fathomless sea; where, if after all we can do no better, let us sink together, and sweetly lose ourselves, shipwrecked amid an ocean of wonders, in our attempt to follow the idea of Mary's sanctity, keeping it at least in sight, if we cannot hope ever to reach it.

That first grace, then, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which we have seen to be so unspeakably great, went on redoubling itself ever after, from the first moment that she received it, to her dying breath. This I might assume as an undoubted truth, for, if this process of the doubling of grace was common to all the Angels, for that short space of time, during which they were in a state of progress, and had the capacity of meriting, how can it be otherwise but that the accumulation was still more considerable in Mary, the Queen of Angels? Albertus Magnus regarded it as a sort of first principle, a self-evident truth, that the graces of the Saints in heaven were communicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, in a more perfect manner, than to all the rest together; and consequently, if any privilege or favour could be questioned in Mary, that favour or privilege could not be granted to any Saint or Angel whatever. *It is a prin-*

ciple, these are his words, *which needs only to be stated, to be acknowledged, that the graces of all the Saints were bestowed upon the Virgin, in a still more perfect manner.*<sup>1</sup> However, as our whole argument is based upon the fact of this continual redoubling of grace in the Blessed Virgin, I am willing to prove it, instead of taking it for granted. It is, then, unquestionable that the Blessed Virgin proceeded, with most extraordinary speed, to make new acquisitions of grace every day and hour, since, as she was totally free from the *Fomes peccati*, or root of sin, her progress in sanctity was not retarded by any opposition. This may be explained by a comparison, as clear as the sun itself, for it is from his very light that I will borrow it. Have you ever observed with what incredible swiftness this light transports itself to the utmost limits of the horizon? A cannon-ball, carried upon wings of fire, does not fly faster than about three miles in a minute, according to experiments often made by the most expert artillerymen. At this rate, even if we supposed it to go on without ever slackening its speed, it would only accomplish a hundred and eighty miles in an hour's time. Light, on the contrary, not only passes from one side of the horizon to the other, in the twinkling of an eye, but traverses in a few minutes, with the same ease, all those ninety five millions of miles, which we suppose to lie between us and the sun. Now whence proceeds this extreme swiftness of motion in light, so

1 Principium ex terminis per se notum, Virgini perfectius collatas omnium Sanctorum gratias. Alb. l. de B. M. c. 69. 70. 71.



different from what we see in all other things that are moved, except from its having no opposition to encounter? In all that vast tract of the ethereal regions, it meets with nothing to obstruct its passage, and therefore, moving on uninterruptedly, it comes almost immediately to the end of its flight. And this is the difference between the Blessed Virgin's progress, and that which is common to the rest of mankind. Although some, perhaps, may be found, who advance with rapid steps in the way of sanctity and perfection, nay who run or even fly, still they never advance at full speed; because in this their course, or even flight, they always meet with more or less opposition, and find some clog to retard their motion. They all have within them, the *Fomes peccati*, the inclination or bias, that every man has from his own corrupt nature, by which he tends, not to God the true centre of his soul, but to himself and to sin. In the Blessed Virgin there was nothing whatever of this, for, being entirely free from sin, and from all inclination to sin, from the very first moment of her Conception, she never met with the least resistance, that could retard her in her prosperous course. As therefore she was *the first-born from the voice* of the Divine Word, in the order of grace, no otherwise than light was the first production of the same powerful voice, in the order of nature, so she perfectly resembled the nature of light in this rapidity of motion and action, whereby she raised her merit to the utmost height, not at intervals, but in an instant. Observe then the ground of that pious opinion, which

the devout clients of the Holy Virgin maintain, when they say that, in each act of her life, she successively doubled her stock of grace. It rests upon two considerations. On the one hand, the habit of virtue, accompanied by an actual grace proportioned to it, is, to speak in the language of the schools, *an adequate principle*, for the production of an act of equal intensity with the habit itself. On the other hand, the Blessed Virgin, as we have seen, never meeting with any hindrance, always exerted herself to the very utmost of her power, nor did she suffer any of those precious talents, with which God was continually supplying her, in order to increase her capital, to remain unoccupied even for a single moment.

From these two truths, of which the first is not questioned, and the second has been clearly established, it follows that, with her second act, the Blessed Virgin doubled the merit of her first, and having thus made the habit doubly intense, disposed herself to redouble with her third act the merit, of which her second left her in possession. I perceive already that this argument is not a light, on which every eye can gaze. But then, the very fact of not being understood will in some manner help to explain my meaning. Let him, who does not understand this sort of progressive calculation, rejoice that the glories of Mary are such, as to baffle his imagination, and even confound his understanding: and let him employ his time in loving and admiring what at present he does not understand, that he may come one day

to understand that, which he is now contented to love and admire.

However, to leave no means untried, perhaps I might give you some idea of this prodigious multiplication, by a familiar illustration. It is told of a clever horse-trainer, that having by skilful management brought to perfection in a colt all those qualities, of which a noble steed is capable, he exposed him for sale. As the story goes, at his very first appearance the horse displayed such fine points, that a gentleman was so taken with him as to be resolved to have him at any price; and therefore, without many words, he offered the owner a blank cheque ready signed, that he might write down what sum he pleased. Sir, said the man, I esteem this horse as much as Alexander did his Bucephalus, and perhaps your whole estate will not be sufficient to pay the value of him. However, if you think fit, we will agree thus. The horse and trappings shall be yours for nothing, and you need only pay me for the nails in his shoes, and for them at the following rate. For the first nail you shall give me a single sixpence, for the second a shilling, for the third two shillings, for the fourth four shillings, and so on, doubling the price of every nail, till we come to the last of the two and thirty nails. At this the gentleman smiled, and being a better horseman than arithmetician, he soon struck a bargain; never doubting, before he went through the calculation, that, instead of paying the full value of a fine horse, he had over-reached an experienced jockey. However, when he came to compute the price, he found

that the thirty second nail, paid for according to the terms agreed on, would require the sum of *two thousand one hundred and forty seven million, four hundred and eighty three thousand, six hundred and forty eight six-pences, or fifty three million, six hundred and eighty seven thousand, and ninety one pounds sterling*; which is a sum far exceeding the income of any gentleman, or even of the greatest Prince in Europe. Here, dear reader, I could wish you were as good an accountant, as I suppose you to be a devout client of our Lady, since some knowledge and skill are required to follow me. If however you are not quick enough at your pen, to work up this sum by arithmetic, try what you can do with your fingers. Place yourself before one of those chess-boards, on which you have, perhaps more than once, lost the most precious of all gold, I mean the irrecoverable gold of time, and on the first of those sixty four little squares, into which the chess-board is divided, put one grain of corn, two upon the second, four upon the third, eight upon the fourth, sixteen upon the fifth, and so on, till you come to the last, doubling the number each time, as in the other example. At the end you will find that, not to speak of granaries, there are not in the whole world, as many sacks of corn, as would belong to the sixty fourth square, which is the last on the board. Nay the very ships, that would be necessary to carry such a heap of corn, allowing three thousand sacks to every ship, would come to the number of *one thousand seven hundred and seventy nine millions, one hundred and ninety*

*nine thousand, eight hundred and fifty two*; that is, more than ever have, or ever will sail upon the ocean, as long as the world exists. According to this way of reckoning it is evident, that even if the Blessed Virgin, in her Immaculate Conception, had not received from the Eternal Word, for earnest, as it were, of the immense dowry, which He was preparing for her, any more than one degree of grace, that is, as much as a child receives, who dies immediately after Baptism; yet notwithstanding, in sixty four quarters of an hour, or sixteen hours of the first day, supposing that she doubled her capital, just once in each quarter of an hour, her treasures of grace would have grown to so prodigious a height, that it would baffle not only our weak capacities, but even the most penetrating understanding of the highest Seraphim, to comprehend their amount. It is so immensely great, that only to pronounce it is enough to take away a man's breath. Observe how much must be uttered in a breath, to express the number of these accumulated degrees of grace,—*eighteen millions of millions of millions, four hundred and forty six thousand, seven hundred and forty four millions of millions, seventy three thousand seven hundred and nine millions, five hundred and fifty one thousand, six hundred and sixteen.*<sup>1</sup> Now, then, consider what the Blessed Virgin's whole stock, principal and interest, will amount to, if we suppose that she had, for her original capital, not one degree only of grace, but as many as, nay even more than St. Michael

1 18,446,744,073,709,551,616.

the Archangel. If we suppose that this process of doubling her stock of grace was carried on, not only for the space of two thirds of a day, but, during the whole seventy two years of her life, not to mention the time she was in her mother's womb; if again we suppose, that, in consequence of the perfect dominion she had over all her own acts, she never produced one that was not deliberate; and if in the last place, according to the opinion of many authors, her mind never ceased from acting meritoriously, even during the repose of her body, any more than our heart suspends its natural motion, because we are asleep, so that those words were literally true of her: *I sleep, and my heart watcheth*:<sup>1</sup> all this being considered, who will be able to comprehend, much less give any account of such an immense treasure of Divine grace? Clavius,<sup>2</sup> for an extraordinary specimen of his skill, calculates the number of small grains of sand, which would be requisite to fill the vast empty space all around the earth, and up to the very firmament. And, supposing that each single grain of sand was so small, that ten thousand of them would scarcely be equal to the smallest poppy seed, he shews that the whole number would require fifty one ciphers with one unit before them, to express it. And yet what is even such a number as this, compared to the amount of the Blessed Virgin's merits? When we reflect on that doubling of grace, of which we have been speaking, and consider with what assiduity she

1 *Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat.* Cant. v. 2.

2 A mathematical writer of celebrity, employed by Gregory xiii. in the reformation of the Calendar.

practised it, not only every hour of the day, but almost every minute and every moment, we cannot but confess that her accumulations must have amounted to a sum, quite as enormous as this, in a very short period of her life. Therefore it might have been said of her, that she was equal in beauty to the whole heavenly Jerusalem: *Thou art beautiful, O my love, sweet and comely as Jerusalem.*<sup>1</sup> And this, not merely at the end of her life, but when the Eternal Word Himself came down in person, to give, as we may say, the finishing stroke to such an admirable master-piece of His Divine art, and, as great masters are accustomed to attach their names to their best pieces, to write under it, with His own Hand, *The work of the Most High;*<sup>2</sup> yea even long before that time, and whilst she was yet under the Divine Artist's hands. That is to say, she possessed more grace than all the citizens of Heaven together, not only when she died, but even whilst she was actually living.

But now we find ourselves immersed in the widest and deepest part of this boundless sea. What will become of us? O most amiable Virgin, let me turn my eyes for a moment upon thee. Thou didst once say of thyself, that thou wast no more than a rivulet of water: *I like a brook out of a river;* but then thou didst wisely add, *of a mighty water.*<sup>3</sup> For indeed, in respect of Almighty God, the true Ocean of Sanctity, thou art only *a brook*, but in

1 Pulchra es, amica mea, suavis et decora sicut Jerusalem. Cant. vi. 3.

2 Opus Excelsi. Eccl. xliv. 2.

3 Ego quasi trames aquæ immensæ. Eccl. xxiv. 41.

respect of us, thou art a brook *of a mighty water*; nor has there ever been any one, that could boast of having discovered the bounds of such vast seas, by crossing them from shore to shore. And now that, as I said, we are in the middle of this great sea, by what way are we to reach land again? But it matters not. It was love of thee, great Virgin, that brought us hither, the same love shall keep us here still. And we will rejoice to be lost in such an ocean of wonders, that we may have so much the more reason to praise, and admire the Divine Power, in the most wonderful and most beautiful work, which ever came forth from the hands of the Almighty.

What, however, will you say, O devout client of Mary, when you reflect that, in all that has been mentioned of this inconceivable multiplication of merit, I have not yet taken into account that, which may perhaps be looked upon, as the chief part of the capital, whence these great accumulations are derived, I mean that grace which is called *ex opere operato*—the grace which was given her, not on account of her own exertions and meritorious actions, (grace thus obtained being properly *ex opere operantis*) but purely on Christ's own account, who wrought in her such effects, as He thought most suitable, according to His own Divine pleasure. If this grace is calculated in combination with the sums already specified, not only all the arithmetic upon earth, but even that of Heaven itself, must fail to find figures enough to express the result, unless we could penetrate into the Divine Understanding, and there discover the mystery of those hidden characters,



the knowledge of which God has reserved to Himself alone. Who can conceive how many graces, favours, and heavenly blessings the Eternal Word poured into the Blessed Virgin's sacred breast, when she first received Him within her virginal womb?—how many He communicated to her during all the time that He remained there?—how many, when she was delivered of her sacred burden and gave Him to the world?—how many, when upon rising from the dead, He came to visit and comfort her in His glorious triumph?—how many, when leaving her on earth, He ascended into Heaven?—how many, when, from Heaven, He sent down the Holy Ghost upon her, with whole torrents of heavenly gifts? And lastly how many, when He came down Himself in person to receive her blessed spirit, which, like a celestial fire not able to remain any longer out of its proper sphere, left this earth to take its place next to Him in Heaven? These are great sums, every one of which makes a considerable addition to the main stock of her grace.

And yet there remains something more to be added to this. For it is generally believed, that the most Blessed Virgin lived four and twenty years and some months, after the Ascension of Christ into Heaven; during which time it is most probable that, according to the custom of the primitive Christians, she communicated every day. We shall find then, if we take a faithful account of her Communions, that she received our Lord, her own Divine Son, into her breast, in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, above eight thousand eight hundred and fifty

times. Now it is well known that, in this sacrament, grace is communicated in proportion to the disposition of the person who approaches it. Since therefore the disposition of the Blessed Virgin was certainly more perfect than anything that we can conceive, it cannot be doubted but that the treasures of grace, which she daily received from her Divine Son in Holy Communion, were also inexpressibly great. And though He could hide His visible Presence from her eyes, under the veil of the Sacramental species, yet He could never conceal His love. Now, if any one were to ask, with the son of Sirach: *Who hath numbered the sand of the sea and the drops of rain,*<sup>1</sup> which fall upon the mountains? We might answer, that it would be a much easier task to reckon up all that, than to calculate any part of Mary's merit. No plummet will serve to fathom so great a depth; and though I am only, as it were, a few steps from the shore, yet already I find no bottom. So that St. John Damascene had good reason to style our Lady, not *a sea*, as her name seems to import, but *an immense abyss of grace*;<sup>2</sup> for there is no sea so deep, or so wide, that it cannot be measured, whereas an abyss is absolutely beyond the reach of every measure: *Who hath measured the depth of the abyss?*<sup>3</sup> Whichever way I look, I see no bounds. Here, therefore, I must leave you, where I myself am lost. From any part of the sea, I might hope in time to bring

1 Arenam maris, et pluviae guttas...quis dinumeravit? Eccli. i. 2.

2 Gratiae abyssus immensa. Orat. 2. de Assumpt.

3 Profundum abyssi quis dinensus est? Eccli. i. 2.

you to land again, but to bring you out of an abyss, I own is not in my power.

## SECTION V.

### THE BLESSED VIRGIN CONFIRMS TO SUAREZ THE TRUTH OF THIS OPINION.

I cannot dismiss this subject, without taking notice that this opinion of the Blessed Virgin's grace being superior to that of all the other Saints and Angels in Heaven together, was so agreeable to her, that she sent expressly to thank the learned Suarez, for teaching it, he being the first doctor who maintained this pious opinion, which he defended publicly in the famous University of Salamanca.

With me, this is a very powerful argument to induce me to embrace it. I know that there has since appeared an author, not over-favourably inclined to the opinions of that great man, who, for want of a better argument to oppose this opinion in particular, thought it sufficient to assure the world upon his own bare word, that in this Suarez only went by guess, and shot at random. Be this as it may, I am credibly assured that the Blessed Virgin sent a message of thanks to him, who first maintained this opinion, and I have not yet heard that she ever sent any to him that opposed it. And if a thesis, weighed so maturely and with such deliberation, founded upon so many probabilities, corroborated by the sentiments of so many holy Fathers, and defended afterwards by the united suf-

frages of the whole University of Salamanca, may be called guessing, or shooting at random, we may truly say, that Suarez must have been a very good hand at guessing, to light upon the truth so happily, and to hit the mark with a random shot. The Blessed Virgin Mary, however, is an object so conspicuous, that in publishing her praises, even a blind man cannot miss his aim, much less a marksman so skilful as Suarez.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE FOURTH MOTIVE OF DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED  
VIRGIN IS THE UNIVERSAL CONSENT OF THE  
WHOLE CHURCH IN HONOURING HER.

## SECTION I.

HONOUR PAID BY THE CHURCH IS A SURE  
PROOF OF MERIT.

Honour is not always a proof of merit so authentic and so free from error, as to constitute an unexceptionable claim to our belief. As it is but a shadow of virtue, it partakes of the nature of a shadow in this respect, that it often falls short of the true stature of merit, and, in like manner, often exceeds it. There can be no room for this, however, when there is neither ignorance to blind the understanding, nor passion to overrule the will, in him who pays the honour. Indeed, in that case, honour becomes no longer a shadow or vague outline of the object, but rather a picture, which represents it to the life. Or if even then we choose to call it no more than a shadow of merit, let it be at least, the shadow of a sun-dial, which never fails to tell the true hour. This previous consideration will help us to understand how highly deserving the Blessed Virgin is of honour, since

the Church has thought it only just and reasonable to honour her, as much as she does. For since the Church of Christ is the throne of truth, established upon earth by Truth Itself, it is impossible that flattery and deceit could have any part in the honours, which she assigns to Mary. And therefore this shadow, if we still call it so, since it never leaves the Blessed Virgin, may be safely taken as a scale of proportion, by which to measure the greatness of her merit.

In order to give the honour paid to virtue the highest possible value, as an offering of esteem and reverence, the combination of three main qualities is indispensable, namely, *antiquity*, *universality*, and *sublimity*.

All these conditions are found, in a pre-eminent degree, in the honour and veneration, which the Church pays to the Blessed Virgin.

## SECTION II.

### THE ANTIQUITY OF THE HONOUR PAID BY THE CHURCH TO MARY.

In the first place, the honour paid to this great Virgin is most ancient, for we may truly say that it began with the beginning of all things. If we undertake to discover the hidden sources of this Nile, we shall be obliged to ascend, not only to the earthly, but even to the celestial Paradise. For, as the Angels, from the very moment of their creation, and while in a state of probation, had an obscure knowledge of Christ by faith, and, from the first

instant of their happiness in the state of perfection, had a clear instinctive knowledge of the same Christ, *in Verbo*, that is, in the Eternal Word; so, from the beginning, they had a corresponding knowledge of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as the rich plant, which, in time to come, was to produce that Divine Fruit. And, if in both those states of probation and perfection they saw her, and knew her such as she was, it cannot be doubted but that they immediately adored her, as the Mother of their common Lord.<sup>1</sup> For, as St. John Damascene says, *it is fitting that the Mother of God should enjoy what belongs to her Son, and be adored by all.*<sup>2</sup> In like manner, the Blessed Virgin was known and honoured by man upon earth, from the very creation of the world, for there was no reason, why earth should shrink from paying any honour whatever to the Blessed Virgin, when Heaven itself had first set the example. Our two first parents, Adam and Eve, in particular, like those two high mountain-tops in the chain of Caucasus, which see the dawn of day four hours earlier than the plains lying beneath them, discovered this heavenly day-break, more than forty centuries before it began to appear above our horizon, visible to all the world. For Almighty God, being willing to apply an early remedy to the mortal wound which they had given themselves and their posterity, in the sin which they had so lately committed, was graciously pleased to comfort those hapless exiles, by giving

1 Suarez 3. p. to. 2. Disp. 21. Sec. 2.      2 Decet Dei Matrem ea, quæ Filii sunt, possidere, et ab omnibus adorari. S. Joan. Dam. Orat. 1. de Nat. Virg.

them notice of another woman, who, becoming the virgin mother of a man, and more than man, should repair their losses so effectually, as even to open the way to greater advantages, than if they had never fallen. And, in order that they might conceive a high idea of the sanctity of this woman, and consequently of the honour due to her, He gave them to understand, that between them and the serpent, who had infected them with his poison, there should be a most implacable enmity for ever, from generation to generation; denouncing this perpetual war to the serpent, in these unmeasured terms: *I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed.*<sup>1</sup> The knowledge thus supernaturally imparted to our first parents, was handed down from age to age, through the Patriarchs and Prophets, who had as clear a foresight of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as they had of the future Messias. Accordingly, as sentinels from the top of a watch-tower give notice of long-wished for succours to their besieged companions below, so these, beholding with prophetic eye this Virgin Mother, with the Infant Jesus in her arms, coming onward as it were in the distance, proclaim the happy tidings of both to their fellow men, who in this vale of tears and misery were not only besieged on all sides, but absolutely overwhelmed with evils, beyond hope of recovery by any other means.

