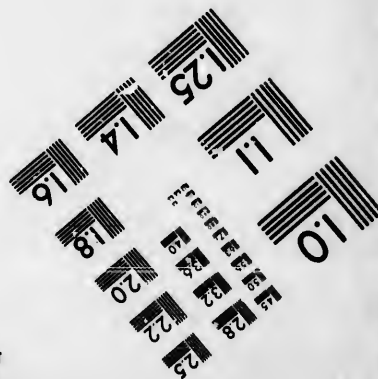
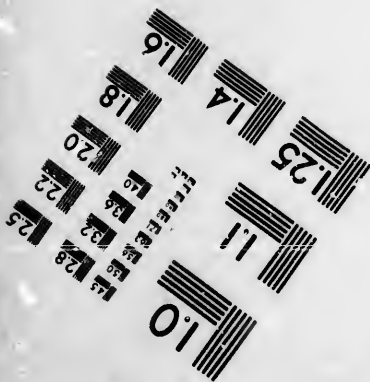
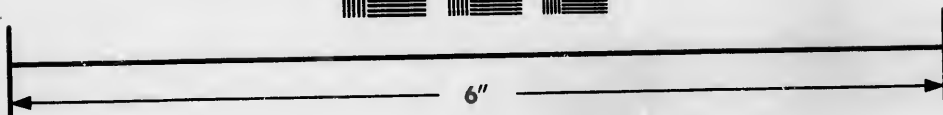
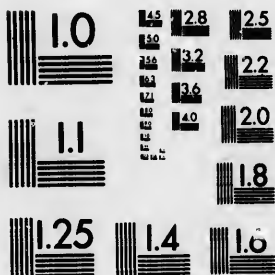


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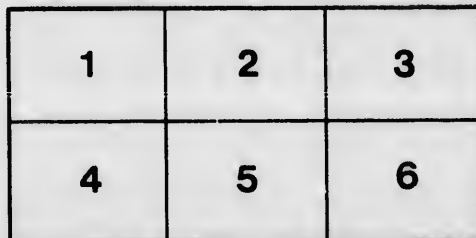
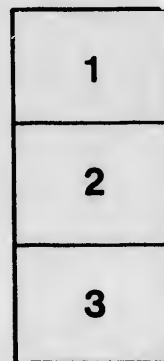
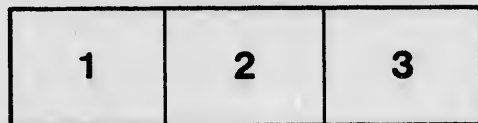
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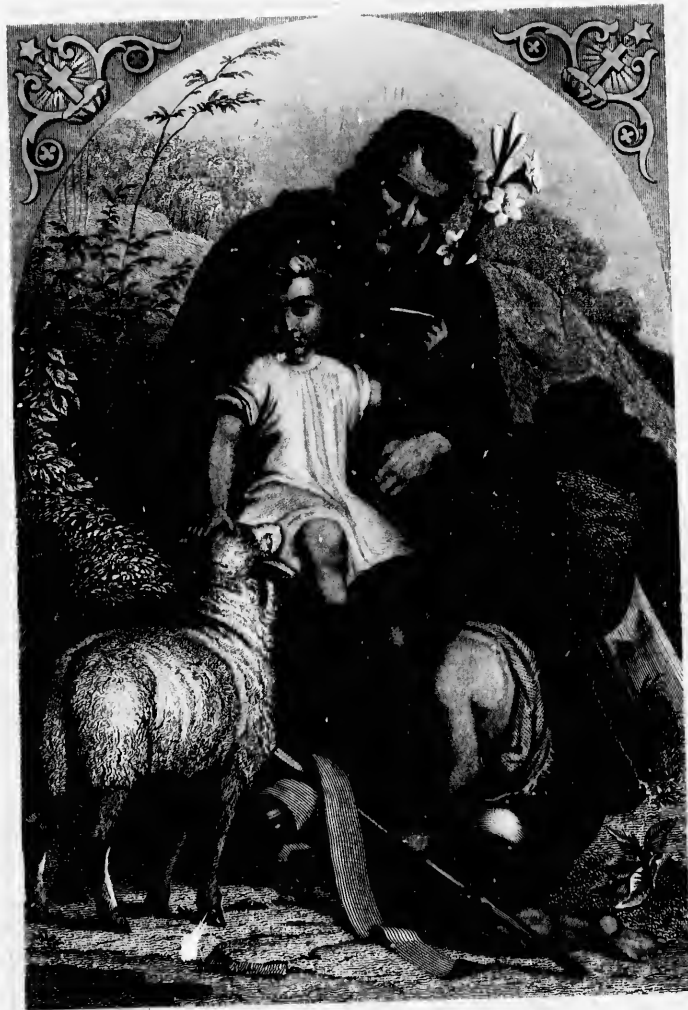
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THE FIRST SHALL BE LIKE THE LAST AND
THE LAST SHALL BE LIKE THE FIRST





THE

ADMIRABLE LIFE

OF THE GLORIOUS

PATRIARCH SAINT JOSEPH:

TO WHICH IS ADDED THE

LIVES OF ST. JOACHIM AND ST. ANNE.

TAKEN FROM

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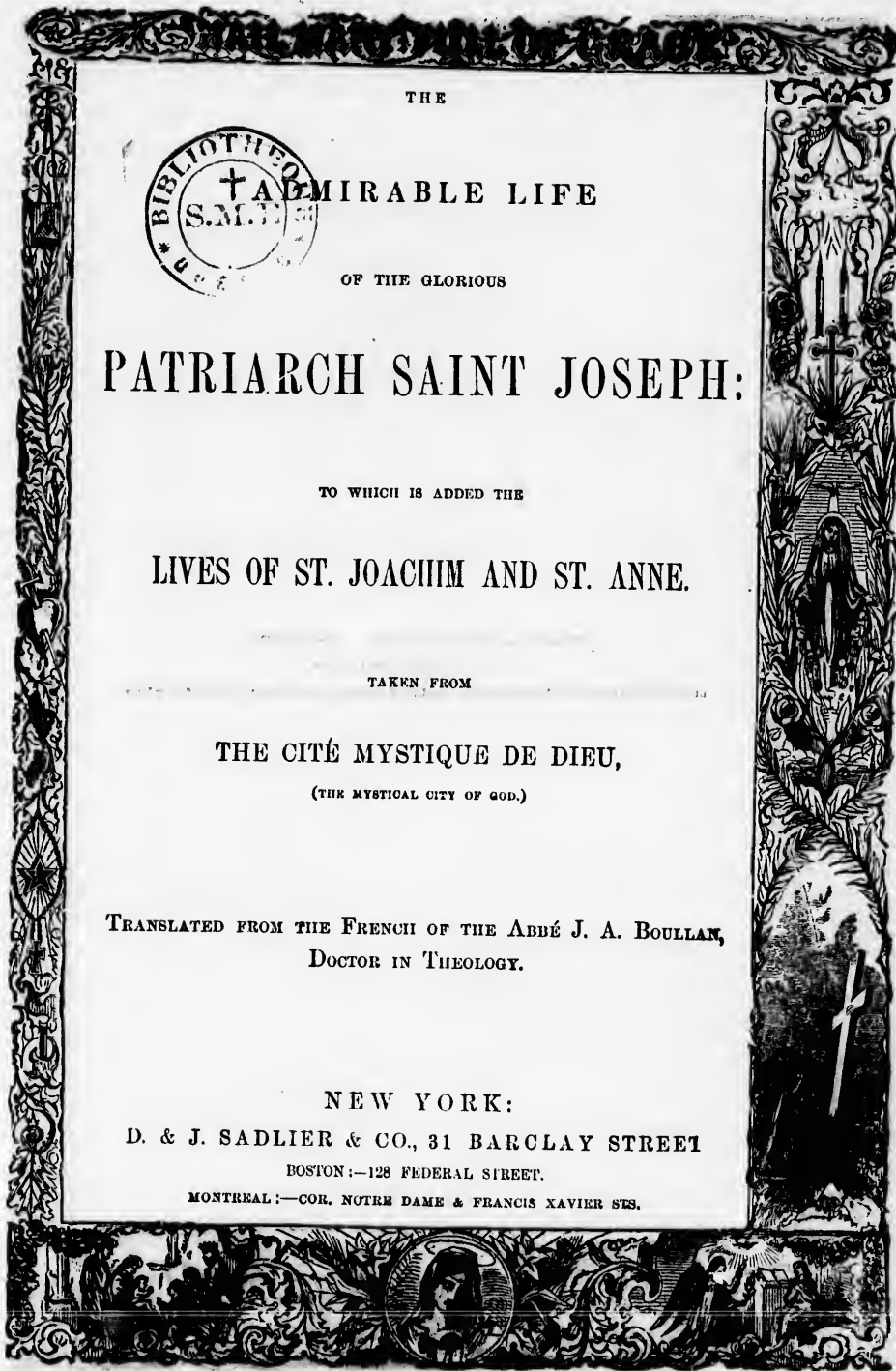
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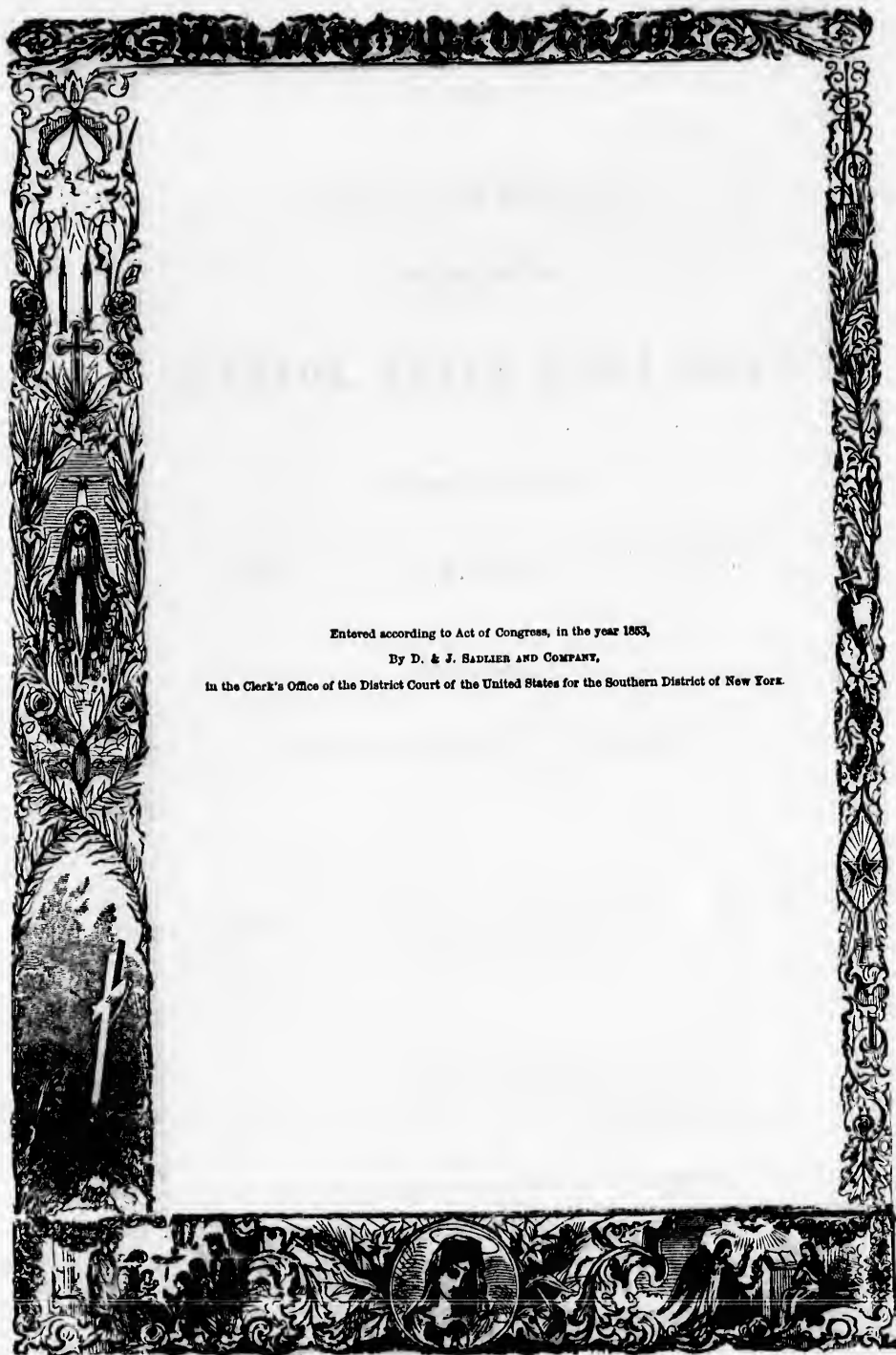
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APPROBATIONS

THE volume which we now offer to the public, under the title of "*The Admirable Life of the Glorious Patriarch St. Joseph*," is a faithful extract, without change, modification, or alteration, taken *verbatim et literatim* from the celebrated production, "*The Cité Mystique*,"* of Mary of Jesus of Agreda. Hence, all the approbations conferred on the latter work are applicable to this. We subjoin a sketch of these various approbations, of which we guarantee the authenticity, having copied them from the acts of the process for the beatification and canonization of the servant of God, Maria d'Agreda.

1. Approbation of the bishop of the place where this servant of God died in the odor of sanctity, and also of that where the work was published. Bishops (as every one knows) are the judges, in the first instance, of the doctrine of the books which are published in places under their jurisdiction.

2. Approbation of the inquisition of Spain, who examined it, word for word, and authorized its publication and diffusion.

3. Approbation of all the religious bodies appointed to examine this work. They have bestowed unbounded praises upon it, and recommend it as a fruit of the Holy Spirit of God.

4. Approbation of the most celebrated universities, who, after a minute examination, have declared that this book contains nothing contrary to faith or morals, and who have exalted it beyond measure, as the Sovereign Pontiff, Benedict XIV., attests in his decree of 1748. The University of Paris alone offers an exception, because, at that epoch, it was controlled by the influences of Jansenism.

5. Finally, the Roman Church, after having placed this work on the Index, August 4th, 1681, on account of the controversy which it excited,

* *The Mystical City of God.*

withdrew it on the 9th of November of the same year. This last decree is of such force, that in 1713, a bishop having prohibited the reading of it, the Holy Office declared this prohibition to be of no effect, and obliged the bishop to retract it, as being contrary to the decree of the 9th of November, 1681, of Innocent XI., which decree, said the Holy Congregation, has the force of an obligatory law throughout the Universal Church. *Qui habit aures, audiendi, audiat.*

Alexander VIII. authorized the reading of it *oraculo viva vocis*. Clement IX., in 1704, prohibited its being placed on the Index. And last of all, in 1729, under Pope Benedict XIII., of holy memory, the Sacred Congregation of Rites promulgated an ample and unanimous decree, which *allows this book to be read and retained without any further examination*. Hence, he who, by whatever rank, dignity, or honor he may be invested, presumes to forbid the reading of this work, which has been approved by the Holy See, will be obliged, if required, to make a public retraction.

Thus, pious reader, the cause is ended. Read the book, and study it without hesitation; for Rome, who cannot err, has spoken.

THE ABBÉ J. A. BOULLAN.



TO THE DIVINE HEART OF JESUS, AND TO
MARY IMMACULATE.

O JESUS! Son of the Eternal Father! Divine Redeemer of our souls, whom Thou hast redeemed by the effusion of Thy precious blood! Thou hast deigned, during Thy mortal life, to call by the sweet name of father, the glorious St. Joseph, and Thou hast chosen to be named by men the son of Joseph. Word of God! Master of eternal wisdom! to whom, unless it be to Thy Sacred Heart, can I more worthily make the offering of this little book, in honor of the incomparable Patriarch? Deign, I implore Thee, to bless it, and its author. All unworthy and miserable as I am, I beseech Thee that this life of Thine adopted father may bear fruits of grace to many souls—that it may become a blessing to the dwellings which receive it—that the sinner may be converted, and the just encouraged to become holy, by meditating upon it. O Sacred Heart of Jesus! vouchsafe to grant that grace, and these favors, in memory of Thy complaisance in the fidelity and love of Thy glorious servant, Saint Joseph!

Mother of Jesus! Immaculate Virgin! Spouse of St. Joseph, thou who hast deigned to communicate to us by means of thy beloved daughter, Mary of Agreda, all that forms the subject of this volume, disdain not, Queen of Mercy, to bless it. I place it in thy hands. Thou knowest, that, overwhelmed by the weight of my miseries, I have had recourse to thy glorious spouse, whom thou hast permitted me to call my father; and that in acknowledgment of his miraculous benefits, I have applied myself, by thy consent, to this work. May this *Life* serve as an instrument to augment the devotion to St. Joseph among the children of the



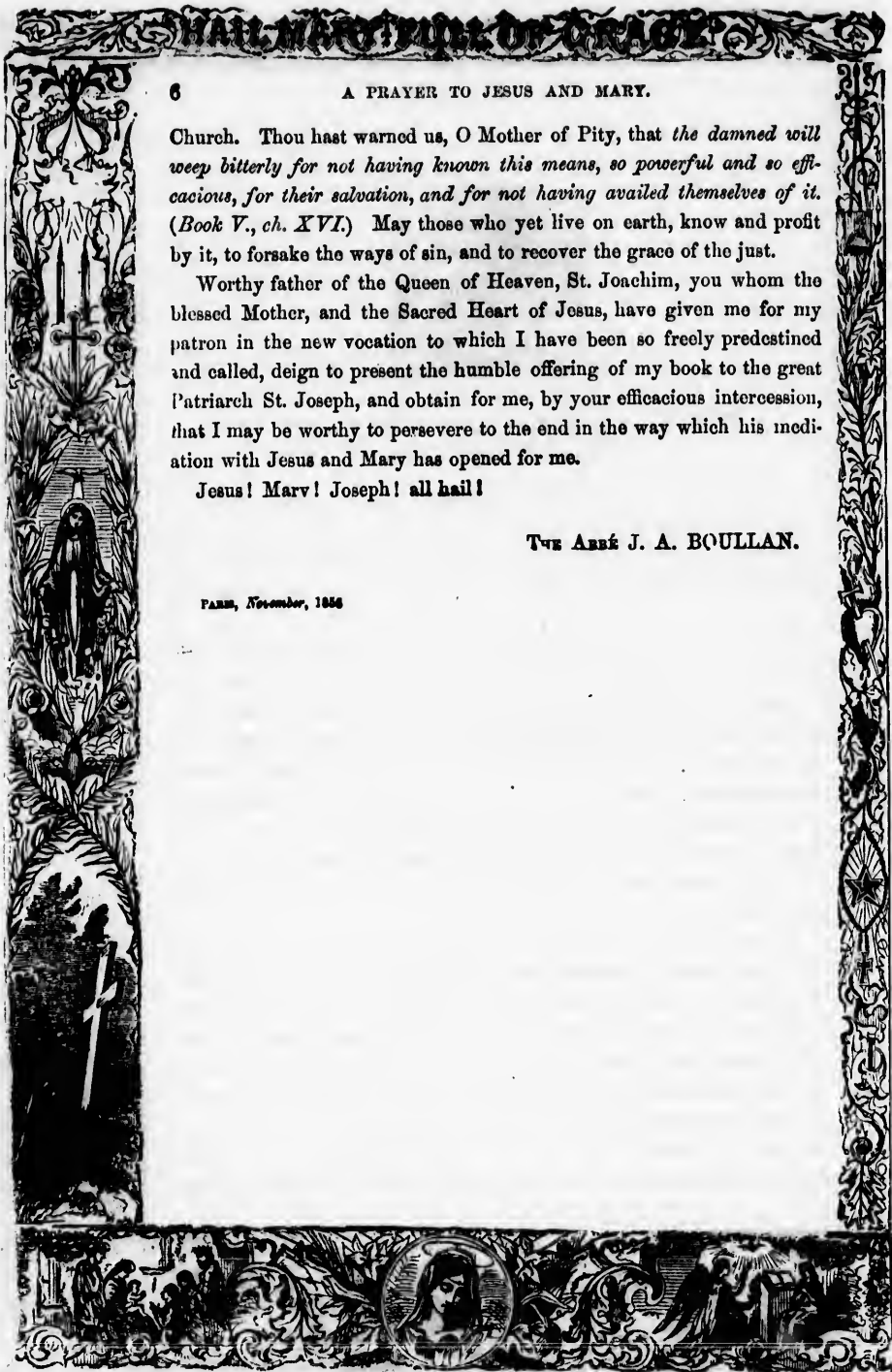
Church. Thou hast warned us, O Mother of Pity, that *the damned will weep bitterly for not having known this means, so powerful and so efficacious, for their salvation, and for not having availed themselves of it.* (Book V., ch. XVI.) May those who yet live on earth, know and profit by it, to forsake the ways of sin, and to recover the grace of the just.

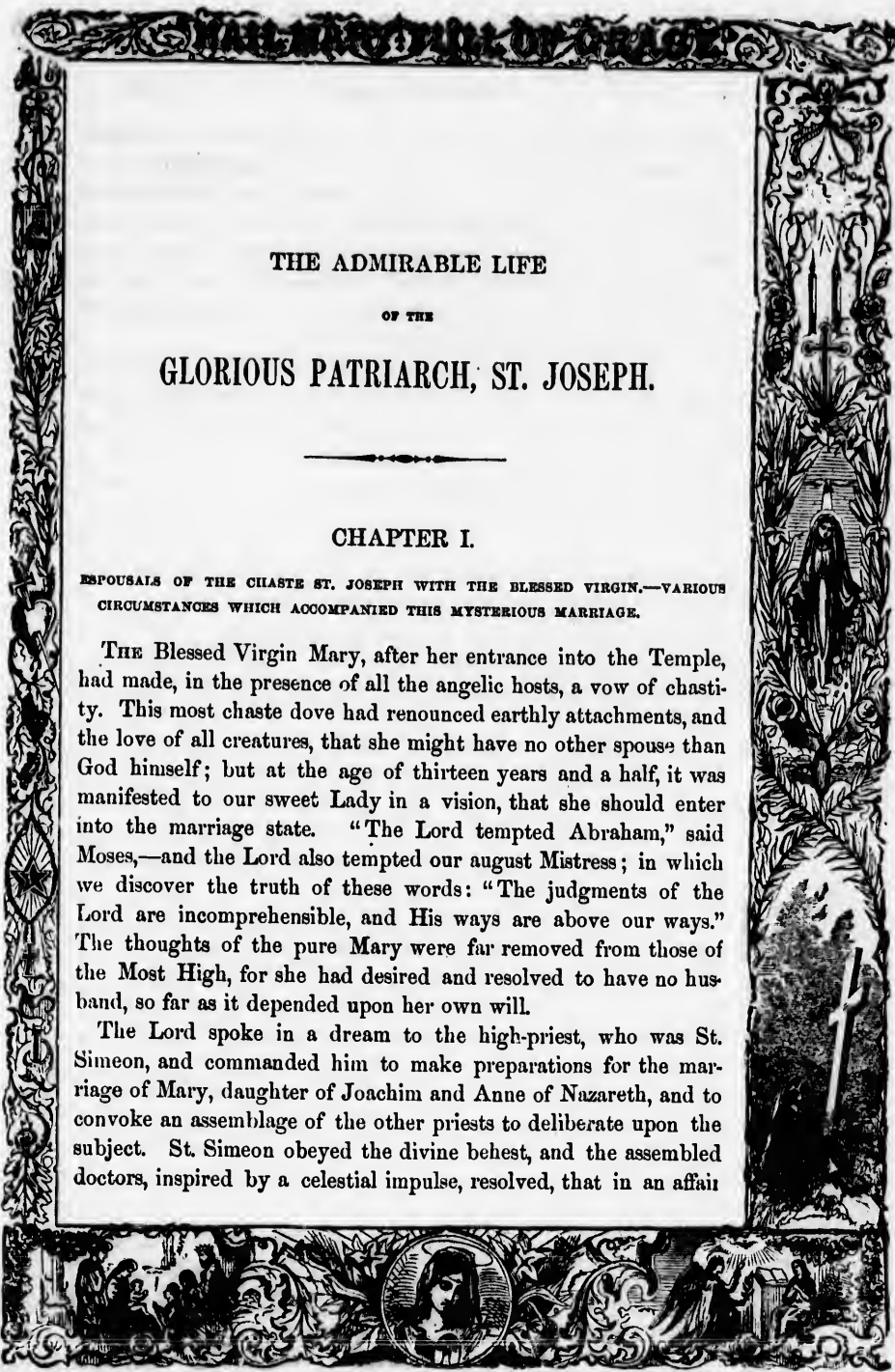
Worthy father of the Queen of Heaven, St. Joachim, you whom the blessed Mother, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, have given me for my patron in the new vocation to which I have been so freely predestined and called, deign to present the humble offering of my book to the great Patriarch St. Joseph, and obtain for me, by your efficacious intercession, that I may be worthy to persevere to the end in the way which his meditation with Jesus and Mary has opened for me.

Jesus! Mary! Joseph! all hail!

THE ABBÉ J. A. BOULLAN.

PARIS, November, 1856





THE ADMIRABLE LIFE
OF THE
GLORIOUS PATRIARCH, ST. JOSEPH.

CHAPTER I.

ESPOUSALS OF THE CHASTE ST. JOSEPH WITH THE BLESSED VIRGIN.—VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH ACCOMPANIED THIS MYSTERIOUS MARRIAGE.

THE Blessed Virgin Mary, after her entrance into the Temple, had made, in the presence of all the angelic hosts, a vow of chastity. This most chaste dove had renounced earthly attachments, and the love of all creatures, that she might have no other spouse than God himself; but at the age of thirteen years and a half, it was manifested to our sweet Lady in a vision, that she should enter into the marriage state. "The Lord tempted Abraham," said Moses,—and the Lord also tempted our august Mistress; in which we discover the truth of these words: "The judgments of the Lord are incomprehensible, and His ways are above our ways." The thoughts of the pure Mary were far removed from those of the Most High, for she had desired and resolved to have no husband, so far as it depended upon her own will.

The Lord spoke in a dream to the high-priest, who was St. Simeon, and commanded him to make preparations for the marriage of Mary, daughter of Joachim and Anne of Nazareth, and to convoke an assemblage of the other priests to deliberate upon the subject. St. Simeon obeyed the divine behest, and the assembled doctors, inspired by a celestial impulse, resolved, that in an affair

upon which the Lord had declared His good pleasure, they ought to consult His holy will by praying, that He would manifest, by a sign, him who should be the husband of Mary, and that he should be of the house and lineage of David, that the law might be fulfilled. They therefore resolved to appoint a day when all the young men of that family, present in Jerusalem, should be invited to assemble in the Temple. It was precisely the day on which our blessed Lady had attained her fourteenth year.

The Priest Simeon summoned the chaste Mary, in order to make known to her this resolution. It was nine days before that on which their designs were to be put into execution. During this time the most blessed Virgin redoubled her prayers, her tears, and sighs, for the accomplishment of the will of God in an event which caused her the greatest pain. The Lord consoled her, saying: "I will give you a spouse who will not oppose your holy desires, but who will rather, by the help of my grace, confirm them. I will choose him for you perfect, and according to my own heart, and I will elect him for you from among my servants." The holy angels also consoled her, saying: "The Most High will guide you in the way which is the best, the most perfect, the most holy."

Joseph was born at Nazareth; nevertheless, by the disposition of the Most High, he had come to dwell in Jerusalem, because of certain reverses of fortune, which resulted so favorably for him that he had the happiness to become the spouse of her whom God had chosen to be His own Mother, under the circumstances that we are about to relate.

The day appointed by the priests arrived. Our blessed Lady had completed the fourteenth year of her age. The young men of the tribe of Judah, and of the family of David, from whom the august Mary was descended, who were in the city of Jerusalem, were assembled. Joseph, originally of Nazareth, but now an inhabitant of the holy city, was invited to be with them, because he, too, was of that royal race. He was then thirty-three years of age, well-made, and possessed of an agreeable physiognomy, which expressed an incomparable modesty. He was indeed as chaste in his thoughts and deeds, as in his inclinations; and having made a

vow of chastity when but twelve years old, his life was pure and irreproachable before God and man. He was related to the Virgin Mary in the third degree.

Inspired by the Most High, the chief-priest placed in the hands of each of these young men a dry rod, in order that by this means the Lord should manifest him whom He had chosen to be the husband of Mary. All united their prayers to those of the priests, for none were ignorant of the virtues and modesty of this holy maiden, nor of the reputation of her beauty, and her possessions, as an only child; and each desired to make her his wife. Joseph alone, the most humble, the most pious among them, deemed himself unworthy of so great a boon; and, calling to mind his vow of chastity, he resolved anew to observe it, resigning himself to the divine will even to the end of his life. But this did not prevent him from entertaining for the virtuous maiden veneration and esteem beyond any of his compeers.

All were engaged in prayer, when they saw blossoms burst forth from the rod borne by Joseph, and at the same instant a beautiful dove was seen to descend, which alighted on the head of the saint. The Lord, at the same moment, spoke to him interiorly, and said: "Joseph, my servant, Mary shall become your spouse, receive her with assiduity and respect, for she is very agreeable in my eyes; she is good and most pure in body and mind, and you will do all that she will tell you." The priests, upon this sign from heaven, determined to give St. Joseph to Mary for her husband. They then called for her, who was more excellent than the sun, more beautiful than the moon, and she appeared with a majesty more than angelic; with a loveliness, modesty, and grace incomparable; and the priests espoused her to Joseph, the most chaste and the most holy of men. The august Mary, with mingled modesty and tenderness, took leave of the priests and of her mistress,—asking pardon of her companions, and expressing her grateful sense of all the kindness she had received from them; then, accompanied by many of the most distinguished ministers of the Temple, she departed with her saintly spouse for Nazareth, the country of the newly married pair, where lay the possessions of the blessed parents of our sweet Lady.



On their arrival they were received and visited by all their relatives and friends, with the usual rejoicings on similar occasions; and having religiously acquitted themselves of all those duties which custom commanded in their intercourse with the world, our holy spouses at length found themselves alone in their house. It was a custom among the Jews, that the newly espoused, during the first days of their union, should study together their natural inclinations, in order to promote their future peace.

On one of these days, St. Joseph said to his spouse Mary: "I give thanks to the Most High God for having granted me the favor to choose me for your husband, when I did not in the least merit this honor, and when I believed myself unworthy to bear you company. But His Divine Majesty, who can, when He will, uplift the poor, has shown His mercy towards me. I desire that you will aid me with your goodness and your virtues in offering Him my thanksgivings. In all that regards His service, I will be your servant. I pray you to supply my deficiencies in those qualities which I have not, but which, as your husband, I ought to possess. Only make your wishes known to me, that I may fulfil them."

His most holy consort replied to the saint: "I am well pleased that the Most High, having destined me for marriage, has had the goodness to choose you for my husband and my master, and, with your permission, I will now express the thoughts and intentions which I wish to impart to you on this subject."

The prevenient grace of the Most High inflamed anew the heart of St. Joseph with His divine love. "Speak," he said, "for thy servant heareth." The Queen of the universe was attended by her thousand angels; for the most pure Mary comprehended the respect and attention to be observed in conversation with her spouse; and that she might have more abundant grace and merits, the Lord had continued in her the reserve and fear that she had in speaking alone with a man, which had never before happened to her, except it might be in some casual encounter with the chief priest. The august Virgin then said to St. Joseph: "It is just that we offer thanks, and give glory and praise to our God and Creator, who has made His mercy to shine upon us, in choosing us for His

service. In my most tender youth, I consecrated myself to God by a vow which I made, to be, during all my life, chaste in body and mind, and my desire to preserve my faith to Him is unchangeable. I trust that you will help me to fulfil this vow, and in all things else I will be your servant. Accept, my husband, this holy resolution, and confirm it by your own, so that we may obtain the eternal joys for which we aspire."

The chaste Joseph, filled with joy, replied: "In declaring to me your chaste thoughts and holy resolutions, you have penetrated and opened my heart, which, until you had revealed your own, I was unwilling to uncover. The Lord called me, also, at an early age, that I should love Him with an upright mind. Know, then, that in my twelfth year I, too, made a promise to serve God in perpetual chastity. I now renew this vow, and, with His grace, I will be your faithful servant, and I pray you to receive my chaste affections, and to regard me as your brother."

During this conversation the Most High confirmed anew in the heart of St. Joseph the virtue of chastity, and the pure and holy love which he should bear to the blessed Virgin, his spouse. Thus he was possessed by this love in an eminent degree, and our august Queen augmented it, and enraptured his heart by her conversation. By this divine assistance the holy spouses enjoyed inexpressible consolation. The august Queen promised to second the desires of St. Joseph, and the Most High imbued him with such an exalted purity, and such an absolute control of his passions, that he served his consort without obstacle, and with a grace as admirable as it was extraordinary. In serving her, he followed the will and the good pleasure of the Lord.

They made a division of the effects which St. Joachim and St. Anne had left to their blessed child. One part was offered to the Temple, where she had been educated; the second was devoted to the service of the poor; and the third was placed at the disposal of St. Joseph. For herself, our Queen reserved only the care to serve and employ herself within the house, for she dispensed herself always from the affairs of buying and selling.

