

" Ah, my child ! "cried Rufinus, beside himself, " Ah, my child ! can the Eternal lower Himself thus to the level of His poor creature ? Can a worm of the earth receive his God without being annihilated by the weight of His Majesty, without being consumed by the flames of His splendor and of His glory ? "

Valeria replied :

" Divine love which saved us on the cross, placed itself in the person of JESUS, with His arms extended between God and man ; it lowered the Infinite down to the dust of humanity, and lifted the Son of earth up to the throne of God, up to His paternal heart. "

" And may I,"questioned Rufinus, " may I, after having so long served false gods and resisting grace, may I hope to be one day admitted to this heavenly banquet ? Oh, my child ! May I stretch out my hands to the Son of God, may my lips open to receive this Bread of Heaven ? May my heart countain Him ? I am not worthy ! But I may at least adore Him under the form of bread. I shall be able to see how you, pure souls, you become absorbed in Him and He in you. Now I understand, " continued the prefect, " that the power of the emperors struck in vain against Christianity, I understand why the martyrs went joyfully to meet death and how it is that they could gaze without growing pale on the instruments of torture, of which the sight alone made me shudder. "

Irene and Candidus had followed this conversation with ever increasing emotion ; initiated since long years into the astonishing mysteries which throw even the angels themselves into a state of stupor, they trembled with admiration and love in presence of Rufinus' rapturous transport, fathoming for the first time the marvels of divine tenderness.