Nor was this knowledge so entirely confined within the

<sup>1</sup> *Inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem, et inter semen tuum et semen illius.* Gen. iii. 15. Vid. Cajet. in loc.



narrow limits of God's chosen people, that no gleam of it could break out amongst the Gentiles also. Hence it clearly appears, what great regard Almighty God has for the honour and glory of the spotless Virgin, since, in order to promote it, He made the very shadow of her, as it were, beneficial to the world, even before she herself appeared in it, and ordained that not only the life-giving fruit of this majestic tree, but even its leaves should bring safety and happiness to those, who took shelter under them.

But *when the fulness of the time was come*,<sup>1</sup> the Church Militant upon earth had so well learnt from the Church Triumphant in Heaven, how to honour the Blessed Virgin Mary, that, even while she was still living, the faithful came flocking from all parts to Nazareth, to see her and become acquainted with her, esteeming any intercourse with the Mother of God so great a happiness and honour, that they thought the mere sight of her more than sufficient recompense for the long journeys, which they had taken from the most remote parts of the world. Nor was it only the common people, who are easily misled, that displayed this pious eagerness. The Apostles themselves, as they were the first in dignity and authority amongst the faithful, were the first to set an example of zeal in paying honour to the Blessed Virgin. Thus the great St. Denis attests that he himself was present, when several of them, and amongst the rest St. Peter, the head of them all, came from different parts

1 Gal. iv. 4.

of the world to visit her, with no other object, than that of contemplating once more the greatest work of the Divine Majesty, and devoutly celebrating the praises of its Almighty Author. *For no other purpose, he says, than in order to contemplate Mary, and from contemplation of her to ascend as high, as their limited powers would reach, in the praises of the Almighty Goodness.*<sup>1</sup>

We all know what sublime titles St. James gives her in his Liturgy, and how he himself dedicated a church to her in Saragossa, as St. John afterwards did in Asia, and St. Peter in Rome, besides many other churches, which, in their zeal and emulation, different persons erected in her honour while she was still alive; such as those which were built by the disciples of the Prophet Elias upon Mt. Carmel, by St. Martha in Marseilles, by the Magi, and by Queen Candace in Ethiopia.<sup>2</sup> Thus piety towards Mary was the very milk, with which the infant Church was nurtured from the cradle. In fact the worship of Christ, and devotion to His Blessed Mother, were propagated throughout the Christian world, by the same steps and in the same degrees. And although time, the devourer of all things, has enviously robbed us of almost all distinct traces of this primitive worship and devotion towards the Blessed Virgin Mary, yet still, just as those few remains, which are left us of ancient buildings, are sufficient to give us some idea of their magnificence, so

<sup>1</sup> Non alia de causa, quam ut Mariam contemplarentur, et ex ejus contemplatione, infinita potentia præditam Bonitatem, quantum ferret imbecillitas eorum, laudarent. S. Dion. de div. nom. c. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Niersmb. Trop. Mar. l. 5, c. 2. Bozio. l. 9. c. 9. Locrius, l. 3. c. 3.

what little we know of the progress of this devotion, in those happy ages, is enough to convince us of the zeal and fervour with which it was practised.

Even in this, however, the faithful were not alone. Many among the Gentiles knew and honoured this great Queen before the coming of Christ, and we find that many have done the same since. We have authentic accounts of a most ancient temple in Calicut, of another in Quilon, towns on the Malabar coast; of a third in the Canary islands, and of a very splendid one, as well as of many famous images of our Lady in China, where these inhabitants, worshipping a virgin mother, honoured the Blessed Virgin Mary, without knowing who she was. Thus, through the thickest clouds of their ignorance and idolatry, there were some feeble rays of light breaking in upon them from that bright moon, even while she did not shine upon their hemisphere.

But what is still more remarkable in this devotion towards the Blessed Virgin is, that though it be of such great antiquity in the world, yet it does not decay with age, but seems on the contrary to grow stronger and more vigorous, the longer it continues. For modern Christians, who share with those of primitive times the glory of the same spiritual birth in holy Baptism, are, in their lives and manners, as different from them, as lead is from gold, though both are often the produce of one mine. Still in this one particular of honouring the Immaculate Virgin, Christians of the present day seem to be as zealous as their ancestors, and even in some respects to surpass

them. To this end, they daily receive new encouragements and new communications of fervour from the Father of Lights, who recompenses with proportionate honour every service done to his Divine Son, according to the promise: *If any man minister to Me, him will My Father honour.*<sup>1</sup> And He has therefore decreed, that she who gave that Son His very life and nurture upon earth, shall receive in return such honours, as correspond to the importance of the service and the dignity of the employment.

## SECTION III.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE HONOUR PAID  
BY THE CHURCH TO MARY.

While thus engaged in setting forth the antiquity of the honours paid to the Blessed Virgin Mary, I find that I have already, in great measure, established the universality also. For from what has been said, it clearly appears, that all nations, as well as all ages, have vied with each other in honouring the Blessed Virgin; and thus the prediction of the Prophet Isaias is everywhere accomplished: *I will make thee to be an everlasting glory, a joy unto generation and generation.*<sup>2</sup> I could wish that the narrow bounds, to which I have confined myself in this book, left me more at liberty to indulge my inclination to enlarge upon this subject. Then would I point

<sup>1</sup> Si quis Mihi ministraverit, honorificabit eum Pater Meus. Joan. xii. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ponam te in superbiam sæculorum, gaudium in generationem et generationem. Is. lx. 15.

to multitudes of all nations, zealous champions and fervent clients of the Blessed Virgin, and amongst them, kings and princes still more zealous than their people. What wonders could I not relate of a Constantine, of a Charles the Great, and of a Henry II., amongst the Emperors; of a Lewis IX., and of a Robert, the only one of that name, amongst the Kings of France; of an Alphon-sus III., and a Ferdinand III., amongst the Kings of Spain; of an Edward in England, a Boleslaus in Poland, a Wenceslaus in Bohemia, a Stephen in Hungary; and of so many other monarchs, who, from their earthly thrones, have been raised to the honours of our altars, after having first distinguished themselves, no less for the love of Jesus Christ, than for that of His Blessed Mother? It is enough to run over the Ecclesiastical annals with a cursory eye, to be convinced with what tender devotion the great Queen of Heaven has always been honoured and beloved in the Church, by those who have been most illustrious, either for dignity, learning, or sanctity, and what exalted praises they have unanimously given her. Indeed the holy Fathers often speak of her in such terms, that, without some favourable interpretation, their language would seem to us extravagant. Were I to count all the pens, which, from time to time, have been employed in writing her praises, what vast libraries would they not make up! In every corner of the world the Blessed Virgin is seen in her pictures and statues, for the consolation of those, who, being still pilgrims upon earth, are banished for a time from the sight of her glo-

rious countenance. She is sculptured in all our most precious woods, marbles, stones, and metals, and portrayed in the most lively colours, by the hands of eminent painters. Her name and her praises resound every day in our ears, in the rich harmonies of our finest music. She is devoutly invoked by all that are in misery and distress, as their secure refuge ; by sailors in storms, as their haven ; by the ignorant, as their guide ; by the sick and infirm, as their health ; and by soldiers in battle, as the giver of victories. Nay more, victorious kings and emperors themselves have often descended from their triumphal chariots, to seat the Blessed Virgin in their places, and have assigned to her all the honour of their triumphs, by hanging before her images the banners of their conquered enemies, their arms, their spoils, and all their trophies of victory.

What shall I say more ? It cannot be denied that Religious Orders are the most learned, the most pious, and the most judicious part of the Church. Now these, by the homage which they all pay to this glorious Virgin, by publishing and teaching her praises in every quarter of the world, by propagating devotion to her, and by making it their glory, as they all do, to fight under her protection, may truly be said to be that living tongue, by which the Church expresses her constant and universal sentiments, concerning the honour due to the great Mother of God. If therefore we admit the assertion of Aristotle, that whatever is believed by all men is true, we must certainly conclude, that since the Blessed Virgin is

reckoned worthy of the highest reverence which can be paid to a pure creature, by all nations in the world where the Gospel has ever been preached, by all degrees of persons, from the prince down to the peasant, by all the learned writers and holy Fathers, by all the Saints, and by all wise men, and by all Religious Orders, she must really be worthy of the whole of that honour, of which she is judged so deserving. And whilst I am writing, the beautiful Esther rises up before my mind, who, being sent like the rainbow of peace after a storm, to calm the incensed mind of Assuerus, comes into his presence, gently leaning upon one of her maids of honour, whilst another bears up her train.<sup>1</sup> This I imagine is exactly the appearance which the Immaculate Virgin now makes before the Tribunal of God, and the Throne of His Mercy. She comes in attended by the two natures, the angelical and the human, like two handmaids ambitious of the honour of ushering her into the Divine presence; but with this difference, that the angelical nature, which goes before and supports her arm, is that one on which the Blessed Virgin reposes with delight, while the human nature, which follows behind and gathers up the train, is that from which she is still expecting a faithful imitation of her royal virtues. Her appearance is sufficient to charm the Heart of an offended God; ours surely ought to be all on fire with holy love towards this great object of devotion.

<sup>1</sup> Esther v.

## SECTION IV.

THE SUBLIMITY OF THE HONOUR PAID BY  
THE CHURCH TO MARY.

The chief point in the honour which the Church has always paid, and still pays to the Blessed Virgin, remains to be considered, namely, its sublimity. Without this, the two qualities already considered would be, after all, of little consequence; just as, for purposes of commerce, the antiquity of a piece of money, and the universality of its currency would be little regarded, if the coin itself possessed no great intrinsic value. What then is the height to which the Church carries the honour paid to Mary, and how far does it properly rise above that, which may lawfully be paid to other Saints? I seem to see the Church, from the very beginning, full of admiration and wonder, anxiously deliberating with herself upon this question, as formerly Assuerus did with his favourite courtier, as to what honours should be given to Mardochai. *What ought to be done to the man whom the King is desirous to honour?*<sup>1</sup> What kind of honours shall we assign to that incomparable woman, whom a God, and He, her own Son, desires to see exalted? On the one hand, to honour her simply as a creature seems too little, since she is in possession of a dignity, which is as it were infinite. While, on the other hand, to honour her as Divine, would certainly be too much, for it would be to

1 *Quid debet fieri viro, quem rex honorare desiderat. Esther vi. 6.*



communicate a name altogether incommunicable, and which can only be appropriated to One. *What therefore ought to be done?* If I might, for the sake of illustration, ascribe words and thoughts to inanimate things, I could imagine some such deliberation in an assembly of the clouds, when discussing the rank or dignity in the heavens, that ought to be assigned to the phenomenon called a Parhelion. To treat it as if it were merely a cloud like the rest would be too little; for if it is a cloud, it is a cloud fully impregnated with the sun. Yet to place it in the rank of a sun would be too much, for nothing can properly be so called, which has not the reality and nature of a sun, however greatly it may participate in its beauty and splendour. Now since honours as well as benefits conferred, ought always to be above the merits of the person rewarded, rather than beneath them, so we might be tempted to think the Church ought to have followed the same course that Assuerus did, when he decreed to Mardochai the privileges of royalty; and that, in this doubtful case, she should have assigned those honours to the Blessed Virgin, which properly belong to the King of Kings, her own Divine Son, namely, the honours of worship no less than Divine. *For it is fitting*, as we quoted before from St. John Damascene, *that the Mother of God should enjoy the privileges of her Son and be adored by all.* And if the Church herself did not hesitate to bestow these honours of Divine Worship on the bare wood, upon which Christ laid down His life for our redemption, how could she fear to bestow the same

honours on the Blessed Virgin, who gave Him that very life? Upon the Cross He poured out His Blood for the salvation of the world; but it was from His Mother that He received that same Precious Blood. If therefore we adore with the highest kind of worship, called *latria*, the mere table, as we may term it, on which Christ paid down that precious gold, with how much more reason ought we to give the same Divine worship to the mine itself, whence He drew that very gold, which He so liberally expended for our sake? The Church however, to shew that she has no inclination to run into excesses, especially when either the ignorance of some of her children, or the malice of her enemies may put a wrong construction upon her most innocent intentions, chooses rather to act towards the Blessed Virgin with the greatest rigour, and to refuse her what she has granted to an inanimate piece of wood! But shall we on this account suppose that the Church esteems the Blessed Virgin at all less highly? On the contrary, she rather shewed, by this cautious way of proceeding, that her esteem for Mary was in a manner boundless. She well knew that, in permitting Divine honours to be paid to the Cross, there could be no danger of mistake; since it appears at once, even to the most illiterate, that those honours are not given to the wood itself, which is incapable of them, but to Christ, who triumphed upon that wood. Whereas, if the same honours were assigned to Mary, the case would be different, for then people would be in danger of supposing, that these honours were paid her, not on account of those exterior

privileges and prerogatives which she enjoyed, by having so often received the Saviour of the world into her arms, as the Cross may be said to have done by its close approach to Him and contact with His Sacred Body, and by that help, which, in a certain sense, it rendered to Him on account of being united with Him, as she was, in the great work of our Redemption; but because of some more interior and intimate participation, which it might be imagined that she had with Him, in the Divine Nature itself; and therefore such honours, though otherwise correct, have been forbidden by the Church. But is it not evident, that the very prohibition raises Mary to a still higher degree of honour? In this the Church has exactly followed that rule of policy, which the Angels observed upon the death of Moses, when they concealed his body, lest it should become an object of idolatry amongst that infatuated people. Yet this was so far from pronouncing Moses unworthy of respect, that it was rather a declaration that he deserved the greatest honour, because it manifested their conviction that his deserts were great enough to raise him in the opinion of men to the dignity of a God; an erroneous opinion, it is true, but one which would be founded on a very plausible error. Hence if those Angels, with their own hands, had raised, as the sepulchral monument of the great Prophet, a temple more vast, more beautiful, and more magnificent than that which was built by Solomon, they would not, in my opinion, have honoured him so much as they did, when, removing him from the eyes of his

people, they hid his body in the shade of Mt. Sinai. It is thus that the Church has acted with regard to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It has pronounced her great, by those honours which it allows her, but it has declared her to be still greater, by those which it denies; for it refuses them, not because they might not reasonably be given, but because it is too evident that she justly merits them. Such is the perfection of Mary, that eyes so weak, as are those of mortal men, would be overstrained in attempting to distinguish what are the honours due to her, not as considered in herself, but only as the image of the Divine Sun.

So much more easily would they then confound the dignity of the Original with that parhelion of dignity which belongs to the image. And if, as St. Epiphanius observes, whilst the Church has so expressly forbidden us to give the Blessed Virgin the honour of *latria*, there have been many, especially the Collyridian heretics, who have foolishly looked upon her as a goddess; what would have happened if, instead of being proscribed, this honour had been appropriated to her as her own. Even St. Denis the Areopagite, the most learned man then living on the earth, might have run no little risk of idolatry himself; for he relates that when he went to see Mary for the first time, he discovered in her a bearing so much more than mortal, that, had not a strong faith supported him whilst looking upon her, he would instantaneously have fallen to the ground and adored her as a divinity. However the Church renders to the Blessed Virgin all the honour

that she can, without the danger of being wrecked upon the rock we have alluded to. It ordains for her alone a peculiar kind of worship called *hyperdulia*, greater than that which is paid to all the other Saints together; it extends to her those abstract titles of our way, our life, our sweetness, and our hope, which otherwise belong to God alone; it honours her in the daily Sacrifice, and, not content with this, it invokes her immediately after God, in those solemn praises which are sung in the daily Office of the Church. To her blessed name it dedicates one day in every week, and to her memory it especially consecrates feast after feast throughout the year; three times every day its sweet sounding bells invite all the faithful to salute her, and in a word, in its most urgent necessities, it ever has recourse to Mary, with processions, prayers, and votive offerings, that show in how high a rank it places her, next after God Himself.

## SECTION V.

### INSTANCES OF THE BENEFIT DERIVED BY THE CHURCH FROM THE HONOUR SHE HAS PAID TO MARY.

Thus then the Church honours the Blessed Virgin, because God Himself, who directs the Church, wills that she should be honoured exactly in this manner: *Thus shall she be honoured, whom the King hath a mind to honour.*<sup>1</sup> And, in order that all may know that this is really the will of God Himself, He has so arranged, that

<sup>1</sup> Sic honorabitur quemcumque voluerit rex honorare. Esth. vi. 2.

to honour her thus has always been to the Church a source of the greatest blessings. Hence the sovereign Pontiffs, who are the chief interpreters of the Divine Will, have taught us, by their own example, that in all public and universal calamities to honour Mary is the most efficacious and the surest means of obtaining prompt assistance from Heaven. To prove this assertion it will suffice to recount a few of the most remarkable examples. Frederic II., one of those princes who are so jealous of power that they cannot bear even God Himself to be the partner of their throne, having devised in his mind a plan to rob the Church of its life by a single stroke, resolved to deprive it of its head, by hindering the election of a new Pope, on the death of Celestine IV. But after a contention of nearly two years duration, he was unable, either by fraud or by violence, to prevent the election of Innocent IV. And what were the means which the latter took to defend himself in future from so terrible a blow? He chose Mary for his shield, and added an octave to the festival of her glorious Nativity. Thus the same year that he was nominated to the Pontificate, which was in 1243, he fulfilled the solemn vow, which, in order to secure the desired election, all the clergy had made to the Holy Mother of God. <sup>1</sup>

In the fearful tempests of his own turbulent times, where did Paul II. at last find a safe harbour, but amidst the honours of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by decreeing that the festival of the Presentation in the Tem-

1 Bar. an. 1243.

ple should be celebrated that year, with unusual magnificence throughout the whole world?<sup>1</sup> And when the Church, torn asunder by a schism of fifty years, shewed on all sides her breast exposed, with what balm did Boniface IX. at last heal her wounds? Was it not by encouraging devotion to Mary the Queen of Peace, and by instituting, for the first time, a feast in memory of her Visitation?<sup>2</sup> Leo IV. added an octave to the most ancient feast of the Assumption, to exterminate that pestilential monster, whose look and rage and fatal breath infested the City of Rome, and filled her streets with death.<sup>3</sup> And before his time, Hilary I., in order to suppress the games of the lupercal, which, like a venomous dragon, poisoned the whole Christian world, instituted the feast of the Purification of her, who, being more spotless than the sun, has power indeed to infuse the virtue of purity into others, but can receive no addition to her own.<sup>4</sup> Lastly Gregory IX., to free the Church from the oppression of Frederic, commanded all the faithful to invoke with one voice the protection of Mary, three times every day, at the sound of the bell.<sup>5</sup> And Urban II., desirous of raising a bulwark to withstand the impetuous flood of Turkish invasion, gave orders that all, both clerics and priests, should recite daily the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary;<sup>6</sup> not to mention what Pius V., raised to the honour of our altars, did to rescue Christianity from the jaws of the Ottoman, glutted with the

1 Molan, in addit. Martyr. 2 Bar. in notis 2 Jul. 3 Stgeb. an. 844.

4 Bar. an. 495. 5 Arn. l. 5, llg. vitæ c. 20. 6 Bar. an. 1093.

conquests he had already made, and elated with the hope of conquests to come.