In his youth St. Joseph had learned the carpenter's trade, as being one of the most useful to gain a livelihood, for he was with-



THE MARY OF CRICK

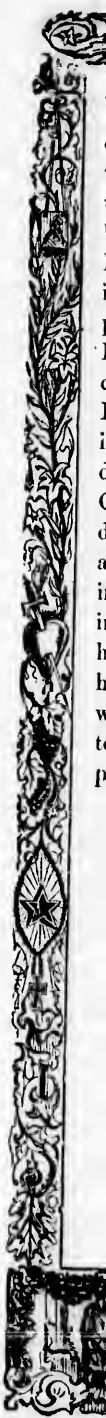
out property. He inquired of his saintly spouse if she would consent that he should practise this trade to gain something for the poor, and also as a means to avoid idleness. The most prudent Virgin consented, and reminded St. Joseph that it was not the will of God they should be rich, but poor, and protectors of the poor, so far as their abilities permitted. After this, the two holy spouses had an humble dispute, in which each wished to obey the other as superior. But the most humble Mary, who was the humblest of the humble, was victorious in her humility, and the man being the head, she would not permit the order of nature to be reversed. She therefore obtained the consent of her husband to receive her obedience in all things. She asked only permission to give alms to the poor, to which the saint consented.

During these first days, St. Joseph, by a new light from above, had penetrated the character of his spouse. Her rare prudence, her profound humility, her incomparable purity, and her possession of every virtue beyond all that he could have hoped, enraptured him with admiration. With a spirit full of joy, and his heart inflamed with ardent affection, he ceased not to praise the Lord, and to offer Him thanks for having bestowed on him so unmerited a treasure. The Lord had also so ordered, that the Queen of Heaven, by her mien and by her presence, inspired her spouse with such mingled sentiments of reverence and respect, that we find no terms to express them. To the eyes of St. Joseph a radiant splendor shone from the features of our Lady, like that of Moses when he descended from the mount.

Afterwards, in a vision, the Blessed Virgin heard these words: "You perceive how faithful I am in my promises: the companionship of my servant Joseph will aid you to preserve the laws of my spouse; obey him as you ought, and be careful of his happiness." She replied: "With the divine favor and help, I will obey Thy servant Joseph, and serve him."

Their marriage had been celebrated on the 8th of September, and until the 25th of March, when the Word became Incarnate, the two spouses had lived in such wise that the Most High prepared them for the work for which they had been chosen.

But let us pause to express our joy on witnessing the fortunate



SHALL BE FULL OF GRACE

destiny of the happiest among mortals, St. Joseph. Whence comes to thee, O man of God, so eminent a benediction, that among all the children of Adam it can be said of thee alone, that God has been so entirely thine that He was taken for thy Son? The eternal Father gives thee His daughter; the Son places His own Mother in thy charge; the Holy Spirit confides to thee His spouse, and places thee in His stead, and the Holy Trinity gives thee His elect, His only one, for thy lawful spouse. Great saint, dost thou then comprehend all thy dignity? Dost thou fathom all thy greatness? Dost thou know that she whom thou hast just received as thy wife is Queen and Mistress of heaven and earth, and that thou art the depository of the inestimable treasures of God himself? Behold, O man of God, the precious pledge thou hast, and know that if thou dost not render the angels and the seraphim envious, thy happiness, and the wonderful mystery of thine espousals excite their wondering admiration. For such joys and favors receive congratulations in the name of the whole human race. For thou art the spouse of her who has only God above her. Thou shalt be powerful and happy among men and angels. Be mindful of our poverty and wretchedness, and of me, miserable worm of the earth, for I desire to be thy faithful servant, and to be enriched and favored by thy powerful protection.



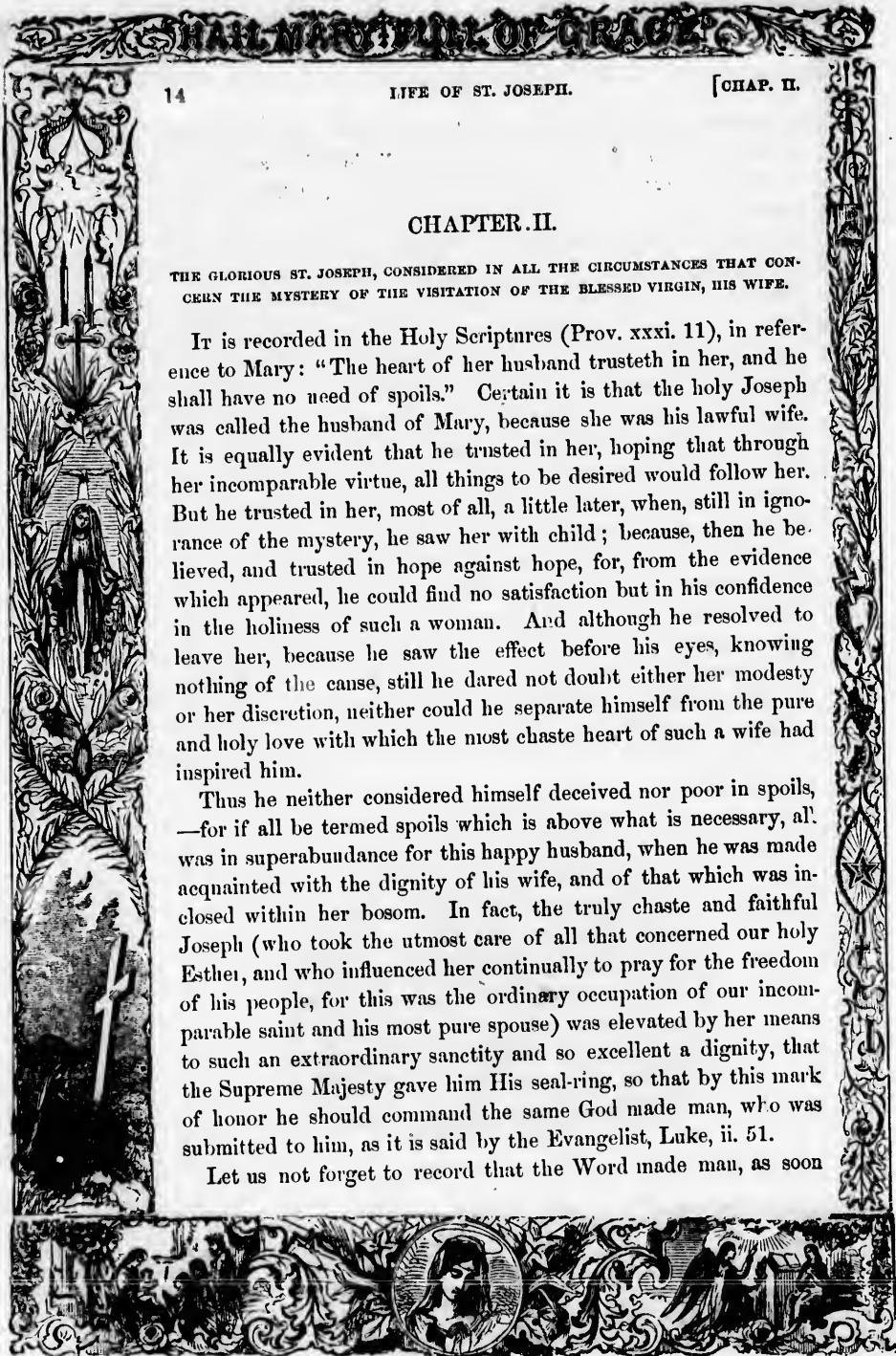
CHAPTER. II.

THE GLORIOUS ST. JOSEPH, CONSIDERED IN ALL THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT CONCERN THE MYSTERY OF THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN, HIS WIFE.

It is recorded in the Holy Scriptures (Prov. xxxi. 11), in reference to Mary: "The heart of her husband trusteth in her, and he shall have no need of spoils." Certain it is that the holy Joseph was called the husband of Mary, because she was his lawful wife. It is equally evident that he trusted in her, hoping that through her incomparable virtue, all things to be desired would follow her. But he trusted in her, most of all, a little later, when, still in ignorance of the mystery, he saw her with child; because, then he believed, and trusted in hope against hope, for, from the evidence which appeared, he could find no satisfaction but in his confidence in the holiness of such a woman. And although he resolved to leave her, because he saw the effect before his eyes, knowing nothing of the cause, still he dared not doubt either her modesty or her discretion, neither could he separate himself from the pure and holy love with which the most chaste heart of such a wife had inspired him.

Thus he neither considered himself deceived nor poor in spoils,—for if all be termed spoils which is above what is necessary, all was in superabundance for this happy husband, when he was made acquainted with the dignity of his wife, and of that which was inclosed within her bosom. In fact, the truly chaste and faithful Joseph (who took the utmost care of all that concerned our holy Esther, and who influenced her continually to pray for the freedom of his people, for this was the ordinary occupation of our incomparable saint and his most pure spouse) was elevated by her means to such an extraordinary sanctity and so excellent a dignity, that the Supreme Majesty gave him His seal-ring, so that by this mark of honor he should command the same God made man, who was submitted to him, as it is said by the Evangelist, Luke, ii. 51.

Let us not forget to record that the Word made man, as soon



as He had been conceived in the chaste womb of the most pure Mary, having first performed His duties towards God, prayed for His Mother and for St. Joseph, supplicating for them eternal blessedness.

The august Mary, aged fourteen years, six months, and seventeen days, had conceived in her blessed womb the Word made man under the miraculous circumstances which may be seen in her *life*.* Now she learned from the discourse of the celestial ambassador, St. Gabriel, that her cousin Elizabeth had conceived six months before. The Most High had revealed to her that the son of Elizabeth would be great before the Lord, that he would be a prophet and the precursor of the Incarnate Word. At the same time, our blessed Lady knew that it would be pleasing to the Lord if she should visit her cousin, in order that the son, whom she bore in her womb, might be sanctified by the presence of their Saviour.

The Most High said to her: "I will that you go and visit Elizabeth, because We choose her son for great things, which are of Our good pleasure." The prudent Mary replied: "My heart and my desires are entirely consecrated to Thy divine will, and I will execute with diligence all that Thou shalt command Thy most humble handmaid to perform. Allow me to ask permission of Joseph, my husband, that I may make this journey with his consent."

After this vision, the humble Mary resolved to ask the permission of St. Joseph; and, without revealing to him the command of God, but with rare prudence, she said: "I know, by a divine illumination, that the goodness of the Most High has favored my cousin Elizabeth, wife of Zachariah, in giving her a son, whom she had so greatly desired. I think I am obliged by customary usage to go and visit her, to offer my sympathy, and to promote her spiritual welfare. If this journey be agreeable to you, I will make it, with your permission, being entirely submissive to your will. Consider what will be for the best, and tell me what I shall do." The discreet silence and humble submission of Mary were pleasing to the Lord. He therefore disposed the heart of Joseph by a divine light to do as she desired. Guided by this celestial light, the holy

* For these the reader is referred to the *Cité Mystique*.

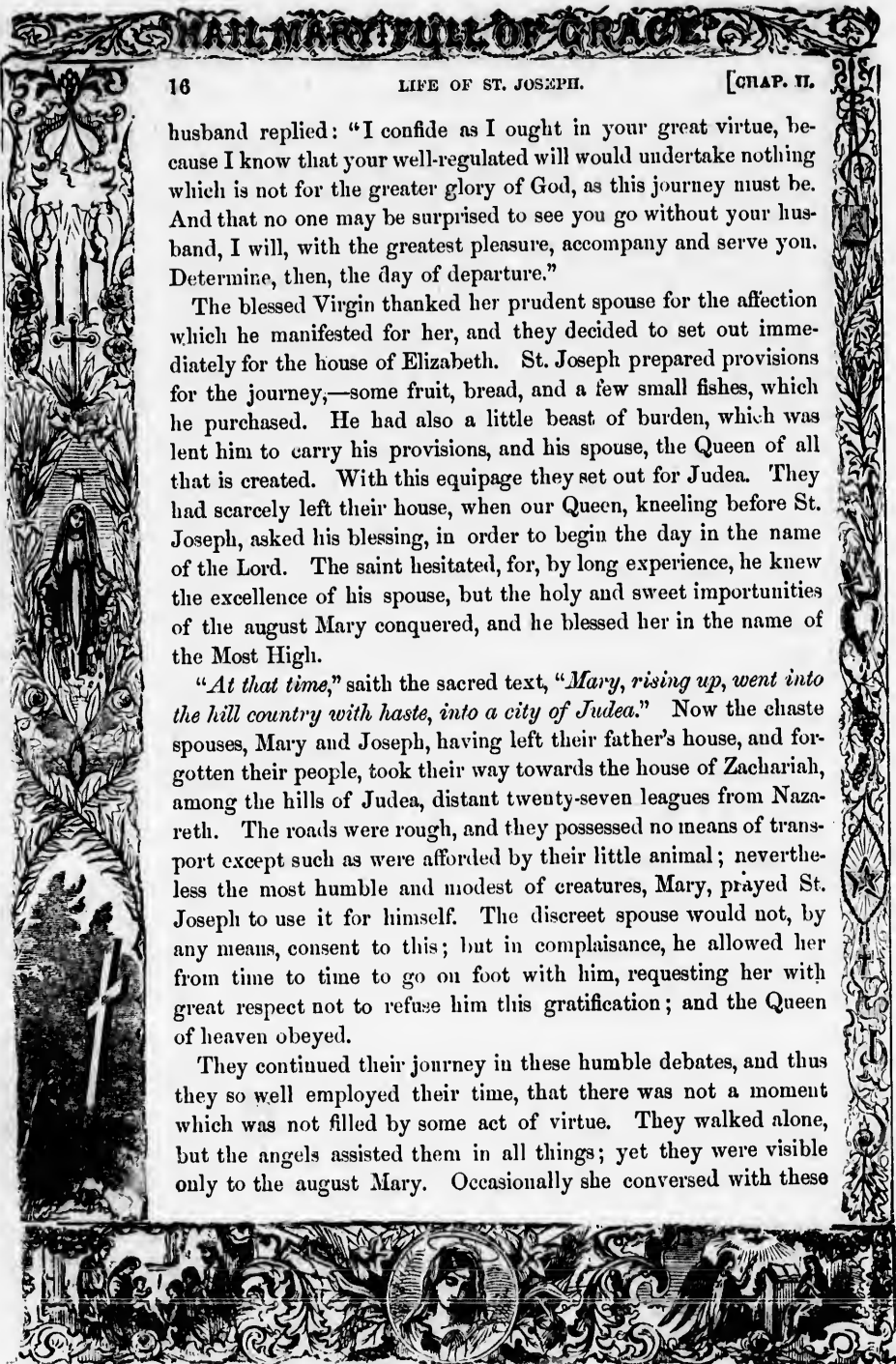


husband replied: "I confide as I ought in your great virtue, because I know that your well-regulated will would undertake nothing which is not for the greater glory of God, as this journey must be. And that no one may be surprised to see you go without your husband, I will, with the greatest pleasure, accompany and serve you. Determine, then, the day of departure."

The blessed Virgin thanked her prudent spouse for the affection which he manifested for her, and they decided to set out immediately for the house of Elizabeth. St. Joseph prepared provisions for the journey,—some fruit, bread, and a few small fishes, which he purchased. He had also a little beast of burden, which was lent him to carry his provisions, and his spouse, the Queen of all that is created. With this equipage they set out for Judea. They had scarcely left their house, when our Queen, kneeling before St. Joseph, asked his blessing, in order to begin the day in the name of the Lord. The saint hesitated, for, by long experience, he knew the excellence of his spouse, but the holy and sweet importunities of the august Mary conquered, and he blessed her in the name of the Most High.

"*At that time,*" saith the sacred text, "*Mary, rising up, went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judea.*" Now the chaste spouses, Mary and Joseph, having left their father's house, and forgotten their people, took their way towards the house of Zachariah, among the hills of Judea, distant twenty-seven leagues from Nazareth. The roads were rough, and they possessed no means of transport except such as were afforded by their little animal; nevertheless the most humble and modest of creatures, Mary, prayed St. Joseph to use it for himself. The discreet spouse would not, by any means, consent to this; but in complaisance, he allowed her from time to time to go on foot with him, requesting her with great respect not to refuse him this gratification; and the Queen of heaven obeyed.

They continued their journey in these humble debates, and thus they so well employed their time, that there was not a moment which was not filled by some act of virtue. They walked alone, but the angels assisted them in all things; yet they were visible only to the august Mary. Occasionally she conversed with these



HAIL MARY FULL OF GRACE

angels, and the most pure heart of our sweet Lady was kindled anew with divine love. St. Joseph contributed to all this by his discreet silence, concentrating his thoughts within, and yielding himself to sublime contemplations. At other times the spouses conversed together upon many things regarding the salvation of their souls, the coming of the Messiah, the prophecies which the ancient fathers had received on this point, and other mysteries and secrets of the Most High.

During this journey there happened to St. Joseph something which excited his wonder. Inspired by a special grace, he bore to his sponse a most tender and holy love, and the saint, being of a noble nature, amiable, agreeable, and obliging, was inclined to an ever watchful care for her. Now, as the Queen of heaven carried in her virginal bosom the Incarnate Word, the saint was sensible that, through the words and conversation of his spouse, new impressions were made upon his soul, but of the cause he was ignorant. He found himself more and more inflamed by divine love, and in a higher knowledge of those mysteries which formed the subjects of their conversation; and the further they advanced on their way and in their discussions, the more these favors were augmented. He felt also that the words of his spouse served as the organ, by means of which these favors were communicated to him. It was not possible that the discreet St. Joseph should not reflect upon this new and wonderful influence. But although it would have afforded him, filled as he was with wonder, the greatest gratification, without curiosity, to have been informed of the cause of it, his modesty was such that he could not venture to ask to be enlightened.

Our blessed Lady penetrated the thought of her spouse, but, ignorant of the way by which God would conduct this mystery, her great prudence and her own discretion taught her, although she had no command from the Lord to conceal it, how good it was to guard the secret of the most sublime of all mysteries. She therefore concealed it, without making it known to her spouse, either on this occasion, or afterwards, during the interior pains which St. Joseph suffered on this account. What admirable prudence! Our sweet Lady prayed to God for the saint, imploring the divine as-



sistance, of which she foresaw he would have need, and of which we shall treat in the following chapter.

This was the first journey which the Incarnate Word made in this world, four days after his entrance into it. Our blessed Lady thus served as a car for the true Solomon (Cant. iii. 9). This journey lasted four days, during which our holy travellers, besides those interior virtues which have God for their object, performed many acts of charity towards their neighbors. The blessed Virgin cured, among others, a poor sick girl, in a village through which she passed, on the first day of her departure.

At length the august Mary and her spouse, Joseph, arrived at the city of Judea, which was then inhabited by Elizabeth and Zachariah. This city was distant, as I have said, twenty-seven leagues from Nazareth, and about two leagues from Jerusalem, near the spot where the torrent of Sorec has its source. It was afterwards entirely ruined, but the Lord does not permit the memory of places so venerable to be altogether lost. The Visitation was made at the same place where these divine mysteries are now honored by the faithful who dwell in Palestine, and by pilgrims who go there to offer their devotions.

St. Joseph went on before to give notice to the inmates of the house, and, having knocked at the door, he saluted them, saying: "May the Lord be with you, and fill your souls with His divine grace." St. Elizabeth had been already warned of her coming, for the same Lord had revealed to her that her cousin Mary of Nazareth was on her way to visit her. Now, having heard of her arrival, she came forth quickly, with others of her family, to receive the holy Virgin, who saluted her first, saying: "*The Lord be with you, my dear cousin.*" "*And may the same Lord,*" replied Elizabeth, "*reward you for having taken the trouble to give me this consolation.*"

The two consins having retired together, it was then that the great mystery of the sanctification of John the Baptist was operated; but those facts do not belong to this history. Coming out of their retreat in the dusk of the evening, St. Elizabeth, who was informed of the happiness of the chaste St. Joseph, of which he was himself ignorant, bestowed upon him every mark of esteem and veneration.



After the saint had passed three days in the house of Zachariah, he asked permission of his blessed spouse to return to Nazareth. He took leave, with the promise to come and conduct our sweet Lady home when she wished to return. St. Elizabeth offered him presents, praying him to accept them, but he received only a few things, because this man of God was not only a lover of poverty, but he had also a magnanimous and generous heart. He then took the road to Nazareth with the little beast that he had borrowed. Having arrived at his house, he was served there, in the absence of his spouse, by a relative who lived near,—the same who had been accustomed to bring them supplies from without, when the holy Lady was there.

After having passed three months, less two days,* in the house of Zachariah, in the midst of events and prodigies which do not belong to this history,† the august Mary thought of departure. St. Joseph, having been notified by St. Elizabeth, left Nazareth to reconduct his spouse to her home. On his arrival at the house of Zachariah, he was received with the highest marks of respect, for the holy priest already knew that the great patriarch was the depository of the mysteries and the treasures of heaven. The blessed Virgin received him with discreet demonstrations of joy, and having placed herself on her knees before him, according to her custom, she asked his benediction. After he had taken some repose, they fixed on the day of departure. Having taken their leave, the happy patriarch, rejoiced to possess his treasure again, although he knew not as yet its full value, set out for Nazareth. The blessed Virgin, as usual, asked his blessing, and, pursuing their way, in four days they reached their place of destination. During their route, the same effects attended their divine colloquies as those which have been already indicated.

The discreet Mary perceived that she could not long conceal her condition from her chaste and faithful spouse. But the Lord guided

* In counting eight days after the Word was incarnate, the holy Virgin and St. Joseph arrived the second of April, towards evening, at the house of Zachariah. If we add three months, less two days, which should commence the third of April, we come to the first of July inclusively, which is the eighth day after the birth of John the Baptist, and that of his circumcision.

† All these details will be found in the *Cité Mystique* of Maria d'Agreda.



all by means the most conducive to His glory, and to obtain merits for St. Joseph and the Virgin Mother. For this reason He did not make known to them His good pleasure. On their journey, the august Queen met with a woman who had once been virtuous, but who, tempted by the devil, was led into sin, and afterwards possessed by him. As soon as our blessed Lady saw her, she discovered her malady, and, using her queenly power, commanded the evil spirit to depart from the woman, and, having delivered her from the consequences of her sin, she obtained for her the gift of perseverance.

Our holy travellers arrived one day at an hostelry, the master of which was of a vicious disposition, and led a disorderly life. The Lord ordained, as the preparation for his coming happiness, that he should receive the august Mary and St. Joseph with marks of benevolence and consideration. He bestowed attentions and rendered them services beyond those he was accustomed to offer to other strangers. Our Queen, who knew the depraved state of his conscience, offered prayers for her host, and procured the justification of his soul, and the amendment of his life.

At length they reached Nazareth, when the Queen of heaven, assisted by the holy angels, put her house in order. St. Joseph occupied himself, as usual, for the subsistence of our Lady, and she did nothing to damp the hopes of her spouse. After her return home, Lucifer tempted the august Mary in every way, but he was vanquished with all his infernal legions, and precipitated into the depths of hell. While the Lord had permitted Lucifer to show himself, this enemy had contrived to sow discord among the neighbors of St. Joseph. They came together, and, having called for the innocent Mary, they accused her in the presence of her husband, and in the bitterest terms, of troubling the peace of their families. This reproach was keenly felt by our Queen, because of the pain which it caused to her spouse, for he had begun to remark something of her condition; and already suffered anxiety and trouble on this account, as we shall see in the following chapter. Now, the demon, ignorant of the real cause of this trouble, strove to plant the seeds of discontent within the bosom of St. Joseph, so as to make him impatient of his poverty; representing to him at the



same time that his spouse Mary remained too long in her retreat and devotions, and that she was idle. But St. Joseph being of an upright and magnanimous heart, and of great perfection, despised these diabolical inventions, and utterly rejected them. Besides, his internal suffering regarding the state of his spouse, occupied him so exclusively, that it obliged him to forget every other. The Lord delivered him from this temptation by the intercession of the holy Virgin, leaving only that of which we are about to speak in the following chapter.



CHAPTER III.

ST. JOSEPH DISCOVERS THAT MARY IS ABOUT TO BECOME A MOTHER, WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO PENETRATE THE MYSTERY. HE ENDURES GREAT SUFFERINGS ON THIS ACCOUNT.

It was about five months since the eternal Word had become incarnate in the chaste bosom of the Virgin Mary, when St. Joseph began to observe indications of it, and to entertain suspicions. It was the more apparent, because the proportions of her pure form were so perfect, that the least change was perceptible. Deeply concerned and anxious, St. Joseph, as he one day observed her coming forth from her oratory, perceived that it was no longer possible to doubt the testimony of his own eyes. The heart of the man of God was penetrated with profound sorrow, and he was unable to resist the harrowing reflections that tormented his spirit.

It may not be without utility or interest to notice some of these reflections, which increased the violence of his great affliction. In the first place, he entertained a most chaste and sincere love for his faithful spouse, to whom, since the commencement of their union, he had devoted all the tenderness of his heart. Besides, his desire to serve her was augmented from day to day by the unequalled holiness and attractive manners of our blessed Lady. Our saint, therefore, was impelled, by a desire natural to his love, to find a response to it on her part. The Lord so ordered it, that, from this same desire, the holy Joseph was still more careful to serve and respect our blessed mistress.

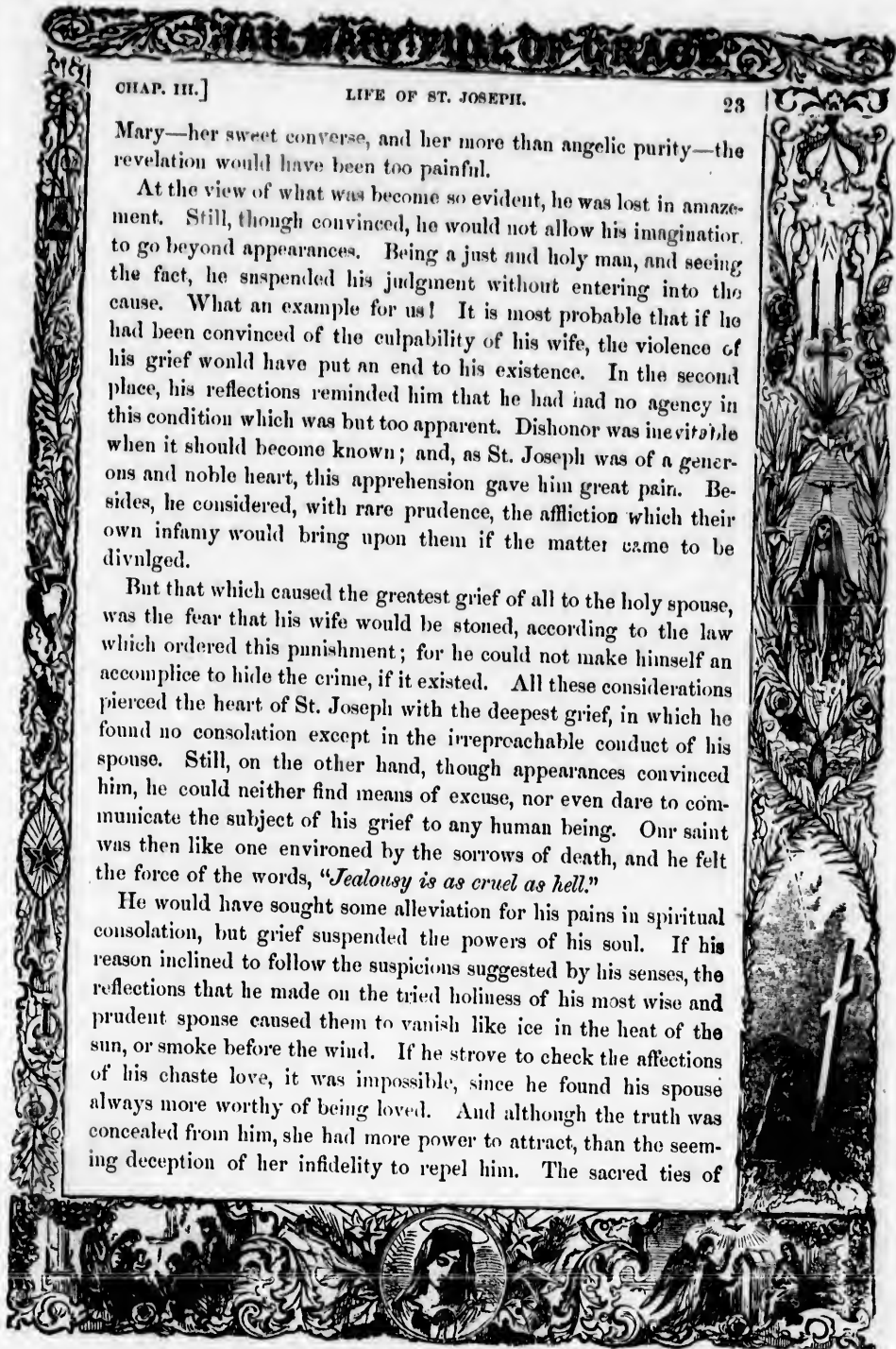
Thus St. Joseph fulfilled with great zeal his obligations as a most faithful husband and guardian of the mystery which, as yet, was hidden from him. But the more assiduous he was to serve, to honor his spouse while bearing for her a love, so pure, chaste, holy, and just, the more eager was his desire that she should reciprocate his affection. Nevertheless he did not disclose this internal conflict; either because of the respect produced by the humble majesty of his spouse, or because in witnessing the discreet deportment of

Mary—her sweet converse, and her more than angelic purity—the revelation would have been too painful.

At the view of what was become so evident, he was lost in amazement. Still, though convinced, he would not allow his imagination to go beyond appearances. Being a just and holy man, and seeing the fact, he suspended his judgment without entering into the cause. What an example for us! It is most probable that if he had been convinced of the culpability of his wife, the violence of his grief would have put an end to his existence. In the second place, his reflections reminded him that he had had no agency in this condition which was but too apparent. Dishonor was inevitable when it should become known; and, as St. Joseph was of a generous and noble heart, this apprehension gave him great pain. Besides, he considered, with rare prudence, the affliction which their own infamy would bring upon them if the matter came to be divulged.

But that which caused the greatest grief of all to the holy spouse, was the fear that his wife would be stoned, according to the law which ordered this punishment; for he could not make himself an accomplice to hide the crime, if it existed. All these considerations pierced the heart of St. Joseph with the deepest grief, in which he found no consolation except in the irreproachable conduct of his spouse. Still, on the other hand, though appearances convinced him, he could neither find means of excuse, nor even dare to communicate the subject of his grief to any human being. Our saint was then like one environed by the sorrows of death, and he felt the force of the words, "*Jealousy is as cruel as hell.*"

He would have sought some alleviation for his pains in spiritual consolation, but grief suspended the powers of his soul. If his reason inclined to follow the suspicions suggested by his senses, the reflections that he made on the tried holiness of his most wise and prudent spouse caused them to vanish like ice in the heat of the sun, or smoke before the wind. If he strove to check the affections of his chaste love, it was impossible, since he found his spouse always more worthy of being loved. And although the truth was concealed from him, she had more power to attract, than the seeming deception of her infidelity to repel him. The sacred ties of



love could not be rent asunder, because they reposed on the solid foundations of truth, reason, and justice.

Our saint did not then judge it expedient to declare his grief to his blessed spouse: added to this, the gravity, ever equal and divinely humble, which he saw in her, did not permit him to take this liberty; for, although he saw marks so unequivocal, a conduct so pure and holy as hers could ill accord with infidelity. Such a fault could not in any manner be compatible with so much purity, holiness, and discretion; nor with that assemblage of graces whose growth was each day more visible in the august Mary.

In these perplexities the saintly husband addressed himself to God in prayer. Placing himself in His presence, "Eternal God and my Lord," he said, "my desires and my groanings are not hidden from Thy divine Majesty. I find myself struggling with violent agitations, I have given my heart to the sponse whom I received from Thy hands, I have trusted in her purity, but the strange appearances which I discover in her cast me into the most afflicting perplexity. It would be rash to think that she had been unfaithful and had offended Thee, seeing in her such great purity and so eminent a holiness. It is, nevertheless, impossible to deny the evidence of my senses, and sorrow must destroy me unless there be here some mystery that I have not discovered. Reason exculpates, but the senses condemn her. I see plainly that she conceals from me the cause of her condition. What shall I do? I suspend my judgment, ignorant of the cause of what I see. Receive, O God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, my sighs and my tears, as an acceptable sacrifice. I cannot believe that Mary has offended Thee; but, being her husband, I cannot presume the existence of any mystery of which I can be unworthy."

Saint Joseph persevered in his supplications and united with them many other affections and prayers. He thought there must be in all this some mystery, but his humility hindered him from being assured on this point. All the reasons that presented themselves in favor of the holiness of our most sweet Lady, contributed only to persuade him that she had committed no fault. At the same time the saint never thought of her being the mother of the Messiah, for he could not have believed himself worthy to be her spouse.



