

long-protracted and painful rites were now necessary. In an instant flames of fire descended from heaven, consumed the sacrifice, with the wood, the stones, of which the altar was constructed, and licked up the water that flowed around it in the trench. Awed by a miracle so manifest, the people fell upon their faces amazed, confounded, terrified, and with a loud voice exclaimed, "The Lord He is God! The Lord He is God!"

The controversy being thus decided, the priests of Baal, who had artfully seduced the people into all the crimes and horrors of idolatry, were sentenced by Elias to be put to death. The law of God pronounced this punishment on such offenders; and Ahab, under present circumstances, did not attempt to shield them from their fate. "Elias brought them down to the torrent Cison, and killed them," and not one escaped.

This great change in the public feeling was followed speedily by the removal of the judgment with which the nation had been visited. "Elias said to Ahab; Go up, eat, and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain. Ahab went up to eat and drink, and Elias went up to the top of Carmel, . . . and he said to his servant: Go up, and look towards the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said: There is nothing. And again he said to him: Return seven times. And at the seventh time: Behold a little cloud arose out of the sea like a man's foot. . . . And behold the heavens grew dark, with clouds, and wind, and there fell a great rain. And Ahab getting up went away to Jezrahel: and the hand of the Lord was upon Elias, and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab, till he came to Jezrahel.

This little cloud, which the prophet saw rise from the sea, he knew also signified the glorious Immaculate Virgin Mary, who was to spring forth out of the infected and bitter sea of our corrupt nature, without any corruption; and like an auspicious cloud, being overshadowed by the virtue of the Most High, was to water this barren world with the heavenly rain of the expected Messias. There and then, as it is believed, by the express command of Almighty God, he instituted the Order of Mount Carmel, which was to be specially dedicated to the honor of this Sacred Virgin. Many holy Fathers, as SS. Athana-

sius, Jerome, Augustin, and others assert that Elias was the author of the monastic state.

A course of sin renders the mind so dark and obdurate, that good impressions, though made with difficulty, are soon easily effaced. This was now the case with Ahab, the unhappy and degraded king of Israel. On his return from Mount Carmel, he related to his impious wife, the contest of St. Elias with the priests of Baal; the victory of the Prophet and his subsequent infliction of the penalty of death on the transgressors of God's law. Exasperated at the great dishonor done to the idol Baal, and at the punishment endured by the promoters of his worship, the impious queen dispatched a messenger to Elias, in which, with solemn imprecations on herself, she vowed, that before that time to-morrow to inflict on him the evil he had brought upon her priests. Although a witness to the miracle which had attested their delusion and hypocrisy, and accessory by his non-resistance to the fate of these idolaters, yet Ahab did not control the infuriated Jezabel, when she thus denounced the Prophet of the Lord. Timid and selfish in his spirit, he had neither grace nor virtue to uphold the truth, nor courage in the hour of danger to defend his own associates in iniquity.

Knowing well the temper of this degraded woman, St. Elias judged it better to retire from the impending storm. Firm as he was, and zealous for God and his country, yet his spirit, under this renewed affliction, sunk into temporary discouragement. Quitting the land of Israel, he travelled towards the south of Canaan, under the dominion of the king of Juda; but there, thinking that the eye of merciless revenge would soon discover him, he thought it better not to remain. Not wishing to involve another in the danger with which he himself was threatened, he left his servant, and retired alone into the wilderness; where, weary and dejected, he availed himself of solitude to give expression to the grief, which, in a moment of despondency, appeared to weaken his spirit, and to relax the steadfast temper of his soul. A wish to die, apparently proceeding rather from impatience of the ills of life than from a view to the enjoyment of the blissful vision of the Deity, escaped the persecuted Prophet as he sat beneath a juniper tree, whose shade protected him from the oppressive heat of the mid-day sun. The best and most learned men are but imperfect judges of the wisdom of unerring Providence. This trial under which the great Prophet Elias sunk with more than usual depression, was in the end divinely over-ruled for more than common benefit, and was made the interesting means of introducing him to new proofs of eternal goodness, from which resulted a more intimate and hallowed fellowship with Almighty God.

TO BE CONTINUED.