After all this, can we wish for clearer evidence to prove to us how much the Church, that safest judge of the true worth of virtue, has promoted in every age the honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary; or, on the other hand, to prove how much benefit she has derived from its very promotion. And if this be true, is it not alone sufficient to obtain your concurrence in offering the honour of all hearts to her, whom all honour, as if they had but one heart.



## CHAPTER V.

THE FIFTH MOTIVE OF DEVOTION TO THE  
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY IS THE BENEFITS WE HAVE  
RECEIVED FROM HER HANDS.

## SECTION I.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN BY BEING THE MOTHER OF CHRIST  
IS THE MATERIAL CAUSE OF ALL OUR BLESSINGS.

It was not the sword of the conquering barbarian that first imprisoned the liberty of man, it was the kindness of a generous friend. The Philosopher wisely remarks that he, who meets with a kindness, meets with his own chains, <sup>1</sup> and these so strong, that he who does not feel the power they have to bind, is either without a heart, or is not worthy to have one; because he is too fierce to surrender himself to an affection, which can find a place for itself even in the breast of tigers, the affection, namely, of gratitude. If there be any who cannot persuade themselves to honour our Lady for those graces, which, whilst they render her supremely good in herself, render her also worthy of the highest love from us, can they refuse to yield their hearts in return for those favours, by which she shows herself equally good to us.

1 Qui invenit beneficium, invenit compedes. Arist.

Now as to these favours that have been bestowed upon us by the Blessed Virgin, they may all be easily comprehended in the pregnant words: *Of whom was born Jesus*,<sup>1</sup> since they form a full and perfect compendium, as it were, of all her noble attributes. She has given us Jesus; and if this be true, what gift is there yet remaining in the treasury of Heaven, which does not already belong to us? *How hath He not also, with Him, given us all things?*<sup>2</sup> But if we are to be able correctly to weigh those words *all things*, we must first have a mind that can comprehend the darkness of that chaos, wherein, had it not been for Christ, the whole race of man would now lie buried. Could we conceive this, ah! soon might we understand, even at one glance, how countless are those blessings which this lovely dawn brought us, by the glorious day to which she has given birth!

Picture to yourself that the remote country of Greenland had been, up to this time, left without the light of the sun, not for six months in the year, but for three entire centuries. Imagine this country enveloped in a succession of mists, the sea frozen, the plants stunted in their growth, the meadows parched up, the animals in it scarce living if not already dead, the inhabitants themselves appearing in that long night, with countenances no longer of men, but of ghosts. Then tell me, if upon that darkness so frightful and so fatal to life, there should unexpectedly arise a beautiful Aurora, ushering in a

1 De qua natus est Jesus. Math. i. 16.

2 Quomodo cum Illo non omnia nobis donavit? Rom. viii. 32.

sun so genial, that ere long the whole scene would be changed: were the beauty of the earth restored and refreshed with new springs of water, were the rivers unbound, were the meadows covered with flowers, and new life given to all creatures: were its inhabitants now enjoying scarce less than a paradise of delights, where but a moment before, all was a sepulchre of horror; what love and gratitude would they not feel bound to return to this beneficent Aurora? It were wonderful if, on so sudden a surprise, and dazzled with so many rays, at once of light and of joy, they did not fall down and adore that sun and that Aurora, as though actual divinities, instead of mere figures and imperfect copies of the Deity. It is however certain, that, as all effects in nature are so many favours which we receive from the kind influence of this material sun, so they ought in some manner to be regarded by the people we have been speaking of, as the favours of that Aurora, which after so long and so dismal a night, brought that very sun upon their hemisphere. Yet here, I confess, I cannot but lament the treachery of our deluded and deluding senses. They make fair offers to help us to explain some truth and render it more intelligible; and after they have involved us in a labyrinth, they leave us to get out as best we can. It was by their suggestion that I ventured upon this comparison, though more imaginary than real, with the hope of making myself better understood. But was not this only to take a coal into my hand, and not a pencil, with which to sketch in the rich tints of scarlet or gold? For how can we com-

pare the darkness of our eyes with the darkness of sin? Or how can the perfections of the Uncreated Sun be adequately figured by those of our material sun, which is beautiful and beneficial to us, only in as much as it is a shadow of the other? And who was it that, in the dead of that dark night of sin, brought unto us this infinitely better Sun? Was it not the Blessed Virgin Mary? I am the beneficent Aurora, she says, who brought that Sun, shining before on the Angelic world alone, to shed His rays upon this lower sphere also. Through me was revealed to the outward eye He, who before was visible only to the mind. In my womb He veiled the immense rays of His glory, that He might be the more enjoyed by man. In my womb He diminished His greatness. In my womb He humbled His majesty. Within my womb He became so tender and compassionate towards miserable man, though always flying from Him, that, to run after this vile slave and to gain his affections, He disdained not to penetrate, even deeper than the material sun, into that poor dwelling where I first conceived Him; into that open stable where I brought Him forth; into those woods where I fled with Him, to save Him—a tender infant, from the cruelty of His persecutors; into that lowly work-shop where I nurtured Him, and where He helped a poor carpenter even to work for His living; in fine, penetrating beneath the ground, where I buried Him when He descended to momentary darkness in His Passion, that He might rise again infinitely brighter to the eternal day which He

now enjoys in His glory. With justice therefore may the Blessed Virgin say: *I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never faileth.*<sup>1</sup> And if at present, this Divine Sun, though under the cloud of the Eucharistic Accidents, ceases not to enlighten our earthly Jerusalem here, little less than He does the heavenly one above, where He is seen unveiled and face to face; to whom are we indebted for this immense favour, if not to His glorious Mother? From her was taken that most pure Flesh, which is given to us for food, and that most Precious Blood, which is given us to drink. And therefore, from the great share she herself has in that sumptuous Banquet of the Divine Eucharist, she may also justly invite us to it, as to a banquet of her own preparing: *Come, eat my Bread, and drink the Wine which I have mingled for you.*<sup>2</sup> And so if we discuss the rest, we shall clearly see, that as many as are the blessings which we either receive or enjoy in Christ, so many are the debts and obligations binding us in gratitude to the Blessed Virgin.

## SECTION II.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN BY BEING THE MOTHER  
OF CHRIST IS THE MORAL CAUSE  
OF ALL OUR BLESSINGS.

What has just been said should have so much the greater weight with us, as Mary was not only the mate-

1 Ego feci ut oriretur in cælis lumen indeficiens. Eccl. xxiv. 6.

2 Venite, comedite panem meum, et bibite vinum quod miscui vobis.

Prov. ix. 6.

rial, but also the moral cause of all our blessings. For, as we have already observed, she did not conceive Christ like other mothers, without knowing Him beforehand, but she knew Him and chose Him above thousands of others, and foresaw all those blessings which were to flow down from Him upon us. Who therefore can sufficiently comprehend the infinite obligations that we owe her upon this account? If that most happy mother of the great Leader of Israel could have foreseen the many advantages, which her son would bring to his afflicted people, when, being grown up to man's estate, he was to prove as it were a God of revenge to Pharaoh, and a God of safety to Israel; and if to this end she had conceived him with so much hazard, nursed him with so much care, and brought him up with so much tenderness and affection, it being always deeply impressed on her mind, that she was saving a saviour for her people: how could they have ever made an acknowledgment to such a mother, that would not fall far short of the benefits received? Again, let us suppose that this glorious mother had lived to see her people under the government of Solomon, in full possession of the Land of Promise, and enjoying a profound peace, not only among themselves, but with their neighbours on all sides. If at that time the whole nation, overwhelmed with joy on account of their happy state, should look back a little, to compare their present flourishing condition, with that of their forefathers in the cruel slavery of Egypt; to take a view of that forty years' journey marked out with more prodigies than footsteps,

those nights, so profoundly dark to others, made full of light to them, that they might see their way; the seas opened to give them passage, and closed again to swallow their enemies; the hardest rocks softened for their refreshment, and the softest dew hardened for their food; whole armies defeated at their very appearance, cities beaten to the ground, kingdoms taken, kings made tributary, whole nations made their slaves, and that all this was owing to Moses, and Moses to her: what an object of love and admiration, would not this incomparable woman have been to that flourishing nation, and of envy to all other mothers? Oh! when would that people have ceased to cry, blessed the womb that gave to Israel so great a birth! blessed those hands that screened him from the wrath of Pharaoh! blessed the breasts that nourished him!

Again, would not those wonders and prodigies, which were wrought by Moses himself in favour of his people, have been looked upon as so many debts and obligations owed to that mother, who, in giving them such a son, had given them all their happiness? This comparison appears indeed to be a just one, yet it is as far from expressing the real truth, as the Land of Promise is from Heaven.

Never can I hope to comprehend the sum of my obligations to thee, O Sovereign Benefactress, until from the shades of death I come by thy favour to the bright regions of the living. Then indeed when first I set my foot upon that happy threshold, and look back to measure

with my eye the immense distance between sin and grace, between the dangers I have escaped and the favours I have received, then I shall see each article of my accounts clearly stated, and soon perceive the greatness of my debt.

Even if the Blessed Virgin had been not the cause, but only the occasion of our salvation, still would our hearts be far too narrow to acknowledge the obligations which we owe her. But since she was truly the cause of it, that she effectually desired it, and not only so, but even hastened it by her fervent sighs and prayers, how can we do else than despair of ever returning her thanks equal to these favours. And yet, according to Richard of St. Victor, it is actually thus: *She desired the salvation of all, she sought it, she obtained it, nay, it was even effected by her means; and therefore she is called the Safety of the World.*<sup>1</sup>

### SECTION III.

#### THE BLESSED VIRGIN STILL CONTINUES TO CONCUR IN THE BESTOWAL OF ALL GRACES.

But hitherto I have only proved that the Blessed Virgin has virtually given us all things, in giving us Jesus Christ, *Who is all in all*. Yet it is certain that the Holy Fathers aim at a great deal more than this, when with one voice they proclaim her the Repairer of our losses, the Mediatrix between God and man, and the

1 *Omnium salutem desideravit, quæsit, obtinuit, imo et salus omnium per ipsam facta est: unde et mundi salus dicta est. Rich. a S. Vict. in Cant. c. xxvi.*



channel of all those graces, of which Christ alone is the source. They mean, no doubt, that she not only gave us all things virtually, at the first, but that she still continues to give us all things, even actually, by concurring to every particular grace, which the Divine Mercy bestows on us, through the Merits and for the sake of Christ. And because to understand a truth of this nature is to understand a truth of the highest importance, it will not be amiss to establish it on some more solid foundation. This I shall endeavour to do, by tracing up, as far as possible, the sources of this noble river, which, flowing from the Paradise of Mary's bountiful heart, enriches the whole earth with its golden streams. Now these sources are two, that is, the Blessed Virgin claims a twofold merit from the Divine Mercy, one founded on the Incarnation of Christ, the other on Christ's Passion.

As to the first, it is to be observed that Almighty God, though so *rich in mercy* as the Apostle describes Him, had not in all His treasury any one mercy, which, according to our limited ideas, was complete, and not wanting, so to speak, in one half of its perfection. For, as the Angelic Doctor teaches, there are two parts, which as body and soul compose this eminent virtue. The first, which serves as its body, is sympathy with the misery of others: the second may be called its soul, and consists in giving them relief. Almighty God indeed possessed this second prerogative with infinite perfection, and therefore never failed to succour man in every necessity and affliction, with all the tenderness of a loving Father. But

He did not possess the first, and so, strictly speaking, He could not have that which we call compassion for the miseries of mankind: *God cannot be saddened by the misery of another, but to drive away another's suffering, this is especially His prerogative.*<sup>1</sup> Whence our imperfect understanding led us to apprehend some defect in the Sovereign Mercy of God, whilst we conceived it to be infinitely good, infinitely kind and bountiful, but still without any compassion for our evils. The Blessed Virgin came, clothed the Divine Word with human flesh, and, by making Him passible, she made Him also compassionate. It was but fitting therefore, that to a Mother, who had given to the Divine Mercy its full complement, some rich compensation should be made. But what could be called the most appropriate? What else than that Almighty God should impart to the mercy of the Blessed Virgin as much of His Power to help, as she had conferred on the Divine Mercy tenderness to compassionate us. And this is the recompense which she received. *Our sister is little—and she hath no breasts:*<sup>2</sup> this lovely Virgin, says the Divine Mercy, is not yet come to her full maturity; *Parva est*—she is little. Her heart indeed is wide enough to embrace, within the boundless extent of her tender compassion, all the sinners of the world, but she has not yet breasts full enough to give them milk: *Ubera non habet.* Her power to relieve them is not

1 *Tristari de alterius miseria non competit Deo, sed repellere miseriam alterius hoc maxime ei competit.* S. Thom. 1. p. q. 21. art. 3.

2 *Soror nostra parva—et ubera non habet.* Cant. viii. 8.

equal to her compassionate affection towards them. Let her therefore make an exchange with Christ. She shall give Him some part of her compassion, and in return, He shall give her somewhat of His Power. And thus both Christ and the Blessed Virgin shall become, each in their degree, capable of the fullest compassion, possessing not only the affection, but also the effect of so noble a virtue; Christ as the head, the Blessed Virgin as the neck; Christ as the fountain, the Blessed Virgin as the channel; Christ as the author, and the Blessed Virgin as His helper. In this matter, if we take notice, the Divine Wisdom has preserved a certain proportion not unlike that, which He observed in the terrestrial Paradise. *There Almighty God took one of the ribs of Adam, and filled up flesh for it. And He built the rib which He took from Adam into a woman.*<sup>1</sup> Who will not admire the mystery? In the formation of Eve, a rib is taken out of Adam's side, and flesh is put in the place of it; strength is borrowed from him, and weakness is given in return. On the contrary, in the formation of Christ, flesh is borrowed from the Blessed Virgin, and a rib, as one may say, is given to her for it. That is, weakness is taken from her, and strength or power is given to her in its stead. A God becomes weak, and a woman is made almost omnipotent. The Uncreated Mercy receives the affection of compassion, and the Created Mercy receives the power of giving succour. So that, as it was said there,

1 Tullit Deus unam de costis Adæ, et replevit carnem pro ea: et ædificavit costam quam tulerat de Adam in mulierem. Gen. ii. 21.

*He took one of his ribs and filled up flesh for 'it*: so we may say here, by a striking antithesis, He took away flesh, and gave a rib in place of it. The Word Incarnate did not borrow power from the Blessed Virgin, but weakness: and for this weakness, which He took, He gave to her power in return. And this is exactly God's manner of working, never to let Himself be out-done in liberality by any of His creatures. The Queen of Saba brought presents to King Solomon, so rare and so precious, that all Jerusalem was filled with admiration at the sight. *There were no such spices as those, which the Queen of Saba gave to King Solomon.*<sup>1</sup> But then, in exchange for the rarity of those extraordinary presents, which she left behind her, she carried away with her at her departure many more of much greater value. *And King Solomon gave to the Queen of Saba all that she desired, and that she asked, and many more things than she brought to him.*<sup>2</sup> In like manner, our great Queen of Heaven gave to her Divine Solomon presents, so rare, and so new, that until then the like had never been seen in the heavenly Jerusalem: presents, which He wanted, only in order to bring to effect that great work of Mercy, which He had undertaken, the Redemption of mankind. She environed Him with flesh, she filled Him with compassion, she rendered Him in all things like those, on whom He designed to bestow His mercy. *It behoved*

1 Non fuerunt aromata talla ut hæc, quæ dedit Regina Saba Regi Salomoni. 2 Paral. ix. 9.

2 Rex Salomon dedit Reginæ Saba cuncta quæ voluit, et quæ postulavit, et multo plura quam attulerat ad eum. Ibid. ix. 12.

*Him in all things to be like unto His brethren, that He might become merciful.* <sup>1</sup> But, at the same time, she received much greater gifts than those which she brought. Because, in return for that which she contributed of her own to the Divine Heart, by giving Him the affection of mercy, she received from Him the arbitrary disposal of all the fruits, that were to redound unto us from that same mercy. And behold the first source of that liberality, so universal in the Blessed Virgin Mary, towards all mankind, namely, the merit which she claims from the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His Incarnation!

Let us now enquire into the second source, which is another merit which she claims from Christ, and is founded on His Passion. In that mournful tragedy, enacted before innumerable multitudes upon the ignominious theatre of Mount Calvary, which ended in the awful death of a God, the Holy Virgin was not a simple spectator but a real actress, at the foot of the Cross. But how can this be, since it is true that Christ completed that work alone, without the help of any? *I have trodden the wine-press alone.* <sup>2</sup> That only Son, who sacrificed Himself a victim for the whole world upon the altar of the Cross, was no less the true Son of this Mother, than He was the true Son of God the Father. Wherefore, as the Eternal Father, for His own glory and for the salvation of man, delivered up this His Only-begotten Son unto death; so Mary gave Him up to death, both for the glory of the

1 Debit per omnia fratribus assimilari, ut misericors fieret. Heb. ii. 17.

2 Torcular calcavi solus. Ia. lxiii. 3.

Eternal Father, and for the salvation of mankind. For, as St. Bernard says, in an ecstasy of admiration at what they had both done for us: *To redeem a slave, they delivered up their common Son.*<sup>1</sup> And surely, if the Eternal Word required this Mother's express consent, ere He would begin to live within her most chaste womb, much more would He require it, before He voluntarily yielded up His life, and died upon so ignominious a tree. Hence that especial leave, which Christ took of the Blessed Virgin before His Passion, was not a simple farewell, but a positive consent on her part that He should lay down that life, which, being the life of a Son, in some manner belonged to her, who was His Mother. And because the Blessed Virgin, both then, and much more when she stood at the foot of the Cross, offered up that share which she had in the Divine Victim, and offered it with so much readiness and constancy, that, had such been the pleasure of the Eternal Father, she herself would have sacrificed Him with her own hands, and with courage more than human, would, in Him, have pierced her own soul; she was, in recompense for such unheard of heroism, admitted to share in the application of the merits of this great Sacrifice, and to be an instrument in the hands of the Divine Mercy, for dispensing all those future blessings which were designed for man, as she had already been permitted to share in that one, which was by far the greatest of them all. This none can reasonably question.

<sup>1</sup> Ut servum redimerent, communem Filium tradiderunt. S. Ber. l. 1. Serm. 51. c. 4.