Sometimes he suspended his suspicions; at others appearances augmented them. Sometimes he was overwhelmed by agitation; sometimes in an aching calm, without power to resolve or to believe any thing. He could neither vanquish his doubts nor appease his heart, nor find that certitude of which he had so much need, to regulate his conduct and to calm his mind. And thus it was that the sufferings of the holy Patriarch were so cruel. They serve as evident proofs of his incomparable prudence and sanctity, and they gained him such merits before God as to render him worthy of the favors he was about to receive.

Through the knowledge and infused light which she possessed, our blessed Lady saw all that passed in the breast of St. Joseph. But, though filled with tenderness and compassion for the sufferings of her spouse, she spoke not on the subject of his pain, but contented herself to serve him with submission and exactitude, because it was not proper to disclose the secret of the great King, without an express command from the Lord.

During this period, while he was in ignorance of the mystery of his spouse, St. Joseph thought it his duty to maintain his superiority, yet with great moderation. In this he imitated the ancient Patriarchs, from whom he would not degenerate, whose wives were very submissive. Although just and good, he therefore allowed himself to be served and honored by the Blessed Virgin after their espousals, preserving in all things his authority as chief, which he sweetened by his rare humility and great prudence. And he would have had cause for this if our Lady had been like other women. On her part, the august Mary was most submissive and obedient to her husband, and, although she was above all, none ever equalled her in these qualities. She served her spouse with an incomparable respect and promptitude, and thus she gave opportunities to our saint, while she served him at table, or occupied herself in other domestic affairs, to observe her closely, and, to the great affliction of his soul, assure himself more positively of the truth. It was impossible that in her actions the signs of her condition should not be more evident, but this did not hinder her in her tasks. She desired neither to excuse nor to justify herself, because this would not have accorded with the truth, nor with her angelical candor,



nor with the grandeur and generosity of her most noble heart; and the pains of St. Joseph found no alleviation. The Queen of heaven could easily have alleged the truth of her irreproachable innocence—have exculpated herself, and relieved St. Joseph of his pain by disclosing the mystery, but she would not hazard the justification of so mysterious a truth upon her own testimony, and, with great wisdom, she abandoned herself to the divine Providence. She strove to console and please him in all things, often asking what he would have her to do. Many times she served him on her knees, and although these loving ways might in some sort console the saintly spouse, they gave him, also, additional causes of affliction in considering the many motives to love and esteem her who plunged him in such perplexity.

St. Joseph could not entirely conceal his grief: thus he often found himself pensive, sad, and thoughtful. Preoccupied by his sorrows, he sometimes spoke to his spouse with more harshness than formerly. But this was neither from indignation nor vengeance, for he had no such thought—it was merely the effect inseparable from a wounded heart. Our most prudent Lady, on her part, changed nothing in her sweet manners; on the contrary, she took greater pains than ever to comfort her spouse. She served him at table, or offered him a seat. Without doubt, this painful season was one of those which most exercised not only St. Joseph but our blessed Lady. Our incomparable Queen offered continual supplications for her spouse to the Most High, that He would vouchsafe to regard and console him. In order better to understand the profound humility and the sublime wisdom of the august Mary in these circumstances, it should be understood that the Lord had not commanded her to keep the secret of the mystery of the incarnation. He did not even disclose His will on this point with as much clearness as in other matters. It seemed that the Lord left all to the wisdom and to the divine virtues of His elected one.

Thus the divine Providence gave occasion to the most pure Mary, and to her most faithful spouse, to exercise by heroic actions, each according to their capacity, the virtues and gifts which He had allotted them. He was pleased, as one might say, to witness the faith, the hope, the love, the humility of these upright hearts in the



midst of so poignant an affliction. The Lord seemed deaf, according to our manner of speaking, for His greater glory, in order to give to the world this example of sanctity and prudence. He waited until the proper time to speak was come. Let us understand from this the designs of God, and His secret ways with the souls whom He cherishes, and whom He would render capable to receive His favors and His gifts. We ought to use every effort, and employ all our care to acquire efficaciously a true resignation to this divine Providence. If men only knew the loving care of this Father of mercy, they would be happy to forget themselves, and cease to plunge into cares at once burdensome, useless, and dangerous. It is of the utmost importance to the creature to let himself be guided by the hand of the Lord, because men are ignorant of His operations, and the ends to which they are to be led by them.

If God were susceptible of being touched like men, by pain or jealousy, He would suffer, in perceiving that His own creatures desire to seek the least thing in any other than Himself. The Lord regards the actions of men; He corrects their faults with love; He foresees their desires; He protects them in danger; He fortifies them in their trials; He assists them in their afflictions. None can resist Him, or hinder His will. He executes what He can; He can execute all that He wills, and He will give himself entirely to the just who are in His grace and confide in Him alone. Who can conceive the greatness and the nature of the gifts which He pours into hearts disposed to receive them!

Let us leave all to His providence, for the Most High will give us whatever is most sure and necessary for our salvation. Except the pains which the august Mary endured from those which were suffered by her most holy Son, the most severe of all her life were caused by the afflictions and perplexities of St. Joseph in the circumstances which we have just related.



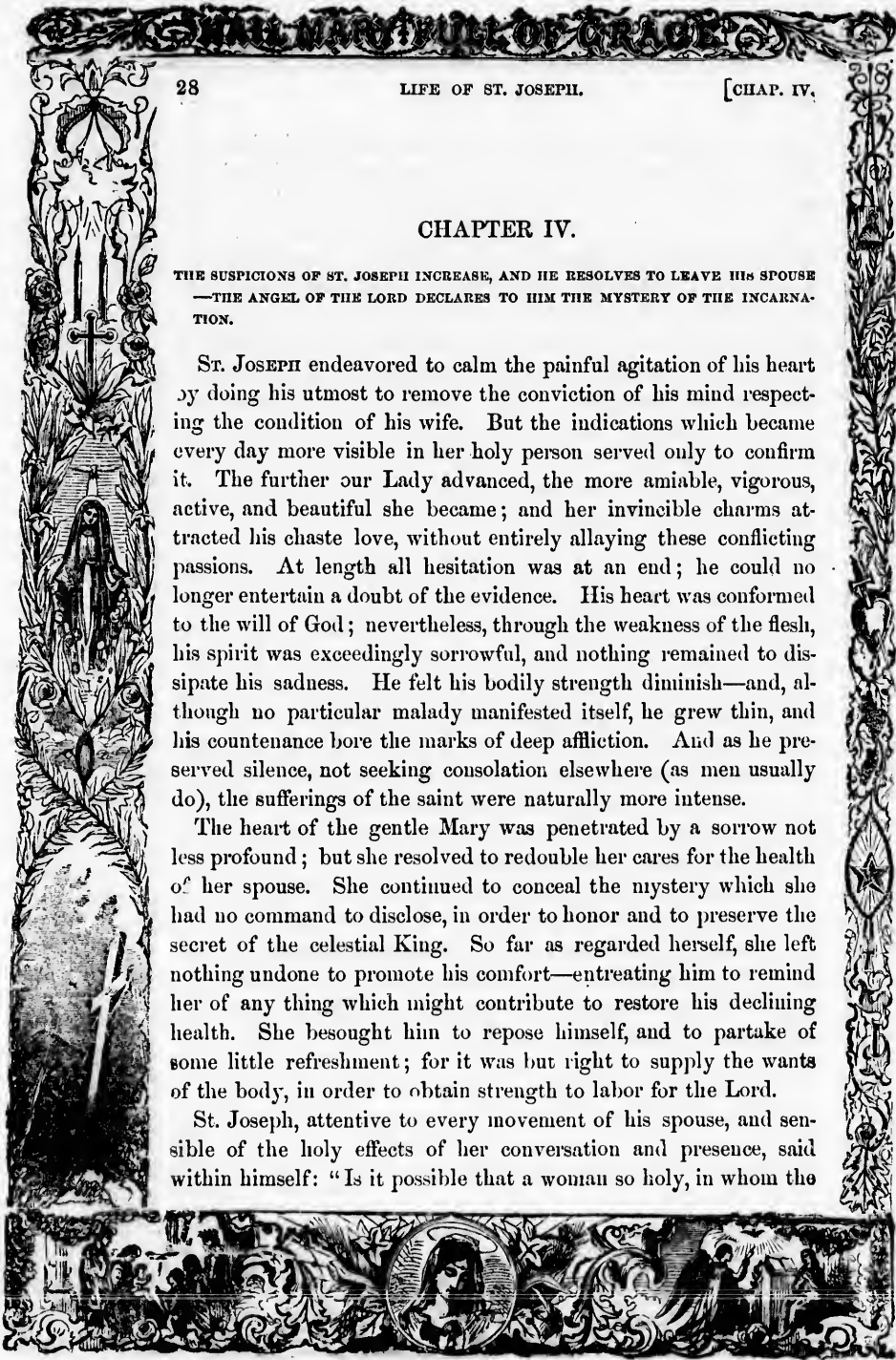
CHAPTER IV.

THE SUSPICIONS OF ST. JOSEPH INCREASE, AND HE RESOLVES TO LEAVE HIS SPOUSE—THE ANGEL OF THE LORD DECLARES TO HIM THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION.

ST. JOSEPH endeavored to calm the painful agitation of his heart by doing his utmost to remove the conviction of his mind respecting the condition of his wife. But the indications which became every day more visible in her holy person served only to confirm it. The further our Lady advanced, the more amiable, vigorous, active, and beautiful she became; and her invincible charms attracted his chaste love, without entirely allaying these conflicting passions. At length all hesitation was at an end; he could no longer entertain a doubt of the evidence. His heart was conformed to the will of God; nevertheless, through the weakness of the flesh, his spirit was exceedingly sorrowful, and nothing remained to dissipate his sadness. He felt his bodily strength diminish—and, although no particular malady manifested itself, he grew thin, and his countenance bore the marks of deep affliction. And as he preserved silence, not seeking consolation elsewhere (as men usually do), the sufferings of the saint were naturally more intense.

The heart of the gentle Mary was penetrated by a sorrow not less profound; but she resolved to redouble her cares for the health of her spouse. She continued to conceal the mystery which she had no command to disclose, in order to honor and to preserve the secret of the celestial King. So far as regarded herself, she left nothing undone to promote his comfort—entreatng him to remind her of any thing which might contribute to restore his declining health. She besought him to repose himself, and to partake of some little refreshment; for it was but right to supply the wants of the body, in order to obtain strength to labor for the Lord.

St. Joseph, attentive to every movement of his spouse, and sensible of the holy effects of her conversation and presence, said within himself: "Is it possible that a woman so holy, in whom the



grace of God is so perceptible, can cast me into such perplexity? What can I find to equal her, if I leave her? Where find consolation, if she fail me? But all these trouble me even less than the infamy that may result from this unhappy affair; or that I should give cause to believe that I have been the accomplice of a crime. If I make myself the author of her condition, it will be a falsehood unworthy of an honorable man, and opposed to my conscience and my reputation. In such a state of embarrassment, what shall I do? The least evil that can happen is to absent myself—to leave the house."

Our blessed Lady being sincerely afflicted by the resolution, which her spouse had just taken, addressed herself to the angels of her guard: "You," she said, "who obey with promptitude all the commands of the Lord, listen now to my prayers. Prevent my spouse, I conjure you, from executing this intention which he has made to absent himself from me." The angels obeyed their Queen, and silently conveyed many holy inspirations to the heart of St. Joseph. They persuaded him anew of the sanctity and perfection of his spouse—that God was incomprehensible in His works, and impenetrable in His judgments, and that He was most faithful to those who trust in Him.

The agitated spirit of St. Joseph was somewhat soothed by these inspirations, although he knew not from whence they came, nor by what order he received them. Yet as the cause of his grief remained, he always sank again into sadness, and returned to his first resolution to desert his spouse. Then our blessed Lady addressed herself directly to her Son whom she bore in her virginal bosom. "It would not be becoming," said she, "that thy servant should be without a husband who assists and shelters her from calumnies: do not permit him to execute his design of abandoning me." The Most High replied: "I will speedily console my servant Joseph, and after I shall have declared to him, through my angel, the mystery of which he is ignorant, you may speak with him concerning it. I will fill him with my spirit, and enable him to accomplish all that he should do in these mysteries. He shall aid and assist you under all circumstances."

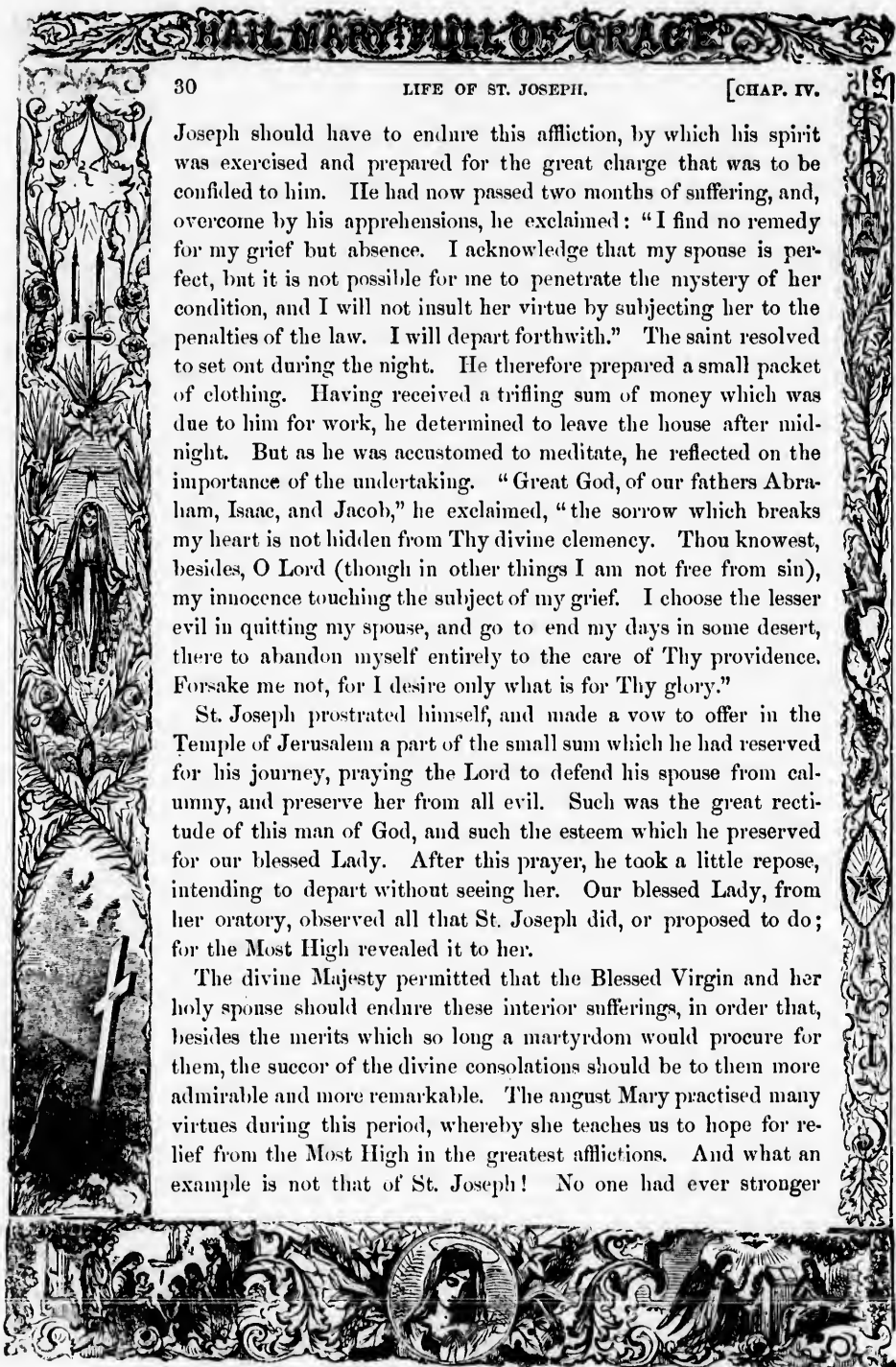
The august Mary comprehended how important it was that St.



Joseph should have to endure this affliction, by which his spirit was exercised and prepared for the great charge that was to be confided to him. He had now passed two months of suffering, and, overcome by his apprehensions, he exclaimed: "I find no remedy for my grief but absence. I acknowledge that my spouse is perfect, but it is not possible for me to penetrate the mystery of her condition, and I will not insult her virtue by subjecting her to the penalties of the law. I will depart forthwith." The saint resolved to set out during the night. He therefore prepared a small packet of clothing. Having received a trifling sum of money which was due to him for work, he determined to leave the house after midnight. But as he was accustomed to meditate, he reflected on the importance of the undertaking. "Great God, of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," he exclaimed, "the sorrow which breaks my heart is not hidden from Thy divine clemency. Thou knowest, besides, O Lord (though in other things I am not free from sin), my innocence touching the subject of my grief. I choose the lesser evil in quitting my spouse, and go to end my days in some desert, there to abandon myself entirely to the care of Thy providence. Forsake me not, for I desire only what is for Thy glory."

St. Joseph prostrated himself, and made a vow to offer in the Temple of Jerusalem a part of the small sum which he had reserved for his journey, praying the Lord to defend his spouse from calumny, and preserve her from all evil. Such was the great rectitude of this man of God, and such the esteem which he preserved for our blessed Lady. After this prayer, he took a little repose, intending to depart without seeing her. Our blessed Lady, from her oratory, observed all that St. Joseph did, or proposed to do; for the Most High revealed it to her.

The divine Majesty permitted that the Blessed Virgin and her holy spouse should endure these interior sufferings, in order that, besides the merits which so long a martyrdom would procure for them, the succor of the divine consolations should be to them more admirable and more remarkable. The angust Mary practised many virtues during this period, whereby she teaches us to hope for relief from the Most High in the greatest afflictions. And what an example is not that of St. Joseph! No one had ever stronger



grounds of suspicion, nor more of discretion to control his judgment than he.

The passion of jealousy produces sharp wounds in him who is attacked by it, and no one ever felt its effects so sensibly as St. Joseph, though, in fact, there was no foundation for it, if he had but known the truth. He was endowed with a singular intelligence to penetrate the sanctity and the lovely character of his spouse. But this, in augmenting his esteem for her whom he was about to lose, augmented his sorrow to find himself necessitated to abandon her.

St. Joseph was not subject to the disorders of common jealousy, in which the passions of concupiscence are engaged, which neither reason nor prudence can vanquish. The jealousy of the saint arose only from the depth of his love and a conditional suspicion, viz.: whether his chaste spouse reciprocated his affection; for a pledge so dear as the affection of a wife must not be shared by any other. When love is so well founded, the chains that cement it are very strong, and the more so because there are fewer imperfections to weaken them. There was nothing in our sweet Lady which could diminish the love of her spouse. On the contrary, all that she had received from grace and from nature gave him new subjects every day to strengthen his affection.

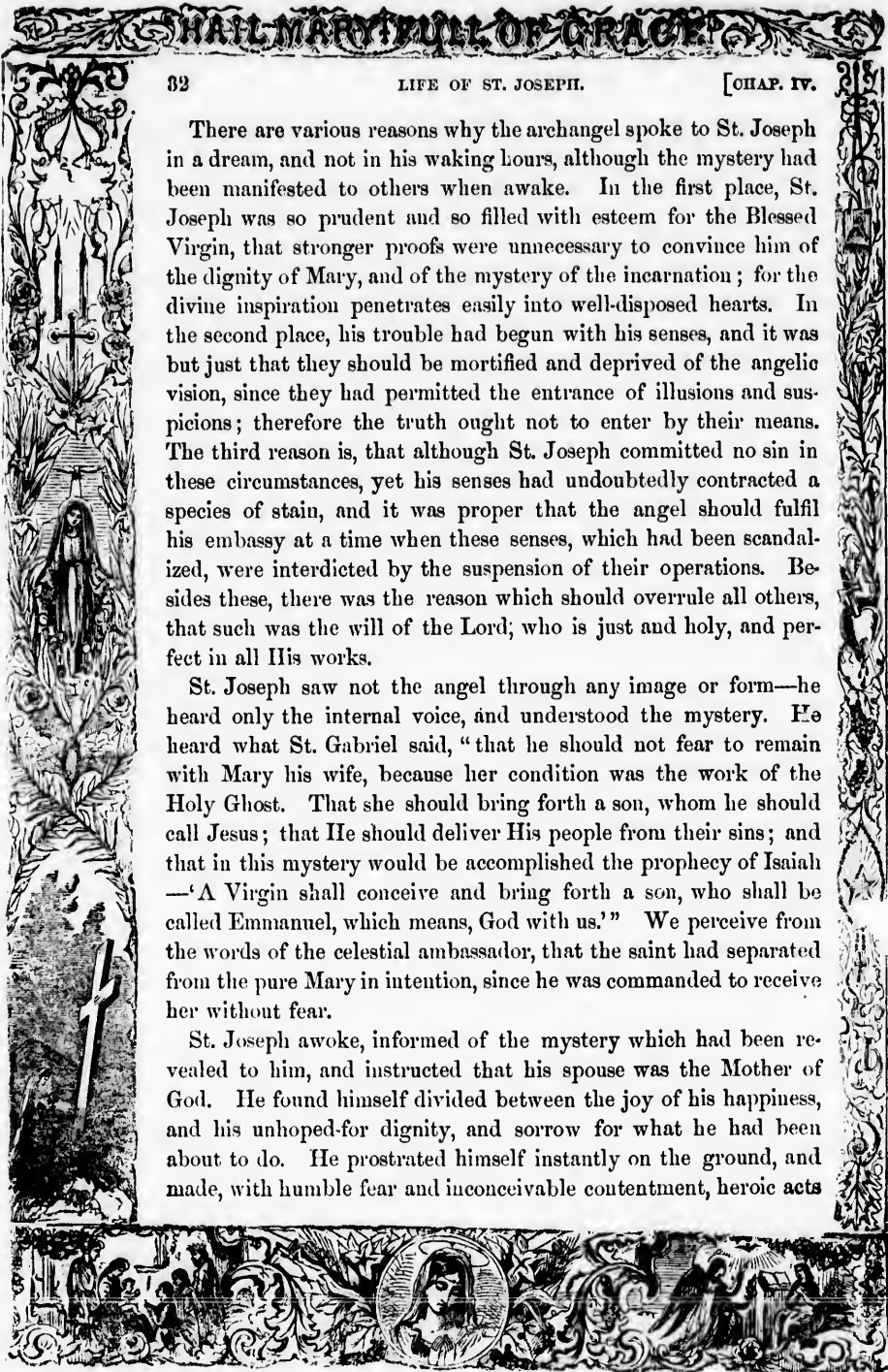
After the saint had offered the prayer, of which we have already made mention, he fell asleep in this sadness, which had sunk into dejection. He was sure that he should awake in time to depart at midnight, without being seen, as he thought, by his spouse. Our Lady, on her part, awaited the remedy, and earnestly sought it by her humble prayers. She was consoled by an assurance that the pains of her spouse had now reached their highest degree—the hour of mercy and consolation for that sorrowing heart could not long tarry, and her desires would soon be accomplished. And now the Lord sent the archangel Gabriel, to disclose, by a divine revelation to St. Joseph, while he slept, the mystery which was to be accomplished in his spouse. The archangel acquitted himself of this embassy, appeared in a dream, as related by St. Matthew, and declared to him, in the terms quoted by that evangelist, the whole mystery of the incarnation and redemption.



There are various reasons why the archangel spoke to St. Joseph in a dream, and not in his waking hours, although the mystery had been manifested to others when awake. In the first place, St. Joseph was so prudent and so filled with esteem for the Blessed Virgin, that stronger proofs were unnecessary to convince him of the dignity of Mary, and of the mystery of the incarnation; for the divine inspiration penetrates easily into well-disposed hearts. In the second place, his trouble had begun with his senses, and it was but just that they should be mortified and deprived of the angelic vision, since they had permitted the entrance of illusions and suspicions; therefore the truth ought not to enter by their means. The third reason is, that although St. Joseph committed no sin in these circumstances, yet his senses had undoubtedly contracted a species of stain, and it was proper that the angel should fulfil his embassy at a time when these senses, which had been scandalized, were interdicted by the suspension of their operations. Besides these, there was the reason which should overrule all others, that such was the will of the Lord; who is just and holy, and perfect in all His works.

St. Joseph saw not the angel through any image or form—he heard only the internal voice, and understood the mystery. He heard what St. Gabriel said, “that he should not fear to remain with Mary his wife, because her condition was the work of the Holy Ghost. That she should bring forth a son, whom he should call Jesus; that He should deliver His people from their sins; and that in this mystery would be accomplished the prophecy of Isaiah—‘A Virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son, who shall be called Emmanuel, which means, God with us.’” We perceive from the words of the celestial ambassador, that the saint had separated from the pure Mary in intention, since he was commanded to receive her without fear.

St. Joseph awoke, informed of the mystery which had been revealed to him, and instructed that his spouse was the Mother of God. He found himself divided between the joy of his happiness, and his unhopèd-for dignity, and sorrow for what he had been about to do. He prostrated himself instantly on the ground, and made, with humble fear and inconceivable contentment, heroic acts



of humility and gratitude. He gave thanks to God for the mystery which had been disclosed to him, and for having made him the spouse of her whom He had chosen to be His mother—him, who did not deserve to be her servant. The doubts and uncertainty which St. Joseph had suffered, laid in him the foundations of the most profound humility, necessary for him to whom was confided the dispensation of the most holy counsels of the Lord. The remembrance of what had passed served as a lesson for his future life.

Having rendered thanks to the divine Majesty, the holy man began to reproach himself. "O my divine spouse," said he, "most sweet dove, chosen by the Most High to be His own mother, how bath thy unworthy servant dared to call in question thy fidelity! How could he, who is only dust and ashes, suffer her who is Queen of heaven to serve him? Why have I not kissed the earth thy steps have trod, and served thee kneeling? How shall I dare to raise my eyes in thy presence, or open my lips to speak with thee? Lord, give me grace, grant me strength to pray for pardon! Inspire her to show me mercy, so that she may not reject her unworthy servant as he deserves. Alas! how clearly she must have penetrated all my thoughts: how can I have the boldness to appear in her presence? I see now the grossness of my conduct, and my stupid mistake; and if Thy justice for my chastisement had permitted me to execute my imprudent intention, what wretchedness would now be mine! Thanks to Thee, my God, throughout eternity, for so great a blessing. I will present myself to my princess, my spouse, confiding in the sweetness of her clemency, and, prostrate at her feet, I will beseech her pardon, so that for her sake, Lord, Thou wilt regard me with pity, and pardon my fault."

St. Joseph went forth from his humble chamber very unlike what he was before his recent slumber. Now he was happy: yet he dared not disturb our blessed Lady, who was still employed in the sweets of her contemplation. While awaiting the favorable moment, the man of God, with tearful eyes, unbound the little packet that he had prepared—but with sentiments far different from those which had previously occupied him. Having learned the honor due to our blessed Lady, our saint watered the house



with his tears; he swept it and prepared other little household work, which, while ignorant of her dignity, he had intrusted to the care of his blessed spouse.

He now resolved to change his deportment towards her, by appropriating to himself the office of servant, reserving that of mistress for her majesty. Further on we shall relate the loving disputes which he had with our queen to decide which of the two should serve and take the humbler place. At the proper time the saint presented himself at the chamber of our blessed Lady, who awaited his coming with the sweetness and complacency which we shall recount in the following chapter. Let us take an example from St. Joseph, who believed, without delay and without doubting, that which the angel revealed to him, in such wise that he merited to be elevated to a great recompense, and to a sublime dignity. And if he abased himself with so much humility, not having committed any sin in what he did, but only in having been greatly troubled under circumstances which seemed to give so much occasion for anxiety, consider how much we ought to humiliate ourselves—we, who are nothing but miserable worms of the dust—by weeping over our negligence and our sins, so that the Most High may regard us as father and spouse.



CHAPTER V.

ST. JOSEPH ASKS PARDON OF THE HOLY MARY HIS SPOUSE—HE RESOLVES TO SERVE HER IN ALL THINGS WITH PROFOUND RESPECT.

St. JOSEPH, after the discovery of his error, waited until our blessed Lady should come forth from her retreat. As soon as he thought it was time, he opened the door of the little chamber occupied by the mother of the heavenly King, and, throwing himself at her feet, he exclaimed, with humility and profound veneration: "My spouse, Mother of the Eternal Word, behold your servant prostrate before you. By the same Lord whom you bear in your most chaste bosom, I pray you to pardon my presumption. Sure I am that none of my thoughts can be hidden from your wisdom, nor from the divine light which you have received. Great was my blindness to think of deserting you; but you know that I did it in ignorance, because neither the secret of the great King had been revealed to me, nor the greatness of your dignity. Forget, I entreat you, the many deficiencies of a vile creature who offers his heart and his life to your service; I will not rise from your feet until you have pardoned my folly—until I shall have received your forgiveness and your benediction."

The august Mary listened with mingled feelings to the humble words of her spouse. She rejoiced in the Lord to learn that St. Joseph was informed of the mysteries of the incarnation, and that he revered them with such profound faith and humility. But she was troubled by the resolution he had taken to change his conduct towards her, and with the respect and submission with which he addressed her. Knowing how much she ought to esteem humility, she was disturbed by the apprehension that St. Joseph, recognizing in her the mother of the Lord, would deport himself in all things as her inferior. Insisting that he should rise, she prostrated herself at his feet, although he made every effort to hinder this, but it was not possible; for in humility she was invincible. Then she said to the saint: "It is I, my spouse, who ought to beseech your pardon



for the pain and sorrow that you have had to endure on my account, therefore I beg you will forget them."

Our blessed Lady, for the consolation of her husband, continued: "I could not reveal to you the hidden mystery which the Most High had inclosed within me, because it was my duty to await the expression of the will of the Lord. Thus my silence should not be considered as arising from any want of esteem for you, for in all things I regard you as my master and my husband. I am, and I always shall be, your faithful servant; but do not make any change in the demeanor which you have always preserved towards me. The Lord has not elevated me to the dignity of being His own mother to be served, but to be the servant of all, and of you especially. This is my office: it is but just that you should leave it to me, since the Most High has so ordained in giving me your protection."

St. Joseph, by these reasons and many others, sweetly efficacious, found his spirit enlightened in a singular manner. He received, through this purest of creatures, extraordinary divine influences, and, entirely renewed in heart, he replied: "You are blessed among women; you are blessed among all nations. May the Creator of heaven and earth be glorified by eternal praises, for that He has chosen you for His dwelling. In you alone He has accomplished the promises that He made to our fathers and to the prophets. Let all generations bless Him that He has not exalted Himself in any creature as in you, and that He has chosen me, the vilest of men, to be your servant." The saint was enlightened by the divine Spirit after the manner of St. Elizabeth; but the light and knowledge which St. Joseph received were, in a certain sense, more admirable, because of his dignity and ministry.

The august Mary replied by the Magnificat and other new canticles; and while chanting them, inflamed by the divine fire, she was rapt in a sublime ecstasy, and, lifted up from the earth in a globe of brilliant light which encircled her, she was transformed as in a glory. St. Joseph was filled with admiration and joy inconceivable at this view of his holy sponse, for he had never yet seen her surrounded with such glory and excellence. She appeared to him quite transparent, and, at the same time, he discovered the



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integrity and virginal purity of our queen and the mystery of her dignity. He saw, also, and recognized in the chaste bosom of Mary the holy humanity of the Infant God and the union of the two natures in the person of the Word. He adored the Infant God with a profound humility, acknowledged his true Redeemer, and offered himself to His service with fervent acts of divine love.

The Lord regarded him with great favor, and distinguished him among all men, for He accepted him as His reputed father, and gave him the title. And to render him conformable to this new and honorable name, He imparted to him all the knowledge and divine gifts to which Christian purity can or ought to aspire.

If it were a proof of the magnanimity of the glorious St. Joseph that he did not die of jealousy, it is also a subject of admiration that he was not overwhelmed by the joy which he felt on this occasion. In the first case his holiness appears, but in the second he received such augmentations of graces and gifts from the Lord, that, if His divine Majesty had not dilated his heart, he could not have been able to receive them. He was entirely renewed and enlightened so as to converse worthily with her who was the Mother of God, and, conjointly with her, to dispense all that concerned the incarnation and the charge of the Word made man. It was also manifested to him, in order that he should recognize the obligation imposed on him to serve his holy spouse, that all the gifts he had received from the Most High were received through her and for her. He knew that the gifts he had received before his espousals were bestowed because the Lord had chosen him for this office, and that those which he now received were because she had merited them for him. And as our blessed Lady had been the instrument by which the Lord had wrought the sanctification of John the Baptist, and his mother, St. Elizabeth, she was the organ, also, by whom St. Joseph received the plenitude of grace. This most happy spouse knew all this, and he responded to it like a faithful and grateful servant.

The holy evangelists make no mention of these great mysteries, nor of many others which were known to our blessed Lady and St. Joseph, because, for many reasons, they were not suitable to be made known to the Gentiles on their first conversion. These things



were reserved, by the impenetrable judgments of Providence, for times which the divine wisdom judged more suitable,* or when the Church should have need of the intercession and support of our holy queen. The faithful St. Joseph, after having been made aware of the dignity of his spouse, and the mystery of the incarnation, conceived so lofty an esteem for her, that, although he had been always pure and perfect in his life, he now became as a new man. He resolved henceforth to change his conduct, and to redouble his veneration towards our blessed Lady. This was in conformity with the wisdom of the saint, and due to the excellence of his spouse, for he was servant, and she mistress of the universe. St. Joseph knew all this by divine illumination. Now, to satisfy the desire he had to honor her in whom he recognized the Mother of God, when he spoke to her, or passed before her, if alone together, he bent the knee. He would not suffer her to wait on him, nor that she should occupy herself in other humble offices, such as sweeping the house, cleansing the vessels, and many other things which he thought derogatory from the dignity of our queen.

But our saintly Lady, who was the humblest of the humble, and whose humility was not to be overcome, prayed St. Joseph not to pay her such honors as to bow the knee to her. This veneration, she said, was doubtless due to the Lord, whom she bore in her bosom; but while He remained there, the person of Christ could not be distinguished from her own. The saint, yielding to her humble desires, rendered this worship to the Lord, who was in the bosom of Mary, and to her as His mother, only when unperceived by her.

They had also humble disputes respecting their servile employments. St. Joseph could not consent to allow our amiable mistress to perform them, and strove to prevent it. On her part, she did what she could, but while she was retired in her oratory the saint found time to do many things, and thus our sweet Lady was frustrated in her desires to be the servant. At these times she addressed her meek complaints to the Lord, and prayed Him to oblige her spouse not to hinder her in the exercise of humility.

* Jesus said, "I have yet many things to say to you: but you cannot hear them now."—*St. John*, xvi. 12.



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This virtue is so agreeable at the tribunal of God, that we ask for no common grace when we pray for it; for humility imparts a certain greatness to all things, and inclines God to clemency. The divine Majesty hearkened to the request of our blessed Lady, and his guardian angel said, interiorly, to the blessed St. Joseph, "Do not frustrate the humble desires of her who is above all creatures in heaven or on earth. Permit her to serve you in external things, and preserve for her in your interior the greatest reverence. Render to the Word made man, in all times and in all places, the homage that is due to Him. You can, meanwhile, assist His mother, and honour always the Lord of the universe who is within her."

Having received these orders from the Most High, St. Joseph no longer refused her humble exercises to our sweet Lady. Thus both offered to God the sacrifice of their will. The most pure Mary, in practising her profound humility, and faithful obedience to her spouse; and St. Joseph, by obedience to the Most High, with a holy confusion to see himself served by her whom he recognized as mistress of the universe and mother of the Creator.

Thus our saint was compensated for the humility which he could not exercise; for to see himself served as he was, humiliated him far more, and obliged him to abase himself still more profoundly in contempt of himself. In these dispositions St. Joseph meditated upon the Lord, whom the august Mary bore in her chaste bosom, adoring and rendering to Him honor and glory. Then, in recompense for his sanctity and his respect, mingled with fear, the Infant God, made man, sometimes manifested Himself in an admirable manner. He saw Him in the bosom of His most pure mother, as through a luminous crystal. Afterwards, our incomparable Lady conversed more familiarly with her blessed spouse upon the mysteries of the incarnation, for she knew that he was now informed of the secrets of the hypostatic union of the two natures, divine and human, within her virginal bosom.

No tongue can relate the celestial discourses that were held between the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. And who can describe the effects produced on the gentle and pious heart of this holy man, on finding himself the spouse of her who was the veritable



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mother of his Creator, and to see her performing for him the duties of a simple servant ?

If the Almighty enriched the house and the person of Obed-Edom with such plenteous benedictions for having received the ark of the Old Testament, what benedictions would He not bestow upon St. Joseph, to whom He had confided the true Ark, and the Legislator Himself who was inclosed within it ?

The happiness and the fidelity of this saint were incomparable, not only because the living Ark of the New Testament abode in his house, but because he guarded it like a faithful and prudent servant. The Lord placed him over His family, also, that he should provide for it according to its necessities as a faithful administrator. Let all nations acknowledge him, bless him, and publish his praises, since the Most High has never done for any other what He has done for this incomparable saint. In view of mysteries so august, I will glorify this adorable Lord, and confess Him as holy, just, merciful, wise, and admirable in all His wondrous works.



CHAPTER VI.

MODE OF LIFE OF THE AUGUST MARY AND ST. JOSEPH.—CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THEM, AND OTHER REMARKABLE CIRCUMSTANCES.

THE humble house of Joseph, which our saints made their dwelling-place, consisted of three chambers only. St. Joseph slept in one of these, and used another as a workshop, where the tools were deposited which served for use in his trade of carpenter. The third, which contained a small bed, the work of our saint, was appropriated to the Queen of heaven, who slept there, and made it her ordinary abode. This order was established from the date of their marriage.

Before he was informed of her dignity, the saintly husband rarely, except when some affair obliged him to ask her advice, visited his wife, because he was engaged with his work, and she remained in her retreat. But after his happiness was made known to him, the holy man became more assiduous, and went very often to seek our blessed Lady, to renew the offer of his services. Yet he never approached her but with great humility and reverent respect. Before speaking to her he was careful to observe how she was occupied. Thus, many times he saw her rapt in ecstasy, and surrounded by a radiant light; at others, he found her discoursing with angels. Often she was prostrate, in the form of a cross, and speaking with the Lord. In these circumstances our saint contented himself with the liberty of gazing upon her with the most profound reverence. It was granted to his merits to hear the harmony of the angelic chants, and to inhale a delicious fragrance that strengthened him and filled his whole being with spiritual joy and consolation.

The holy spouses were alone in their house, for they kept no servant—not only because of their great humility, but also that they found it most convenient to have no witnesses of the prodigies that were of such frequent occurrence with them.

Our Lady never left the house, unless obliged by some pressing



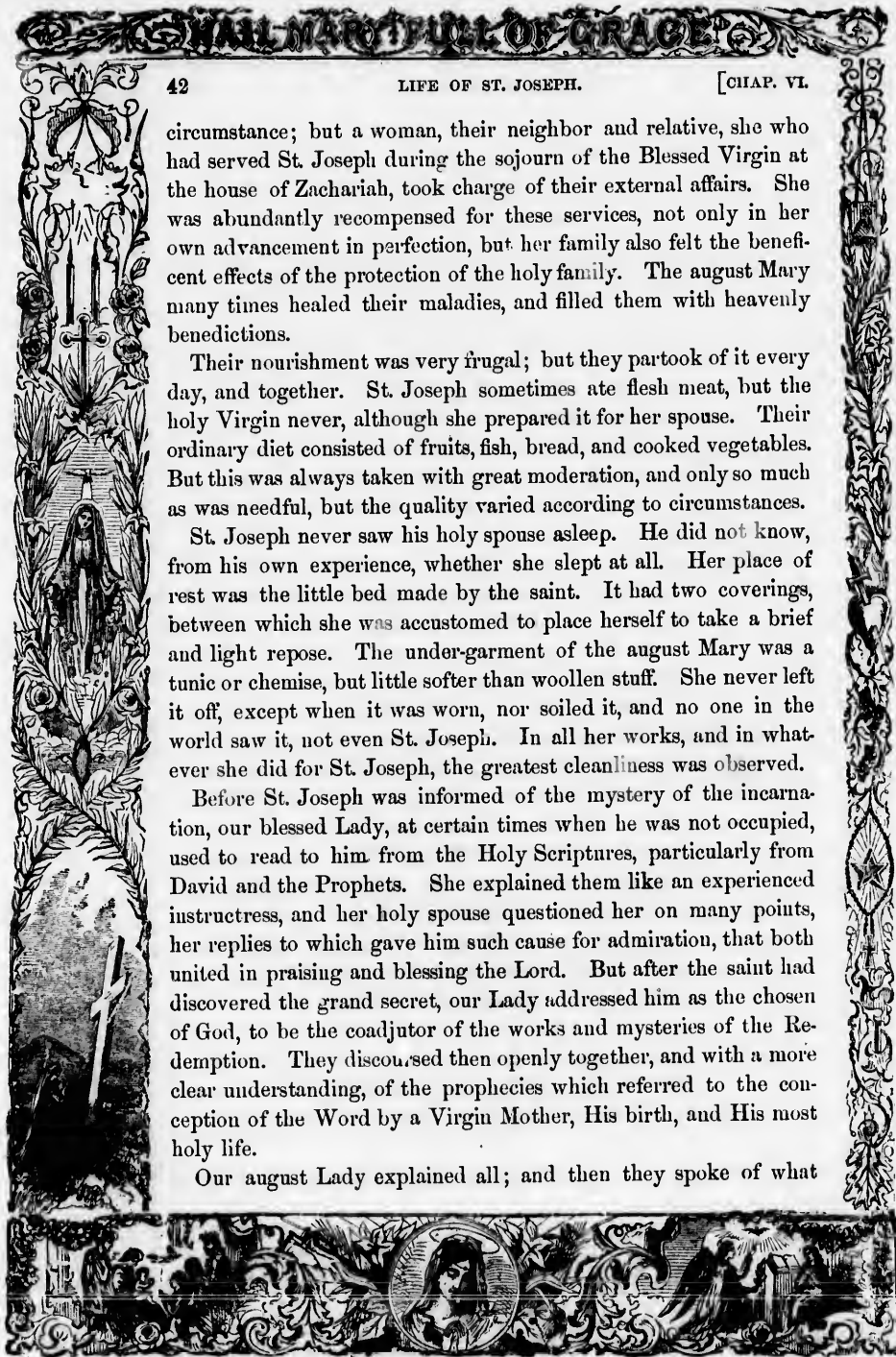
circumstance; but a woman, their neighbor and relative, she who had served St. Joseph during the sojourn of the Blessed Virgin at the house of Zachariah, took charge of their external affairs. She was abundantly recompensed for these services, not only in her own advancement in perfection, but her family also felt the beneficent effects of the protection of the holy family. The august Mary many times healed their maladies, and filled them with heavenly benedictions.

Their nourishment was very frugal; but they partook of it every day, and together. St. Joseph sometimes ate flesh meat, but the holy Virgin never, although she prepared it for her spouse. Their ordinary diet consisted of fruits, fish, bread, and cooked vegetables. But this was always taken with great moderation, and only so much as was needful, but the quality varied according to circumstances.

St. Joseph never saw his holy spouse asleep. He did not know, from his own experience, whether she slept at all. Her place of rest was the little bed made by the saint. It had two coverings, between which she was accustomed to place herself to take a brief and light repose. The under-garment of the august Mary was a tunic or chemise, but little softer than woollen stuff. She never left it off, except when it was worn, nor soiled it, and no one in the world saw it, not even St. Joseph. In all her works, and in whatever she did for St. Joseph, the greatest cleanliness was observed.

Before St. Joseph was informed of the mystery of the incarnation, our blessed Lady, at certain times when he was not occupied, used to read to him from the Holy Scriptures, particularly from David and the Prophets. She explained them like an experienced instructress, and her holy spouse questioned her on many points, her replies to which gave him such cause for admiration, that both united in praising and blessing the Lord. But after the saint had discovered the grand secret, our Lady addressed him as the chosen of God, to be the coadjutor of the works and mysteries of the Redemption. They discoursed then openly together, and with a more clear understanding, of the prophecies which referred to the conception of the Word by a Virgin Mother, His birth, and His most holy life.

Our august Lady explained all; and then they spoke of what



they should do when the day, so much desired, should come—when the Child should be born, when He should be in her arms, and she should nourish Him from her virginal breast, and when, alone among mortals, her holy spouse would be the only one who should participate in this inconceivable happiness! But she said little of the death and the passion, for she was unwilling to afflict the tender heart of her spouse.

The faithful and happy St. Joseph was all enkindled by divine love in these gracious conversations, and, shedding tears of joy, he cried out: "Is it indeed possible that I shall see my God and Redeemer within your chaste arms?—that I shall adore Him there?—that I shall hear His sweet voice?—that I shall touch Him?—that my eyes shall see His divine face?—that the sweat of my brow shall be employed in His service, and for His support?—that we shall speak and converse with Him? Whence comes to me such bliss as none could ever have deserved? Why have I not rich treasures, that I might lay them at His feet?"

Our august Lady replied: "The great God comes not into the world to find riches, for He needs them not; for them would He not descend from heaven. He comes on earth only to repair the disorders of the world, and by sure ways to conduct it to eternal life; and these ways are none other than humility and poverty. For this He has chosen our poor habitation. He wills not that we be rich in worldly goods, which are but vanity and vexation of spirit."

The saint often besought the holy Virgin to instruct him in the character of the virtues, especially that of the divine love, in order that he might understand how to conduct himself in a suitable manner towards the God-man, so as not to be rejected as an unprofitable servant. The Mistress of the Virtues condescended to his request, and explained to her spouse the properties of the virtues, and the manner of practising them with all possible perfection. Nevertheless she departed herself in these instructions with such great discretion, that she appeared in no wise the mistress of her spouse, for she interrogated the saint and instructed him by her questions.

They mingled these conversations, or readings from the Scrip-





tures, sometimes with manual labor, when the saint was obliged to continue at his work. Our most amiable Lady added to them the consolations of the celestial doctrines; and thus the happy husband made greater advancement in virtue than with the work of his hands. She showed to him the great fruit that may be drawn from labor. Believing herself unworthy to be maintained by her spouse, she was humbled, in thinking how much she was indebted to him. She felt herself as much obliged as if she had been the most useless of all creatures, and, being unable to assist our saint, she served him whenever it was possible. About this time St. Joseph saw, one day, a great number of birds come to entertain the queen of creatures. They fluttered around her, as if to form a choir, and sang with a delicious melody. St. Joseph had not before witnessed this marvel, and, overflowing with joy and wonder, he exclaimed: "Is it possible that unreasoning creatures acquit themselves of their obligations better than I? It is just that if they recognize, serve, and honor you, so far as they are capable, that you should permit me also, to acquit myself of what is justly your right." But the most prudent Virgin replied: "I am but a simple creature, yet I ought to induce all creatures to praise the Most High."

It often happened that they found themselves in want of necessities, for they were very liberal to the poor, nor were they careful, like worldly people, to provide for their wants in advance. Now the Lord so ordered it, that the faith and patience of His holy Mother and St. Joseph should not be idle. These privations were an inexpressible consolation to the august Mary, not only because of her love of poverty, but also of her humility, through which she considered herself undeserving of the necessary aliments of life. She prayed the Most High only to supply the wants of St. Joseph.

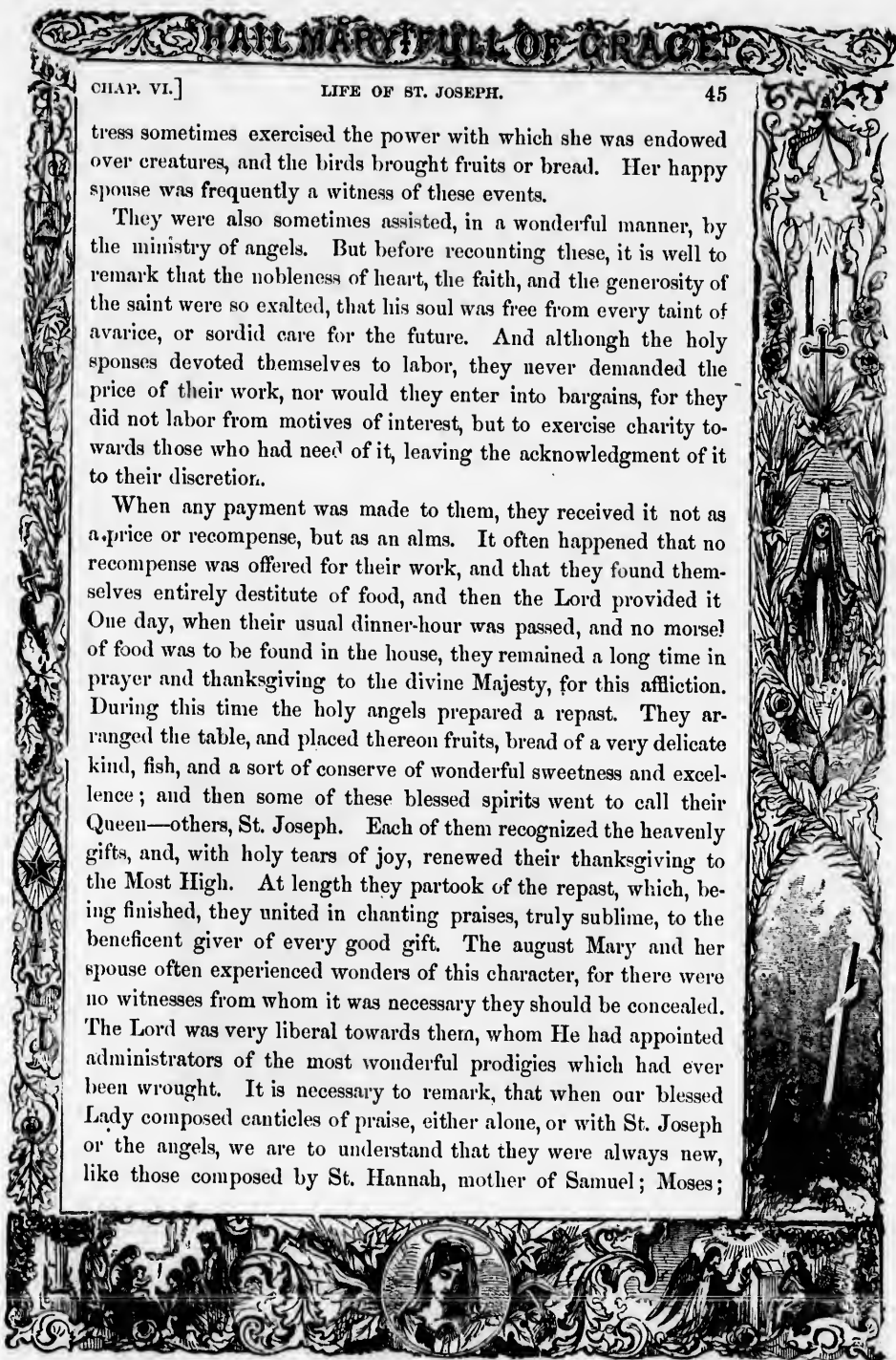
The All-Powerful forgot not His poor, and, while giving them occasion to augment their merits and to exercise their virtues, He gave them also food in season. Sometimes He inspired their neighbors or acquaintances to assist them by a gift. Oftener St. Elizabeth sent them succors from her own house; for, since the visit of the Queen of heaven, she had resolved to help them, and our sweet Lady sent in return some work of her own hands. Our holy Mis-



ness sometimes exercised the power with which she was endowed over creatures, and the birds brought fruits or bread. Her happy spouse was frequently a witness of these events.

They were also sometimes assisted, in a wonderful manner, by the ministry of angels. But before recounting these, it is well to remark that the nobleness of heart, the faith, and the generosity of the saint were so exalted, that his soul was free from every taint of avarice, or sordid care for the future. And although the holy spouses devoted themselves to labor, they never demanded the price of their work, nor would they enter into bargains, for they did not labor from motives of interest, but to exercise charity towards those who had need of it, leaving the acknowledgment of it to their discretion.

When any payment was made to them, they received it not as a price or recompense, but as an alms. It often happened that no recompense was offered for their work, and that they found themselves entirely destitute of food, and then the Lord provided it. One day, when their usual dinner-hour was passed, and no morsel of food was to be found in the house, they remained a long time in prayer and thanksgiving to the divine Majesty, for this affliction. During this time the holy angels prepared a repast. They arranged the table, and placed thereon fruits, bread of a very delicate kind, fish, and a sort of conserve of wonderful sweetness and excellence; and then some of these blessed spirits went to call their Queen—others, St. Joseph. Each of them recognized the heavenly gifts, and, with holy tears of joy, renewed their thanksgiving to the Most High. At length they partook of the repast, which, being finished, they united in chanting praises, truly sublime, to the beneficent giver of every good gift. The august Mary and her spouse often experienced wonders of this character, for there were no witnesses from whom it was necessary they should be concealed. The Lord was very liberal towards them, whom He had appointed administrators of the most wonderful prodigies which had ever been wrought. It is necessary to remark, that when our blessed Lady composed canticles of praise, either alone, or with St. Joseph or the angels, we are to understand that they were always new, like those composed by St. Hannah, mother of Samuel; Moses;



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Hezekiah, and other prophets. If they had been written, they would form a large volume, which would have been the admiration of all the world.

The providence of the Most High declares Himself protector of the humble who confide in Him, because the divine Majesty regards them with love. He is pleased with them—He bears them in His bosom—He is attentive to all their desires and all their pains. The august Mary and St. Joseph were very poor, and often found themselves in great want, but never did they allow the poison of avarice or cupidity to enter their hearts. They sought the glory of God alone, abandoning themselves entirely to His most loving care.

We ought to be content with what is necessary, and to be convinced that the providence of our Creator can never fail. If He be slow sometimes to send us His help, we should not be afflicted nor lose hope. He who has abundance ought not to fix his hopes upon it. We should attribute to God both abundance and poverty, and make a holy use of both. Let us practise this doctrine, and abandon ourselves to Providence, and nothing that is needful for us can ever be wanting.



CHAPTER VII.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE BIRTH OF THE INFANT JESUS.—EDICT OF AUGUSTUS.—
THE BLESSED MARY AND ST. JOSEPH GO TO BETHLEHEM.

THE Mother of the Eternal Word, the holy Mary, seeing the period of the birth of the Infant God approach, would not undertake to make the necessary preparations for it, without the commands of her husband, and the will of God. Although she was able to decide for herself in whatever concerned the maternal office, she preferred to practise the duties of an obedient and most faithful servant. She therefore consulted her holy spouse, St. Joseph. "It is time," she said, "to begin the preparations for the birth of my most blessed Son. With your permission, I will provide the swaddling-clothes to receive Him. I have some linen, spun by myself, which will serve for a part, if you will seek for the finest and softest that can be found for the rest. And that all may be well done, let us offer a special prayer to His divine Majesty that we may do whatever is most agreeable to Him."

St. Joseph replied: "If it were necessary to give the purest of my blood to testify my readiness to render service to my God, and to do what you request, I should esteem myself happy to pour it out in the cruellest torments. Order all as it seems best, for I desire to obey you as your servant." While they were engaged in prayer, the Most High replied to each in particular by the same voice. "I have descended from heaven to earth to elevate humility, and to debase pride—to honor poverty, and to make riches contemptible. For this reason, it is my will that you treat me in the humanity which I have assumed, in all things exterior, as if I were the child of both of you—and interiorly you will recognize in me the Son of my eternal Father, and true God, with the veneration and love due to me, being man and God at the same time."

The august Mary and St. Joseph were confirmed by this divine voice in the wisdom that should guide their actions in all the services which they were to render to the Infant God. They resolved



to practise the most sublime and perfect mode of honoring their true God, and never among mere creatures was He so perfectly honored. But before the eyes of the world they treated Him as if they were conjointly His parents, because it was the Lord's will that men should so believe. The celestial inhabitants were in admiration at the conduct of the holy spouses, as we shall relate further on. They resolved also to devote to the Infant God all the services which their condition admitted, without attracting observation, so that the secret of the great King should be concealed; neither should he want for any thing, for, in ministering to Him, they could manifest their ardent love, so far as it was possible.

St. Joseph, having received payment for some of his work, purchased, according to the wishes of his spouse, two pieces of cloth, one white, and the other nearer violet than gray—the best that could be found. Our lovely Lady made of them swaddling-clothes for her most holy child. She made little shirts of the linen that she had spun during the early period of her marriage, with the intention of offering it at the Temple. Happily her intention was changed; nevertheless she made an offering of what was left. The Blessed Virgin had woven this linen on her knees, with tears of inexpressible devotion. St. Joseph also purchased flowers and aromatics, from which the holy Mother composed the most delicious perfume that ever was made. With this she sprinkled the swaddling-clothes consecrated to the Victim, and, folding them, she placed them in a case which she and St. Joseph carried with them to Bethlehem, as we shall see.

It is hardly necessary to remark, that all these works recounted here, ought not to be regarded simply as facts. Their objects, and the intentions which inspired them, redolent of sanctity, and enriched with the highest perfection, must be taken into view. The divine Mother, her heart all glowing with love, offered all the sacrifices which the ancient law contained in figure. She realized, in truth, the ancient figures, by the exercise of virtues and acts both interior and exterior. Her happy spouse, on his part, accompanied her in many of them.

If the smallest portion of grace that a creature, whoever he may be, receives, by means of a virtue that he has practised, is worth



more than all the universe, who can estimate its greatness in her who surpassed the merits of the highest Seraphim! Our holy Lady saw the humanity united to the Divinity in the person of the Word, saw all the interior acts of the most holy soul of her divine Son, and the prayers that He offered for her, for St. Joseph, for the whole human race, and especially for the predestinate.

The Most High had determined, by His immutable will, that the only Son of the Father should be born at Bethlehem. The ancient prophets had long since announced it. The Lord disposed all things for the accomplishment of His divine decree; and it was by an edict of Cæsar Augustus, who commanded, as it is recorded by St. Luke, a census to be made of the whole world. It consisted in acknowledging the authority of the Emperor of Rome, and paying a certain tribute. To effect this, every one was obliged to inscribe himself on the register of his native city.

This edict being published at Nazareth, St. Joseph was informed of it. Returning home, in much trouble, he related to his blessed spouse what had happened. The most prudent Virgin replied: "The edict of an earthly potentate ought not to disturb you in this manner, since the Sovereign of heaven and earth takes care of all things that belong to us. His Providence will assist us. Let us abandon ourselves with confidence to His guidance."

The holy Virgin was instructed in all the mysteries of her divine Son, and she knew that He was to be born in Bethlehem, poor, and a stranger; but she said nothing of this to St. Joseph. They conferred together upon what they ought to do, for the period of the birth of the Infant God approached. At length St. Joseph said to his spouse: "It seems to me that I cannot be dispensed from executing this edict of the emperor. And although it would suffice to go alone, I dare not leave you, for I should not have a moment of repose—my heart would be in perpetual alarm. It would be risking too much to propose to you to accompany me to Bethlehem; it would expose you, too evidently, to danger. This apprehension gives me great pain. Present, I entreat you, my supplications to the Most High, that He may not separate me from you."

The humble Mary obeyed the request of St. Joseph, only to prove her obedience, for she was not ignorant of the divine will.

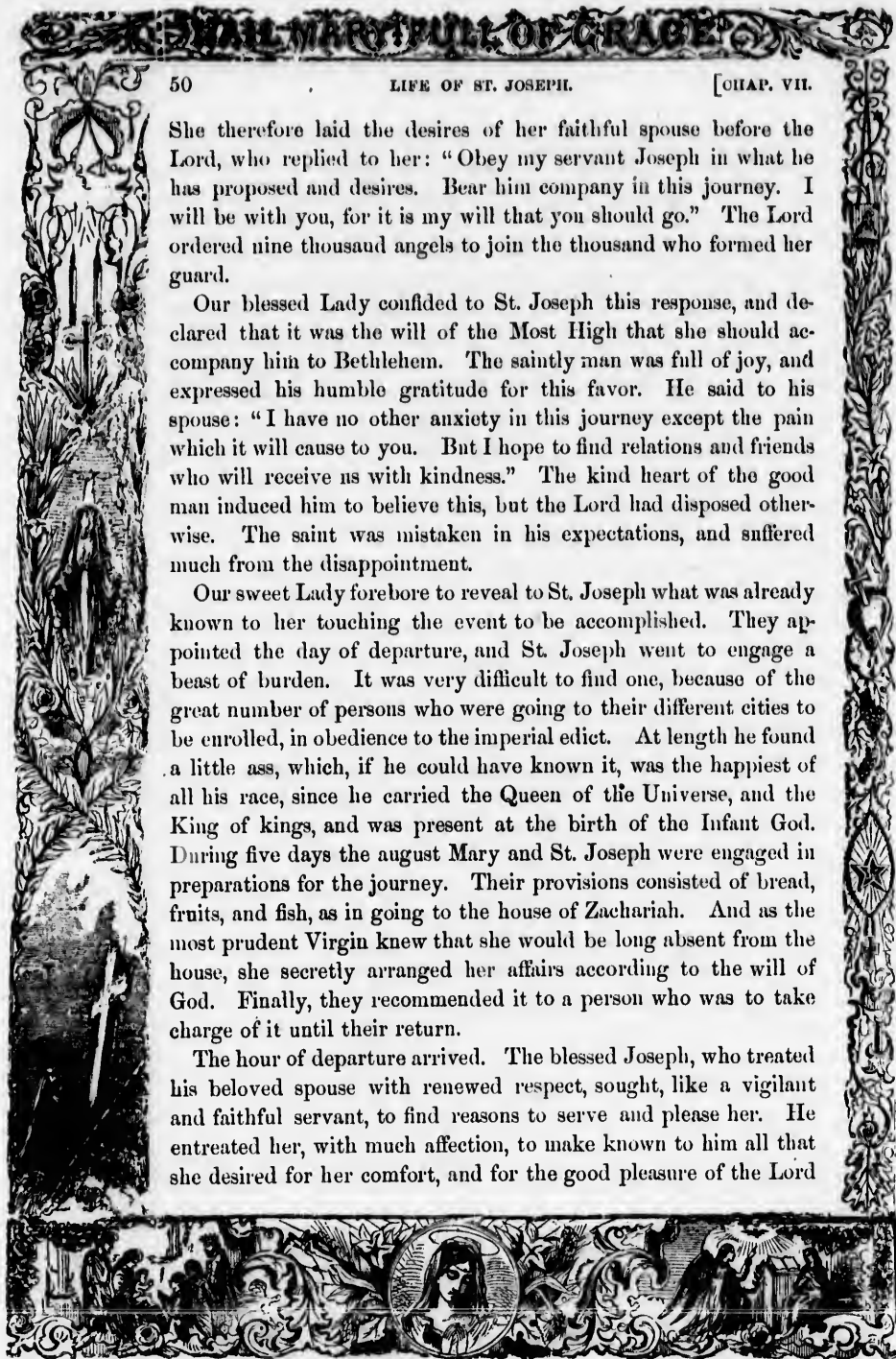


She therefore laid the desires of her faithful spouse before the Lord, who replied to her: "Obey my servant Joseph in what he has proposed and desires. Bear him company in this journey. I will be with you, for it is my will that you should go." The Lord ordered nine thousand angels to join the thousand who formed her guard.

Our blessed Lady confided to St. Joseph this response, and declared that it was the will of the Most High that she should accompany him to Bethlehem. The saintly man was full of joy, and expressed his humble gratitude for this favor. He said to his spouse: "I have no other anxiety in this journey except the pain which it will cause to you. But I hope to find relations and friends who will receive us with kindness." The kind heart of the good man induced him to believe this, but the Lord had disposed otherwise. The saint was mistaken in his expectations, and suffered much from the disappointment.

Our sweet Lady forebore to reveal to St. Joseph what was already known to her touching the event to be accomplished. They appointed the day of departure, and St. Joseph went to engage a beast of burden. It was very difficult to find one, because of the great number of persons who were going to their different cities to be enrolled, in obedience to the imperial edict. At length he found a little ass, which, if he could have known it, was the happiest of all his race, since he carried the Queen of the Universe, and the King of kings, and was present at the birth of the Infant God. During five days the august Mary and St. Joseph were engaged in preparations for the journey. Their provisions consisted of bread, fruits, and fish, as in going to the house of Zachariah. And as the most prudent Virgin knew that she would be long absent from the house, she secretly arranged her affairs according to the will of God. Finally, they recommended it to a person who was to take charge of it until their return.

The hour of departure arrived. The blessed Joseph, who treated his beloved spouse with renewed respect, sought, like a vigilant and faithful servant, to find reasons to serve and please her. He entreated her, with much affection, to make known to him all that she desired for her comfort, and for the good pleasure of the Lord



whom she bore in her virginal bosom. Our Queen meekly accepted the holy affection of her spouse: she even consoled and animated him to endure the fatigue of the road, for His divine Majesty willed that they should accept the inconveniences of the journey with an equable and joyous heart.

Before setting out, our blessed Lady knelt to ask the benediction of St. Joseph. The man of God excused himself because of her dignity, but the always invincible humility of the august Virgin conquered, and obliged him to give it. She then prayed him to offer himself anew to her most holy Son, and to obtain for her His divine grace. After these holy preparations they set out for Bethlehem, in the depth of winter, which made the journey more painful and more inconvenient.

The august Mary and the glorious St. Joseph left Nazareth to go to Bethlehem! Poor and humble travellers they were, in the eyes of the world, which had no more esteem for them than it had for humility and poverty. But, oh! wonderful secrets of the Most High! hidden from the proud and impenetrable, from the wisdom of the flesh, our travellers were not alone, nor poor, nor despised. They had a magnificent suite, inestimable riches, and a glory unparalleled. They were the highest objects of the care of the eternal Father, and of His immense love. They bore with them the treasures of heaven, and the Divinity itself.