In return for the ready obedience to the Divine command, which Abraham showed in offering up his only son Isaac, as a holocaust to God upon the mountain, he received no less a reward, than to be constituted the father of all future believers. Mark in what solemn terms the patent of this his singular privilege is worded. *Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thine only begotten son for My sake, I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is by the sea shore.*<sup>1</sup> Could anything be said more glorious to Abraham than this, had he even offered up the life, not of one son only, but of as many sons as were promised him in that numerous posterity? Judge therefore what high expressions the Divine Mercy must have used to the Blessed Virgin Mary, when, with such undaunted courage, she consecrated her only begotten Son to the glory of the Eternal Father, and offered for the Redemption of mankind that precious Life, which alone was infinitely more valuable than the life, not of an Isaac, but of all those together, for whom the Blessed Virgin offered Him. *Because thou hast done this thing,* must the Eternal Father doubtless have said to her, *and hast not spared thy only begotten Son for My sake,* therefore there shall be nothing, which I will not do for thee. Thou hast adopted for the rule of thy affections, not the feelings of nature, but My Divine Will, and hast deli-

<sup>1</sup> Quia fecisti hanc rem, et non pepercisti unigenito filio tuo propter me, benedicam tibi, et multiplicabo semen tuum sicut stellas cœli, et sicut arenam quæ est in litore maris. Gen. xxii. 16, 17.

vered up thine only begotten to be sacrificed. Behold, in recompense for so noble an act, I will give thee a numberless progeny of chosen people, I will constitute thee mother of all the living, thou shalt have in thy keeping the treasury of My liberalities, thou shalt dispense all My graces, thou shalt direct My justice, in a word, thou shalt have the sovereign command over My Heart. My clemency, which hitherto has never acknowledged any other law than that of My own will, shall be henceforward subject to the law of thy wishes, it being only right, that I should bestow as many blessings and favours upon the earth, as it shall seem good to thee to demand in Heaven. So must the Eternal Father have addressed the most glorious Virgin, and thus I find it written foremost among the high encomiums of our great and powerful Advocate: *The law of clemency is on her tongue.*<sup>1</sup> And this is said of her, that all may know, that as much as Christ can do by His command, so much, and no less, the Blessed Virgin can do through her prayers: *Quod Deus imperio, tu prece, Virgo, potes.* She by her intercession concurs to all those effects of mercy towards men, of which Christ alone is the true cause, in virtue of His Infinite Merits. No one need believe what I have said, if anything has been advanced in commendation of Mary, which goes even a thought beyond her dignity. But if, on the contrary, any of these prerogatives, which we have ascribed to her, not only does not exceed, but comes very far short of the preeminent rank, held by her

1 Lex clementiae in lingua ejus. Prov. xxxi. 26.



as Mother of God, let no one hesitate to acknowledge, that the salvation of mankind is granted to her prayers *de congruo*, or by congruity; whilst *de condigno*, that is, in strict justice, it is owing solely to the Blood of the Redeemer. Let them believe, that it was no undue exaggeration in St. Bernard to say: *Such was His will, who would have us to receive all things through Mary's hands.*<sup>1</sup> Let them listen to the humble Virgin herself, who certainly never intended to exaggerate, when she told her beloved St. Bridget, that *as Adam and Eve had sold the world for an apple, so Christ and herself had redeemed it, as with one heart.*<sup>2</sup> And thus, if I mistake not, we have sufficiently discovered the never-failing spring of Mary's great power to help us in all our necessities.

## SECTION IV.

### THE LIBERALITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF HER FAVOURS.

But now, who shall explain that excess of affection and good will towards us, with which she made use of this power? It cannot be doubted but that our Blessed Lady sees all our wants and necessities, in the Divine Word, as in a most clear and spotless mirror. For if Almighty God makes them known to our Guardian Angels, that

1 Sic est voluntas Ejus, qui omnia nos habere voluit per Mariam. S. Ber. Serm. de Nat. Virg.

2 Sicut Adam et Eva vendiderunt mundum pro pomo, sic Christus et ego redemimus quasi uno corde.

they may help us according to the charge committed to them, it cannot be supposed that He would keep them secret from His own beloved Mother, to whom He has recommended the salvation of all mankind, much more than He has recommended to an Angel, the salvation of any soul in particular. On the other hand, if she knows all our necessities and sees them so clearly, who will be so rash as to think that, at the sight of such misery in creatures unable to help themselves, she is not moved to compassion, and does not immediately apply to Her Divine Son, imploring His Mercy to grant them speedy relief; especially since whatever she asks of Him, she immediately obtains? To imagine such a thing, would be to suppose in the Blessed Virgin a heart towards her children, such as is not found even in the fiercest tigress. Whence I am persuaded, that if the Blessed Virgin could look on unconcerned and see us hurried to destruction, without hastening to save us from the fatal precipice, long before her birth she would have shared in the sentence pronounced from Solomon's tribunal, and have been declared to be, not the true Mother, as she professed; but a mere stranger pitiless and hardened to our cries. And therefore, as St. Epiphanius says with truth that Mary is all eyes to our miseries, we may very well add that she is all heart to compassionate them, and all hands to relieve them.

Oh! that I could lay before you in one general view, as it were in a map, all the favours, graces, and blessings

which Mary has distributed throughout the whole world, in every age, in every place, and on persons of every rank, from the highest to the lowest ! There is surely no monster of ingratitude so black, on this side of Hell, who would not then throw down his arms at the feet of so tender a benefactress, and yield himself up as wholly conquered by her love. We may say with truth, that, as the milky-way in the heavens is but a long track of stars, so innumerable and so crowded together that they mark out a luminous path, so the life of every man is a continuous series of Mary's liberalities, marking out to him, by their frequency and number, that brilliant path-way to salvation, from which, unless wilfully blind, he can never go astray. To this beneficence of Mary all nations bear witness, for by the multitude of their temples dedicated to her honour, by the assiduous fervour of their devotions, by their unvarying constancy in her service, and by their never ceasing prayers, they have always professed to acknowledge her as the mediatrix of all heavenly favours. Yet it must still be owned, that all the acknowledgements they can make, will never equal the smallest part of their real obligations, for the dark night of this mortal life does not permit us to discover any more of Mary's benevolence towards us, than what falls under the perception of our feeble senses. A day however will come, when the bright Sun of Justice will shine upon us in full glory. Then indeed in that meridian of charity, each one, astonished at his past ignorance, will cry out in the very excess of his gratitude : *This wisdom went before me and*

*I knew not that she was the mother of them all.*<sup>1</sup> I did not in the whole of this mortal life take one step, when this loving mother was not walking before me, and pointing out the way by her favours, and I, meantime, was equally ignorant both of the great tenderness of her love, and of the multiplicity of the favours, which through this love she was continually bestowing upon me. *I knew not that she was the mother of them all*, I knew not that she was the mother of all my happiness.

If the earth were transparent, and had eyes on every side to see what passes within itself, how surprised would it be at the beneficence of the sea in supplying it with moisture necessary for all its productions! It would observe that the rains, which the clouds pour down upon its breast, are only a small part of those waters which it receives from the sea. For the showers, in all their abundance, are nothing when compared to the other secret streams, which the sea through hidden channels is continually sending into the very bowels of the earth, in order to fertilize it. It would find that there is no part, which is not indebted to the sea for whatever moisture it has, and consequently for its fecundity and energy. It would find, that the sea is so ingenious to insinuate itself into every part, that, rather than let any want the common benefit, it finds means to convey its waters, contrary to their nature, to the tops of the most inaccessible mountains. This would the earth see, if it had eyes and were

1 Antecedebat me ista sapientia, et ego ignorabam quoniam horum omnium mater est. Sap. vii. 12.

transparent. But oh! how much should we all discover of Mary's goodness, if its abundance and its excellency were not veiled from our senses, which are too dull and too heavy to give us a faithful account of it! We should see in an instant, that those signal victories which were gained heretofore, through the visible protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by Heraclius over the Persians, by Narsethes over the Goths, by Zemiscas over the Bulgarians, by Pelagius over the Arabians, by the Portuguese over the people of Angola, by Alphonsus over the Moors, and by the Austrians over the Turkish fleet—we should see that all those victories and many more, obtained by the evident assistance of Mary, if compared to innumerable other hidden ones, wherein she herself engages with and conquers our infernal enemies, are no more than a small troop compared to a numberless army. We should see that all those particular favours so often received and acknowledged by the faithful, as coming from the Holy Virgin's hands, that assistance in so many dangers, that health recovered after so many diseases, that life preserved amidst so many deaths, though authentically attested by the countless votive offerings, that hang upon the walls of her churches, are but a few drops of Mary's liberality, in comparison with those showers of blessings, which she is silently pouring down upon us. In a word, we should see that there is no part of the Church, however remote, which does not partake of the favours of this liberal Queen of Heaven. She knows how to penetrate into the hearts of all, she softens the hardest, cultivates

the wildest, fertilizes the most barren : in fine, upon the highest tops of the proudest mountains, that is upon those haughty souls who can scarce bend a knee to beg her assistance, she often showers down her favours, though unasked and undeserved ; and from those hard and impenitent hearts, she strikes out floods of bitter tears of sincere devotion and repentance. These are the delightful objects we should behold, if the sum of all our debts to the compassionate Mary were laid before our eyes—debts so many and so great, that to make but a small return for them, we should have to consecrate to her, as her temple, the whole earth with all that it contains. The countless multitude would stand, like so many statues, struck dumb at the contemplation of such inconceivable beneficence. But since so clear a sight is not to be hoped for, in the obscurity of this mortal life, let the want be supplied by faith, and under its holy influence, respectfully venerating not only that arm which bestows so many visible benefits, but also that one, which confers so many in secret, let us lay down our hearts, and abandon them into those same hands of Mary, in which God has deposited the uncontrolled disposal of His treasures.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE SIXTH MOTIVE OF DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED  
VIRGIN IS THE GREAT LOVE WHICH  
SHE HAS FOR US.

## SECTION I.

THE DIFFICULTY OF EXPRESSING THE GREATNESS OF  
MARY'S LOVE TOWARDS US.

That which most of all enhances a gift is the love and affection of the giver. In the absence of this, it is but a body without the soul, having no power to move us to a return of love. And with reason is it so, for he that merely bestows a kindness, gives but a part, and a small part, of the goods belonging to him; but he that loves gives all, because he gives himself. Hence, although we may remunerate a benefactor by our hand alone, a friend is not paid as he deserves, if we do not yield to him our heart. Since therefore we are so strictly bound to honour and serve the Blessed Virgin Mary, upon account of the many favours and blessings, which are so continually flowing from her breast into ours, what affections of love and devotion ought we not to conceive towards her, for that special act, by which she adds to all her favours that which enhances them beyond all price, namely, her love ?

In describing the love of Mary towards us, my pen finds the same difficulty, as the painter's pencil does in depicting the nature and activity of fire; every stroke and every colour is too dull for so lively a subject. I hope, however, to give you at least an imperfect sketch of that celestial fire which burns within Mary's breast, if I can represent to you her heart so disposed to be inflamed upon all occasions in our behalf, that on whatever side she turns her eyes, whether upon herself, or upon us, or upon Almighty God, she still gathers from every object new flames of love: like the phoenix, to whom everything about her, even her own feathers, her nest, and the sun, serve as the material of fire.

## SECTION II.

### MARY'S LOVE INFLAMED BY LOOKING UPON HERSELF AS APPOINTED TO BE OUR MOTHER.

And first, if she looks upon herself, she sees herself constituted and proclaimed our Mother, by a most solemn public act, from the throne of the Cross. So that when she remembers that the last words which her dying Son spoke to her were: *Woman, behold thy Son,*<sup>1</sup> and that in no other words than these did He convey His last will, that this was His last recommendation, this His parting memento; how is it possible that she should not be moved to love us with the fulness of the most tender affection? For observe that Christ, in this His last will

<sup>1</sup> Muller, *eccc filius tuus*. Joan, xix, 26.



and testament, did not leave the Blessed Virgin to St. John as His beloved, but as His disciple: *He saith to the disciple, Behold thy mother.*<sup>1</sup> And so He did not leave her, as a private legacy made to him alone, but as a general inheritance, which was equally to belong to all those who, in quality of faithful disciples, were to adhere to Christ and to follow Him. And therefore when St. John took her to his own, it was not in his private name and quality of Christ's peculiarly beloved, but in his public quality of disciple, and in the name of all the faithful: *From that hour the disciple took her to his own.*<sup>2</sup> Observe again that Jesus, when on the Cross, did not leave the Blessed Virgin in the character of a queen to rule over us as her subjects, but of a mother to take care of us as her children. Had He only said, Woman be thou, by thy presence, the support of this world, that it may not through My absence sink into ruin, then the presence of Mary, her attention, her assistance, and her favours had been more than sufficient to answer this end. But when He said, be thou a mother to them, the case was altered. To comply with the office of a mother, favours alone will not suffice, there must be love and affection. And therefore, even if the law of charity had not been imposed upon all, yet, in my opinion, it would bind the Blessed Virgin in a particular manner, for the reason I have alleged, that she has been proclaimed our

1 *Dicit discipulo, ecce mater tua.* Joan. xix. 27.

2 *Et ex illa hora accepit eam discipulus in sua.* Joan. xix. 27. Tol. in Joan. c. 19. S. Ant. 4. p. t. 15. c. 2.

mother. So likewise if, at that time, the Blessed Virgin had not found within herself those strong feelings of tenderness and compassion towards us, which are so necessary to sustain her character of universal mother of the Church, then it would have been not only reasonable and becoming, but even the part of justice in Almighty God, to have communicated those affections to her. Thus to Solomon, that he might be a king worthy of so numerous a people as Israel, a heart was given wide as the shores of the sea ; and so to Mary, that she might be a worthy mother of the vast race of the faithful, there was given a heart capacious as the wide expanse of Heaven, that she might embrace them all with an affection, which could not be equalled. Nature herself never makes a mother, even among the fiercest tigers, without instilling into her breast a proportionate love for her young. And can we think that grace could have left mothers devoid of a similar love for their children ? Nay, shall we not rather say that the Blessed Virgin was already disposed to this extraordinary tenderness for us, by Christ our Lord, even from the first moment that He chose her to be His Mother. It is well known to physicians, how through the milky veins, it is very easy not only for the qualities of the nurse to pass into the child, but also for those of the child to be conveyed to the nurse, though indeed the bad ones are oftener thus imparted than the good. Whence it has sometimes happened, that a child, secretly infected with a contagious disease, has communicated the same infection to the nurse who gave it suck. And if

this be true, can we think that the Infant Jesus was not infinitely more disposed to transfuse His own sanctifying qualities into the soul of His Blessed Mother and only Nurse, than other children are to transmit their infection into the body of those, who give them their first milk? At the very instant, in which the Holy Virgin first applied to her sacred breasts that glowing Furnace of Charity, *breathing out fiery vapours*,<sup>1</sup> the Heart of her Divine Jesus was able to inflame her with the most ardent zeal for our good; and so, from that moment, she was prepared for the most important charge, which was in due time to be laid upon her, of being a tender mother to us all. What burning flames of love would not that mother conceive within her breast, who, so to speak, was nurturing the Sun? Whence you may conclude the full force of this truth, that if Mary looks upon herself, she cannot help loving us with affections of charity, beyond the power of eloquence to express.

### SECTION III.

#### MARY'S LOVE INFLAMED BY LOOKING UPON THE MISERIES OF HER CHILDREN.

But may it not be that these beautiful flames of love will die out, when she turns away from herself to look down on us, and here finds nothing to deserve her affections? Far from it. Ah! happy are we, in whom those very demerits, which she discerns in us, concur to make

1. *Radios igneos exsuffiantem. Eccl. lxxiii. 4.*

us still more worthy of her love! Search amid the problems of Aristotle, for the reason why mothers love their children more tenderly, than fathers commonly do. Perhaps the most ingenious reason which he brings forward is, that while the birth of children brings nothing but pleasure to the father, it brings the pangs of child-birth to the mother. So that the more pain a child has cost its mother, the more dearly will she love it; according to that principle, by which, laying aside the consideration of other circumstances, that is always deemed most precious, which has been purchased at the greatest cost. From this it follows, that we must be certainly very dear to the Blessed Virgin Mary, since she became our mother, under the tree of the Cross, in the midst of a sea of sorrows and grief. The First-begotten of this most beautiful Rachel, the Saviour, not of Egypt only, but of the whole world, was brought forth whilst the Blessed Mother was wholly absorbed in a paradise of delights. But when she was to become the mother of all the brethren of Christ, then indeed the scene was changed. Those labours and pains, from which she was singularly freed in her first most happy child-birth, were in her second multiplied a thousand fold in her suffering soul. That she might become our mother, she was obliged to cross over a gulf of such unheard of sorrows, such interior sufferings, that to compare them to the torments of other martyrs, would be to compare the inconveniences of a short voyage with the horrors of certain shipwreck.<sup>1</sup>

1 S. Ansel. de Assum. c. 5. Et alii Patres.

Others suffered martyrdom in their bodies, but the Spotless Virgin suffered martyrdom in her soul, *the sword of grief has pierced thy very soul.*<sup>1</sup> And who does not know, that the sufferings of the soul are far more keenly felt than those of the body? Since the body without the soul can feel no pain at all, whereas it is certain that the soul without the body can suffer with the utmost intensity. Besides in other martyrs the love itself, with which they were inflamed, was a balm so powerful to assuage the violence of their torments, that often under the heaviest scourges, upon the cross, the gibbet, and the rack, and in the midst of scorching flames, he who suffered, and he who spoke to the bystanders, seemed not to be the same man; <sup>2</sup> as is related of the martyrdom of St. Lawrence, and might be said of all the other martyrs, in proportion to the sufferings of each. But, on the contrary, Mary's love, so far from being a sovereign balsam to heal the wounds of her heart, was rather like so much gall poured upon them, for the very purpose of inflaming them the more. And thus, as cruelty was the only measure of the martyrs' torments, so nothing but love was the measure of Mary's. Whence it follows, that as much as the love of Mary surpassed the cruelty of the tyrants, so much her sorrows and sufferings surpassed all the torments of the martyrs. And therefore Jeremias, having with prophetic eye seen her at the head of an innumerable army of martyrs, as the Queen of Dolours, cried

1 Tuam ipsius animam doloris gladius pertransivit.

2 Tanquam alius esset qui torqueretur, alius qui loqueretur.

out full of astonishment. *To what shall I compare thee? or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? To what shall I equal thee, O Virgin daughter of Sion?*<sup>1</sup> And having thought with himself awhile, he gives the answer in these words: *Great as the sea is thy destruction: who shall heal thee?*<sup>2</sup> For my part, I can only say, O glorious Virgin, as thou art an ocean of charity, so thou art also an ocean of sufferings. And the reason is, because the Passion of the Son ought, in some manner, to be looked upon as the passion of the mother, on account of the perfect sympathy of heart which passed between them, like that, as observes St. Augustine, which exists between two strings of a lute tuned to be in perfect unison, so that one cannot be struck without the other answering to it, though untouched. Or, as the Blessed Virgin expressed it more vividly to St. Bridget, were it possible for one to keep only half his heart within his breast, the part without would suffer in perfect sympathy with the part, which had been left in its place. So the Blessed Virgin, living as much within her Son as within herself, exactly verified the ingenious saying of Denis the Carthusian: *The soul is more where it loves, than where it lives.*<sup>3</sup> Hence she felt at the same instant, within herself, all those stripes that fell upon the Body of her Son. And this was according to the mysterious design of Divine Providence. For, since it was impos-

1 Cui comparabo te? vel cui assimilabo te, filia Jerusalem? Cui exæquabo te, Virgo filia Sion? Thren. ii. 13.

2 Magna est velut mare contritio tua: quis medebitur tui? Ibid.

3 Anima verius est ubi amat, quam ubi animat. In Epist. ad Phil. c. 3. a. 3.

sible that Christ could meet with that compassion which the excess of His sufferings deserved, either from a friendly Heaven, for Heaven itself had decreed that He should suffer, or from an ungrateful earth, which cared not for His sufferings ; it seemed necessary that a creature should be found, who could supply for all, by receiving within her great soul a sea of compassion for our suffering Lord, so vast as to be like that other sea of the most bitter Passion which He Himself endured. And if it was only like and not equal to it, the reason must have been, that to mourn for the shedding of that Divine Blood, with tears equal to its infinite worth, the tears themselves should be Divine. In this sad condition therefore, our Holy Mother stood suffering, at the foot of the Cross, overwhelmed in an abyss of sorrows, and, as she appeared in the Apocalypse, torn to pieces with the pains of this second child-birth.<sup>1</sup> Even then, totally forgetful of herself, with earnest importunity she begged of Almighty God the life of those very children, who were the cause of so much suffering to her, saying with Rachel : *The Lord give me also another son.*<sup>2</sup> Grant me, Lord, the life and salvation of these my adopted sons, who have cost me so dear ; for this I freely offer to Thee my First-begotten, the very soul of my soul. And thus indeed the Mother of Dolours, in giving up her dearly beloved Son and very soul into the hands of His enemies, made a last effort of her love, and did for us the utmost it was possible for

1 Crucifabatur ut pariat. Apoc. xii. 2.

2 Addat mihi Dominus filium alterum. Gen. xxx. 24.

her to do. These very sufferings then, which we have brought upon her, these are the merits by which we claim the Blessed Virgin's love.