All the celestial court revered them. The insensible creatures recognized the living ark of the Testament far better than the waters of the Jordan recognized that which was only the type of Her. With them were the ten thousand angels, appointed for His divine Majesty and His holy Mother. The incomparable Mary and her saintly spouse marched with this regal train, unseen by the eyes of mortals. The angels chanted canticles to the Lord, and to His blessed Mother, acknowledging her sometimes as a car, incorruptible and living—sometimes as the fertile ear, which contains the living wheat—sometimes as a richly freighted vessel.

The holy travellers were five days on the way; for the careful husband would not make long journeys. There was no night for our Queen during this time, for the angels threw so bright a radiance around her that the light was equal to the most serene day.

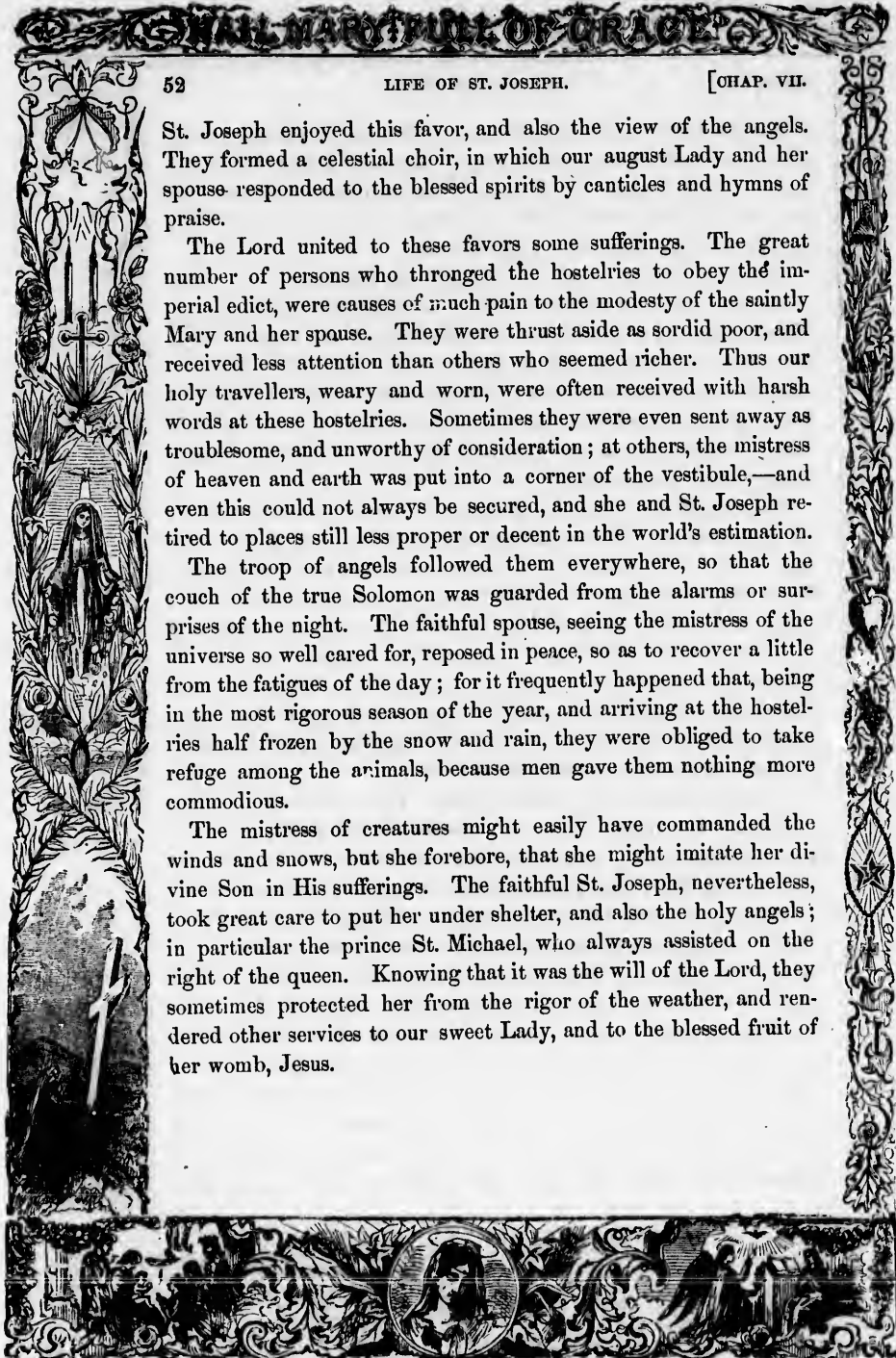


St. Joseph enjoyed this favor, and also the view of the angels. They formed a celestial choir, in which our august Lady and her spouse responded to the blessed spirits by canticles and hymns of praise.

The Lord united to these favors some sufferings. The great number of persons who thronged the hostelries to obey the imperial edict, were causes of much pain to the modesty of the saintly Mary and her spouse. They were thrust aside as sordid poor, and received less attention than others who seemed richer. Thus our holy travellers, weary and worn, were often received with harsh words at these hostelries. Sometimes they were even sent away as troublesome, and unworthy of consideration; at others, the mistress of heaven and earth was put into a corner of the vestibule,—and even this could not always be secured, and she and St. Joseph retired to places still less proper or decent in the world's estimation.

The troop of angels followed them everywhere, so that the couch of the true Solomon was guarded from the alarms or surprises of the night. The faithful spouse, seeing the mistress of the universe so well cared for, reposed in peace, so as to recover a little from the fatigues of the day; for it frequently happened that, being in the most rigorous season of the year, and arriving at the hostelries half frozen by the snow and rain, they were obliged to take refuge among the animals, because men gave them nothing more commodious.

The mistress of creatures might easily have commanded the winds and snows, but she forebore, that she might imitate her divine Son in His sufferings. The faithful St. Joseph, nevertheless, took great care to put her under shelter, and also the holy angels; in particular the prince St. Michael, who always assisted on the right of the queen. Knowing that it was the will of the Lord, they sometimes protected her from the rigor of the weather, and rendered other services to our sweet Lady, and to the blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus.



CHAPTER VIII.

ARRIVAL AT BETHLEHEM.—BIRTH OF JESUS IN A GROTTA.—ST. JOSEPH IS PRESENT AT THIS MYSTERY.

Our holy travellers, the blessed Mary and St. Joseph, reached Bethlehem on the fifth day of their journey, on Saturday, about four o'clock in the afternoon,—the hour when, at the winter solstice, the sun is near his setting, and the night approaches. They entered the town to seek a shelter, and having made inquiries, not only at the inns, but among their relations and friends, they were refused with rudeness and contempt. Our august Lady followed her spouse, who went from house to house—from door to door, in the midst of the crowds who arrived. And, although she knew that the houses of men, like their hearts, were closed against them, she willingly endured all this mortification in obedience to St. Joseph. At the same time it was more painful to find herself in the midst of such a crowd, than to be disappointed in finding a lodging. In wandering about the city, they found the house where the register was kept, and, to avoid the necessity of returning there, they inserted their names, and paid the tribute. Then, pursuing their way to find a place of refuge, they applied at more than fifty houses, and were everywhere refused. The holy angels admired the wonderful mysteries of the Lord, the patience and sweetness of the Virgin Mother, and the insensibility of men.

It was nearly nine o'clock in the evening when the faithful St. Joseph, deeply grieved, turning towards his prudent spouse: "My courage fails me," he said, "to find not only that I cannot lodge you according to your merits, but that I cannot even secure for you such a shelter as is rarely or never refused to the poorest and most contemptible applicant. Doubtless some mystery underlies this. I remember to have seen, without the city walls, a grotto where the shepherds are accustomed to fold their flocks. Let us go there, for if the place is not occupied, you will there receive from heaven the hospitality which men refuse to us."

The most prudent Virgin replied: "Do not afflict yourself, my spouse. The place you speak of is quite conformable to my desires. Change your tears into joy, for we love and we possess poverty, which is the inestimable treasure of my holy Son. He comes from heaven to seek it. Let us go with pleasure whither the Lord conducts us." Immediately the holy angels guided the saintly pair towards this place; they found it unoccupied, and, full of celestial joy, they praised the Lord.

The palace which the King of kings and Lord of lords had prepared in this world to receive His only Son, incarnate for men, was the lowly and humble grotto where the most pure Mary and St. Joseph had retired, after having been repulsed by all, as it has been related. This place was so unpromising, that, in spite of the extraordinary affluence of strangers at Bethlehem, no one had deigned to occupy it. In fact, it was suitable only to the masters of humility and poverty, and the wisdom of the eternal Father had reserved it for them.

The august Mary and Joseph entered the place, and, by the radiance of the angels, they saw that it was as poor and solitary as they could have wished. They then fell upon their knees, praising the Lord with thanksgivings for this blessing. The grotto was formed out of the natural rock, and was so unequal and rough, that it was fitted only for the lodging of animals.

The angelic spirits assumed a corporeal and human form. St. Joseph saw them, for it was proper that, on this occasion, he should enjoy this favor, either to diminish his pain, or to animate his spirit and elevate it for the events which the Lord had prepared for this same night. Our blessed Lady, informed of the mystery which was about to be accomplished, resolved herself to cleanse the grotto. The holy Joseph, attentive to the dignity of his admirable spouse, entreated her to leave this care to him. He therefore began to sweep and purify every part of it, and our humble Lady seconded him to the best of her power. The angels also assisted them, until in a short time the grotto was brought into a decent condition, and they filled it with a delightful perfume.

St. Joseph kindled a fire, of which there was much need, for the weather was very cold. They afterwards supped from the seraps



MARY FULL OF GRACE

of food still left; but our sweet Lady ate only on the pressing solicitations of her spouse, whom she desired to obey in all things. At the close of their repast, they returned thanks to God as was their custom, and afterwards discoursed together concerning the mystery of the incarnate Word.

The most prudent Virgin knew that the hour approached. She entreated St. Joseph to seek repose, for the night was far advanced. The man of God yielded to her solicitations, praying her to follow his example. In order to provide for her the means of rest, he arranged their luggage in such a way as to make up a species of crib, on the floor of the grotto, and, leaving to the august Mary this sort of bed, he withdrew into an angle at the entrance to engage in meditation and prayer. The Holy Spirit came to visit him, and he felt himself drawn by a gentle force that rapt him in ecstasy, during which the events of this night were manifested to him. He remained in this ecstasy until called by his holy spouse. This mysterious slumber of Joseph was more sublime and more fortunate than that of Adam in paradise.

[This would be the place to speak of the wonderful birth of the Infant God, and to admire the prodigies of every kind that accompanied it; but since it is impossible to relate all, we prefer to confine ourselves to what regards St. Joseph exclusively. The reader who desires to be informed of all these circumstances, is referred to the great work of Maria d'Agreda. It is not without lively regret that we omit here the narration of those facts which have commanded the admiration of heaven and earth.]

The evangelist St. Luke relates that the Virgin Mother, having brought forth her first-born Son, wrapped Him in swaddling-clothes, and laid Him in a manger. He does not mention who placed Him in her arms. But the two princes, St. Michael and St. Gabriel, were the ministers on this occasion, and they presented Him to her with as great a reverence as when the priest exposes the holy host. The holy Mother received the Infant God into her arms from these two celestial princes. She served as the altar and sanctuary, which the angels of her guard approached to adore their Creator, and venerate that youthful virgin of fifteen, so worthy to dispense these

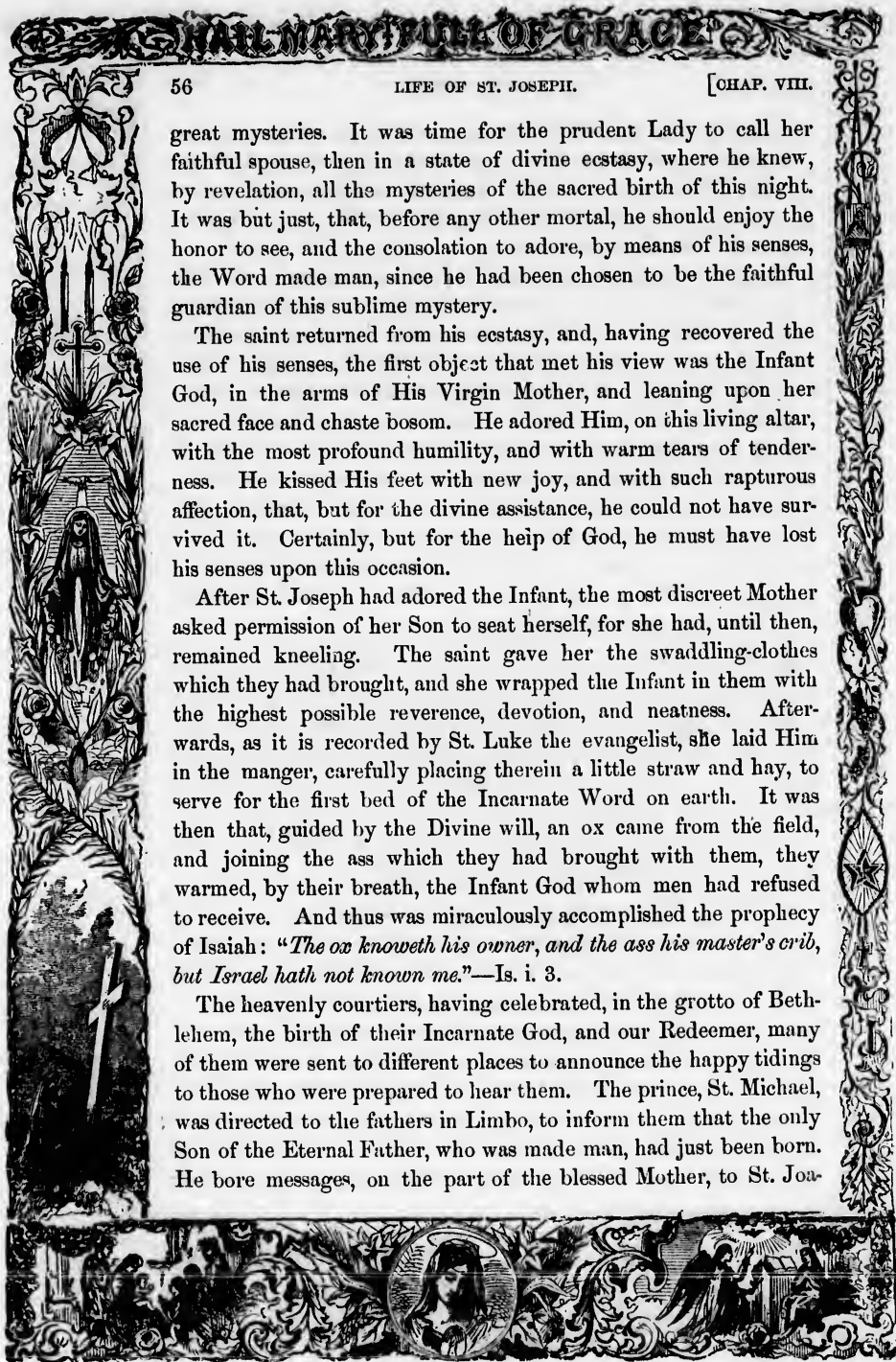


great mysteries. It was time for the prudent Lady to call her faithful spouse, then in a state of divine ecstasy, where he knew, by revelation, all the mysteries of the sacred birth of this night. It was but just, that, before any other mortal, he should enjoy the honor to see, and the consolation to adore, by means of his senses, the Word made man, since he had been chosen to be the faithful guardian of this sublime mystery.

The saint returned from his ecstasy, and, having recovered the use of his senses, the first object that met his view was the Infant God, in the arms of His Virgin Mother, and leaning upon her sacred face and chaste bosom. He adored Him, on this living altar, with the most profound humility, and with warm tears of tenderness. He kissed His feet with new joy, and with such rapturous affection, that, but for the divine assistance, he could not have survived it. Certainly, but for the help of God, he must have lost his senses upon this occasion.

After St. Joseph had adored the Infant, the most discreet Mother asked permission of her Son to seat herself, for she had, until then, remained kneeling. The saint gave her the swaddling-clothes which they had brought, and she wrapped the Infant in them with the highest possible reverence, devotion, and neatness. Afterwards, as it is recorded by St. Luke the evangelist, she laid Him in the manger, carefully placing therein a little straw and hay, to serve for the first bed of the Incarnate Word on earth. It was then that, guided by the Divine will, an ox came from the field, and joining the ass which they had brought with them, they warmed, by their breath, the Infant God whom men had refused to receive. And thus was miraculously accomplished the prophecy of Isaiah: "*The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel hath not known me.*"—Is. i. 3.

The heavenly courtiers, having celebrated, in the grotto of Bethlehem, the birth of their Incarnate God, and our Redeemer, many of them were sent to different places to announce the happy tidings to those who were prepared to hear them. The prince, St. Michael, was directed to the fathers in Limbo, to inform them that the only Son of the Eternal Father, who was made man, had just been born. He bore messages, on the part of the blessed Mother, to St. Joa-



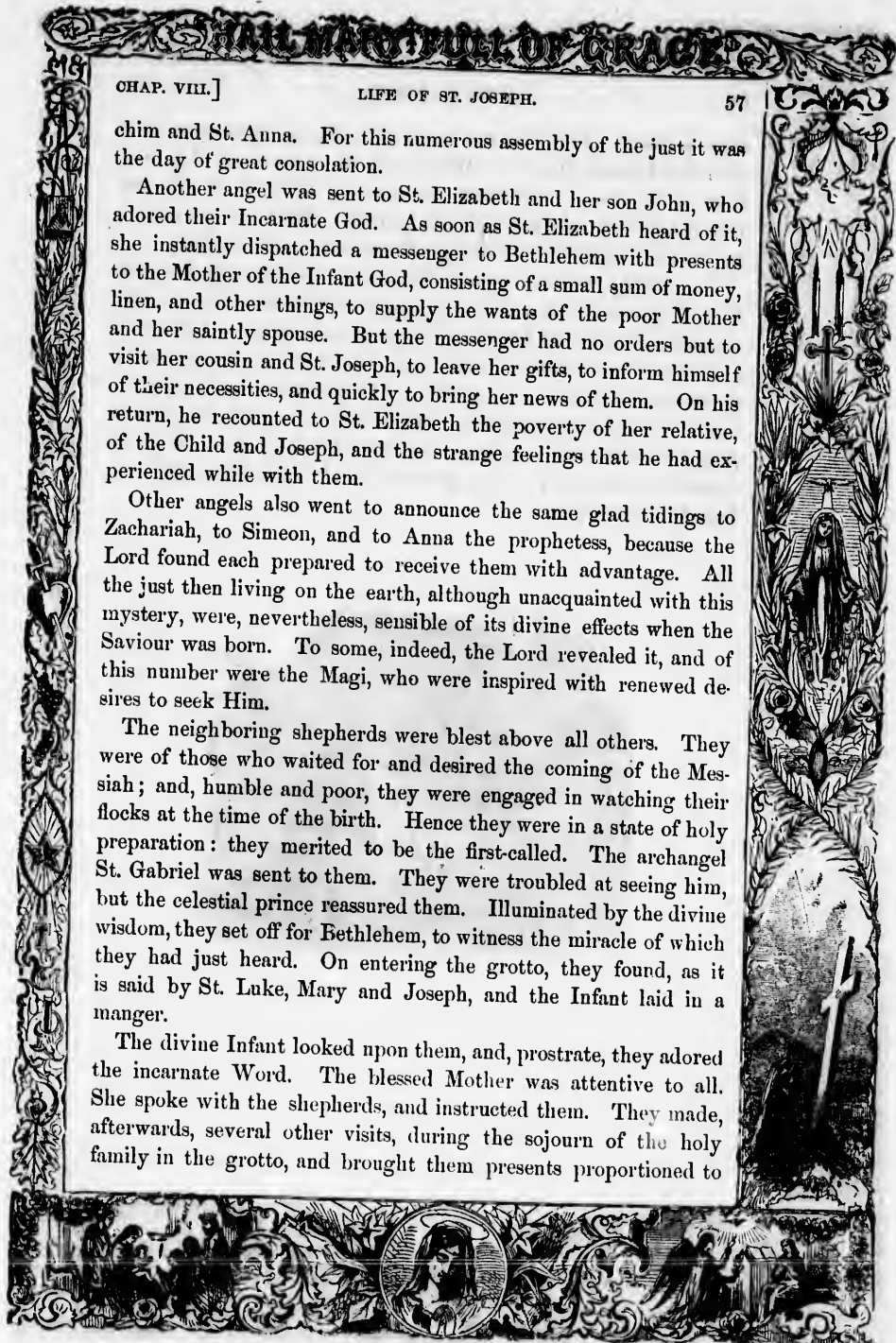
chim and St. Anna. For this numerous assembly of the just it was the day of great consolation.

Another angel was sent to St. Elizabeth and her son John, who adored their Incarnate God. As soon as St. Elizabeth heard of it, she instantly dispatched a messenger to Bethlehem with presents to the Mother of the Infant God, consisting of a small sum of money, linen, and other things, to supply the wants of the poor Mother and her saintly spouse. But the messenger had no orders but to visit her cousin and St. Joseph, to leave her gifts, to inform himself of their necessities, and quickly to bring her news of them. On his return, he recounted to St. Elizabeth the poverty of her relative, of the Child and Joseph, and the strange feelings that he had experienced while with them.

Other angels also went to announce the same glad tidings to Zachariah, to Simeon, and to Anna the prophetess, because the Lord found each prepared to receive them with advantage. All the just then living on the earth, although unacquainted with this mystery, were, nevertheless, sensible of its divine effects when the Saviour was born. To some, indeed, the Lord revealed it, and of this number were the Magi, who were inspired with renewed desires to seek Him.

The neighboring shepherds were blest above all others. They were of those who waited for and desired the coming of the Messiah; and, humble and poor, they were engaged in watching their flocks at the time of the birth. Hence they were in a state of holy preparation: they merited to be the first-called. The archangel St. Gabriel was sent to them. They were troubled at seeing him, but the celestial prince reassured them. Illuminated by the divine wisdom, they set off for Bethlehem, to witness the miracle of which they had just heard. On entering the grotto, they found, as it is said by St. Luke, Mary and Joseph, and the Infant laid in a manger.

The divine Infant looked upon them, and, prostrate, they adored the incarnate Word. The blessed Mother was attentive to all. She spoke with the shepherds, and instructed them. They made, afterwards, several other visits, during the sojourn of the holy family in the grotto, and brought them presents proportioned to



their poverty. They did not speak of what they had seen until after the blessed Mary, the Infant, and St. Joseph had departed from Bethlehem. Their testimony was not believed by all; but Herod believed, only not with a holy faith. They were, nevertheless, saints, and filled with divine science, even to their death.

The coming of the incarnate Word was terrible only for hell. Many things were concealed from Lucifer and his agents, which he might naturally have known; but he considered it an idle fancy to believe that the Word would come and establish His power in so obscure and humble a manner. The Mother of wisdom penetrated all the deceit of Lucifer. She glorified the Lord, and offered prayers for all of the human race, who, by their sins, had made themselves unworthy to recognize the Light who had just been born to redeem them.



CHAPTER IX.

SENTIMENTS OF THE AUGUST MOTHER AND ST. JOSEPH FOR THE INFANT GOD.—THE CIRCUMCISION.—THE SPOUSES GIVE HIM THE NAME OF JESUS.

DURING the time that our august Lady abode in the grotto, which was an incommodious place, and exposed to the inclemency of the weather, she took the greatest care to protect her tender and sweet Child. She had brought coverings with her for this purpose, and she held Him almost constantly in her arms, except when she left Him in those of St. Joseph. She wished to afford him the gratification to aid her in this service, and that he should serve the Incarnate God in the office of father.

The first time the saint received the Infant God, our blessed Lady said to him, "Receive within your arms, my spouse, the Creator of heaven and earth. Enjoy His sweet companionship, so that my Lord and my God may take delight in you." And speaking interiorly with the divine Infant she said, "Rest in the arms of your servant and friend Joseph, my spouse. It pains me to be without you for a single instant, but I wish to share my blessing with him who is worthy of it." The faithful St. Joseph, conscious of this new happiness, humbled himself profoundly. "Queen of the universe," he replied, "how can I dare, I who am so unworthy, to hold in my arms the same God in whose presence the pillars of heaven tremble. Supply my deficiencies, my baseness, and pray His divine Majesty to regard me with clemency." The holy man, hesitating between his desire to receive the Infant God and the respectful fear that held him back, offered to Him acts of love, faith, humility, and respect. He fell on his knees, and received Him with a holy trembling and inconceivable veneration from the hands of His blessed mother, shedding gentle tears of joy. The Infant God regarded him with a caressing air; and at the same time renovated his soul by His divine influence. The faithful Joseph, finding himself enriched by so many and such magnificent favors, gave utterance to new canticles of praise. After enjoying for a time the in-



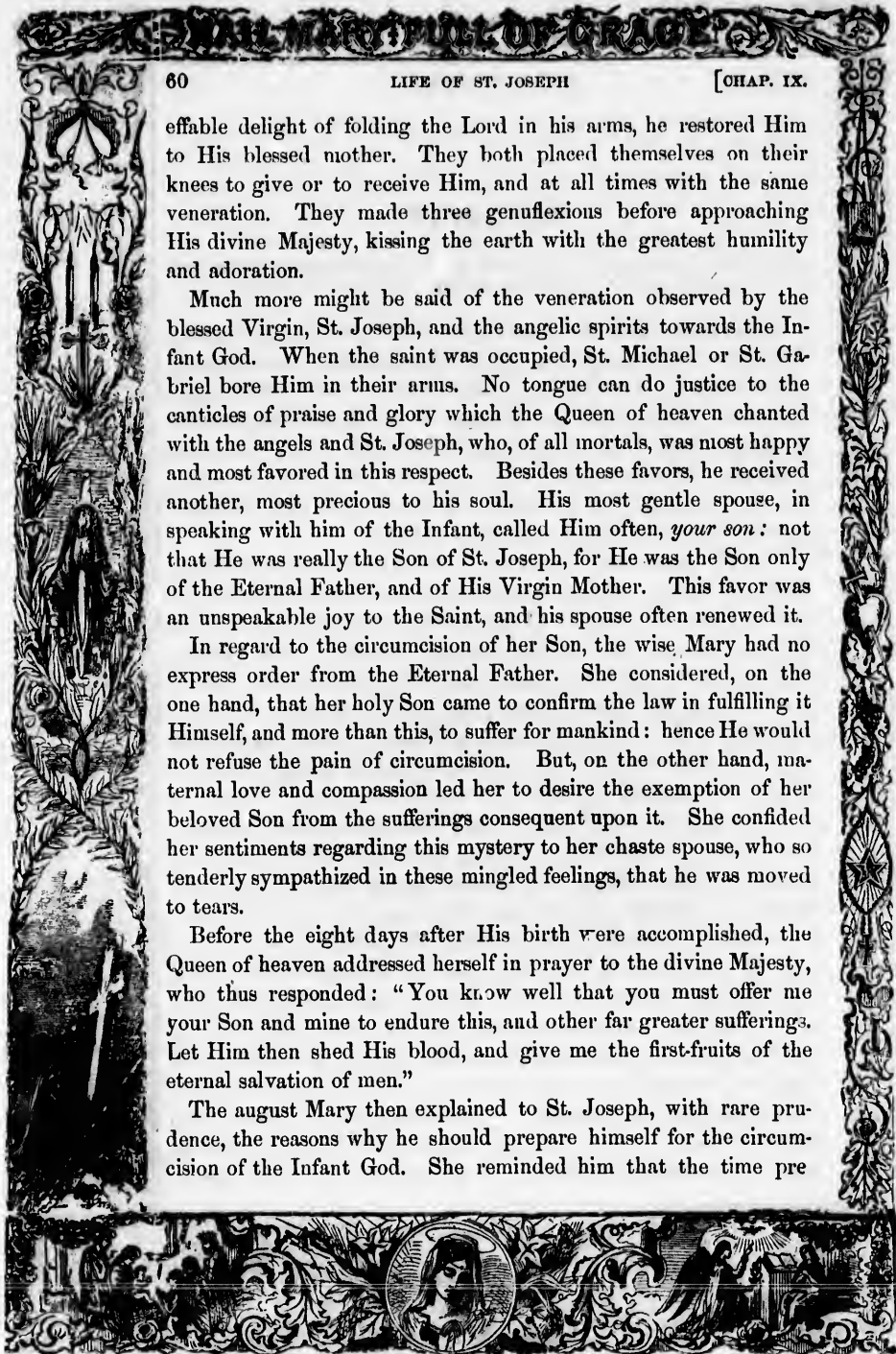
effable delight of folding the Lord in his arms, he restored Him to His blessed mother. They both placed themselves on their knees to give or to receive Him, and at all times with the same veneration. They made three genuflexions before approaching His divine Majesty, kissing the earth with the greatest humility and adoration.

Much more might be said of the veneration observed by the blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and the angelic spirits towards the Infant God. When the saint was occupied, St. Michael or St. Gabriel bore Him in their arms. No tongue can do justice to the canticles of praise and glory which the Queen of heaven chanted with the angels and St. Joseph, who, of all mortals, was most happy and most favored in this respect. Besides these favors, he received another, most precious to his soul. His most gentle spouse, in speaking with him of the Infant, called Him often, *your son*: not that He was really the Son of St. Joseph, for He was the Son only of the Eternal Father, and of His Virgin Mother. This favor was an unspeakable joy to the Saint, and his spouse often renewed it.

In regard to the circumcision of her Son, the wise Mary had no express order from the Eternal Father. She considered, on the one hand, that her holy Son came to confirm the law in fulfilling it Himself, and more than this, to suffer for mankind: hence He would not refuse the pain of circumcision. But, on the other hand, maternal love and compassion led her to desire the exemption of her beloved Son from the sufferings consequent upon it. She confided her sentiments regarding this mystery to her chaste spouse, who so tenderly sympathized in these mingled feelings, that he was moved to tears.

Before the eight days after His birth were accomplished, the Queen of heaven addressed herself in prayer to the divine Majesty, who thus responded: "You know well that you must offer me your Son and mine to endure this, and other far greater sufferings. Let Him then shed His blood, and give me the first-fruits of the eternal salvation of men."

The august Mary then explained to St. Joseph, with rare prudence, the reasons why he should prepare himself for the circumcision of the Infant God. She reminded him that the time pre



scribed by the law approached, and that they must submit to it, having no order to the contrary. Her saintly spouse replied, that "he would conform himself to the divine pleasure in all things made manifest by the common law." He then inquired how the circumcision should be performed.

The blessed Virgin said, that, in fulfilling the law, she would not be separated from the Infant, nor place Him in charge of any other person, but that she would support Him in her own arms. Yet since, from His temperament, His pain would be greater than that of ordinary children, it would be necessary to be prepared with remedies for the wound. The careful mother prayed St. Joseph also to seek a vial of crystal in which to gather the precious blood, which she wished to preserve; and she had linen cloths also ready, so that not a drop should fall on the ground. St. Joseph then went to call a priest, whom he begged to come to the grotto to perform the rite of circumcision, as being the legitimate minister for this office.

The august Mary and St. Joseph discoursed together respecting the name which they should give to the Infant God in the circumcision. "When the angel," said St. Joseph, "declared to me the great mystery of the incarnation, he commanded me to call your divine Son *Jesus*." The Virgin Mother replied: "He made the same declaration to me when the Word was made flesh in my bosom. Therefore we will request the priest to give Him this name on the register of circumcised children."

While the Queen of heaven and St. Joseph held this discourse, innumerable troops of angels descended from heaven in human form, and of incomparable beauty. They bore a device, upon which was engraved the name of Jesus. The two archangels, St. Michael and St. Gabriel, each held in their hands a luminous globe of wondrous beauty and splendor, within which was written the most holy name of Jesus. They thus addressed their Queen: "This name which you see is that of your Son. The Most Holy Trinity have given it to your only Son our Lord, with power to save the human race. He will chastise His enemies, and reduce them to serve as His footstool. He will exalt His friends, and place them in glory at His right hand. But all this must be purchased by His sufferings and His blood."



The most happy St. Joseph saw and heard all. He was unable to penetrate the mysteries of the redemption like the mother of wisdom, but he discovered some of them. The holy spouses were filled with joy and admiration: in brief, there passed between them, or in their presence, at various times, so many wonderful things, that it would be impossible to convey any just idea of them.

There was at Bethlehem a synagogue, not for offering sacrifices, which could be offered only at Jerusalem, but to read there the Law of Moses. The priest, who was minister of the law, was also of the rite of circumcision. Nevertheless, any one could circumcise. Our august Mother desired, because of the dignity of the Infant, that the priest should be the minister, and for this reason it was that the happy St. Joseph summoned him. The priest came to the grotto. At the view of the Mother and the Child his heart was sensibly touched with singular devotion and tenderness. The happiness which he enjoyed in touching the flesh of the Infant God renewed him by a secret power, and rendered him holy and agreeable to the Supreme Lord of the universe.

In order to perform the circumcision with all the respect that was possible in such a place, St. Joseph lighted candles. The priest requested the Virgin Mother to withdraw for a little space, to avoid the pain of witnessing the sacrifice, but she prayed the minister of God to permit her to assist at the sacrament. The priest then consented that she should support the Infant in her arms. Thus she was the consecrated altar upon which the verities represented by the ancient sacrifices began to be accomplished.