Nor is this strange, for love, when it is but weak and tender, must be fed with kindness and favours, but when it is strong and grown to full maturity, it is best nourished with sufferings and afflictions; like a raging flame, which receives new vigour from the impetuous blast, before which one that is weaker would be extinguished. And therefore this excess of suffering in the Blessed Virgin ought to be a strong argument, to prove the excess of her love. It is a wise saying, and a true one, that friends are made in prosperity, but known only in adversity; for there can be no greater proof of true friendship than suffering. Who would not consider quick-silver to be a perfect emblem of the truest friendship, since it adheres to gold so closely, and follows it everywhere so inseparably? Still it is but a faithless friend, and though it follows the gold, yet it does so, only so long as it does not come near the fire. For at the first feeling of heat, the quick-silver leaves its friend to suffer alone in the crucible. On the contrary, what greater proofs can we desire of Mary's most ardent charity towards us, when we have seen it not only never yielding to the violence of affliction, but rather growing stronger in our behalf, under the oppression of so heavy a weight. The least we can do is to repay her with love. For if our love be, as it were, a load-stone to attract another, a love so inured to suffering for our sake should, like a



load-stone set in steel, not only draw, but even violently carry away our hearts.

#### SECTION IV.

##### MARY'S LOVE ENKINDLED BY THE FIRE OF THE DIVINE LOVE.

It must however be confessed, that notwithstanding all that we have said of Mary's great charity towards us, we have not yet rightly hit the mark. The true origin of those ardent flames of love, is neither in her, nor in us, but in God Himself. It is He, who by the reflection of His own infinite love enkindles this great fire in the sanctuary of Mary's innocent heart. The sun, in the parts of Africa situated under its direct rays, has such power, that it is said not only to set fire to the woods, but to scorch up even the very sands. What burning flames of love must the Blessed Virgin therefore conceive within her heart, since she approaches so closely to the Divinity, and is placed directly beneath its strongest rays?

But, the better to see the force of this inference, we must observe with St. Thomas, that the love of God, and the love of our neighbour, are not two distinct virtues, but one and the same. So that were I to compare these two kinds of love, to the famous twins, who, being born at the very same moment, exactly resembled each other not only in their features, as it commonly happens, but also in their disposition, intellect, and their whole nature, and who, as is still more surprising, always so equally shared in the same feelings of joy and sadness, that they

seemed to measure every event of their lives with one common thread; such a comparison, while it might help to illustrate the truth of St. Thomas in his assertion, would not however be exactly correct. Because the two kinds of love we speak of, though they may in some sense be called twins, in effect form only one: *It is one and the same virtue of charity, from which both acts are produced.*<sup>1</sup> They are like the direct and reflex ray of one and the same light, which, though they have neither the same tendency, nor the same direction, yet have the same efficient cause and principle. Hence it is that, in proportion as the Divine love increases in us, so also will the love of our neighbour: these two being strictly commanded by the same individual precept, *and this commandment we have from God; that he, who loveth God, love also his brother.*<sup>2</sup> And so true is this, that geometricians will sooner see two straight lines meet in the same centre, without diminishing their distance from each other, than we shall behold this prodigy of two hearts loving God, and by that love approaching to Him as their common centre, without, at the same time and by the very same steps, approaching one another by mutual love. This being so, whoever desires to know how dear the faithful are to the heart of Mary, let him only measure her love towards Almighty God, and he will soon discover the just proportion of her love to man. If the heart of Mary,

1 Idem numero est habitus charitatis, ex quo uterque actus elicatur. S. Thom. 2. 2. q. 25. a. 1.

2 Mandatum habemus a Deo, ut qui diligit Deum, diligat et fratrem suum. 1 Joan. iv. 21.

now reigning in the empyreal, be a furnace of Divine love, *seven times more heated*, than the hearts of all the other Saints together, it may be safely affirmed, that the love which all the Saints together have for mankind, is but a small flame in comparison with that great fire, which is always burning for us in Mary's breast. And this is the rule followed by St. Augustine, to explain her care and solicitude for us; *As much as the Blessed Virgin surpasses all other Saints in her love towards God, so much, says this Saint, she surpasses them all in care and solicitude for us*; <sup>1</sup> just as the highest sphere, which, in proportion as it exceeds the lesser spheres in height, exceeds them in the velocity with which it is impelled for the benefit of our earth. For my part, I wonder sometimes how our souls are not ready to leap forth from our breasts, through pure excess of joy, to see ourselves so immeasurably beloved by the great Mother of God. Wherefore, if the liberality of Mary towards us, as we have seen in the foregoing chapter, and her excessive charity for us, as has been proved in this, are equally ineffable and beyond all expression, of what hard rock of flint must that ungrateful heart be made, which, while loaded with her benefits, would not thank her most affectionately, and, being the object of so much love, would not gratefully return her love.

<sup>1</sup> Sicut omnibus Sanctis est potior, ita omnibus Sanctis pro nobis est sollicitior, S. Aug. citatus a S. Bonav. in specul. Mor. c. 4.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE SEVENTH MOTIVE OF DEVOTION TO THE  
BLESSED VIRGIN IS THAT IT IS A  
MARK OF PREDESTINATION.

## SECTION I.

DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS A SURE  
SIGN OF PREDESTINATION.

That strong desire, which man naturally has, to learn something of the fortune likely to attend him, during the short space of time he has to live on this miserable earth, often brings him to enquire even among the stars, for those profound and hidden volumes, in which the Almighty either has never written what he seeks, or at least has not done so in characters, which may be read at this distance by mortal eye. How much wiser would it be for us to turn this useless and dangerous curiosity another way, endeavouring to discover by the light of the Gospel, rather than of the stars, what will be our destiny, whether happy or miserable, in the eternity which is already so close upon us? It is certain that if this grave matter, the only one indeed deserving our attention, were grasped by our minds as its importance requires, it would take such entire possession of our souls, that we should have

neither thought nor heart for anything else—as a criminal, in whose hands the dice are placed to throw for the chance of life, would be incapable of any other comfort than the hopes of a favourable cast, or of any other sadness and anxiety than the dreadful expectation of a bad one. Then indeed the world would understand, how great account should be made of true and sincere devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, since it is to the faithful a most authentic mark of salvation, and of a happy eternity.

To prove the truth of this opinion, it would be sufficient to bring the authority of all those holy writers and Doctors who positively assert it.<sup>1</sup> Instead however of resting solely on their word, for a truth of so great importance, let us prove by reason the security of this anchorage, before we cast our anchor, especially since it is one of so great weight.

The Blessed Virgin then is a faithful and never-failing pledge of salvation to us. And why should any one doubt it now, since she has been so from the very beginning of the world? In that terrible deluge, when the whole race of mankind was drowned in the guilt of sin, the earliest ray of comfort, which broke forth upon our unhappy first parents, was, as we have elsewhere observed, the glorious Virgin Mary. She was the rainbow of peace promised to them by Almighty God, the harbinger

<sup>1</sup> S. Ansel. de Laud. Virg. S. Petr. Damian. Opusc. 32. c. 2. Rich. l. 2. de Delp. c. 3. S. Anton. 4. p. to. 15. c. 14. Raynau. in Marial. Plebar. Stell. l. 12. p. 2. c. 1. Spinell. in Throno. c. 24. Recupit. de sign. Prædestin. Vide Mond. l. 2. Flor,

of future serenity; and so we may truly say that she was the first token, given since their fall, of the salvation of their souls, exposed at that time to eternal damnation. Nor was Adam ignorant of this mystery. For the moment he heard of that implacable enmity which this wonderful Virgin was, in days to come, to manifest against the serpent, he immediately understood how sovereign an antidote she carried within her bosom, to secure not only his own safety, but also that of all his descendants. Hence we may consider it highly probable, that *being sensible of what was present, and foreseeing what was to come*, in the name which he gave to Eve, when, after their sin, he called her the mother of the living, he intended to prefigure, though at a very great distance, our second mother infinitely more deserving of that name. For otherwise, how could he, with any pretence of truth, call her the *mother of the living*, who had already given death to all her posterity, before she gave them life? We may therefore securely say, that, as Christ was the Saviour, or the *Lamb slain from the beginning of the world*,<sup>1</sup> so the Blessed Virgin was, from the very beginning, the sign of that salvation of which Christ was the cause, and that she was the most propitious sign, next to the Sun of Justice Himself, which ever appeared in any of the heavenly spheres. Therefore it can to no one appear wonderful that the Church was afterwards born under the auspices of this most fortunate star. Before the Church was born on Mount Calvary, out of the sacred

1 Agnus occisus ab origine mundi. Apoc. xiii. 8.

wound of His side, our Lord Jesus Christ had already appointed Mary to be its mother. Nor was it without a mystery, that on this occasion He so ordered it, that the first to take possession of this happy mother, should be His favourite disciple; to signify that the Blessed Virgin Mary was to be always a guiding-star of happiness and safety to all the favourites of Christ, the elect, or predestined to glory. Whence it will be no easy matter to express the greatness of the efficacy, which the Saints and holy Doctors have always attributed to this wonderful sign. It will be enough to quote the impressive words of St. Anselm: *As it is impossible for those to be saved, whom the Blessed Virgin abandons by turning the eyes of her mercy from them: so it is necessary, that they on whom she mercifully casts her eyes, and takes their cause in hand, should be first justified on earth, and afterwards glorified in Heaven*; <sup>1</sup>—words so strong and of such vital importance, that, lest they should appear exaggerated, it will not be amiss to support them by those words, dictated by the Holy Ghost, and expressly applied by the Church to the Blessed Virgin: *All that hate me, love death*, because they deprive themselves of that influx of grace, which is only transmitted to us by her means. On the contrary: *He that shall find me, shall find life*; <sup>2</sup> for, though the Blessed Virgin is not the life, since *the*

1 Sicut impossibile est quod illi, a quibus Virgo Maria oculos suæ misericordiæ avertit, salventur: ita necessarium est ut hi ad quos converterit oculos suos, pro eis advocans justificentur et glorificentur.

2 Qui me invenerit, inveniet vitam.....Qui me oderunt, diligunt mortem. Prov. viii. 35, 36.

*life is Christ*, yet to find the Blessed Virgin differs not much from finding Christ; of such efficacy is the virtue which the Sun has communicated to this sign. Jewelers are glad to meet with a sapphire, because within it they also find the carbuncle, whose superior brightness crowns it king over all other precious stones. In the same manner, the true clients of Mary may well rejoice when they have found her; for to find her is as great a gain as to find the King of the elect—her Divine Son, dwelling within her: *He that shall find me, shall find life.*

But since the consideration of a subject so full of comfort is to the servants of Mary, like striking the deeper strings of a harp, which are always sweetest in tone; let us enter further into this matter, and examine what are the particular reasons why the Blessed Virgin may be said to have so much influence over our salvation. These may be reduced to two, the first of which is found in the end of our predestination, and the other in the means necessary to gain that end.

## SECTION II.

### THE HONOUR OF MARY IS THE SECONDARY END OF OUR PREDESTINATION.

As to what concerns the end of our predestination, it is certain that the great number of the elect, who have been so blessed as to be separated from the unhappy mass of the reprobate, cannot be more nobly employed in Heaven, than in forming a regal court for Christ—the First-



begotten of the Eternal Father, and in making Him appear among the predestined as a glorious Sun, preeminent above all the rest, and waited upon by a countless retinue of inferior stars : *For whom He foreknew*, says the Apostle, *He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son, that He might be the First-born amongst many brethren.* <sup>1</sup> Now if this be true, it necessarily follows that, as this great and happy number of attendants was chosen from the beginning, to form a court for Christ, so was it also chosen at the same time to be a court for Mary, as the Mother of that great First-born ; and this Divine Solomon, intending to confer upon His Blessed Mother the highest possible honour, has raised her to the most exalted position, and has seated her on His right hand, as both His Mother and His Spouse. <sup>2</sup> And because His design is to keep her next to Himself, and never suffer her to be separated from Him, He wills that, as He is the Sun in the midst of so many attendant stars, she shall be looked upon as the Moon ; and yet she requires not the absence of the Sun, before she can shew her light, but rather shines so much the brighter, the nearer she approaches to Him. Thus you may observe that the five prudent virgins, who, for their diligence and wisdom, had the happiness to be admitted to the marriage-feast, came with a design to make their court both to the bride-groom and the bride, and to increase the

<sup>1</sup> Nam quos præscivit, et prædestinavit conformes fieri Imagini Filii Sui, ut sit Ipse Primogenitus in multis fratribus. Rom. viii. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Astitit Regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato. Ps. 44. 10. 3 Reg. ii.

number of their retinue: *They went out to meet the bride-groom and the bride.*<sup>1</sup> And under that title they were received in preference to the other five, who for their folly and indiscretion were excluded from that company, as being unfit to appear in a court where true wisdom only was held in esteem. And this was to give us to understand that the predestinated are admitted to everlasting bliss, first for the greater glory of the Divine Bride-groom, and then, as a consequence, for the greater glory also of that heavenly Bride, who had the double honour of being both His Mother and His Spouse: *They went out to meet the bride-groom and the bride*; so true it is, that all the Saints in Heaven are ordained for the greater glory, not only of Christ, but also of Mary—His Virgin Mother. Let none be surprised at this proposition, nor consider it too boldly advanced. Of the Prince of the Seraphim, it is said in Ezechiel, that to adorn him all the most precious stones were called into requisition: *Every precious stone was thy covering,*<sup>2</sup> after which the Prophet reckons up nine different sorts of jewels; and these, in the opinion of St. Gregory, are a figure of the nine choirs into which the Angels are distributed, as though all the inferior Angels, were created only to add to the beauty and glory of the highest.

With how much more reason, may we say of the Blessed Virgin, that not only the angelic legions, but those innumerable multitudes of blessed Saints in Heaven, were

1 Exierant obviam sponso et sponsæ. Matt. xxv. 1.

2 Omnis lapis pretiosus operimentum tuum. Ezech. xxviii. 13.

designed, at least by a secondary intention, for her glory, to render more imposing the majesty of her throne, to enlarge her empire, to adorn her triumph, and to fill her court with the richest splendour and magnificence. For as she was the secondary cause of our salvation, so it was reasonable that she should also be the secondary end of our predestination. Now if this be so, who does not see that, since all the elect must belong to Mary's court, nothing can better help us to be one day favourably received into the number of her thrice-blessed courtiers, than to wear her livery at present, to obey her will, to please her in every thing, and to gain her favour upon earth by bearing all the marks of one of her servants, in fine, to make it a chief part of our ambition to be known to belong to her. *All the rich among the people shall entreat thy countenance.*<sup>1</sup> The noblest and richest among the people shall be ambitious to appear before thy face, O glorious Virgin, and to do homage to thy majesty! And indeed who ever saw a court formed to please a great queen, without having special regard to those who have any particular dependence upon her? Let it not be objected here that the Blessed Virgin could not, in any manner, concur towards the election of her clients unto glory, since they have been already chosen from all eternity, in the sacred consistory of the three Divine Persons, without her knowledge or participation. For very learned authors teach us, that the Eternal Father predestinated all those whom the Son was afterwards to demand of Him

1 *Vultum tuum deprecabuntur omnes divites plebis Ps. 44. 12.*

distinctly and individually, according to the unlimited promise, that He should obtain whatever He might ask for: *Ask Me and I will give Thee the Gentiles for Thy inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for Thy possession*;<sup>1</sup> that thus Christ might be acknowledged to be, not merely the Steward of the salvation of mankind, but the absolute Lord and Master of it, both in Heaven and upon earth,—in Heaven by deserving it, and upon earth by putting it into execution: *All power is given to Me in Heaven and in earth.*<sup>2</sup> Does it not then seem to you, that the Son ought to demand of the Father, making in their favour a special offering of His merits, those who, in the abysses of His knowledge He foresaw, would, day by day, render themselves still dearer to His glorious Mother by their homage?

### SECTION III.

#### MARY IS THE SECONDARY CAUSE OF OUR PREDESTINATION.

It is most clear therefore, that devotion to the Blessed Virgin is wonderfully conducive to the end of our predestination; and, for the same reason, it no less conduces to the attainment of the most efficacious means thereto, namely, her all-powerful intercession. To prove this as distinctly as possible, it will be useful to go somewhat back in the argument; since in discussion, as well as in

1 Postula a Me et dabo Tibi gentes hereditatem tuam, et possessionem tuam terminos terræ. Ps. 2. 8.

2 Data est Mihi omnis potestas in celo et in terra. Matt. xxviii. 18.

navigation, the most direct way is not always the quickest.

In the tribunal of Heaven, there is a law in force contrary to any that we have in our statute-books upon earth. In these women are forbidden to be advocates, or to meddle with the law, <sup>1</sup> not but that a great many of them would carry through a case as cleverly as the ablest of lawyers. But the reason is, that there would be danger of their gaining every case, since it is an advantage too greatly in favour of a cause, when to the natural or acquired eloquence of the tongue in the person who speaks, is added the more persuasive eloquence of the eyes and countenance. It was a scandal upon our very nature, that on the first occasion that woman ever undertook to persuade man,—which was in the terrestrial Paradise, even before man became a slave to his passions—she so far succeeded as to persuade him, contrary to his own good sense and God's positive command, to exchange all his greatness and all his happiness for an apple. But whatever the reasons may be to exclude women from pleading at the bar, it is certain that, as in the tribunal of Heaven prejudices like these cannot be apprehended, so the prohibitions of which we have been speaking are not regarded. So far from it, in that otherwise impartial court, every thing seems to be in favour of the Blessed Virgin, and of her clients. There a woman is singularly chosen to be our advocate, and to plead all our causes. And, to give more weight and authority to her

1 L. Fœmin. ff. de reg. Jur. l. 1. ff. de Postul.

character, it is further enacted that this very woman shall be the Mother of the Judge Himself, in order that, where the merits of our cause will not be sufficient to incline Him to be favourable to us, these two eminent titles of love and authority, in the person who patronises it, may supply for all defects.

The Blessed Virgin took possession of this charitable office, as soon as she became the Mother of God; and who can express with how great solicitude, and with what ardent zeal, she began to exercise its functions! Observe how the first two miracles which Christ wrought upon earth, the one to dispense with the common laws of grace, and the other absolutely to derogate from those of nature, were both equally the effect of the powerful intercession of this our great advocate.

If any one, enlightened by faith to understand the mystery, had been present to see the Blessed Virgin crossing the mountains of Judæa with more than usual haste, would he not have said, this is that bright Aurora which, with the brighter Sun of Justice in her womb, is hastening to carry, before its time, the clear day of grace to the Precursor of the Messiah. It was the Blessed Virgin therefore who hastened the Messiah thither. He came, and the moment He arrived, the great Baptist was sanctified in his mother's womb, before his time. Again, at the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee, although the time was not yet come, in which Christ had determined to confirm His doctrine, by the authentic testimony of such public miracles as He afterwards so frequently

wrought, changing even the nature of the elements, in order to effect a like conversion in the hearts of men : *My hour is not yet come* ;<sup>1</sup> still such was the power of the Blessed Virgin's intercession, that, for the benefit of the world, she made that happy hour come much swifter upon the wings of her fervent prayer, than had originally been designed by Providence.

And who can pretend to express the power and efficacy of the Blessed Virgin's intercession in Heaven? As much as the merits and authority of this our powerful advocate are now increased in Heaven, so much the greater is the power of those prayers which there she offers for us. Almighty God, having in His Providence appointed the use of prayer as the most universal instrument for the execution of all His designs, has given to it such wonderful force, that a man, who presents his petition to God in prayer, is said to *command* Him ; and a God, who gives His signature in favour of that petition, is said to *obey the voice of man*.<sup>2</sup> Yet, of whom did the Holy Ghost speak those words? Of a Josue, that is, of a man who was yet living upon earth in the condition of a servant, and who consequently could not presume to command Almighty God in any thing, but could only call upon Him by humble invocation and prayer. If therefore the bounds, which Almighty God has set to the prayers of a just man, be so unlimited as to be reputed in a manner equivalent to a command, how

<sup>1</sup> Nondum venit hora mea. Joan. ii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Obediens Deo voci hominis, Josue x. 14.

wide must be those bounds, which He has set to the powerful intercession of His own Blessed Mother, or rather may we not conclude that He has set none at all? I am persuaded that the voice of an advocate of such authority, pleading for us in the Court of Heaven, is regarded there, as little less than the voice of one who partakes in God's Omnipotence: *What God effects by His power, you do O Virgin by your prayers.*<sup>1</sup> And if God Himself yields to her prayers, who is there that can withstand their force, or hinder their effect?