The blessed Mother unwashed her divine Child, and, drawing from her bosom a linen cloth, she placed it under the Infant, so that it should receive the blood and the relics of the circumcision. The priest accomplished his office, and the Infant God offered to the Eternal Father three things of such infinite value, that each would suffice for the redemption of a thousand worlds: the first was the form of a sinner; the second, the pain He suffered as man; the third, His most ardent love, with which He began to shed His blood for the redemption of men. The tender and affectionate Mother gathered the sacred relics and the blood shed upon the linen, and placed the whole in the care of St. Joseph.



HALL MARY FULL OF GRACE

The priest inquired of the holy spouses what name they intended to give to the circumcised child. Our sweet Lady, always attentive to the respect which she bore to St. Joseph, requested him to declare it. The saint, turning towards her with veneration, intimated that so sweet a name should be pronounced by her lips—when, by a divine disposition, Mary and Joseph said, at the same moment: "*Jesus is His name.*" The priest replied: "You are of one mind in this, the name you give to the Infant is great." In writing it he was touched by a great interior tenderness, saying to them: "I assure you that I believe this Child will be a great prophet of the Lord." The august spouses replied to the priest, by an humble acknowledgment, and, having given him the wax lights, and some other trifles as offerings, he departed.

The holy Virgin and her spouse remained alone with the Infant. They celebrated anew the mystery of the circumcision by canticles, which they composed in honor of the most sweet name of Jesus. The careful Mother dressed the wound of the Infant God with the usual remedies. She invited the angels to sing. The ministers of the Most High obeyed their Queen, and with heavenly melody they chanted the same canticles which she and St. Joseph had composed in praise of the most sweet name of Jesus.



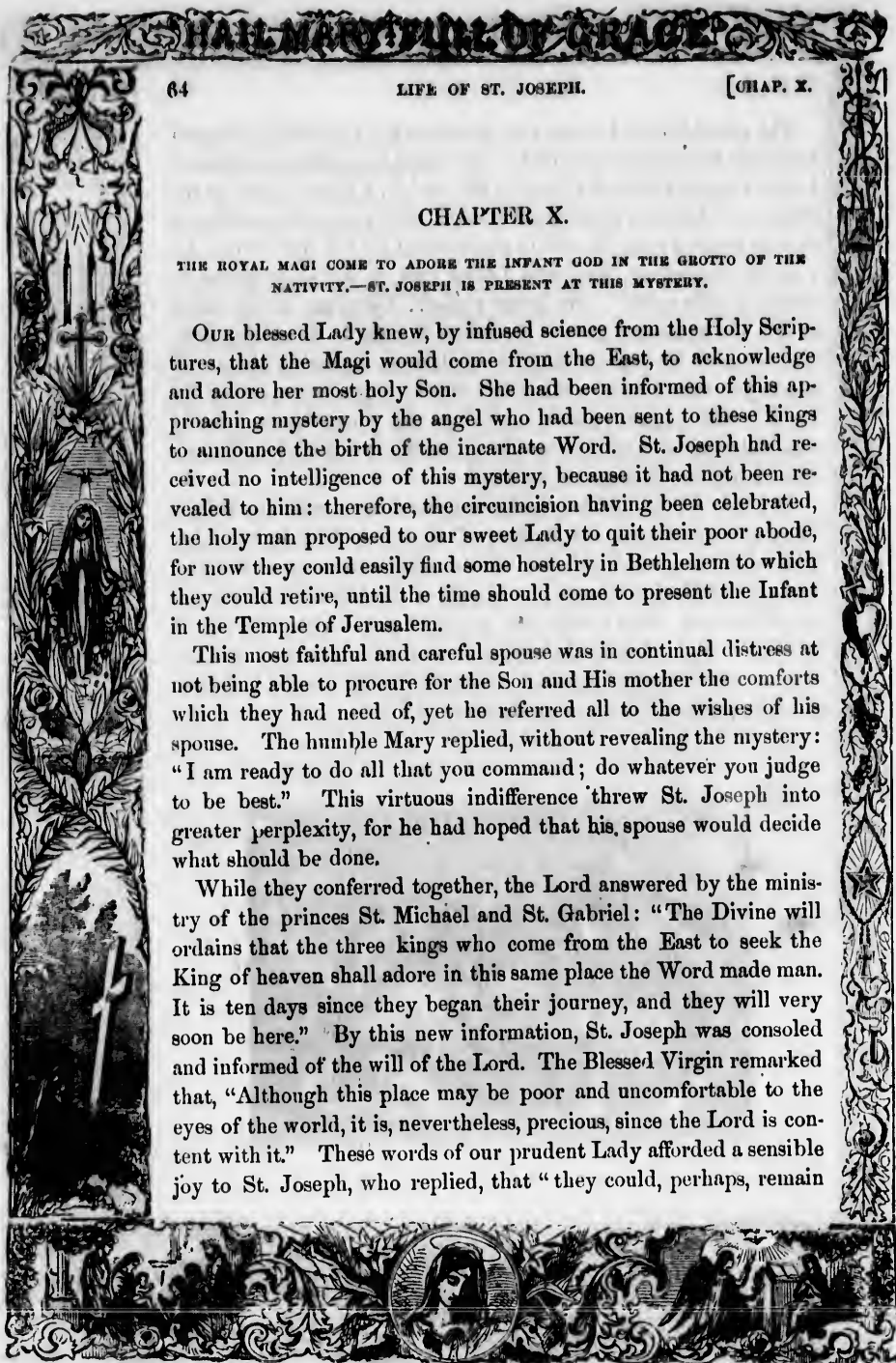
CHAPTER X.

THE ROYAL MAGI COME TO ADORE THE INFANT GOD IN THE GROTTO OF THE NATIVITY.—ST. JOSEPH IS PRESENT AT THIS MYSTERY.

OUR blessed Lady knew, by infused science from the Holy Scriptures, that the Magi would come from the East, to acknowledge and adore her most holy Son. She had been informed of this approaching mystery by the angel who had been sent to these kings to announce the birth of the incarnate Word. St. Joseph had received no intelligence of this mystery, because it had not been revealed to him: therefore, the circumcision having been celebrated, the holy man proposed to our sweet Lady to quit their poor abode, for now they could easily find some hostelry in Bethlehem to which they could retire, until the time should come to present the Infant in the Temple of Jerusalem.

This most faithful and careful spouse was in continual distress at not being able to procure for the Son and His mother the comforts which they had need of, yet he referred all to the wishes of his spouse. The humble Mary replied, without revealing the mystery: "I am ready to do all that you command; do whatever you judge to be best." This virtuous indifference threw St. Joseph into greater perplexity, for he had hoped that his spouse would decide what should be done.

While they conferred together, the Lord answered by the ministry of the princes St. Michael and St. Gabriel: "The Divine will ordains that the three kings who come from the East to seek the King of heaven shall adore in this same place the Word made man. It is ten days since they began their journey, and they will very soon be here." By this new information, St. Joseph was consoled and informed of the will of the Lord. The Blessed Virgin remarked that, "Although this place may be poor and uncomfortable to the eyes of the world, it is, nevertheless, precious, since the Lord is content with it." These words of our prudent Lady afforded a sensible joy to St. Joseph, who replied, that "they could, perhaps, remain



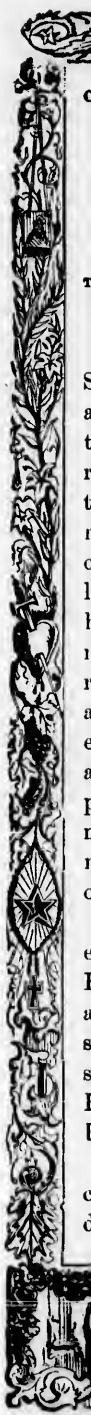




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The Holy Family



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CHAPTER XVI.

THE AUGUST MARY AND ST. JOSEPH DISCOVER THE INFANT IN THE TEMPLE AMONG THE DOCTORS.—RETURN TO NAZARETH.

OUR blessed Lady, ever so assiduous in the service of her divine Son, had, nevertheless, lost sight of Him, and left Him to wander away from her at Jerusalem. Although it might suffice to say that the same Lord so ordained it, we may also perceive how this separation was effected. It is certain that, besides taking advantage of the multitudes of people, the Infant God used, also, supernatural means, and while the men and women were separating from each other, the Omnipotent Lord gave to His blessed Mother an intellectual vision, which so possessed all her faculties, and so elevated her above things of sense, that she was unable to do more than mechanically to follow the path she travelled. St. Joseph had the reasons we have already adverted to, but he, also, was elevated to a most sublime contemplation, which induced a more ready acquiescence in the idea that the Infant had accompanied His Mother, and by this means the adorable Child separated himself from His parents and remained at Jerusalem. He withdrew himself when near the gates of the city, and, returning, He traversed the streets, meditating, by His divine science, on the events of the future, and offering himself to His Father for the salvation of souls.

In order to inaugurate the honor of humble mendicity, as the eldest son of holy poverty, He employed three days in asking alms. He visited the hospitals, consoled all the poor whom He found there, and shared with them the alms He had received. He secretly restored to several sick persons health of body, and to many that of the soul. He wrought these miracles in favor of some who had showed Him kindness, wishing to accomplish, in advance, the promise that He would afterwards make to His Church.

Having occupied himself with these and many other works, according to the will of God, He went to the Temple, where, on the day mentioned by St. Luke, the Rabbis, or doctors of the law,



were assembled in an apartment, where they disputed whether the Messiah was not already born. They were installed in their seats with that authority which usually accompanies those who pass for learned men. The Infant Jesus approached the assembly. The opinions of the doctors upon this subject were widely different, for some asserted the fact, while others denied it; and those who supported the negative, alleged the testimony of the Scriptures and the prophecies, understood by them in the gross manner which the Apostle mentions.

Now, these sages, as they deemed themselves, advanced the opinion that the Messiah ought to come with all the majesty and pomp of a monarch, but, as yet, they saw no indications of this power and liberty.

The Master of Truth, Jesus, perceived that the discussion was about to terminate in this error, for, although there were men who held the contrary opinion, their number was small. His immense charity could not endure this ignorance of His works, and their sublime ends, in these interpreters of the law. The Infant God drew nearer. He entered into the midst of the assembly with admirable beauty and majesty, and excited in these doctors the desire to hear Him with attention.

He opened His discourse, saying: "I have heard all that has been said touching the coming of the Messiah, and the conclusion respecting it. In offering an objection to this decision, I presuppose what the prophets have said, viz.: That His coming should be with great power, and with glorious majesty; for Isaiah declares that He shall be our legislator, our king, who shall save His people. Daniel assures us that all tribes and all people shall serve Him. The Scriptures are filled with similar promises. But my doubt is founded on these passages and divers others. The same Isaiah says that He shall be satiated with opprobrium, and led like a sheep to the slaughter. Jeremiah tells us that His enemies should assemble to erase His name from the land of the living; and David, that He would be the refuse of the people. How will it be possible to harmonize these prophecies? We cannot deny that the Messiah must come twice—the first time, to redeem the world; the second, to judge it. The prophecies should, then, be applied to these two



events, giving to each what belongs to it. Following these observations, if we conclude that the first advent will be with power and majesty, this must not be understood in a material sense, but of a new spiritual kingdom. And with this just interpretation, all the Scriptures, which cannot be harmonized in any other sense, will be found uniform."

To these the Infant God joined many other reasons. The scribes and doctors, who had listened to Him, remained silent. At length, "What wonder is this?" said they. "Whence comes this marvelous child?" The august Mary and St. Joseph arrived in time to hear the conclusion of the discourse. The doctors of the law arose, and our blessed Lady, overwhelmed with joy to have found her treasure, approached her divine Child, and said, as it is related by St. Luke: "*Sen, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee, sorrowing.*" His Majesty replied to her: "*How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?*"

The Evangelist relates that the blessed Mary and St. Joseph did not understand the mystery of these words. It was because of their interior joy, which they had sowed in tears. The prudent Mother said to her divine Son: "Do not separate me from your presence. Receive me for your servant, and if through my own fault I have lost you, I entreat your pardon." The Infant God received her with complaisance, and they again set out for Nazareth. After they had gone a short distance from Jerusalem, our blessed Lady prostrating herself, adored her holy Son, and asked His benediction. The divine Jesus raised her from the ground, and spoke to her with great sweetness. Afterwards He lifted the veil, and, with greater clearness than ever before, revealed to her His most holy soul and its operations.

The blessed Mother conversed with her most sweet Child respecting the mysteries that He had opened to her. The celestial Master informed her that these doctors and scribes knew not that His majesty was the Messiah, because of their presumption and confidence in their own wisdom. Our Redeemer converted many souls during this journey, and, as His holy Mother was present, He made her the instrument of these miracles. He restored many

sick persons to health, He comforted the afflicted, and wrought other wonders which I do not pause to recount.

They arrived at Nazareth. The Evangelist St. Luke includes, in a few brief words, the mysteries of their history: "*The Infant Jesus was subject to His parents,*" i. e., to His holy Mother and St. Joseph. "*His Mother kept all these words in her heart, and Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and man.*" We shall speak of this further on, adding, only, at this time, that the humility and obedience of our Lord towards His parents offered new subjects of admiration to the angels, as did also the dignity of His pure Mother, to whom the God Incarnate was confided, in order that, by the help of St. Joseph, she might minister to His wants.

Although the obedience of the Son was only a consequence of the natural maternity, still, to exercise the rights of a Mother over her Son, a different grace was necessary from that which she had received to conceive and bring Him forth. The august Mary possessed all these needful graces, proportioned to this ministry and office, and with such abundance, that they were reflected upon her happy spouse, so that he was also the worthy foster-father of Jesus Christ, and head of this most holy family.



CHAPTER XVII.

ST. JOSEPH IS NO LONGER ABLE TO WORK.—CONDUCT OF THE AUGUST MARY AND THE DIVINE JESUS, DURING MORE THAN EIGHT YEARS THAT THE HOLY PATRIARCH LIVED IN SICKNESS AND INFIRMITIES.

THE Queen of heaven completed her thirty-third year, and her chaste form retained all its natural perfections so beautifully and well proportioned, that it was the admiration of the angelic choirs. Her sacred body had reached its full development, so that this august Princess resembled the holy humanity of her Son. The pure Mary preserved this admirable complexion at thirty-three, without the least change, and at the age of seventy, she had lost nothing of her strength and beauty. Our blessed Lady understood this privilege. She knew that the resemblance of the humanity of her divine Son was to be always preserved in her. St. Joseph was not aged when this lovely Queen had attained her thirty-third year, nevertheless his strength was much exhausted, because the cares, travels, and continued pains he had taken for the support of his spouse and the Lord of the universe, had worn upon his health more than his years. The Lord, who desired to advance him in the exercise of patience and the other virtues, permitted him to suffer from certain maladies, that hindered him much from application to manual labor. His prudent spouse, who had always appreciated, loved, and served him beyond all that other women have done in regard to their husbands, perceiving his indisposition, said to him, "My spouse, I am under extreme obligations for your fidelity, and the increasing care and fatigue you have imposed upon yourself, in order, by the sweat of your brow, to maintain me, your servant, and my adorable Son. You will receive from the liberal hand of the Most High the recompense for your pains, and the precious benedictions which you have merited. I beg you to cease from this incessant labor, and repose yourself. I will now labor for you, in testimony of my gratitude, as long as the Lord shall give us life."



The saint listened to the reasonings of his sweet spouse with many tears; and, although he assured her that he desired to continue his toil, he yielded to her solicitations, believing it his duty to obey her, and discontinued his labors. In order to have nothing superfluous in this holy family, they gave away his tools in alms.

St. Joseph being thus relieved from labor, gave himself entirely for the rest of his days to the contemplation of the mysteries which he had nourished in his breast, and to the practice of virtue. He was happy in these occupations to find himself in the presence and enjoyment of the conversation of the Incarnate Wisdom and of her who was His Mother. With such helps, he arrived at so high a degree of sanctity, that next to his blessed spouse, who was always unique among mere creatures, *he surpassed all men, and he will never be surpassed by any.**

Our august Queen and her divine Son assisted, served, and consoled him in his maladies, with the most assiduous care. It is impossible to depict the humility, respect, and love which these charitable cares produced in the sincere and grateful heart of the servant of God. The Blessed Virgin charged herself with the support of her most holy Son and her spouse, by her own work. The Eternal Wisdom so disposed it, in order that her merits and virtues might reach the highest degree, and serve as an example to put the children of Adam to shame.

The Lord offers this *strong woman* to us as an example. The heart of her husband trusteth in her, and not only that of her spouse Joseph, but also that of her Son, at once true God and man, as Solomon declares in the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs. Means were not wanting to the Lord to support the corporeal life of His blessed Mother and St. Joseph, since man lives not by bread alone. He could have miraculously provided for them every day, but the world would have been deprived of the privilege of witnessing the industry of the most pure Mother of God, and if our blessed Lady had not acquired these merits, she would have failed to obtain much of her reward.

With prudent diligence she provided for all. Neither our ador-

* Suarez maintains this same doctrine *ex-professo*.

able Saviour nor His Mother, ate flesh-meat—their food consisted of fish, fruits, and herbs, and they partook of these with great moderation. Our august Lady, nevertheless, prepared meat for St. Joseph, and served it in the manner most agreeable to him. It happened sometimes, that her labor was insufficient, because St. Joseph had need of more than heretofore. On these occasions, our Lord exercised His power. He often so ordered that His blessed Mother accomplished much in a short time, so that her work multiplied itself in her hands.



CHAPTER XVIII.

OF THE CARE WHICH THE AUGUST MARY AND THE DIVINE JESUS BESTOWED UPON ST. JOSEPH IN THE INFIRMITIES OF HIS LATTER DAYS.

IT is a common mistake to regard the Lord Jesus only as Redeemer, and not as a master, who by His example instructs us to suffer afflictions. And, although Catholics do not fall into the insensate errors of the heretics, for they all admit that without good works, and without afflictions, there is neither recompense nor crown; yet we find many children of the Holy Church who are scarcely to be distinguished from those who are in darkness, since they avoid works which are painful to them.

Let us reject this manifest error, and be assured that sufferings were not for our Lord Jesus Christ alone, but for us also. The most beloved of our divine Master have received the greatest share of the cross. Let us not be so bold as to say, that if the Saviour suffered as man, He is, at the same time, God, and hence He is, to human weakness, rather a subject for admiration than of imitation. The Saviour of our souls overturns this excuse by the example of His most innocent Mother and St. Joseph, and that of many men and feeble women also.

The Lord conducted by this royal road of suffering the spouse of His blessed Mother, St. Joseph, whom His majesty loved above all the children of men. To increase his merits and his crown, before his power of gaining merits had ceased, the Lord bestowed on him, in the last years of his life, certain exceedingly acute maladies, which caused excessive pain throughout his body, and great debility. Besides these, there was another mode of suffering, more gentle, yet very distinct, which resulted from the force of his burning love. This love was so vehement, and at times his transports were so impetuous, that his pure spirit must have broken the chains that bound it to the body, if the same Lord had not given him the power of resisting it. His majesty made him suffer this sweet violence, because, from the natural febleness of a body so attenuated this painful exercise was a great merit for the saint, not only

from the effects of the pain that he suffered, but from the cause, which was love; hence he acquired incomparable merits. Our blessed Lady had knowledge of all these mysteries. She penetrated the interior of the saint, so that she might not be deprived of the joy she derived from the conviction of having a spouse so holy and so beloved of the Lord. She observed the candor and purity of his soul—his ardent affection, his lofty and divine thoughts, his patience and sweetness in his maladies, the great sufferings that he bore without a complaint or sigh, or asking any solace. Our great patriarch supported all his pains with an incomparable patience and magnanimity. All this his faithful spouse remarked, as well as the value and the merits of the many virtues which the saint practised, and she conceived so high a reverence for him that we will not attempt to express it. She applied herself, with the greatest joy, to sustain and console him. As she had little esteem for what she did herself to relieve the great sufferings of her spouse, and because of the love she bore him, she commanded the viands that she prepared for her holy patient to give him strength and re-establish his appetite, since this was to preserve the life of the saint—the just—the elect of the Most High.

When St. Joseph partook of this food, he was sensible of the sweet benedictions and the genial effects of the viands, and inquired of his spouse: "What aliments of life are these which vivify me, restoring my appetite and my strength, and filling me with new consolation?" The Queen of heaven served him on her knees, and, when his pains were violent, she removed his sandals, and supported and assisted him with the tenderest affection. Although the humble saint made every effort to hinder his spouse from taking such unwearyed pains, it was always in vain, for our sweet Lady understood the maladies of her patient, and when he most needed help, and she therefore hastened to assist him, in all his wants, with the greatest affection. She often said things which exceedingly consoled him. During the three last years of his life, which were those of his greatest suffering, she never quitted him, day or night. If for a moment she withdrew, it was only to serve her divine Son, who united with His Mother to assist the holy patriarch, except when He was necessarily occupied in other works; so we may say



that never was patient so well served. From hence we may learn how great were the happiness and the merits of St. Joseph, for he alone has merited to have her for his spouse, who was also the spouse of the Holy Spirit. The charity of our blessed Lady towards St. Joseph was not satisfied by these services of which we have spoken. She strove to console him by still other means. Sometimes she prayed the Lord, with the most ardent charity, to deliver her spouse from his sufferings, and to inflict them upon herself. In making this request, she believed herself to deserve the pains of all creatures, regarding herself as the least of all. She alleged, also, the holiness of St. Joseph, and the delight which the Lord took in this heart, so conformed to that of His majesty. She witnessed the sufferings of her blessed spouse, and had compassion for them: she knew his merits, and the pleasure which her adorable Son had in him. She rejoiced in the patience of the saint, and magnified the Lord. Sometimes, the Queen of pity, touched by the excruciating pains of her spouse, and melted by tenderest sympathy, having obtained permission from her divine Son, commanded his sufferings, and their natural causes, to suspend their activity, and cease so cruelly to afflict the just and the well-beloved of the Lord.

At other times, she prayed the saints and angels to console her spouse, and to strengthen him in his troubles, when the weakness of the fragile flesh demanded it. By this species of commandment, the blessed spirits appeared to the holy patient in the human form, all radiant with beauty and splendor, and conversing with each other of God and His infinite perfections. Occasionally they chanted celestial music, with a sweetness that suspended his bodily pains, and inflamed his pure soul with divine love. The man of God had, besides, for his greater consolation, a particular knowledge, not only of all these favors, but also of the holiness of his most holy spouse, of the love that she bore to him, of the interior charity with which she served him, and others of the excellences of this great Queen of the universe. All these united produced such effects upon St. Joseph, and enabled him to acquire so many merits, that, in this life, it is not possible to conceive them.*

* M. Olier, who has written such sublime pages on St. Joseph, affirms that we cannot know, here below, the merits of the glorious St. Joseph, and that we are incapable of conceiving them. What a enigma!—*Manuscripts of M. Olier.*



CHAPTER XIX.

PRECIOUS DEATH OF THE GLORIOUS ST. JOSEPH, CAUSED PRINCIPALLY BY DIVINE LOVE—HE EXPIRES IN THE ARMS OF THE DIVINE JESUS, ASSISTED BY HIS BLESSED SPOUSE, THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

DURING eight years St. Joseph had been exercised by pains and sufferings, and his generous spirit was ever more and more purified in the crucible of patience and divine love. With years his tortures increased, his strength diminished. The inevitable term of life, at which we pay the universal tribute of death, approached. His blessed spouse increased her devotion and her cares to serve him with inviolable fidelity.

This most holy Lady, knowing, through her infused science that the last hour of her chaste spouse in this place of exile was very near, went to find her adorable Son, and said to Him: "My Lord and my God, the time for the death of your servant Joseph, which you have determined by an eternal will, approaches. I beseech you, Lord, by your infinite goodness, to assist him in this hour, so that his death may be as precious to you, as his life has been agreeable. Remember, my Son, the love and humility of your servant—his merits—his virtues, and the pains he has taken to preserve your life and mine."

Our Saviour replied to her: "My Mother, your requests are pleasing to me, and the merits of Joseph are in my thoughts. I will now assist him, and I will give him so eminent a place among the princes of my people, that it will be a subject of admiration for the angels, and a motive for praises to them and to men. I will not do for any nation that which I will do for your spouse." Our august Lady returned thanks to her most sweet Son for this promise.

During the nine days that preceded the death of St. Joseph, the Son and the Mother watched by him day and night. They so arranged it that one or the other was always with him. During



these nine days, the angels chanted, three times each day, by the commandment of the Lord, celestial music for the holy patient. It was composed of canticles of praise to the Most High, and of benedictions for the saint himself; and, besides, so delicious a fragrance pervaded all this poor habitation, that not only the man of God was fortified and cheered by it, but many persons on the outside.

A day before his death, all inflamed with divine love for so many benefits, he was elevated into a sublime ecstasy, which continued twenty-four hours, the Lord preserving his strength and life by a miraculous interposition. In this ecstatic state he clearly beheld the divine Essence, and discovered in it, without a veil, that which he had believed by faith, either in the incomprehensible Divinity, or in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption—the Church Militant and the sacraments with which she is enriched. The Holy Trinity destined him to be the precursor of our Saviour Jesus Christ to the saints who were in Limbo, and commanded him to announce to them anew their redemption, and to prepare them for the visit which the same Lord was to make them to conduct them to eternal felicity. St. Joseph returned from this ecstasy radiant in beauty, his soul divinized from the view of the being of God. He addressed himself to his spouse, and requested her benediction; but she prayed her most holy Son to give it, which His divine Majesty was pleased to do. Our blessed Lady, having knelt, besought St. Joseph to bless her as her spouse and head. The man of God, not without a divine impulse, gave his benediction to his beloved spouse before their separation. She afterwards kissed the hand with which he had blessed her, and requested him to salute for her the saints in Limbo.

The most humble Joseph, wishing to close his life by the seal of humility, asked pardon of his holy spouse for the faults which he might have committed in her service as a feeble man of earthly mould. He entreated her to assist him in this last hour, and to intercede for him. He testified, above all, his gratitude to our adorable Saviour, for the benefits that he had received from His most liberal hand during all his life, and particularly in this sickness. Then taking leave of his blessed spouse, he said to her: "You are blessed among all women, and chosen above all creatures. Let

angels and men praise you. Let all nations know and exalt your dignity. Let the name of the Most High through you be known, adored, and glorified in all future ages, and eternally praised by all the blessed spirits, for having created you so pleasing in His eyes. I trust to meet you in the heavenly land."

After this, the man of God addressed our Lord Jesus Christ, and, wishing to speak to His Majesty with profound respect, he made every effort to kneel on the ground. But the sweet Jesus approaching, received him in His arms, and the saint, supporting his head upon His bosom, said: "My Lord and my God, Son of the Eternal Father, Creator and Redeemer of the world, give Thine eternal benediction to Thy servant, who is the work of Thy hands. Pardon the faults I have committed in Thy service and in Thy company. I confess Thee, I glorify Thee, I render to Thee, with a contrite and humble heart, eternal thanks for having chosen me, by Thine ineffable goodness, from among men to be the spouse of Thine own Mother. Grant, Lord, that Thine own glory may be the theme of my gratitude through all eternity."

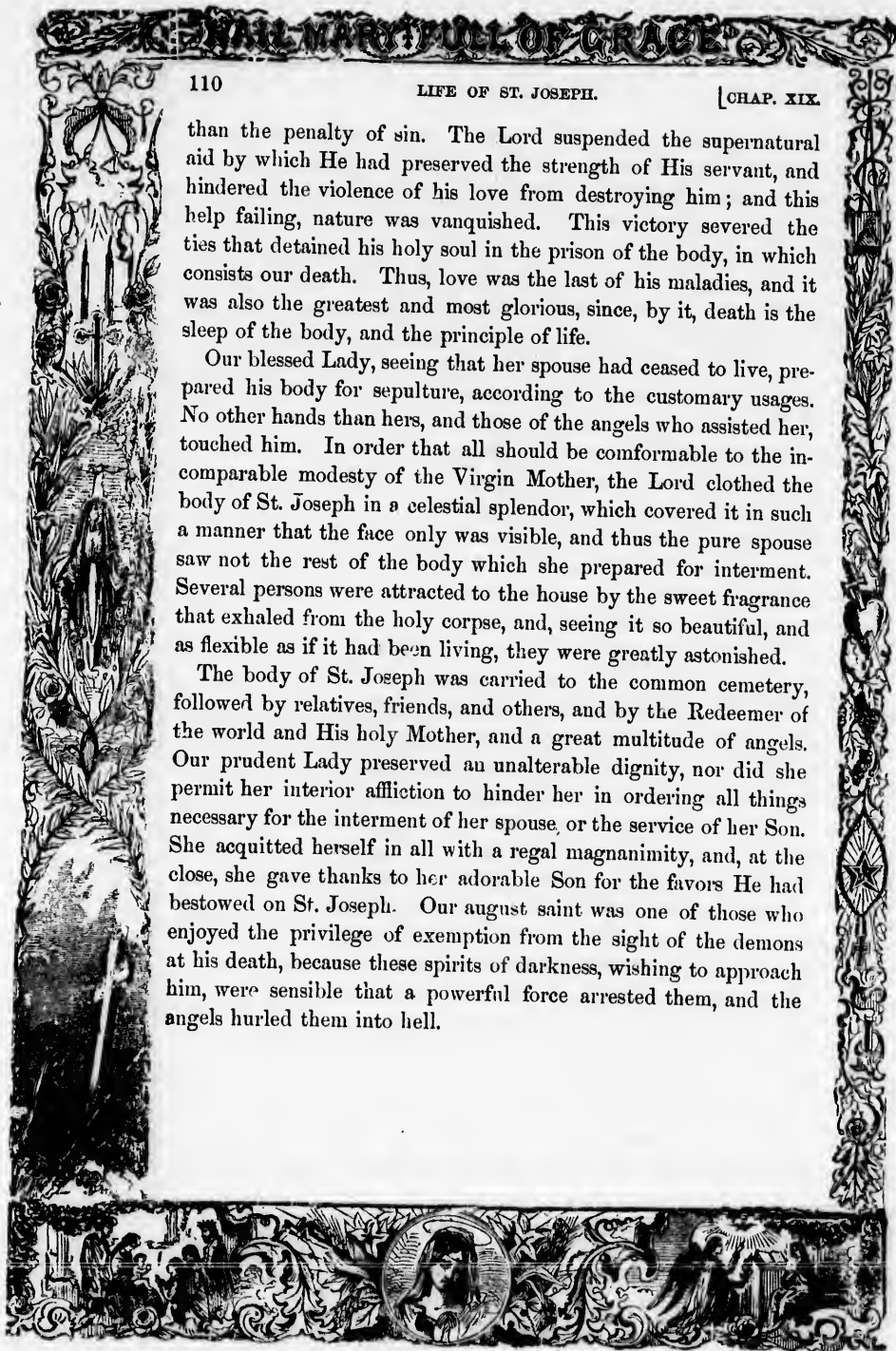
The Redeemer of the world gave him His benediction: "Rest in peace," He said: "the grace of my heavenly Father, and mine, be with thee. Proclaim the good tidings to my prophets and saints, who await thee in Paradise, and tell them that their redemption is nigh." As our beloved Redeemer pronounced these words, the most happy Joseph expired in His arms, and His divine Majesty closed his eyes. The angels chanted the sweetest hymns of praise, and, by order of the supreme King, they conducted this most holy soul into Paradise, where the saints recognized him as the reputed father of the Redeemer of the world, and His greatly beloved one, who merited singular veneration. He imparted a new joy to this innumerable assembly, by announcing to them, according to the commandment of the Lord, that their redemption would not long be delayed. We must not omit to mention, that although the precious death of St. Joseph was preceded by so long a sickness, and such severe sufferings, these were not the chief causes of it. He might have lived longer, notwithstanding these maladies, if the effects of the ardent love that burned in his chaste bosom had not been superadded; for this happy death was rather a triumph of love



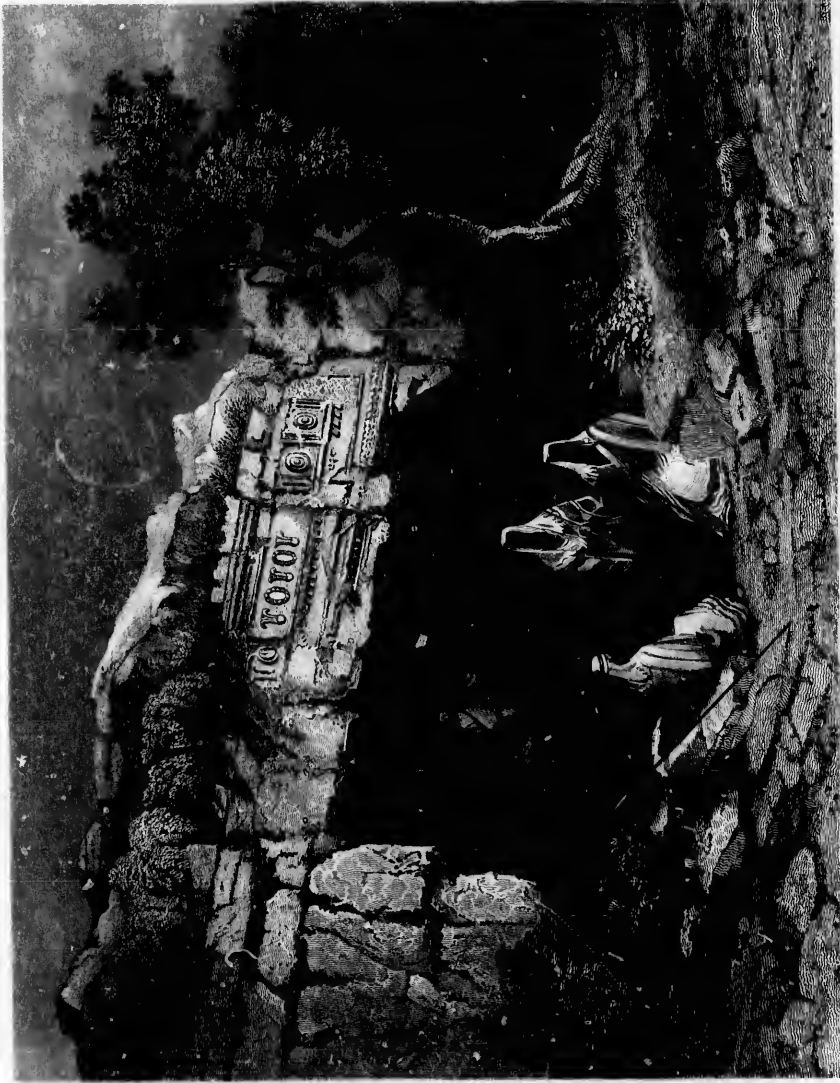
than the penalty of sin. The Lord suspended the supernatural aid by which He had preserved the strength of His servant, and hindered the violence of his love from destroying him; and this help failing, nature was vanquished. This victory severed the ties that detained his holy soul in the prison of the body, in which consists our death. Thus, love was the last of his maladies, and it was also the greatest and most glorious, since, by it, death is the sleep of the body, and the principle of life.