When the Archangel Guardian of Israel was earnestly soliciting the return of the people into Palestine from their captivity in Persia, the Archangel Guardian of Persia stood up to oppose him in favour of Persia, for the space of twenty days, until Almighty God had manifested to them more clearly His will concerning their return. But who is there in Heaven, that can make like resistance to the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as though the will of God could be doubtful, when once she has interposed her authority? Nay, let us even suppose that not an Archangel only, but that the nine choirs of Angels and blessed Spirits in Heaven, all the Saints of every degree, in a word, all the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem, should unite in petitioning my eternal damnation, yet if Mary alone stood up, and engaged to obtain mercy for me, I would look on my salvation as secured; nor would all the hosts of Heaven, risen as a torrent

1 Quod Deus Imperio, tu prece, Virgo, potes,

¶ Suar, to, 2, in 3, p. D, 23. S. 2,



against me, be strong enough to beat down this one rampart of my defence. So great is the trust and confidence which I repose in her powerful intercession. Nor without reason, for if she alone surpasses them all in merit, it is but a reasonable conclusion, that she should also surpass them in the power and efficacy of impetration. And thus she glories of herself: *I alone have compassed the circuit of Heaven.*<sup>1</sup> She is the only one in Heaven, who is always in motion for our assistance, not that she alone intercedes for us, but because her power and authority are so preeminent, that she draws them all after her; so that if any, or even all, should concur to oppose her demands, she would yet prevail against them. Just as the highest among the celestial spheres might glory, that it alone moves on for the benefit of this lower earth; not that the rest do not move also and for the same end, but because they conform their motion so exactly to the motion of the first and highest sphere, that although they all combined to resist it, they would not be able to retard, still less to stop its course. What then have the clients of Mary to fear? They need fear nothing, if by abusing her protection they do not lose it, for so long as she protects them, they are safe. The people of Holland sleep tranquilly in their beds, though the sea about them is higher than their houses, because they trust to that invincible bulwark, which with its beams firmly linked together fortifies them against so powerful a foe, neither yielding to the long siege of so many furious waves, nor

<sup>1</sup> *Girum cœli circuiti sola.* Eccell. xxiv. 8.

wearied by their untiring assaults. This confidence however, though apparently so well grounded, has sometimes been deceived. For it is not long since the sea, breaking suddenly in upon them, laid under water their richest emporium, with irreparable loss to the merchants, who were shipwrecked with all their goods, not in their harbour, but even in the very middle of their market-place. Ah! how much safer is that defence, which the clients of Mary are always sure to find in her protection: *I am a wall*, says the Blessed Virgin of herself, *since I am become in His presence as one finding peace*.<sup>1</sup> From the time that the Blessed Virgin found that peace and favour in the sight of God, which had been sought in vain for so many ages before, she has become for us a wall of defence, so strong and so impregnable, that all the forces of hell together shall never be able to make the least breach in it, much less to beat it down. For my part, if God grant me the happiness of always taking refuge under the shadow of this invincible wall, let my infernal enemies, armed with malice and rage, come upon me by thousands, let them besiege me, let them assault me with all their fury, I fear them not.

Gassenda, a lady no less illustrious for her birth than for her singular piety, and who had always endeavoured to give her nephew Eleazaro a pious education, and one suitable to his rank, became at length so anxious lest, through the usual temptations of youth and bad company, he should fall into evil habits, that she could give

1 Ego murus, ex quo facta sum coram eo quasi pacem reperiens. Can. viii. 10.

herself no rest. Night and day she importuned Heaven, and, so to speak, stormed the Divine Heart with the sweet violence of her fervent prayers for the salvation of her child. Almighty God, who loves to be importuned, and who for a time seemed deaf to her prayers, at last returned her this answer. Know, My daughter, that I have entrusted thy beloved Eleazaro to My dear Mother. Fear nothing, he is safe. Now this was as much as though He had said, My daughter, why dost thou fear? If the Blessed Virgin Mary had power enough to draw Me, who am God, down from Heaven to earth, shall she not be able to draw thy nephew up from earth to Heaven? *If she has been strong against God, how much more shall she prevail against men?* <sup>1</sup>

The Blessed Virgin is that bright morning star, which invited the true Sun of Justice to follow her over our horizon, and still retaining the same tendency to favour us on every occasion, *she rises early and sets late.* <sup>2</sup> She is the first to enter into the hearts of sinners, and the last to leave them. She has given us a Saviour, the Fruit of her own womb; and not content with this, like the branching palm tree, she makes herself the ladder, by which we are to reach that excellent fruit, which she bore for our salvation. O that I could once be so happy, as to ascend into this life-giving palm tree! There would I gather the fruit I sigh after—that fruit which is life everlasting! The holy youth Eleazaro climbed this hap-

<sup>1</sup> Si contra Deum fortis fuisti, quanto magis contra hominem prævalebis? Gen. xxxii. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Cito venit, sero recedit.

py palm tree, until he gathered its loftiest fruits. For, by the Holy Virgin's favour, he arrived at such a degree of perfection, as to espouse virginity to matrimony itself, leaving a rare example which might raise a holy envy even among the angelical Spirits, who indeed are by their nature happier than men, but not more chaste than those who have Mary for the guardian and protectress of their virginity.

Now we have seen how the Blessed Virgin belongs to the mystery of our predestination, first as its end, secondly as a means towards it; its end in the order of election, and the means to it in the order of execution. And so too we may see how much reason we have to look upon her as a most propitious sign, and sure pledge of salvation.

Some authors are of opinion, that the moon was made chiefly to be a companion to the sun; so that when she is full of his light, she might be as a lesser sun, to the heavens by her brightness, and to the earth by her influence. Aristotle, when writing on this subject, says that *the moon through her communication with the sun, and the reception of his light, becomes, as it were, another lesser sun, and so conduces to all the productions and perfections of nature.*<sup>1</sup> But how much more willingly might we subscribe to this opinion, had the authors of it raised their thoughts above these material spheres, to turn their attention to that far more glorious moon to

1 Luna propter solis societatem, receptumque lucis, fit quasi alter sol minor; quamobrem conducit ad omnes generationes perfectionesque. Arist. de gen. anim. l. 4. c. ult.

be whose footstool was the highest honour which our material moon could ever receive.<sup>1</sup> She, as a fair moon, was made to be the companion of the Uncreated Sun of Justice, both during His sojourn upon earth, and in His own country in Heaven. She, when filled with the immensity of His Divine Light, but not filled for herself alone, *full for herself, full for others,*<sup>2</sup> will truly appear to all those who contemplate her glory, as another inferior sun, concurring with the Divine Mercy in the regeneration of all sinners, to the perfection of all the just, and to the future glory of all the elect; insomuch that it may be questioned, whether Mary be a greater ornament to the Empyrean above by her light, than she is by her influence a help to our world below.

## SECTION IV.

THE GLORY OF MARY DOES NOT DETRACT FROM  
THE GLORY OF GOD.

The only possible objection which can be made to all that we have said is, that it seems to detract as much from the jurisdiction of Christ's kingdom, and from His royal prerogative, as it adds to that of His Virgin Mother. But this I look upon as the hissing of those serpents of the north, who, born to persecute this great woman, seem to vie in hatred and malice with the dragon in the Apocalypse, when he pursued her with so much rage. The ancient Romans never showed themselves more truly the lords of the earth, than when they could

1 Et luna sub pedibus ejus. Apoc. xii. 1.    2 Plena sibi atque aliis.

make kings of private men. So Christ never gave greater demonstrations of His Sovereign power, than when He made a creature so powerful as Mary. It is no disparagement to the loadstone that it communicates its power of attraction to the iron or steel which it touches. On the contrary, it is an evident proof of its greater virtue, shewing that it possesses it in so eminent a degree, as to be able to communicate it to other things, and yet suffer no detriment itself. This being undeniable, let us conclude in the divine words of David: *Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God.*<sup>1</sup>

Great and glorious things, I own, have been said of thee, O sovereign city of God, within the narrow compass of this small book. Others have already, and I hope will still publish higher encomiums of thee, in larger volumes: those, I mean, who contemplate thee more, who know thee better, and, though I cannot say it without envying their happiness, know better than I do how to love thee. However neither my feeble pen, nor those of other more sublime writers, who will rise upon the world hereafter, can ever pourtray this greatness in its true proportions. As it is correct to say, morally at least, that the tops of our highest mountains are as far distant from the firmament, as are the valleys beneath them; so we may say with equal truth, that the most penetrating intellects of our ablest masters, as well as the meaner capacities of the common people, are equally distant from thee, glorious Virgin, who, as the highest of Heavens, nay the very

1 *Gloriosa dicta sunt de te, civitas Del. Pa. 86. 2.*

Heaven of Heaven itself,<sup>1</sup> wast made on purpose to be the delightful abode of thy Sovereign Lord. Among astronomers, who could never yet determine the wonderful situation, motion, and distance of the celestial spheres from each other, he is said to treat the matter most ably, who with the greatest skill accounts for all phenomena; and in like manner, since we cannot determine exactly how near to God Himself is the rank which thou enjoyest in Heaven, nor how violent and swift is the motion of thy most inflamed love, nor the boundless distance which is between thee and other pure creatures, we must believe that he comes nearest the truth, in speaking of thy royal person, who best sets forth those great and wonderful appearances of thine as the Church's chief Protectress, as the Restorer of our losses occasioned by Eve, as Companion of the Redeemer, Helper in our Redemption, and as the great Mother of our infinitely greater God.

By a faithful observation of all these surprising phenomena, let any one lay down a right system of this glorious heaven—the ever Blessed Virgin Mary; and then let him tell me, if what I have here laid down, in this compendious map, be anything exceeding either the height which I have assigned to her merit, or the efficacy which I have ascribed to her power.

1 *Caelum cosli Domini.*

## PART THE SECOND.





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DEVOUT CLIENT OF MARY.

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PART THE SECOND.

THE MEANS WHICH MAY HELP US TO OBTAIN

TRUE DEVOTION

TO THE

*Blessed Virgin Mary.*

As that gold is not of any value, which will not bear the trial of fire, so love, the noblest of affections, as gold is of metals, must, to be true and sincere, be able to stand that trial, which is proper to it, and which never fails to discover its sincerity, the test, namely, of good actions. For, as St. Gregory says, the best and indeed only proof of our love is the outward testimony of works.<sup>1</sup> By what do you distinguish a true fire from a painted one, better than by its activity and motion? A painted fire is always quiet, always in the same place, never spreads, wa-

1. Probatio dilectionis exhibitio est operis.

ges war with no one, hurts nothing, not even the dry canvass on which it is painted. A real fire on the contrary can never rest even for a moment, it is always in motion, and if it could, it would overrun and set on fire the whole world. Wherefore that sacrilegious mask of devotion, which we denounced in the beginning of this little book, is not the true devotion to the Blessed Virgin, at which her clients are to aim; nor is even this barren devotion, which yields only a few leaves of words, protestations, and empty proffers. For though this latter kind appears to have a will, or desire to please the Blessed Virgin, yet it cannot be called a ready will, when it lies thus dormant. The true client of Mary must never be idle, but must be always either in action, or in a state of readiness to act, whenever her will or her honour shall require it. In the same manner, he who is not a perfect client of Mary, and yet sincerely desires to become so, must at once resolve to act, because it should be his chief solicitude, to make use of those means which will lead him, by the shortest way, to the end which he desires to attain. These means, though many and various, may be easily reduced to four. And if you adopt them with courage and resolution, you will soon discover that Land of bliss, that Paradise of salvation, and Haven of security, into which the protection of the Blessed Virgin never fails to lead her true clients. The four means I propose are these, frequent meditation upon the Blessed Virgin, the reading of books that treat of her, to invoke her in prayer, and the practise of some particular devotion to

her. The way is neither long nor difficult, but yet it requires resolution. Let us therefore begin by the first two, and as they are in a manner inseparable, we shall treat of both in the same chapter.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE FIRST AND SECOND MEANS TO OBTAIN DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN ARE FREQUENT MEDITATION AND READING.

#### SECTION I.

##### THE FIRST MEANS TO OBTAIN TRUE DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS MEDITATION.

Meditation, according to St. Thomas, is the first milk with which true devotion is nourished, because our will, being a blind power, makes no advance, except under the guidance of the understanding.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand the understanding itself, although it be not blind, is yet so weak-sighted, that it does not discover things at once, but only by degrees, and after careful attention. Like that watchman, appointed by God to observe what chariots came into Babylon towards the evening; *He beheld them diligently with much heed.*<sup>2</sup> He observed each thing very narrowly, and was not content to look once or twice, but *beheld them with much heed*, until he could give a faithful account of what he was sent to discover. Now

1 *Voluntas oritur ex Intelligentia.* S. Aug. l. 14. de Trin. c. 8.

2 *Contemplatus est diligenter multo intuitu.* Isa. xxi. 7.

this is the advantage which we receive from meditation. Those truths which at first sight, on account of our imperfect understanding, appeared to us in shapes far different from the reality, will afterwards by little and little, if we look fixedly upon them, appear in their natural shapes and colours, capable of moving any heart, though before they could make no impression upon us : *I see men as it were trees, walking.*<sup>1</sup> Therefore Saint Augustine assures us that a thorough understanding is the beginning of all good.<sup>2</sup> It would be no wonder, if a painter, while drawing the portrait of some great beauty, should become enamoured with her countenance, since he studies with attention every feature, and every grace. Whereas another, who only gives a passing glance at the same face, scarcely admires it, nay even often despises it. In the same manner, he who meditates seriously upon a truth, giving it time to sink into the understanding, and to display all its beauty, is easily moved to embrace it ; while upon another, who gives but a passing thought to the same truth, as it were looking upon it with a cursory eye, it makes little or no impression.

Meditation, the better to obtain the desired effect, ought to bring two different points before the mind. The one comprehending the unspeakable perfections of the Mother of God, her prerogatives, privileges, and virtues ; the other, her great charity and love, together with the innumerable favours and blessings which she is

1 *Video homines velut arbores ambulantes.* Marc. viii. 24.

2 *Intellectus cogitabundus initium est omnis boni.*

continually showering down upon us, however ungrateful and undeserving we may be. By frequent meditation upon these points, we shall easily conceive in our hearts a love for Mary, perfect both as to its essential and as to its accidental qualities, as we mentioned in the beginning of this treatise; and thus shall we attain that true and perfect devotion towards her, which is the whole object proposed in this little work. We read in the life of Father Francis Suarez, a man equally eminent for learning and sanctity, that on all the solemn feasts of the Blessed Virgin, he spent two whole hours in the reflections, which I now propose to you, well knowing that *to think upon her is perfect understanding*.<sup>1</sup> To think of Mary is true wisdom, for it is a study pleasing to God, and advantageous to ourselves. It is pleasing to God, on account of the singular satisfaction which it affords Him, to see our endeavours to discover the perfections of Mary by our own pious industry, rather than that He should reveal them to us immediately Himself. It is most advantageous to us, because of the abundant reward which we shall receive for it from Mary herself, as she told the learned and devout Suarez, who acknowledges that he drank the waters of this heavenly wisdom, in which he had so large a share, at the same fountain as Albertus Magnus, St. Bernard, and St. Bernardine. For Mary opened the eyes of his understanding, in so sudden and so wonderful a manner, that, though possessed of very ordinary talents when he first applied himself to his stu-

1 Cogitare de illa, sensus est consummatius. Sap. vi. 16.

dies, he afterwards filled the whole world with admiration by his learned and pious works. Do you, in the meantime, endeavour to follow, at least at a distance, the footsteps of so great a man, and so zealous a client of the Blessed Virgin, by the frequent study of the considerations which I have suggested, remembering that those bees which remain longest upon the flowers, always make the best honey.

## SECTION II.

### THE SECOND MEANS TO OBTAIN TRUE DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS SPIRITUAL READING.

The other milk, with which devotion is nourished, is spiritual reading. As holy pictures serve instead of books to those who cannot read, so those beginners, who do not yet know how to meditate upon a mystery, must avail themselves of books. This is the advice which Saint Theresa used to give to her novices, in the exercise of mental prayer, that thus they might grow rich on other mens' labours, as barren countries do on the produce of other lands; and this is the most wholesome advice, not only for beginners, but even for proficients in the art of meditation. For this reason, the Apostle earnestly recommends the exercise of spiritual reading to his beloved Timothy: *Attend unto reading.*<sup>1</sup> However, this is doubly necessary for those who, receiving no refreshing showers from their own skies, have no other way of providing

1 Attende lectioni. 1 Tim. iv. 13.

against spiritual aridity, than by borrowing water from their neighbours' cisterns. You often complain that your imagination is so distorted, that, in spite of all your endeavours, your mind is filled in time of prayer with thoughts if not criminal, at least very earthly and foreign to the subject. To suggest therefore a method, in every corner of your chamber keep some pious book, treating of the Blessed Virgin's merits, perfections, titles and prerogatives, of the rewards which she promises to her faithful clients, and of the constant intercourse that our hearts ought to have with her. Fix your mind often upon these, and you will soon feel noble thoughts and pious sentiments rising in that heart, which before was so dull and so heavy.

I know well that promiscuous reading of spiritual books is not equally profitable, since different books are suitable for different persons, and different times. To the end that your reading may be always beneficial to you, it must have the same wholesome properties as the regular diet of people in good health and of sound constitution. Food, according to physicians, never does more good than when it is taken under these three conditions; that the meat itself be good, wholesome, and savoury; that it be well masticated; and that it be taken in such quantities as the stomach can most easily digest. See therefore that your book, treating of the Blessed Virgin Mary, be well chosen, and not taken up at random. If you are not a sufficient judge of them yourself, take the advice of a prudent director, remembering that the longest are not al-



ways the best, since there are many books, which though large and diffuse contain very little substance. Read leisurely and with attention, and do not peruse them lightly nor with impatience, as those who read from mere curiosity. Remember also, that only so much of this spiritual food as you shall eat with leisure, and digest with ease, will remain in you as nourishment, and be converted into good spiritual substance. And though excess in this, as well as in corporal food, is to be carefully avoided, yet I would advise you to allow as much time for reading as you can, considering your state and the indispensable duties of your position, since these must never be omitted for works of supererogation, however pious. For experience teaches us, that those passing summer showers which only sprinkle the plants, without sinking into their roots, will never give them much strength of growth. In fine, who knows but that a short time spent in careful reading may one day prove of infinite advantage, and perhaps be as valuable to you as Heaven itself?

No one has ever heard or read of the voyages of Columbus, without being surprised at the boldness of his enterprise, when, through a thousand dangers, he sailed further to discover new countries, than the Roman eagles could ever carry their conquests; and this upon an enterprise so difficult in execution, and so doubtful in the result, as was the subjugation of a new world. It was in Plato's *Timæus* that this daring man found wings proportioned to such prodigious flights. There he read what that philosopher narrates of a country called Atlanta.

which was at first joined to the continent of the known world, and afterwards became an island, by the violent convulsion of an earthquake. Curiosity led him in search of this country, though uncertain whether any such country existed. If this be true, as we find in the history of the Indies,<sup>1</sup> we must confess that all those fleets, which at the present day stock Europe with such abundance of foreign merchandise, as gold, silver, spices, and the rarest drugs, unknown amongst us before, are all owing to the reading of a book. But even were this an exaggeration, it will always be true, that the books, which I advise you to read, will open for you the way to the discovery of new worlds, new riches, and new mines unknown to you before. I do not mean those, where silver and gold lie buried, but those spiritual mines, where the true riches of heavenly wisdom are to be found. I myself know many, who are indebted to the frequent perusal of some little book, written in praise of the Blessed Virgin, for their vocation to a religious life; which is the most assured pledge that we can have in this world, that we shall enter one day into that happy land of eternal bliss, promised indeed to so many, but which so few ever reach. If, however, you are already engaged in another state of life, and are thus rendered incapable of so great a happiness, yet you may be assured that, if you acquire a taste for this sort of reading, you will soon find that pious desires of consecrating yourself to the Blessed Virgin's

1 Pet. Cirza. tom. 1. Rerum Indicarum.

service, of pleasing, glorifying, and loving her will take root in your heart, and will grow up into a true and solid devotion to her, far more than were Jacob's flocks increased by the speckled rods, which he set before their eyes at every brook, where they came to drink.

## CHAPTER II.

THE THIRD MEANS TO OBTAIN DEVOTION TO THE  
BLESSED VIRGIN IS FREQUENTLY TO  
INVOKER HER IN PRAYER.

Astrologers pretend that the days of the week are governed by seven planets in their turns, so that the planet which gives his name to that particular day, on which it is his turn to rule, communicates to the same day his own peculiar virtue. And therefore some of them very charitably advise us, as though it were a secret of the utmost importance, to turn our faces often in the day towards the ruling planet; in order, I suppose, to draw from that part of the heavens the purest influences, and to suck in the sweetest drops of that life-giving ambrosia, which the kind planet is so liberally pouring down upon the

earth. <sup>1</sup> Astrology, amongst all its other falsehoods, has advanced none so high-sounding as this. However, to make the best use of this imposing fable, we will place it under our feet as a step to raise us to the contemplation of a real and beneficial truth. The propitious star, which rules not for a day, but throughout the whole year, is the ever glorious and blessed Virgin Mary. To her, therefore, let us turn our eyes and our thoughts every hour, in order that our hearts may draw in those heavenly inspirations, with which she blesses all those who seek her. For, as the Wise man says: *Blessed is the man that watcheth daily at my gates, and waiteth at the posts of my doors.* <sup>2</sup> And this shall be the third means of obtaining devotion to the Blessed Virgin, viz. to call upon her frequently in prayer, according to the advice of the mellifluous St. Bernard, whose heavenly eloquence, as before observed, was owing to the sweetness of that virginal milk, which he drank so plentifully from the breasts of the Mother of Grace. *In all your doubts, in all your afflictions, in all your dangers, think of Mary, call upon Mary; let her name always be in your mouth, and never depart from your heart.* <sup>3</sup> Nay, I say further, that as the movement of the pulse is an undoubted sign of life, so frequent thoughts of Mary, and invocation of her aid, will be, not only a very efficacious means to obtain

<sup>1</sup> Georg. Venet. in Harm. Mundl.

<sup>2</sup> Beatus homo qui vigilat ad fores meas quotidie, et observat ad postes ostii mei. Prov. viii. 34.

<sup>3</sup> In rebus dubiis, in angustiis, in periculis Mariam cogita, Mariam invoca; non recedat ab ore, non recedat a corde. S. Bern. hom. 2. super Miss.

true devotion towards her, but also a sure sign of having already obtained it. And therefore, in my opinion, it is not our own interest only, but the nobler motive of love and esteem which ought to incite us to a frequent invocation of the Blessed Virgin, and to mix with our petitions other expressions of respect, of congratulation, of gratitude, and of praise due to the incomparable merits of this great Queen of men and of Angels. The charge which I have taken upon me, of being a guide to all the affectionate clients of the Blessed Virgin Mary, seems to require that I should not only show them the way they are to follow, but also lend a helping hand to those at least among them, who may be less able to walk by themselves. Let me then offer you a practical method of praying to the Blessed Virgin, under separate titles, adapted to each day in the week. And this plan will, at the same time, open out a large field in which your pious zeal may expatiate, and will give full scope to your affections, by enabling you frequently to renew during the day, in some shorter form, though not less fervently, the same sentiments which are here expressed at greater length.

### SUNDAY.

#### MARY INVOKED AS OUR MOTHER.

O great Mother of God! who by the height of thy dignity art superior to every other creature, when in thy presence I see myself so vile, how is it possible that even

I should call thee Mother? And yet it is true. Thou, who art the Mother of my God, thou art also my mother, left unto me as such, in virtue of the solemn gift of all that belonged to Him, which my dying Jesus made to me upon the Cross. And so I am resolved, that my miseries shall never take from me my right to the possession of so infinite a happiness; since I have the merits of thine own Divine Son, and His parting commendation in my favour. I will therefore call thee Mother, and I will hope, unworthy as I am, that thou wilt on thy part acknowledge me for thy child. Come then Holy Virgin, and show thyself a Mother: *Monstra te esse Matrem*. And if yet thou wilt not hear my voice, hear at least the voice of my Saviour, who in the midst of His bitter torments gave me to thee in His own stead, by those most loving words: *Ecce filius tuus*, behold thy son! Behold me, dear Mother, prostrate at thy feet, disdain not to let me enjoy so great an honour; since thy First-begotten has merited it for me, who for my sake was born of thee in an open stable; for my sake lived with thee in a poor carpenter's shop; and who for me died upon a cross before thine own eyes. Oh! that thou mayest see Him one day adored by all nations as He deserves, and I so earnestly desire; and that thou mayest see thyself acknowledged and honoured as His Mother! Grant me, in the mean time, that I may live like a true child of thine, that I may know mine own dignity, that I may fulfil all that is due from me, and that I may abhor sin more than all other evils; for that is the only thing,

which can render me unworthy of thy adoption and of thy love. Amen.

### MONDAY.

#### MARY INVOKED AS OUR QUEEN.

O holy Queen of Heaven and earth! who, as the Daughter, the Mother, and the Spouse of the Highest, hast a sovereign right over all creatures, I belong to thee, not on one but upon a thousand titles; I too am thine. But though I am already thine, in that entire control which thou hast over all things, yet this does not content me. I would be thine in a more especial manner, by choosing thee, of my own free will. Prostrate therefore before the throne of thy greatness, behold I take thee for my sovereign Queen; and by this offering which I freely make unto thee of my whole self, I desire to strengthen that right of sovereignty, which thou dost already possess over all. From this moment I am resolved that I shall be entirely thine, upon a new title. My dependence shall be on thee, and thou shalt fulfil in me the Divine Will, and all those designs, which Providence has ordained concerning me. Therefore, Holy Queen, dispose of me and of all the concerns of my life, according to thy royal pleasure. Temper prosperity to me with adversity, and adversity with prosperity, as it shall please thee. I trust all to thee; and whatever shall happen to me by thy appointment shall be, if not agreeable and sweet, at least far less bitter, because it comes through the hands

of a Queen so amiable as thou art. All that I will ask of thee is that, after the many vicissitudes of this deluding world, I may come, by thy means, to the kingdom of everlasting happiness, there to know thee, there to pay homage to thee, there to love thee, and to delight in the great glory which Almighty God hath conferred upon thee, as Queen of Heaven, where thou dost reign with Him, for ever and ever. Amen.

## TUESDAY.

## MARY INVOKED AS THE MODEL OF PURITY.

O Virgin of virgins, O Mother and Model of Purity ! How divine a school hast thou opened upon earth, and what holy lessons hast thou given us, by thine own example ! Thou wast the first to offer up thy virginity to God, under a sacred vow ; and thou didst offer it to Him with so resolute a will, that in order to preserve it inviolate, thou wast most ready to renounce even the high honour, which thou now enjoyest, of being the Mother of that same God. After thee I see whole bands of virgins, who, following thy instructions and thy example, raise a holy envy even among the Angels of Paradise, by living in bodies as chaste as though they were not of mortal flesh. And I, miserable creature, when I behold these things, what can I say, or what can I do ? I dare not presume even to set my foot upon the sacred threshold of a school like thine, lest I should defile it. But still, from afar I hold out to thee this my supplication.



A poor sinner, all filth and corruption, prostrate at the feet of the Mother of Purity, begs of her with all possible submission, to obtain for him tears enough to wash away all the stains of his past life, and grace enough to enable him to choose rather to die a thousand deaths, than ever to be stained again with sin. And can I fear that thou wilt not grant my request? Ah no! for it is too much according to thine own heart, to be rejected. And though thou shouldst not have any affection for me, yet thou canst not help loving that purity which I ask of thee, and thou thyself wilt be its guardian, as thou hast been already its model. Fix thine eyes of mercy upon this unhappy sinner, and turn them not away, until, changing me from what I am, thou dost grant that I may follow thee now in this life, and accompany thee, after death, to glory in the life to come. So that, if I cannot there above take part in that sublime canticle of virgins, which it belongs to thee to intone to thy eternal praise, I may be at least so blessed as to hear it. Amen.

## WEDNESDAY.

## MARY INVOKED AS OUR ADVOCATE.

O Mother of holy love! O Life, O Sweetness, O our Hope! It was not then enough for my Jesus, to make Himself my Advocate with His Eternal Father, unless He also made thee my advocate with Himself. Oh! how much must He long for my salvation, since after having secured it by so many means, and at so dear a rate, He

still wishes that thy prayers should concur with His own merits;—those prayers to which He has given such power, that they are respected and obeyed as laws. If it be so, behold! that I may carry out this merciful design of my dear Lord, I come to thy feet, as to a sanctuary of refuge, and there prostrate, whilst I acknowledge myself to be the most unworthy of all creatures, I do assure thee that I wholly confide in thy assistance. And so firm is my hope, that if my salvation were placed entirely in my own hands, I would immediately give it over into thine, so much more do I trust in thee, than in myself. It is true, that by my sins, I stop up the channel of those graces, which thou art daily procuring for me from Heaven, by thy prayers. But yet, I hope that thou wilt remove this hindrance, which I place in the way of my own salvation, and that thou wilt obtain for me, that I may always correspond to thy prayers in my behalf by a holy life, nor ever lose their effect by an evil one. Never was it yet known that a cause, which thou hadst taken in hand, was lost; and shall I fear lest mine should be the first? No! if thou be mindful of me, my loving protectress, I am content that all the world besides should forget me. Only turn thine eyes upon me, and if, at the sight of so much misery in me, thy mercy is not moved to compassion, I am willing to be abandoned by thee. Say to Almighty God that I am one of thine, and I am prepared to perish, if that be not enough to save me. This hope gives me courage. With this I will live, and with this I am resolved to die. *Unica spes mea Jesus, et*

*post Jesum Virgo Maria.* My only hope is Jesus, and next to Jesus, the ever-blessed Mary. Amen.

## THURSDAY.

## MARY INVOKED AS OUR BENEFACTRESS.

The most just punishment, that can be inflicted upon a person who is ungrateful for favours received, is to deprive him of them again. This is only what I deserve at thy hands, O great Mother of God, since I have received so many singular benefits from thee, and have been so careless in acknowledging them. I deserve that thou shouldst turn another way those merciful eyes, with which thou hast so often looked in pity on my afflictions, and hast come so lovingly to my assistance. I own, alas! that I deserve it. But yet, O Holy Virgin, remember how high is that esteem which I have formed of thy goodness. It gives me hope that thou wilt not suffer thyself to be conquered by the malice of my heart, but wilt rather do so much honour to thyself, and to thine own mercy, as to act, not according to my demerits, but according to the inclination of thine own bountiful heart. And can I be deceived in this pious hope? Never let it be said, O great Mother of Mercy! Come therefore Mother of holy love, treasury of Divine graces, and refuge of sinners! Come to my aid, and never tire of bearing with me. I cast myself before thee, as the poorest of all creatures, one who stands in utmost need of thy help. Hear therefore the voice of him that calls upon

thee. Open the bosom of thy mercy to a miserable wretch, lend thy helping hand to one, who having fallen implores thy assistance to rise again. Remember that, as thou art the Mother of my Saviour, so thou art also the mother of my salvation ; and therefore, as many titles as are wanting in me to claim thy assistance, so many thou wilt find superabounding in thyself to oblige thee to come to my aid. Meanwhile I faithfully promise thee that if, by thy favour, even I am chosen as one of the predestined, I will never more be ungrateful to thee, but I will recompense all my past ingratitude with eternal praises, and I will join in the choirs of all the blessed in Heaven, to sing those mercies of the Almighty, which He has so liberally bestowed upon me, through thy bountiful hands. Amen.

## FRIDAY.

## MARY INVOKED AS OUR DELIVERER.

What would become of me now, O sovereign Lady, if thou wast not so full of compassion ! How couldst thou so long bear with the obstinate temper of my heart, which is softened neither by the good which thou hast done to it, nor by the evils from which thou hast delivered it ? How often already have I stood on the very edge of the precipice of hell, and thou, O Queen of Mercy, whilst the devils were waiting with open arms in the bottom of that gulf to receive my soul already falling, whilst my own sins were driving me down and hastening my de-

struction, whilst the Divine Justice was about to pronounce the dreadful sentence against me, thou, O most merciful Virgin, even without being called upon, camest in haste to bring me aid in my greatest danger; and by showing to the Eternal Father the wounds of thy Son, and to thy Son thy own most sacred breasts, thou didst obtain salvation for me, when I was upon the very point of perdition. Hadst thou delayed but one moment to help me, where had I, unhappy creature, now been? I should have been lost for all eternity. And shall not all this be sufficient to soften my obdurate heart? Shall it not move me to consecrate the remainder of my days to the honour and service of so merciful a Deliverer, as thou hast been to me? This is my fixed resolution, from this moment I yield myself as conquered; and thou, Holy Virgin, shalt have all the glory of subduing a heart so rebellious as mine. I only beg of thee to continue to be my constant deliverer from all future evils. Free me from another hell, worse than that from which thou hast already preserved me, I mean the hell of sin. Save me from myself, who have so often been the worst of all devils to my own soul. Deliver me from this miserable course of life, which I have hitherto led, ungrateful to that bountiful God, who, through thy means, has so mercifully delivered me from all my evils. Amen.

## SATURDAY.

## MARY INVOKED AS OUR COMFORTER.

What wonderful harmony is this which I find between the height of thy dignity and the bounty of thy heart, O Mother of all Mercy ! If I lift up mine eyes to behold the sublime throne of glory to which thou hast been assumed, my thoughts are confused, my very soul trembles, and I am lost in the contemplation of such exalted majesty. Thou, most tender Virgin, by incomparable excellence the holiest of all pure creatures, less only than God Himself, the fairest work that ever proceeded from His Divine Hands, thou dost form in Heaven a peculiar order by thyself alone ; and by that close tie of relationship, whereby thou art the Mother of Jesus, thou art raised to a degree almost Divine. And yet, at this long distance from us, in the midst of so much greatness, not only thou dost not forget us in our afflictions here below, but rather thy power is to thee all the dearer, because thou art so much the better able to comfort us in our miseries. Other friends abandon me in my greatest calamities, but thou lookest upon me with more tender compassion, when I am the most afflicted, and the greater my miseries, the readier art thou to relieve them. When we call upon thee, thou comest immediately to our comfort ; nay, how often, even without being invoked, dost thou anticipate our prayers, hastening to allay the storms which rise within our breasts, and, in the midst of our very shipwreck, in the height of our despair, how often

art thou a secure haven of peace and tranquillity? Blessed for ever be that adorable Hand of God which has made thee so powerful, and at the same time so full of compassion, and has joined, in thee, the tender heart of the best of mothers with the awful majesty of the greatest of queens. Mayest thou also for ever enjoy the kingdom over which thou reignest, seated on thy glorious throne, which becomes thee so well. Meanwhile, from this vale of misery, ravished by the incomparable beauties of thy soul, I do as heartily rejoice at thy greatness, as though it were my own. And I here solemnly declare, that, rather than let thee lose the smallest ray of that immense glory which surrounds thee in Heaven, I would lay down a thousand lives, were they only mine. But thou, glorious Virgin, who amongst so many high titles dost not disdain that of being my comforter, encourage me daily, more and more, to bear up against all the troubles and afflictions which assail me. And especially be present to assist me in the most dangerous assault of all, at the hour of death, taking it for no small part of thy glory, to have found in me a misery, the best proportioned of any to the greatness of thy mercy. Amen.

## CHAPTER III.

THE FOURTH MEANS TO OBTAIN TRUE DEVOTION TO  
THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS TO OBSERVE SOME  
SPECIAL PRACTICES IN HER HONOUR.

The last means which I shall propose to you, for obtaining a genuine spirit of devotion towards the Blessed Virgin, is to perform some of those exterior acts of piety towards her, which, on account of their connection with the interior devotion of the heart, and because they are the most proper food to nourish it, are known by the same name of devotions. And therefore some Doctors, when they define devotion in general, expressly call it *a love of all observances*,<sup>1</sup> or zeal in doing all that we can for the service of the person, whom we intend to honour. Since, therefore, they are so necessary for our purpose, I have thought it well to suggest twelve different exercises of this nature, in honour of the Immaculate Virgin, which will form a crown for that glorious Queen of Heaven, perhaps not less honourable nor less acceptable to her, than the twelve stars of the crown she wears in Heaven. And to encourage you the more to the practice of these pious exercises, let me give you a short and simple me-

1 Amor obsequiorum. Alvarez 3. p. 1. 2.



thod, pointing out, as we go along, the examples which many holy and eminent men have left us : for now I must suppose that I am writing for beginners in this pious school of love and devotion towards the Blessed Virgin, who are willing to learn and imitate in others, what they are not so able to originate for themselves.

### FIRST PRACTICE.

#### TO CHOOSE THE BLESSED VIRGIN FOR OUR MOTHER.

The first duty, which you owe the great Mother of God, is to choose her for your own mother. It is but fitting that this should take the first place, since Christ Himself was not only the first to instruct us in this duty, from the chair of the Cross, but, that He might imprint it deeper in our minds, as a matter of the greatest moment, He willed that this should be the last of His counsels to us, saying : *Behold thy mother.* As though He then died content, when He left His Blessed Mother heiress of His love for us, while He left us the heirs of that love, which He bore towards His Blessed Mother. It will also be well that you should begin this practice upon some solemn festival of our Blessed Lady, and that you should prepare for it by a devout Novena in her honour. Afterwards you should renew, each year, the remembrance of the choice you have made, and on the same day reverently ask pardon of so good a mother, for all your past disobediences towards her, promising that, for the future, you will endeavour to make compensation

by acts of fidelity and fervour. At the same time you should offer to her, as a compensation for what has been wanting in your duty, that singular obedience which she received from her Divine Son, when He made Himself subject to her upon earth. And this is a devotion which Christ taught with His own mouth to His beloved St. Gertrude. But you should, moreover, fulfil the duty of all affectionate children to their parents, by asking the Holy Virgin, every night and every morning in the year, for her maternal blessing, as St. Stanislaus used to do, — a Saint in whom this devotion was especially remarkable. And these words of St. Ignatius the Martyr might serve as a short formula: *True Mother of my Saviour, adopted Mother of sinners, receive me within the bosom of thy maternal affection.*<sup>1</sup>

## SECOND PRACTICE.

### TO REVERENCE HER IN HER PICTURES AND IMAGES.

The greatest consolation, which the devil had for the loss he sustained in the destruction of idolatry, was to rob holy images and pictures, especially those of Christ and His Holy Mother, of the honour due to them. Against these he has turned all his fury, like a tigress enraged at the loss of her young ones; he has cursed them by the tongues of so many heretics, he has torn them to pieces by their hands, he has assailed them by

<sup>1</sup> Mater vera Salvatoris, Mater adoptata peccatoris, in gremio maternæ tuæ pietatis claude me. Pleb. l. 11, p. 2, art. 3.

the pens of so many arch-heretics, and endeavoured to destroy them by the persecutions of five powerful emperors. But in spite of all his rage and malice, the more hateful they are to him, the more they will always be honoured and esteemed by the devout clients of Mary. St. Hedwiges, Duchess of Poland, so highly valued one of these pictures of the Blessed Virgin, which she wore in a ring, that, even after her death, it could never be taken from her finger. And Louis, surnamed the Pious, was never without such a picture hung round his neck. In battles it was his buckler, in sports and diversions his true enjoyment, and often, while his courtiers were breathless in pursuit of the game, would he turn aside into the woods, and, casting himself on his knees before that image, instead of pursuing the prey, would offer himself as a voluntary prey to the Holy Virgin, whose delight it is to hunt after the souls of men. It were well that every one should have a picture or an image of our Blessed Lady in his room, that as often as he enters or leaves it, he may kiss her feet with reverence and devotion, renewing, at the same time, his promises of fidelity in her service, according to the admirable custom of her faithful servants, the Carthusian monks, so greatly beloved and favoured by her.