Our blessed Lady, seeing that her spouse had ceased to live, prepared his body for sepulture, according to the customary usages. No other hands than hers, and those of the angels who assisted her, touched him. In order that all should be conformable to the incomparable modesty of the Virgin Mother, the Lord clothed the body of St. Joseph in a celestial splendor, which covered it in such a manner that the face only was visible, and thus the pure spouse saw not the rest of the body which she prepared for interment. Several persons were attracted to the house by the sweet fragrance that exhaled from the holy corpse, and, seeing it so beautiful, and as flexible as if it had been living, they were greatly astonished.

The body of St. Joseph was carried to the common cemetery, followed by relatives, friends, and others, and by the Redeemer of the world and His holy Mother, and a great multitude of angels. Our prudent Lady preserved an unalterable dignity, nor did she permit her interior affliction to hinder her in ordering all things necessary for the interment of her spouse, or the service of her Son. She acquitted herself in all with a regal magnanimity, and, at the close, she gave thanks to her adorable Son for the favors He had bestowed on St. Joseph. Our august saint was one of those who enjoyed the privilege of exemption from the sight of the demons at his death, because these spirits of darkness, wishing to approach him, were sensible that a powerful force arrested them, and the angels hurled them into hell.







CHAPTER XX.

PRIVILEGES GRANTED TO ST. JOSEPH.—HIS BIRTH ACCOMPANIED BY MIRACLES.—HIS ADMIRABLE VIRTUES.—THE VIRTUES WHICH THE MOST HIGH HAS PROMISED TO THOSE DEVOTED TO HIM.—JESUS RESUSCITATES ST. JOSEPH AFTER HIS PASSION.—OUR BLESSED LADY CELEBRATES THE FESTIVAL OF HER ESPOUSALS.

THE duration of the life of this happiest of men, St. Joseph, was sixty years and some days. He espoused the Blessed Mary in his thirty-third year, and he lived a little more than twenty-seven years in her society. At the death of her holy spouse, our Lady was nearly forty-one years and six months old. She felt a natural grief at his death, because she had loved him as her spouse, as a very great saint, and her protector and benefactor; and, although the well-regulated mind of our admirable Lady controlled her sorrow, it was not the less profound. The more she knew of the high degree of sanctity which her spouse had attained among the great saints, whose names are inscribed in the Book of Life, the greater was her affection for him. And, since we cannot lose without sorrow that which we tenderly love, we cannot doubt that the grief of the Blessed Virgin was very great, when we measure it by the love she bore to the holy patriarch.

This is not the place to treat, particularly, of the excellence of the holiness of St. Joseph, for I have no order to impart, more than what will serve generally to make manifest the dignity of his spouse, to whose merits (after those of her divine Son) we must attribute the gifts and graces with which the Most High favored the glorious patriarch. And, even if our blessed Lady had not been the meritorious cause, or the instrument of the sanctity of her spouse, she was, at least, the immediate end to which that sanctity referred. The virtues and graces which the Lord communicated to His servant Joseph, were conferred to render him more worthy of her whom He had chosen to be His Mother. It is by this rule, and by the esteem and love which this adorable Lord bore to His most



pure Mother, that the sanctity of St. Joseph is to be measured. Doubtless, if there had been found in the world another man more perfect and more excellent, His Majesty would have made him the spouse of His own Mother; and since He conferred this dignity upon St. Joseph, it must be granted, without contradiction, that he was the greatest saint of God on earth. As he had been created for such an exalted purpose, it is certain that it was with the design to render him worthy of the august Mary, and to proportion him, by her powerful right, to these same ends. This proportion was to be found in the holiness, the virtues, the gifts and graces, natural or infused, which he so eminently possessed.

I observe a difference between this great saint and the other saints, in the gifts of grace which they received. There have been many saints who have been gifted with privileges, all of which were not connected with their own sanctification, but had regard to other objects for the service of the Most High. They were gratuitous gifts, or apart from sanctity. But for those of our holy Patriarch, all the gifts that he received, augmented in him the virtues, and his interior sanctification. The ministry with which they were connected was a consequence of his holiness and his good works, for the more holy he was, the more worthy was he to be the spouse of the august Mary, and the depository of the treasure and the mystery of heaven. He ought to have been, as he was, in reality, a prodigy of holiness, and, by the special providence of God, he was sanctified at his birth. His nature was in just proportions—his qualities excellent—his complexion perfect, and to these were superadded purity of soul and right inclinations. In him the concupiscence of the flesh found itself enchained, so that no inordinate inclinations could gain the mastery. Although he had not the use of reason at his first sanctification, in which he was justified only from original sin, his Mother was sensible of a new joy in the Holy Spirit, and, without fully penetrating the mystery, she performed great acts of virtue, and believed that her child would become great before God and man.

St. Joseph, as we have said, was born beautiful and most perfect by nature. He brought to his parents an extraordinary joy, like that at the birth of the little Baptist, although the cause of it was



less manifest. The Lord advanced him in the use of reason, and gave it to him in all its perfection, in the third year of his age. He communicated to him, also, an infused science, and a new augmentation of grace and virtue. The holy child began, henceforth, to know God by faith; he knew Him also by natural reason, as the primal cause and author of all creatures, and he comprehended, with a most sublime conception, all that was said of God and His works.

He had, at the same time, the power of elevated contemplation, and he practised the virtues admirably, in proportion to his tender years. The use of reason dates with children usually about or after their seventh year. St. Joseph, in his third year, was already in his reasoning faculty, a perfect man, and in holiness also. He was of a sweet disposition, charitable, kind, and sincere. In all things he gave evidence of holy and angelic inclinations, and, growing in age and in perfection, he attained, by a most holy life, the age at which he espoused the most Blessed Mary.

Then to augment for him the gifts of grace, and to confirm him in these gifts, our blessed Lady aided him by her prayers. She earnestly supplicated the Most High, that if He commanded her to enter the marriage state, He would sanctify her spouse Joseph, so that he should conform himself to her chaste desires. This august Lady knew that God would be gracious to her prayers, and that He would operate in the soul of the holy Patriarch effects divine and beyond expression. He imbued him with the perfect fulness of all the virtues and all the gifts.

His divine Majesty perfected anew all his faculties. In the virtue of chastity he was more elevated than the highest seraphim, because, inhabiting a body, mortal and earthly, he possessed a purity equal to theirs—they being disengaged from matter. There never even entered into his thoughts any image in the slightest degree impure, or of an animal or sensual nature. By this perfection, and by his angelic integrity, he was prepared to be the spouse of the purest of creatures, and to live in her society. Without this privilege he could not have been capable of arriving at so great and excellent a dignity.

Equally admirable in the other virtues, especially in divine love,



he was like one who finds himself at the fountain, and replenishes himself with that living water which conducts to eternal life, or as an inflammable substance near the sphere of the sacred fire, that kindles without resistance. All that can be said in the most exalted praise of this loving spouse, has been already expressed, when it was recorded that the love of God was the cause of his sickness, and the instrument of his death. The sweet pains of love surpassed those of nature, and these were less active than the first. As the objects of his love, our Lord Jesus Christ and His Mother, were present, and since the saint possessed them in a closer union than any other mortal could approach, it was inevitable that this most faithful and candid heart must exhale itself in the affections of a love so constituted.

Blessed be the author of such great wonders, and blessed be the happiest of men, St. Joseph, in whom they were all most worthily wrought! He merits that all nations should know and bless him, since the Lord has not honored any other among mortals, nor ever manifested so much love for any as for him.

In the course of this history, I have said something of the visions and revelations with which our saint was favored. It is certain that he had many more than we can relate; but we may imagine great things if we consider that he was made acquainted with the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy Mother—that he lived so long in close association with them, that he was regarded as the Father of this divine Saviour, and was truly the spouse of our blessed Lady.

Besides all this, I have discovered that the Most High accorded to him, because of his great sanctity, certain privileges in favor of those who choose him for their intercessor, and who invoke him with devotion. The first is, to obtain the virtue of chastity, and to be withdrawn from the danger of losing it; the second, to receive powerful assistance to be freed from sin and to recover the grace of God; the third, to acquire, by his means, devotion for our blessed Lady, and dispositions to receive her favors; the fourth, to obtain a happy death and a special protection against the demons at that last hour; the fifth, to intimidate the enemies of our salvation by pronouncing the name of St. Joseph; the sixth, to obtain health of



body and consolation in affliction; the seventh privilege, to have, by his intercession, successors in families.

God grants all these favors, and many more to those who ask for them as they ought, in the name of St. Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin; and I entreat all the faithful children of the Holy Church to have a great devotion for this great saint, and to be persuaded that they will become sensible of the favorable effects of his protection, if they will dispose themselves worthily to merit and to receive them.

Our Lord arose from the sepulchre after His passion and death, invested with beauty and glory, as the prophets had announced. Finding himself with the saints and prophets whom He had relieved from prison, He promised to all the human race, the universal resurrection of the dead as a consequence of His own glorious resurrection, in the same flesh and in the same body, each in his own; and, as a pledge of this promise, His divine Majesty commanded the souls of many saints to reunite with their bodies, and be raised to an immortal life. These bodies arose, as Saint Matthew records in his Gospel, and among them were those of *St. Anne*, Sr. JOSEPH, and *St. Joachim*: the others were ancient Fathers and Patriarchs.

Our blessed Lady was careful every year on the festival of her most holy and chaste spouse St. Joseph, to celebrate the espousals, through which the Lord had given him to be her faithful companion, in order to conceal the mysteries of the Incarnation of the Word, and to execute with the highest wisdom the secrets and the works of the redemption of the human race. And as all these works of the Most High were as a deposit in the most prudent heart of Mary, and as she kept this festival as a mark of her high esteem for him, the joy and gratitude with which she celebrated his memory were ineffable.

Her most holy spouse Joseph descended at the festival all radiant with glory, accompanied by innumerable angels, who solemnized it with great joy in chanting new hymns, which were composed by



our most blessed Lady, in gratitude for the benefits which her spouse and herself had received from the hand of the Most High.

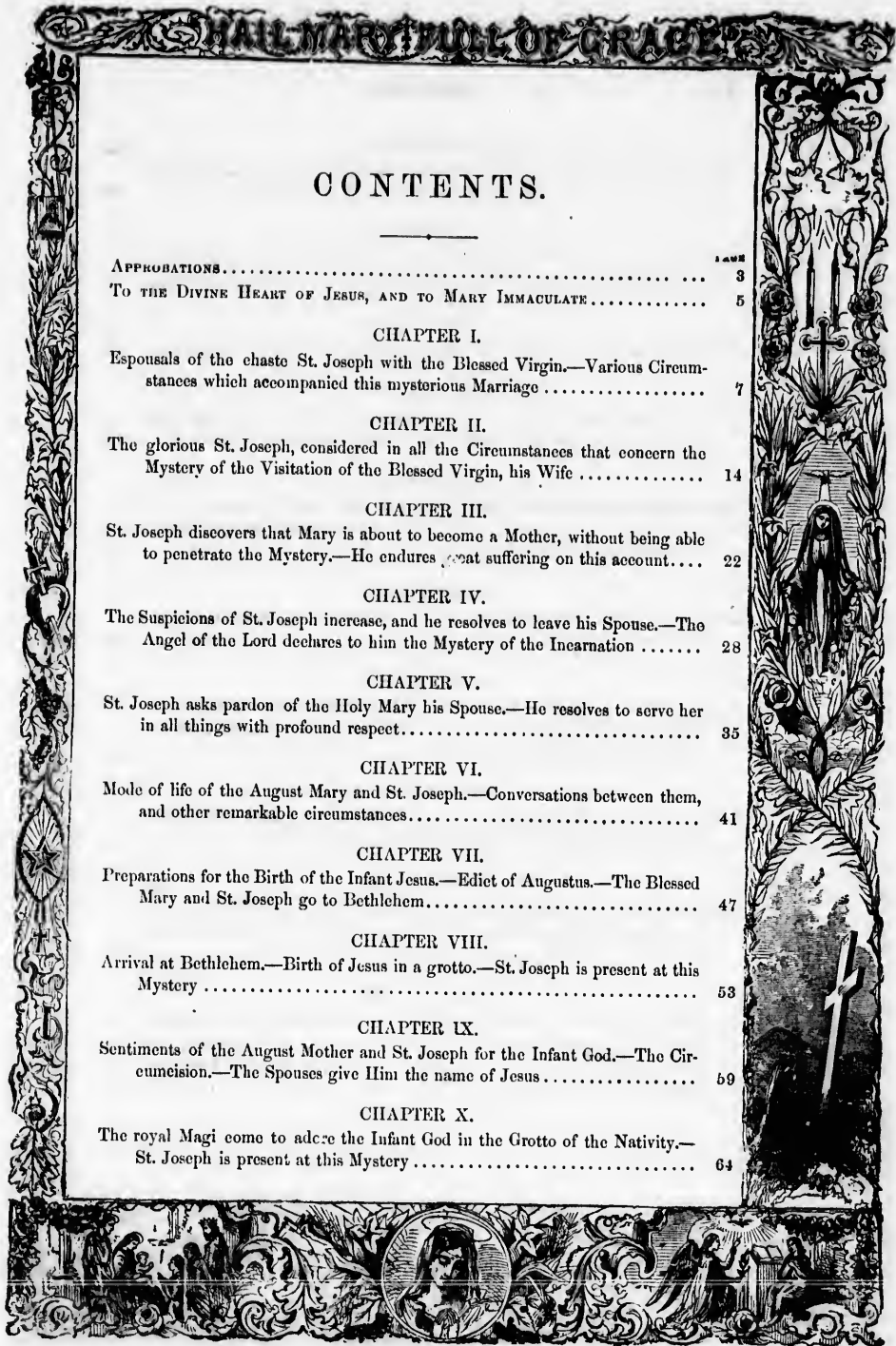
After having thus employed several hours, she discoursed a part of the day with her glorious spouse, on the divine attributes and perfections; for, in the absence of the Lord, these were the occupations that best pleased His gentle Mother. A little before taking leave of the holy spouse, she entreated him to pray for her, in the presence of God, and to praise Him in her name; she also requested him to offer prayers for the Holy Church and the Apostles. She asked his benediction, and the glorious saint returned to heaven.

GLORY
TO THE DIVINE HEART OF JESUS,
TO MARY IMMACULATE,
AND
TO ST. JOSEPH.



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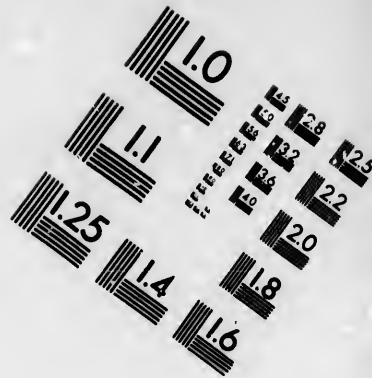
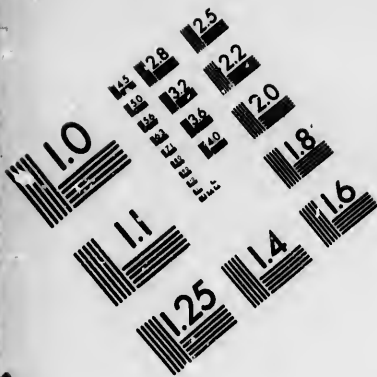
LIVES OF ST. JOACHIM AND ST. ANNE.

BUT little is known in this age of the world concerning the parents of Mary, the mother of God. It has pleased Almighty God to leave the lives of those illustrious persons shrouded in an impenetrable veil of mystery. Nor is this to be wondered at, when we remember that the same silence, or nearly so, is observed in the Sacred Scriptures with regard to their immaculate daughter, the mother of the God-man. All of Mary's life that the inspired writers have left on record only serves to indicate rather than describe the miraculous character which distinguished it from all other biographies of the children of men. So it is with the lives of her holy parents, St. Joachim and St. Anne. Little more is found in Scripture concerning them than the mention of their names in the genealogy of our divine Saviour, and the simple record of the eminent dignity to which they were called. And yet how clearly they stand before us, enshrouded as they are in the sublime mystery of their exalted state! How clearly do they stand out from all the other sons and daughters of the patriarchs, illumined with the reflected light of the divine maternity that was to form their daughter's crown in time and in eternity!

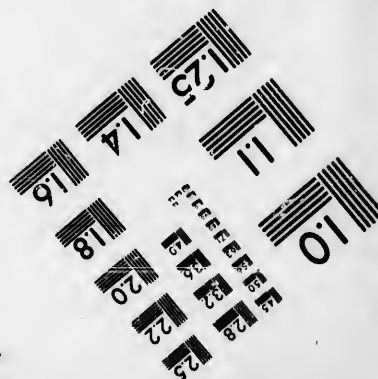
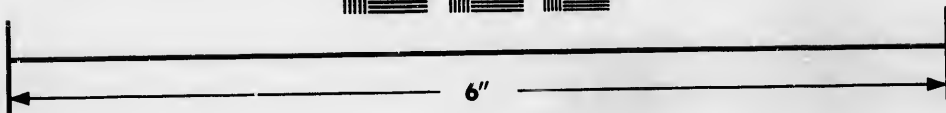
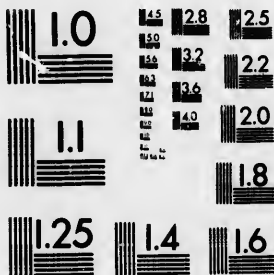
The posterity of Adam spread abroad in great numbers, and, going out, the just and the unjust multiplied exceedingly; and the saints redoubled their cries and supplications for the coming of the Redeemer, while the wicked, by their crimes, rendered themselves unfit for receiving such a favor. The people of God, and the triumph of the Word who was to become incarnate, had already reached the term decreed by the divine will for the coming of the







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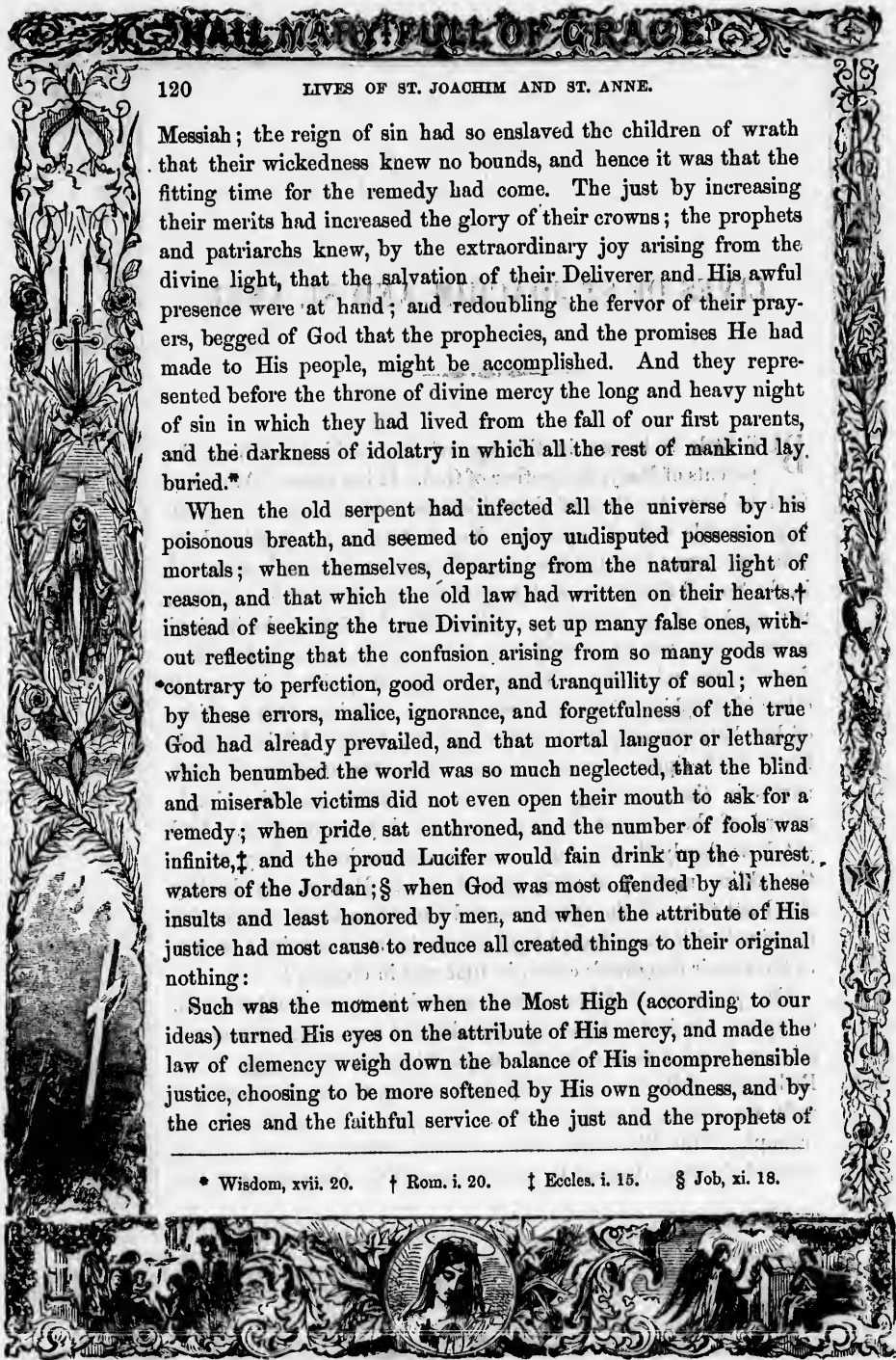
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Messiah; the reign of sin had so enslaved the children of wrath that their wickedness knew no bounds, and hence it was that the fitting time for the remedy had come. The just by increasing their merits had increased the glory of their crowns; the prophets and patriarchs knew, by the extraordinary joy arising from the divine light, that the salvation of their Deliverer and His awful presence were at hand; and redoubling the fervor of their prayers, begged of God that the prophecies, and the promises He had made to His people, might be accomplished. And they represented before the throne of divine mercy the long and heavy night of sin in which they had lived from the fall of our first parents, and the darkness of idolatry in which all the rest of mankind lay buried.*

When the old serpent had infected all the universe by his poisonous breath, and seemed to enjoy undisputed possession of mortals; when themselves, departing from the natural light of reason, and that which the old law had written on their hearts, † instead of seeking the true Divinity, set up many false ones, without reflecting that the confusion arising from so many gods was contrary to perfection, good order, and tranquillity of soul; when by these errors, malice, ignorance, and forgetfulness of the true God had already prevailed, and that mortal languor or lethargy which benumbed the world was so much neglected, that the blind and miserable victims did not even open their mouth to ask for a remedy; when pride sat enthroned, and the number of fools was infinite, ‡ and the proud Lucifer would fain drink up the purest waters of the Jordan; § when God was most offended by all these insults and least honored by men, and when the attribute of His justice had most cause to reduce all created things to their original nothing:

Such was the moment when the Most High (according to our ideas) turned His eyes on the attribute of His mercy, and made the law of clemency weigh down the balance of His incomprehensible justice, choosing to be more softened by His own goodness, and by the cries and the faithful service of the just and the prophets of

* Wisdom, xvii. 20. † Rom. i. 20. ‡ Eccles. i. 15. § Job, xi. 18.



HAIL MARY FULL OF GRACE

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His people, than exasperated by the manifold offences and perverse ways of all sinners. He determined then to give, even in that dreary night of the old law, some assured pledges of the day of grace, sending into the world two radiant lights, to announce the coming dawn of the Sun of Justice, Christ our Saviour. These two lights were St. Joachim and St. Anne, whom the divine will had prepared and created that they might be according to His own heart. St. Joachim had his house, his family, and his parents, at Nazareth, a small town of Galilee. He was always just and holy, guided by a special grace and a heavenly light. He penetrated several mysteries of Holy Writ and predictions of the ancient prophets, and by fervent and unceasing prayer begged of God the fulfilment of his promises; and his faith and his charity penetrated the heavens. He was very humble in himself, pure, and of great candor and simplicity, and holy in all his ways; a grave and serious man, of incomparable meekness and modesty.

St. Anne had her home in Bethlehem. She was a maiden fair, chaste, and humble; and from her childhood, holy, modest, and endowed with every virtue. She was also favored with frequent inspirations from on high; she was ever occupied in the contemplation of things divine, without neglecting her household affairs, in which she was most assiduous. By these holy occupations she attained the highest perfection of both the active and contemplative life. She had an infused knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and a profound understanding of their hidden mysteries; she was incomparable in the infused virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Filled with these gifts, she prayed continually for the speedy coming of the Messiah; and her prayers were so agreeable to the Lord, that, like the spouse in the Canticle, she merited the response of having wounded His heart,* and hastened that happy time; for, without doubt, the merits of St. Anne contributed no little to anticipate the advent of the Word, holding, as she did, the highest place among the saints of the Old Testament.

This strong woman also prayed fervently that the Most High would vouchsafe to give her in marriage a spouse who would assist

* Canticle of Canticles, iv. 9.



her to keep the divine law and become more perfect in the observance of its precepts. While St. Anne was thus supplicating the Lord, His divine providence decreed that St. Joachim prayed in like manner, to the end that both petitions might be presented together before the tribunal of the Holy Trinity, where they were heard and accepted. It was forthwith appointed by a divine ordinance, that Joachim and Anne should be united in marriage, and become the parents of her who was to be mother of the Incarnate God. For the execution of this decree the holy archangel Gabriel was sent to make it known to each. He appeared in corporal form to St. Anne when she was in fervent prayer, petitioning for the coming of the world's Redeemer, the Salvation of mankind. She saw this celestial prince so radiant in glory and in beauty that she was troubled with a holy fear, accompanied, however, by an interior joy which his presence caused her by reason of the lights which he communicated to her soul. The saint prostrated herself with profound humility to honor the ambassador of heaven; but he prevented her from so humbling herself, and encouraged her as one who was to be the ark of the true manna, the thrice-blessed Mary, mother of the Eternal Word; for the Lord had revealed that hidden mystery to the holy archangel, when He sent him on this embassy; although the other angels of heaven did not yet penetrate it, because this revelation or illumination was made immediately by the Lord himself to the archangel Gabriel only, and neither did the archangel reveal it then to St. Anne; but having demanded her attention, he said to her: "Handmaid of the Lord, may the Most High bless you and be your salvation. His divine Majesty hath heard your prayers, it is His will that you should persevere in asking the coming of the Redeemer, and He decrees that you should receive Joachim for your spouse; he is a just man, and hath found favor before God, and you may go on with him in the observance of His divine law and His holy service. Continue your prayers and supplications, and have no other care, for the same Lord will decree the accomplishment of your desire. Walk in the narrow way of justice, raise your heart and mind to the things of heaven, pray always for the coming of the Messiah, and rejoice in the Lord, who is thy salvation." Thereupon, the



angel disappeared, having left St. Anne much inward light for the penetration of various mysteries of the Sacred Scriptures, filled her soul with consolation, and renewed the fervor of her spirit.

The archangel neither appeared nor spoke to St. Joachim in corporal form as he did to St. Anne; but the man of God heard himself thus addressed in a dream: "Joachim, blessed be thou among men; persevere in thy desires, and practise justice and perfection. It is the will of God that thou receive Anne for thy spouse, for the Almighty hath filled her soul with benedictions. Have care of her, and regard her as a precious gift from His bountiful hand, and thank His divine Majesty for having confided her to thee." In virtue of this divine embassy, Joachim demanded the most chaste Anne for a wife, and the marriage was celebrated, in accordance with the will of God, but yet without either party disclosing their secret to the other, until some years had passed, as will be seen in its own place. The holy spouses dwelt at Nazareth, and there walked in the ways of God. They rendered themselves pleasing to the Most High, and were irreproachable in His sight, because of the plenitude of grace that made all their works perfect. They, every year, divided their revenue into three parts. The first they offered in the Temple of Jerusalem, for the worship of the Lord; the second they distributed to the poor, reserving the third for the proper maintenance of their family. God increased their temporal goods, because they employed them with much charity and liberality.

Peace was inviolable between them; they lived in perfect conformity one with the other, without noise or disturbance of any kind. The most humble Anne was submissive in all things to the will of Joachim; and the man of God was ever eager to anticipate the wishes of St. Anne, nor was it in vain that he trusted himself entirely to her guidance.* In such perfect charity did they live, that all their life long they had but one and the same will. Being united in the name of the Lord,† His holy fear never abandoned them: St. Joachim never failing to obey the command of the angel to honor and cherish his wife.

* Prov. xxxi. 11.

† Matt. xviii. 20



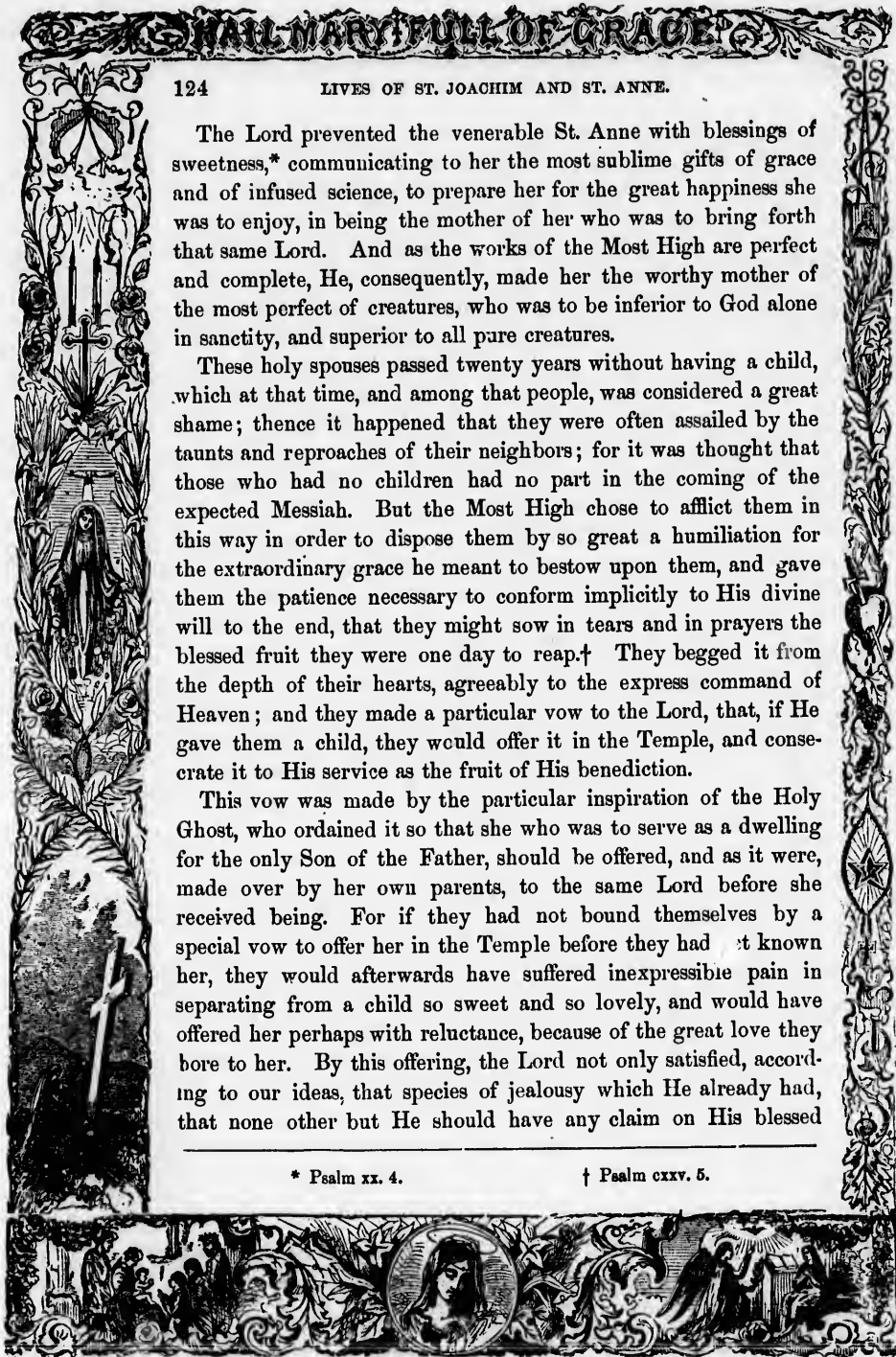
The Lord prevented the venerable St. Anne with blessings of sweetness,* communicating to her the most sublime gifts of grace and of infused science, to prepare her for the great happiness she was to enjoy, in being the mother of her who was to bring forth that same Lord. And as the works of the Most High are perfect and complete, He, consequently, made her the worthy mother of the most perfect of creatures, who was to be inferior to God alone in sanctity, and superior to all pure creatures.