## THIRD PRACTICE.

## TO VISIT HER CHURCHES DEVOUTLY.

Although it is our duty to worship Almighty God in all places, yet churches, where He gives more sensible tokens of His Divine presence, are particularly designed for this purpose. In the same manner, though it be very fitting to honour the Holy Virgin everywhere, even in the images of her which we keep in our houses; yet it is certainly much better to honour her in images, which are exposed in our churches for public veneration, and which she herself has chosen to be the immediate instruments, for distributing among the faithful her greatest favours. To these churches, as to so many cities of refuge for sinners, the devout clients of Mary ought to make their pilgrimages, if at a distance, and their daily visits if they are nearer home. St. Henry, a prince whom God raised up to show, by his example, that it was not impossible for majesty and piety to sit upon the same throne, was in the habit, on entering a city, of directing his steps to that church, which was the most especially dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. There are many who never return to their homes, without visiting some church of our Lady; and this pious practice was invariably observed by Thomas Sanchez, a learned divine and writer of his time. But when your occupations will not admit of your leaving home, it will be sufficient to follow the example of St. Stanislaus, who, when he could not go out, used to fall upon his knees in his room, turning his

face in the direction of some church of our Lady, and upon the wings of love would send his heart thither, to carry his dutiful affections to the great Mother of God.

#### FOURTH PRACTICE.

TO RECITE DAILY HER OFFICE AND ROSARY.

The illustrious Religious Orders of the Carthusians and Dominicans are living monuments of Mary's great liberality and beneficence towards all her devout clients, and both have taught us excellent methods of praising her. The Carthusians, being a very austere Order, were brought, soon after their first establishment, into such difficulties, for want of novices of resolution and courage enough to profess, under that holy habit, a life of such severity in its solitude, its silence and in its whole discipline, that the Order was in danger of dying out, almost before it had been well established. In their distress they could think of no surer means of increasing their numbers, than by having recourse to the Blessed Virgin. They therefore bound themselves, by a public vow, to recite her Office every day; and thus they have hitherto secured such a regular succession from age to age, that down to the present time their rule, though so severe, has been inviolably observed throughout all Christendom, in spite of time itself, which, though it overthrows the greatest potentates of the earth, with their states and kingdoms, yet can never vanquish those who have abandoned themselves to the protection of Mary.

The Order of the Dominicans was instituted in the midst of perhaps the most troubled times, which the Church has ever witnessed. The heavenly industry of these evangelical labourers soon changed the whole face of Europe into a garden of delights, from being a wilderness of horror and confusion through the ravages of impiety and heresy. And how did they effect this, but by ingrafting into the savage hearts of men the holy devotion of the Rosary? It is recounted, in the annals of that learned Order, that St. Dominic, being extremely afflicted at the little harvest, which his labours in the diocese of Toulouse had brought him, was making his humble complaint one day before an altar of his protectress, the most Blessed Virgin, when he received this answer from her: Dominic, thou art cultivating a soil, which will always remain barren, as long as the rain does not fall upon it. And, at the same time, he was given to understand, that this fertilising rain was to be the devotion of the holy Rosary, with the meditation upon those holy mysteries which it includes. No faithful servant of Mary can possibly require stronger motives, to urge him to the practice of the devotions of her Office and Rosary, since he has two such holy Religious Orders for his guides, and the whole Catholic world for his companions.

## FIFTH PRACTICE.

## TO MAKE A NOVENA BEFORE HER PRINCIPAL FEASTS.

As a tender nurse desires nothing more, than to give nourishment to the infant entrusted to her care ; so the Blessed Virgin, who is a mother far more affectionate than any nurse could be, is never more happy, than when she is communicating her favours to us. For this reason, she is always whispering to the hearts of her clients : *Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.*<sup>1</sup> The advice, therefore, which I have to give you now, is to prepare for celebrating her greater festivals, by a previous devotion of nine days, in order to obtain the proper dispositions for receiving those graces and blessings, which she is always ready to bestow, and never more liberally than upon those days, that are especially consecrated to her. Invoke her nine times on each day of the Novena, inviting one of the nine Choirs of Angels to present your humble addresses to her. Endeavour also to make such arrangements as may leave you more at leisure during this time, to practise those other means, which I propose, for obtaining true devotion to our Blessed Mother. It will be of great utility also, to examine carefully, at the same time, how your accounts stand with the Blessed Virgin, towards whom you are in the position of a debtor, and to see how far you have corresponded with her favours. This will incite you to discharge some part, how-

1 Dilata os tuum, et implebo illud. Ps. 80. 11.

ever small, of that great debt, which you can never hope entirely to repay.

St. Gertrude, upon the feast of the Assumption, saw under our Blessed Lady's royal mantle a choir of young and beautiful virgins, attended by Angels, and tenderly caressed by the Queen of Heaven herself. She was told that this happy company was composed of the souls of those, who, for some days, had been preparing themselves with more than ordinary devotion, to celebrate that great Festival, and that in future, as the reward of their fervour, they should be looked upon by the Blessed Virgin with more benignant eyes, and be protected with greater affection by their Guardian Angels.

## SIXTH PRACTICE.

TO PAY SPECIAL HONOUR TO THOSE SAINTS WHO  
WERE MORE NEARLY RELATED OR MORE  
PARTICULARLY DEVOTED TO HER.

The first law of true friendship is conformity of will, and by it we are bound to love, not only our friend himself, but those also who are his friends. The same law equally obliges all the clients of our Blessed Lady to honour, in a more special manner, those Saints who, for some reason, may be supposed to be more dear to her than others. We may name in particular St. Joseph her beloved Spouse; St. Joachim and St. Anne, her happy parents; St. John the Evangelist, the first of her adopted children; St. John the Baptist, the first sanctified



by her means ; St. Bernard, who was permitted to draw milk from her virginal breasts ; St. Herman, who was exalted to the honour of her espousals ; St. John Damascene, the defender of her images ; and St. Ildefonsus, the asserter of her virginity. To these we may add all founders of Religious Communities, who have dedicated their Orders to her service, and many others whose names we have not mentioned. That this practice is highly pleasing to her cannot be doubted, since she herself has often been pleased to suggest it.

In the year 1648, the Blessed Virgin appeared in Naples to a certain Moorish slave, with a countenance so full of sweetness and majesty, that she immediately gained his heart, although, until that time, he had been most obstinate in refusing to embrace the faith of Christ. Having thus converted him, she commanded him to take, at the sacred font of Baptism, the name of Joseph, in memory of her dear Spouse.<sup>1</sup> On another occasion, to a nobleman of Rheims she recommended devotion to St. Anne, her beloved mother, and taught him a particular form of salutation, which at this day may be read, engraved upon an ancient monument of marble, in one of the churches of that famous city.<sup>2</sup> If in any way we can be sure of giving pleasure to the Blessed Virgin, it must, without doubt, be in thus following the very path, which she herself has marked out for us.

1 Chrysog. in mundo Mar. p. 2.

2 Barry in Parad.

## SEVENTH PRACTICE.

TO HAVE MASS SAID OR TO HEAR IT  
IN HER HONOUR.

. The intention which our Saviour Jesus Christ had, when He left to His Church the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass, was especially to free mankind from the miserable necessity of living in constant ingratitude to our heavenly Father. For the Eternal Father having made us a gift of infinite value, in the person of His Only-begotten Son, where could our poverty have found a return worthy of so great a gift, if the Divine Son Himself had not, out of compassion to our weakness, supplied our insufficiency by offering Himself as a Sacrifice of thanksgiving upon our altars? The Angelic Hierarchies might indeed have lent us their hearts and their tongues, to perform that duty; but what heart, or what tongue could express the greatness of an infinite favour? <sup>1</sup> What proportion could there be between a limited thanksgiving, such as that would be, and a gift of infinite value? No alternative was left than for the Giver to become Himself the Sacrifice of thanksgiving, if He desired to receive an acknowledgement equal to the benefit bestowed.

Behold here a large field opened out to your zeal for the honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary. If you are not in a condition to say Mass yourself, have as many Masses celebrated as you can, with the intention of thanking

1 Quid dignum poterat esse beneficiis Ejus

Almighty God for the immense treasures of grace, of sanctity, and of glory, which He has been pleased to confer upon the incomparable soul of that holy first-born of all pure creatures, the glorious Virgin Mary. O how agreeable an offering will this be to the Immaculate Virgin! The Saints and Angels of Heaven could not make her a more noble present. However, if your means will not allow you to cause Masses to be said, endeavour to compensate by hearing and assisting at them. Sebastian, King of Portugal, used upon all Saturdays to hear one Mass, and serve at another in honour of the Blessed Virgin. He looked upon the sacred ministry as an honour far above the dignity of a temporal king, since it would be justly esteemed a very great one, even by the highest Seraphim in Heaven. Imitate this great and pious King, and if you wish for a particular form of offering up the Holy Mass for this intention, you can make use of the following prayer.

O Father of sovereign majesty! Thou Ocean of all good! Ocean immense and inexhaustible! who, from the treasures of Thy own infinite perfections, hast poured into the soul of the most holy and glorious Virgin such ineffable riches of grace, and such superabundance of all Divine gifts; I prostrate myself before Thee, and humbled in the deep abyss of my own nothingness, with all the gratitude I am able, I render Thee as heartfelt thanks for all the mercies, with which Thou hast so bountifully enriched her, as if they had been given to myself. And because the acknowledgement of a creature, so vile as I

am, is of no value in Thy sight, I offer to Thee, in thanksgiving, this adorable Victim of infinite worth which is now being sacrificed upon the altar, drawing from His Divine Heart those sentiments of gratitude, which alone can make my acknowledgement worthy of Thy acceptance. Amen.

### EIGHTH PRACTICE.

TO FAST OR PRACTISE SOME OTHER WORKS OF PENANCE  
ON THE VIGILS OF HER FEASTS.

When a child only asks to be taken up into its mother's arms, she does not always comply with his desire ; but if he begs it crying, she takes him immediately, and caressing him, wipes away his tears. How much more efficacious would our prayers be, if to their incense we added the myrrh of mortification and voluntary penance. It is impossible that, at such pressing entreaties, the tender Mother of Mercy should not be moved to take compassion on us.

St. Elizabeth, Queen of Portugal, upon all Saturdays and vigils of the solemn feasts of our Lady, used to remind her feeble and attenuated body of the service it owed to the Blessed Virgin, by allowing it on those days no other food than a little bread and water ; and thus her prayers never failed to obtain the fulfilment of whatever she desired. If you cannot perform so much as this holy Queen, you may at least deny yourself some gratification, on the day before those great solemnities, and

in this manner endeavour to imitate even the Blessed Virgin herself, who, from her infancy, practised such abstinence, that, as Nicephorus remarks, she would never even take nourishment from the breast of her mother, above once in a week, as though, by these early beginnings of rigorous abstinence, she was preparing a paradise of delights within her virginal body, for the Son of God to dwell in.

What has here been said of fasting may be understood, in proportion, of all other corporal austerities, which are generally comprised under the name of fasts by the Saints and spiritual writers.

### NINTH PRACTICE.

#### TO GIVE ALMS IN HER NAME.

The hook never takes the fish, until it has suffered itself to be caught. From this we may learn another reason why our prayers to the Blessed Virgin are often without fruit. Because our hands are stretched out to receive, but are closed against giving. Listen to the advice of the Divine Wisdom: *Let not thy hand be stretched out to receive, and shut when thou shouldst give.*<sup>1</sup>

Alexander Hales, who was the first master in Divinity of his time, had made a resolution never to refuse to grant anything, that was asked him for the Blessed Virgin's sake. To keep this resolution he put on the rough

<sup>1</sup> Non sit porrecta manus tua ad accipiendum, et ad dandum collecta. Eccl. iv. 36.

habit of St. Francis, at the request of a simple lay-brother of that austere Order, who demanded it of him in her name. And thus he gave himself to Mary with all that he possessed, to the confusion of those who often refuse her a trifling alms, which she asks by the mouth of some poor beggar. But perhaps you are of that happy number, who by voluntary poverty have already purchased a right to the kingdom of Heaven. If so let me suggest to you another way of bestowing your charities, still more acceptable to Mary than the former, and more beneficial to yourself. Offer all the satisfaction of your good works in behalf of those suffering souls in Purgatory, who are most in the Blessed Virgin's favour. And oh! how much will you be the gainer by this liberality to Mary, in the person of her favourites! The price, which you lay down at present for the liberation of those future princes of the heavenly court, will be put out at very high interest, in the hands of the Queen of Heaven, who esteems it as her greatest riches, to be able to enrich others: *I dwell in the highest places, that I may enrich them that love me, and may fill their treasures.* <sup>1</sup>

### TENTH PRACTICE.

TO RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION UPON HER SOLEMN FEASTS.

It is a custom that obtains in all nations, to solemnise great festivals with banquets. If this be true, he cer-

<sup>1</sup> Ego in altissimis habito. Eccl. xxiv. 7. Ut ditem diligentes me, et thesauros eorum repleam. Prov. viii. 21.

tainly is not of the number of those who are affectionate to Mary, who does not honour her festivals with that heavenly banquet, which the Immaculate Lamb of God has prepared for us in His own Flesh upon our altars. We cannot pay greater honour to Mary, than to honour her in the person of her Son Jesus. And indeed how can any one be said to pay respect to that virginal soil, which, without the aid of human industry, and by the sole influence of Heaven, gave us such Divine fruit, if he refuse to eat of that very fruit so liberally offered, as if it were distasteful to him? St. Charles Borromeo had so convinced the people of his time of the truth of what I have said, that in Milan the feasts of our Lady could be scarcely distinguished from Easter-day, so great was the concourse of people to receive the Most Holy Communion.

## ELEVENTH PRACTICE.

### TO IMITATE HER VIRTUES.

Where there is no resemblance there can be but little friendship, for mutual love either presupposes or produces a likeness between the persons that love each other. <sup>1</sup> Hence the only way to deserve the Blessed Virgin's love is to imitate her virtues, and thus to produce a perfect union with her in heart and in action. *Daughter*, said the Blessed Virgin to her beloved St. Bridget, *if thou*

<sup>1</sup> Amor aut pares invenit aut facit.

*wilt gain my affections love my Son Jesus.*<sup>1</sup> So that the most acceptable honour that we can pay to the Holy Virgin, and one which will please her more than any yet mentioned, is that we should never lose an occasion of imitating her as perfectly as we can, in the exercise of all those virtues, which she herself possessed in so eminent a degree.

Margaret of Austria, daughter of Maximilian II., who had a soul greater than that world which she abandoned in the flower of her age, being one day especially enlightened, by a ray of Divine light, to understand how highly the precious pearl of virginity, so much praised in the Gospel, was to be valued above all other jewels, made a generous offering of it to Mary. This present was so pleasing to the Queen of virgins that, by the miraculous movement of one of her statues, she graciously signified how much she thanked her who had given it. At this visible testimony of the Blessed Virgin's acceptance, the young Princess, filled with astonishment, in an excess of joy and fervour gave herself a wound in the breast near her heart, and with the blood that came from it she wrote an absolute renunciation of herself, her riches, and her kingdom, into the hands of the Immaculate Mother of God. Her hand had been sought for in marriage by many princes, but being no less faithful in keeping her promise, than she had been liberal in making it, she retired into a monastery of discalced Carmelites in Spain, and there closed her days holily, under that

1 *Filia, si te mihi vis devotissime, ama Filium meum Jesum.*



religious habit, which is far more glorious to her now than the royal robes which she had renounced.<sup>1</sup>

He, who has not as yet sufficient virtue to make so great an offering, should begin with things of lesser moment, and accustom himself to mortification and self-denial in smaller matters, that he may thus inure himself to the practice of it, in what is more difficult. Just as the huntsman rears up his young hounds, by teaching them at first to bark at a bear's skin, that when they are grown up they may not be afraid to attack the bear himself.

## TWELFTH PRACTICE.

TO ABSTAIN FROM SOME SINFUL ACTION FOR HER SAKE.

*Amicus meus, inimicus inimici mei. He that is my friend is an enemy of my enemy.* This is an axiom so universally received, that it even makes a presumption in law. Hence that implacable enmity, which exists between the Immaculate Virgin and sin, binds all her clients to profess a singular hatred and aversion to that monster of hell. This is the last practice which I shall propose to you, but it is the first and chiefest in the intention of this little book; for, although we observed all the rest, without this we could never hope to gather in our hearts any true devotion to Mary.

The Philistines showed great respect to the Ark of God. They placed it in their temples, conducted it

<sup>1</sup> Joan. a Palma in ejus vita.

through their territories, and enriched it with many presents, yet it brought them no blessings. And why? Because in the presence of the Ark they were so foolish as to adore their own idol, which was its bitterest enemy. Let the true clients of the living Ark of God—the glorious Virgin, be fully convinced by this, that to bend one knee to her and the other to sin, is not the way to gain her favour; but on the contrary, that there is no other way to merit her protection, than by declaring open war against her greatest enemy, the monstrous idol of sin.

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But here, dear client of Mary, your guide must leave you. *This is the way: walk in it securely.*<sup>1</sup> Hasten on with rapid steps, and it will not be long ere you arrive at the goal to which you aspire, namely, a true devotion to the great and sovereign Queen of Heaven. I will stay no longer with you, although I could willingly entertain you at greater length upon so endearing a subject. But I must be brief, and accommodate myself to the inclination of most men, just as physicians have often to humour the taste of their patients, by distilling into one single remedy the virtue of many different herbs. Accept therefore a much greater desire of assisting you, than I can satisfy within the compass of these few pages.

And thou, O Virgin ever Immaculate! accept in this the humble offering of a servant, who has been so highly favoured by thee. If thou art a vast ocean of grace, receive into thy bosom this poor rivulet, in that same

<sup>1</sup> Hæc est via, ambulate in ea. Isa. xxx. 21.

goodness wherewith thou receivest those noble rivers, which pay to thee their tribute of far higher praise. This book indeed is but small ; but oh ! into what a volume would it swell, if I were to add to it the sum of all those mercies, which thou hast been pleased to shew to so wretched a sinner as I am ! Could I recount them all, I should be to thy devout clients as a living book, *written within and without*, written in my body, and written in my soul, with the indelible characters of thy countless favours. But since this is not permitted me, O sovereign Lady, it only remains that, along with the poor gift, thou accept also the giver, and use both the one and the other, as instruments to promote thy glory upon earth ; weak instruments I own, yet such as in thy hands, far more than a jaw-bone in the hands of Samson, will become weapons not only strong, but even victorious. For thy sake, I have made myself a guide to those pious souls, who seek shelter under the wings of thy maternal protection ; be thou likewise to me, I beseech thee, prostrate before the throne of thy greatness, a guide during the rest of my short pilgrimage in this mortal life ; and above all I earnestly pray that, at the hour of my death, thou wilt be present with me, that by thy help I may one day come to see thee,—my only hope after Jesus, to worship thee, to enjoy thee, and to sing thy praises for ever and ever. Amen.

LAUS DEO SEMPER.