These holy spouses passed twenty years without having a child, which at that time, and among that people, was considered a great shame; thence it happened that they were often assailed by the taunts and reproaches of their neighbors; for it was thought that those who had no children had no part in the coming of the expected Messiah. But the Most High chose to afflict them in this way in order to dispose them by so great a humiliation for the extraordinary grace he meant to bestow upon them, and gave them the patience necessary to conform implicitly to His divine will to the end, that they might sow in tears and in prayers the blessed fruit they were one day to reap.† They begged it from the depth of their hearts, agreeably to the express command of Heaven; and they made a particular vow to the Lord, that, if He gave them a child, they would offer it in the Temple, and consecrate it to His service as the fruit of His benediction.

This vow was made by the particular inspiration of the Holy Ghost, who ordained it so that she who was to serve as a dwelling for the only Son of the Father, should be offered, and as it were, made over by her own parents, to the same Lord before she received being. For if they had not bound themselves by a special vow to offer her in the Temple before they had not known her, they would afterwards have suffered inexpressible pain in separating from a child so sweet and so lovely, and would have offered her perhaps with reluctance, because of the great love they bore to her. By this offering, the Lord not only satisfied, according to our ideas, that species of jealousy which He already had, that none other but He should have any claim on His blessed

* Psalm xx. 4.

† Psalm cxxv. 5.



Mother; but His love was also in some sort compensated for the delay in His coming.

Having persevered for a whole year in these earnest supplications, according to the order they had received from the Lord, it came to pass that St. Joachim went to the Temple of Jerusalem by a divine inspiration and an express command, there to offer prayers and sacrifices for the coming of the Messiah, and to obtain the desired fruit. Being come with others from his own neighborhood, to offer, in presence of the high-priest, the customary gifts, a priest called Issachar sharply rebuked the venerable old man for offering his gifts with the others, being barren. Among other things, he told him: "Joachim, why dost thou present thyself to offer sacrifice, being a useless man? Separate thyself from the others, and go thy way hence; anger not the Lord by thy offerings and thy sacrifices, for they are not pleasing in his eyes." The holy old man, confused and ashamed, humbly and lovingly besought the Lord, saying: "My Sovereign Lord and my eternal God, Thy command and Thy will brought me to the Temple; he who holds Thy place therein hath despised me; my sins have merited this affront; I receive it then for Thy sake; despise not, O Lord, the work of Thy hands."* Thereupon the afflicted Joachim going forth from the Temple (to outward appearance calm and tranquil), went to a country house which he had; and for some days, which he passed in solitude, addressed his sighs to the Lord, and prayed to Him as follows:

"God of eternal majesty, from whom is all being, and the entire reparation of the human race, prostrate in Thy divine presence, I beseech Thine infinite goodness to look with pity on the affliction of my soul, and hear my prayers and those of Thy servant Anne Thine eyes penetrate all our wishes; but if I deserve not to be heard, reject not my humble spouse, Lord God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; turn not away Thy clemency from us, and permit not, since Thou art Father, that I be numbered with the reprobate and the outcast in my offerings, as being useless, because Thou givest me no progeny. Remember, O Lord, the

* Psalm cxxxvii. 8.



sacrifices and oblations of Thy servants and Thy prophets the fathers of my race;* and be mindful of those works of theirs which found favor in Thy sight. And since Thou commandest me, Lord, to supplicate Thee with confidence, as the almighty and all-bountiful God, grant me what according to Thy good pleasure I desire; for in beseeching Thee I obey Thy holy will, in that Thou hast promised to hear my prayer. But if my sins impede Thy mercy, remove from me whatever is displeasing to Thee. Mighty art thou, O Lord God of Israel, and canst do whatsoever Thou wilt.† Hear my prayers, poor and miserable as I am, for Thou art infinite and wont to have compassion on the humble. Where shall I find a refuge, if not in Thee, who art the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and the great Omnipotent! Thou hast loaded Thy children and Thy servants with blessings in their generations, and Thou leadest me to desire and to hope from Thy bounty that which Thou hast done for my brethren. If it be Thy gracious will to grant my petition, I will offer in Thy holy Temple, and consecrate to Thy service, the fruit of succession that I may receive from Thy bountiful hand. I give up my heart and soul to Thy divine will, and I have always desired to turn mine eyes away from vanity. Do with me whatsoever Thou wilt, and comfort our souls, O Lord, by the fulfilment of our hope. From the throne of Thy Majesty regard this miserable dust, and deign to raise it up, that it may adore and glorify Thee, and may Thy holy will, not mine, be done in all things."

Thus did Joachim pray in his solitude. Meanwhile the holy ambassador declared to St. Anne that it would be pleasing to the divine Majesty for her to ask a succession of children with that pious intention and that fervent desire to obtain it. And the holy lady, finding that it was the will of God, and of Joachim her husband, prostrated herself before God in humble submission and confidence, and prayed in this manner: "Most high Majesty, Lord, creator and preserver of all things, whom my soul honors and adores as the true God, infinite, holy, and bountiful, I will speak and make manifest in Thy royal presence my necessity and

* Deut. ix. 27

† Esth. xiii. 9.

my affliction, although I am but dust and ashes.* Lord God eternal, make us worthy of Thy benediction, giving us a pure and holy offspring whom we may present in Thy Temple. Remember, Lord, that Thy servant Anna, mother of Samuel, was barren, yet, through Thine infinite bounty she received the fruition of her desires.† I feel an inward motion which incites me to ask a like favor at Thy hands. Hear then, most sweet Lord, mine humble prayer, being mindful of the service, the oblations, and the sacrifices of my fathers, and the favors wrought in and for them by the might of Thy omnipotent arm. I would present Thee, O Lord, with an oblation that would be well pleasing in Thy sight; but the best I can offer Thee is my soul, my powers, my senses, and the being Thou hast given me. And if, vouchsafing to regard me from Thy eternal throne, Thou givest me a child, I consecrate it to Thy service from the first moment of its existence. Cast Thine eyes, O Lord God of Israel, on this vile and poor creature, comfort Thy servant, Joachim, hear our humble supplication, and be Thy holy will in all things accomplished."

These were the prayers offered up by St. Joachim and St. Anne, but it is not possible for me to describe the exalted idea which I have of the sanctity of these blessed parents; neither is it necessary, for what I have said will give some conception of it. If we would rightly estimate the perfect holiness of those great saints, we must consider the high destiny and the sublime ministry for which God designed them, who were to be the immediate progenitors of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the parents of His most holy mother.

The prayers of St. Joachim and St. Anne reached the throne of the Most Blessed Trinity, where, being heard and accepted, the divine will was manifested to the holy angels, and these celestial spirits having learned the decree of the Most High, the archangel Gabriel, adoring and honoring the divine Majesty after the manner of those pure and spiritual substances, bowed down before the throne of the Most Holy Trinity, whence came forth a voice intelligible to him, and it said: "Gabriel, illuminate, vivify, and

* Genesis, xviii. 27:

† 1 Kings, i.

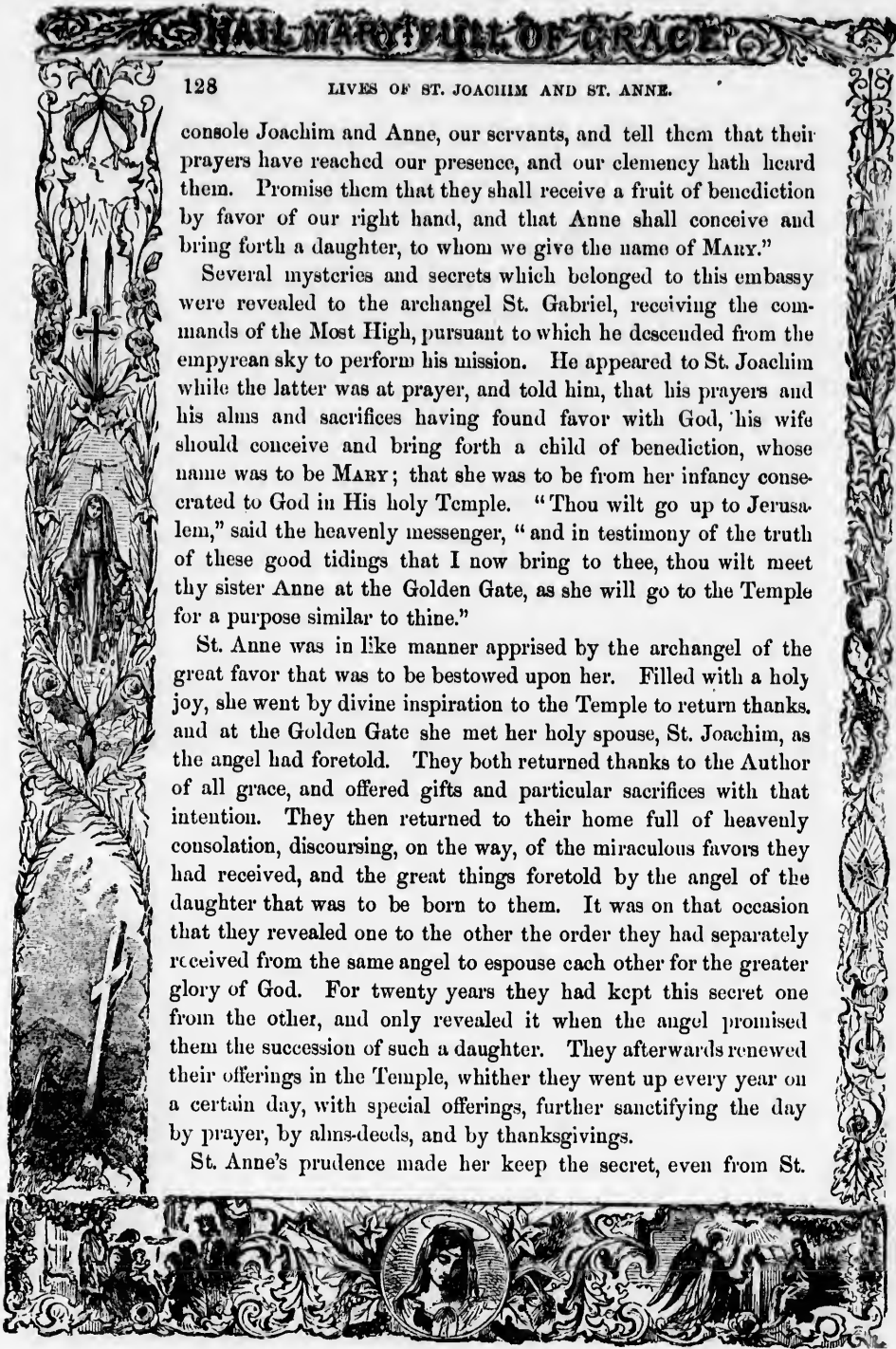


console Joachim and Anne, our servants, and tell them that their prayers have reached our presence, and our clemency hath heard them. Promise them that they shall receive a fruit of benediction by favor of our right hand, and that Anne shall conceive and bring forth a daughter, to whom we give the name of MARY."

Several mysteries and secrets which belonged to this embassy were revealed to the archangel St. Gabriel, receiving the commands of the Most High, pursuant to which he descended from the empyrean sky to perform his mission. He appeared to St. Joachim while the latter was at prayer, and told him, that his prayers and his alms and sacrifices having found favor with God, his wife should conceive and bring forth a child of benediction, whose name was to be MARY; that she was to be from her infancy consecrated to God in His holy Temple. "Thou wilt go up to Jerusalem," said the heavenly messenger, "and in testimony of the truth of these good tidings that I now bring to thee, thou wilt meet thy sister Anne at the Golden Gate, as she will go to the Temple for a purpose similar to thine."

St. Anne was in like manner apprised by the archangel of the great favor that was to be bestowed upon her. Filled with a holy joy, she went by divine inspiration to the Temple to return thanks, and at the Golden Gate she met her holy spouse, St. Joachim, as the angel had foretold. They both returned thanks to the Author of all grace, and offered gifts and particular sacrifices with that intention. They then returned to their home full of heavenly consolation, discoursing, on the way, of the miraculous favors they had received, and the great things foretold by the angel of the daughter that was to be born to them. It was on that occasion that they revealed one to the other the order they had separately received from the same angel to espouse each other for the greater glory of God. For twenty years they had kept this secret one from the other, and only revealed it when the angel promised them the succession of such a daughter. They afterwards renewed their offerings in the Temple, whither they went up every year on a certain day, with special offerings, further sanctifying the day by prayer, by alms-deeds, and by thanksgivings.

St. Anne's prudence made her keep the secret, even from St.



THE MARY OF GRACE

Joachim, that her daughter was to be the mother of the Messiah. And the holy father knew nothing more about her all his life, except that she was to be a great and mysterious woman; but the Most High failed not to make the great mystery known to him a few moments before his death.

The divine Wisdom had prepared all things to separate from the corrupt mass of human nature the mother of all grace. The allotted number of the patriarchs and prophets was already complete, and the mountains raised whereon that mystical City of God was to be placed.* His right hand had prepared the incomparable treasures of His divinity, to portion and endow her. A thousand angels were ready to guard and protect her, and to serve her as their lady and royal mistress. He prepared for her a royal line of ancestors; He gave her parents holy and perfect beyond all the men and women of that age, for had there been any greater saints or more fit to be the parents of her whom He chose for His own mother, there is no doubt but the divine Majesty would have chosen them.

He disposed them for their office by numberless graces and blessings, enriched them with all virtues, and illumined their minds by divine wisdom and the various gifts of the Holy Ghost. They having been apprised of the admirable daughter who was to be given them, the work of the first conception, which was that of the pure body of Mary, was executed. The age of her parents, when they were married, was, that of St. Joachim forty-six, and that of St. Anne twenty-four. Twenty years had passed since their marriage without their having any children, so that the mother was forty-four at the time of her daughter's conception, and the father sixty-six. The conception was according to the common order, but owing to St. Anne's sterility, might be considered miraculous, being also free from every species of imperfection.

At the moment when the soul was infused into the body of our divine lady, it was so appointed that St. Anne, made suddenly sensible of the presence of the Holy Ghost, was moved by such an interior joy, that she fell into a sublime ecstasy, during which she

* Psalm lxxxvi. 2.

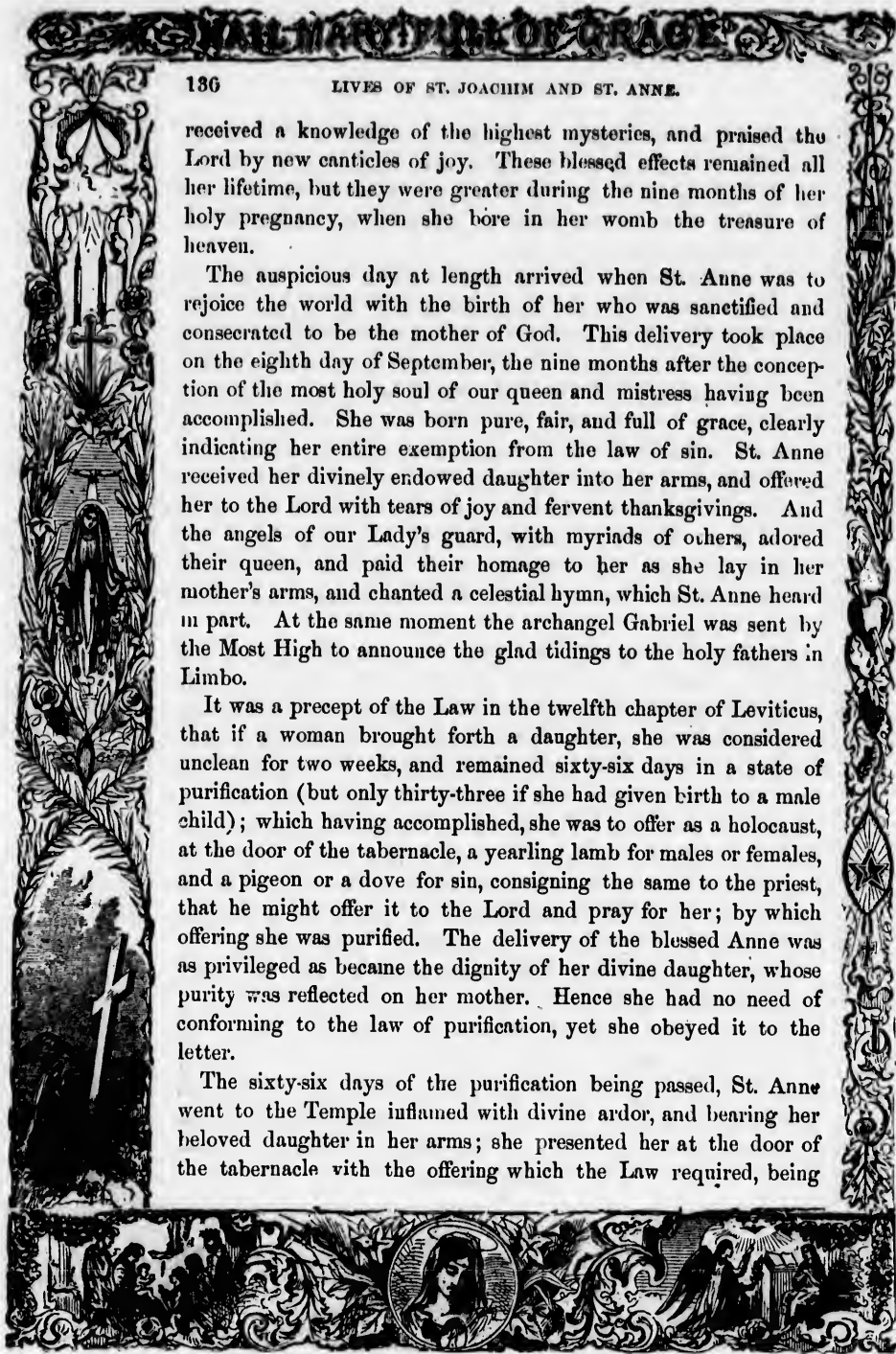


received a knowledge of the highest mysteries, and praised the Lord by new canticles of joy. These blessed effects remained all her lifetime, but they were greater during the nine months of her holy pregnancy, when she bore in her womb the treasure of heaven.

The auspicious day at length arrived when St. Anne was to rejoice the world with the birth of her who was sanctified and consecrated to be the mother of God. This delivery took place on the eighth day of September, the nine months after the conception of the most holy soul of our queen and mistress having been accomplished. She was born pure, fair, and full of grace, clearly indicating her entire exemption from the law of sin. St. Anne received her divinely endowed daughter into her arms, and offered her to the Lord with tears of joy and fervent thanksgivings. And the angels of our Lady's guard, with myriads of others, adored their queen, and paid their homage to her as she lay in her mother's arms, and chanted a celestial hymn, which St. Anne heard in part. At the same moment the archangel Gabriel was sent by the Most High to announce the glad tidings to the holy fathers in Limbo.

It was a precept of the Law in the twelfth chapter of Leviticus, that if a woman brought forth a daughter, she was considered unclean for two weeks, and remained sixty-six days in a state of purification (but only thirty-three if she had given birth to a male child); which having accomplished, she was to offer as a holocaust, at the door of the tabernacle, a yearling lamb for males or females, and a pigeon or a dove for sin, consigning the same to the priest, that he might offer it to the Lord and pray for her; by which offering she was purified. The delivery of the blessed Anne was as privileged as became the dignity of her divine daughter, whose purity was reflected on her mother. Hence she had no need of conforming to the law of purification, yet she obeyed it to the letter.

The sixty-six days of the purification being passed, St. Anne went to the Temple inflamed with divine ardor, and bearing her beloved daughter in her arms; she presented her at the door of the tabernacle with the offering which the Law required, being

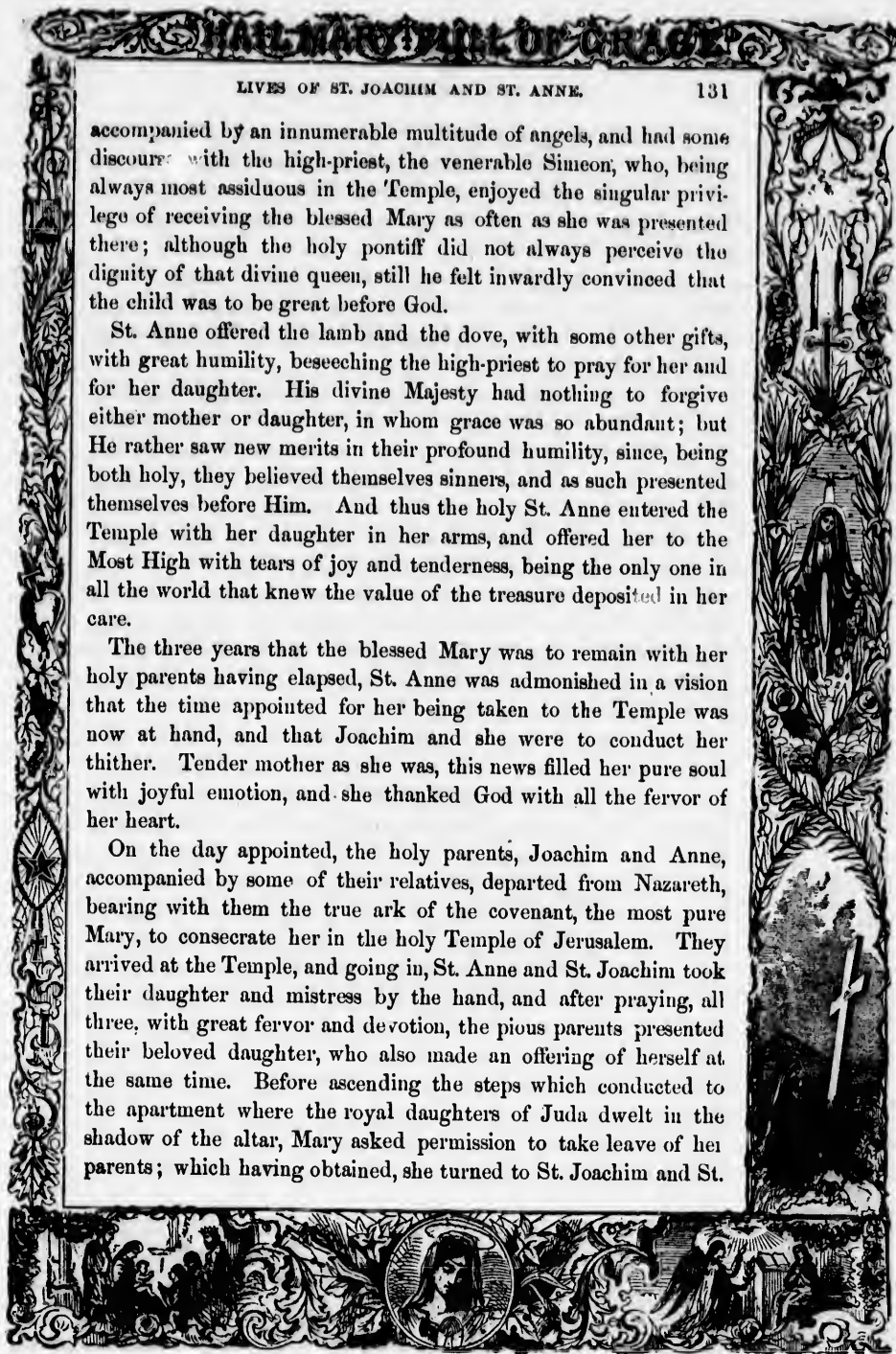


accompanied by an innumerable multitude of angels, and had some discourse with the high-priest, the venerable Simeon, who, being always most assiduous in the Temple, enjoyed the singular privilege of receiving the blessed Mary as often as she was presented there; although the holy pontiff did not always perceive the dignity of that divine queen, still he felt inwardly convinced that the child was to be great before God.

St. Anne offered the lamb and the dove, with some other gifts, with great humility, beseeching the high-priest to pray for her and for her daughter. His divine Majesty had nothing to forgive either mother or daughter, in whom grace was so abundant; but He rather saw new merits in their profound humility, since, being both holy, they believed themselves sinners, and as such presented themselves before Him. And thus the holy St. Anne entered the Temple with her daughter in her arms, and offered her to the Most High with tears of joy and tenderness, being the only one in all the world that knew the value of the treasure deposited in her care.

The three years that the blessed Mary was to remain with her holy parents having elapsed, St. Anne was admonished in a vision that the time appointed for her being taken to the Temple was now at hand, and that Joachim and she were to conduct her thither. Tender mother as she was, this news filled her pure soul with joyful emotion, and she thanked God with all the fervor of her heart.

On the day appointed, the holy parents, Joachim and Anne, accompanied by some of their relatives, departed from Nazareth, bearing with them the true ark of the covenant, the most pure Mary, to consecrate her in the holy Temple of Jerusalem. They arrived at the Temple, and going in, St. Anne and St. Joachim took their daughter and mistress by the hand, and after praying, all three, with great fervor and devotion, the pious parents presented their beloved daughter, who also made an offering of herself at the same time. Before ascending the steps which conducted to the apartment where the royal daughters of Juda dwelt in the shadow of the altar, Mary asked permission to take leave of her parents; which having obtained, she turned to St. Joachim and St.

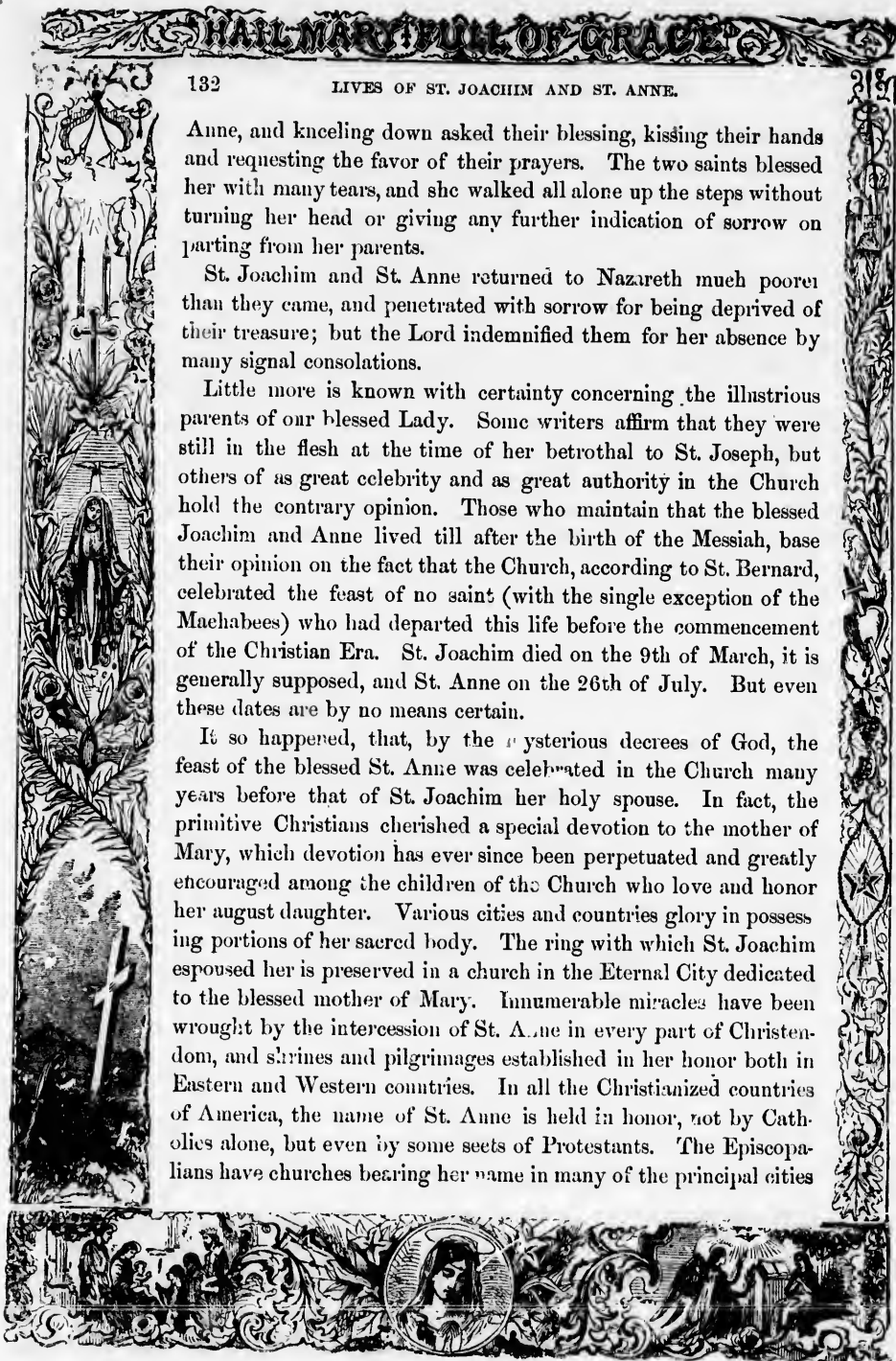


Anne, and kneeling down asked their blessing, kissing their hands and requesting the favor of their prayers. The two saints blessed her with many tears, and she walked all alone up the steps without turning her head or giving any further indication of sorrow on parting from her parents.

St. Joachim and St. Anne returned to Nazareth much poorer than they came, and penetrated with sorrow for being deprived of their treasure; but the Lord indemnified them for her absence by many signal consolations.

Little more is known with certainty concerning the illustrious parents of our blessed Lady. Some writers affirm that they were still in the flesh at the time of her betrothal to St. Joseph, but others of as great celebrity and as great authority in the Church hold the contrary opinion. Those who maintain that the blessed Joachim and Anne lived till after the birth of the Messiah, base their opinion on the fact that the Church, according to St. Bernard, celebrated the feast of no saint (with the single exception of the Machabees) who had departed this life before the commencement of the Christian Era. St. Joachim died on the 9th of March, it is generally supposed, and St. Anne on the 26th of July. But even these dates are by no means certain.

It so happened, that, by the mysterious decrees of God, the feast of the blessed St. Anne was celebrated in the Church many years before that of St. Joachim her holy spouse. In fact, the primitive Christians cherished a special devotion to the mother of Mary, which devotion has ever since been perpetuated and greatly encouraged among the children of the Church who love and honor her august daughter. Various cities and countries glory in possessing portions of her sacred body. The ring with which St. Joachim espoused her is preserved in a church in the Eternal City dedicated to the blessed mother of Mary. Innumerable miracles have been wrought by the intercession of St. Anne in every part of Christendom, and shrines and pilgrimages established in her honor both in Eastern and Western countries. In all the Christianized countries of America, the name of St. Anne is held in honor, not by Catholics alone, but even by some sects of Protestants. The Episcopalians have churches bearing her name in many of the principal cities



of British America and the United States. In Lower Canada there are several shrines and pilgrimages consecrated to St. Anne,* and societies established in her honor.

The feast of St. Joachim is now celebrated on the Sunday within the Octave of the Assumption. His relics are still preserved in the Church, most of them in various cities of Italy. His head is said to be in the church of the Machabees at Cologne.

Much might be here said in praise of these glorious saints, so highly favored in the mysterious decrees of Providence, but what we have related of them sufficiently establishes the fact of their pre-eminent holiness.

* One of these, on the Ottawa river, is the "St. Anne's" of Moore's *Canadian Boat Song*:

"As soon as the woods on shore grow dim,
We'll sing at *St. Anne's* our parting hymn."



THE END

