

St. JOSEPH

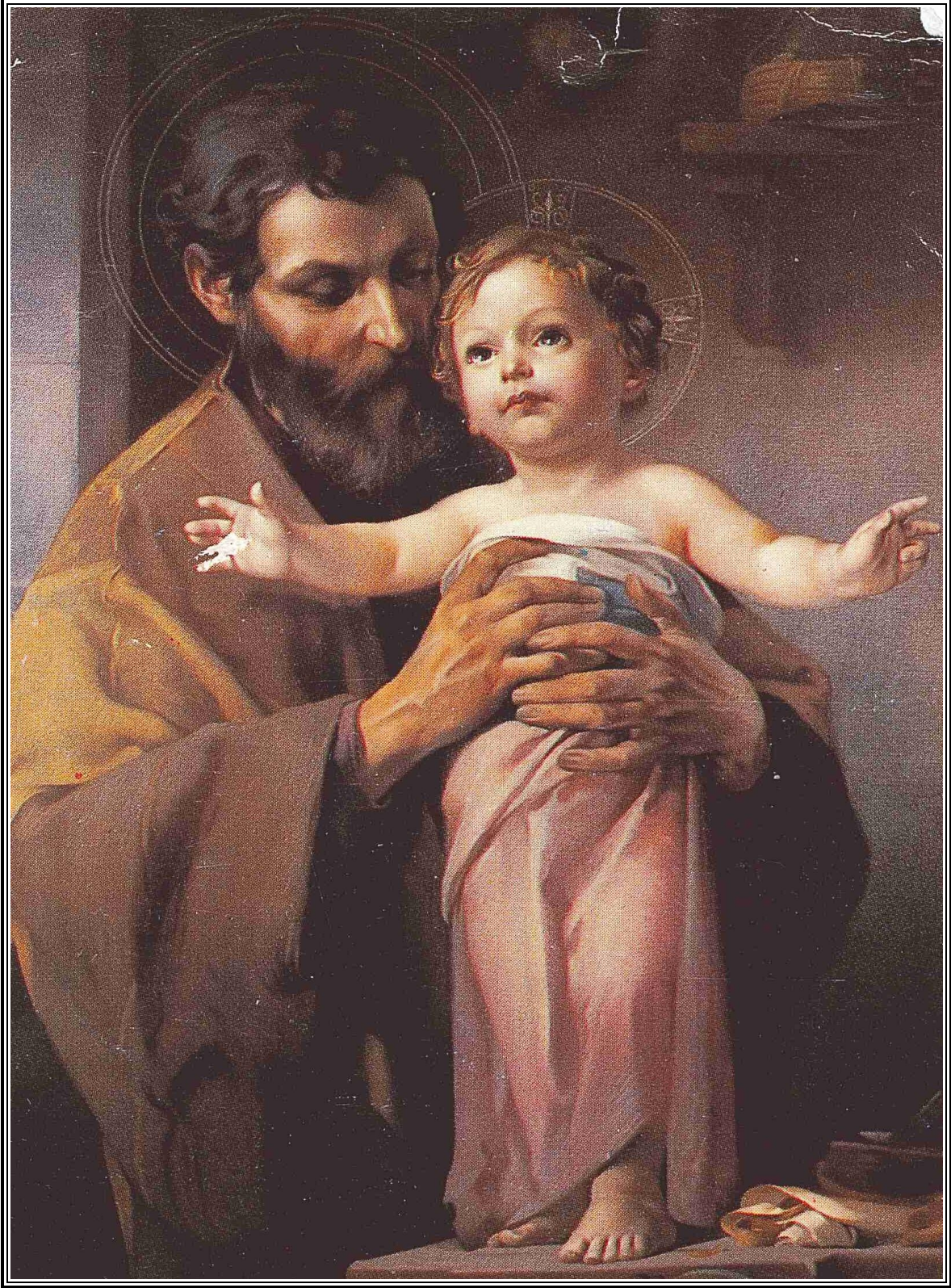
THE JUST MAN AND

THE PROTECTOR

(from the Writings of Maria Valtorta)

Joseph is a saint of the highest order, yet of the four gospels, only Matthew and Luke mention him briefly. These extracts, from the writings of Maria Valtorta, offer significant insights into his life as the spouse of Mary, and as the foster-father of Jesus. Joseph is a wonderful example in the practice of faith, charity, humility, and obedience. He is indeed the model of models for all husbands, and for all fathers. The following passages are taken from three of the five volumes of Maria Valtorta's *The Poem of the Man-God*, and from her *1943 and 1944 Notebooks*.

[According to the decree of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, AAS 58, 1186, approved by Pope Paul VI on October 14th 1966, it is permitted to publish, without a Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur, works relating to private revelations, prophecies and miracles etc., provided that they contain nothing which contravenes faith and morals. This compilation, therefore, has credibility only as human testimony and is not intended to represent the opinion of the Church. The compiler wishes to affirm submission to the final and official judgement of the Church regarding the visions and dictations contained in these extracts.]_



MARY'S VOW

(Vol. 1, p. 61)

(Mary is about 15 years old, and is with other young virgins in the Temple of Jerusalem. She is summoned by the High Priest, who tells Her he knows of Her grace and goodness, and that now She is a young woman, She must have a husband. Mary weeps, and confides in the High Priest that She had given Her life to God as a little girl, even before the time of Her memory. She tells of a voice that seemed to be calling Her:)

« ... With My lips which still tasted of My mother's milk, but with My heart full of celestial honey, I then said: "Here I am. I am coming. I am Yours. No one will have My body, but You, My Lord, neither will My soul have any other love... " And while saying so, it seemed to Me that I was saying over again things already said and that I was fulfilling a rite already fulfilled, and the chosen Spouse was not a stranger to Me, because I already knew His ardour and My sight had been formed at His light and My capacity for loving had been fulfilled in His embrace... When? I do not know. Beyond life, I would say, because I feel I always had Him, and that He always had Me, and that I exist because He wanted Me for the joy of His Spirit and Mine... Now I obey you, O Priest. But please tell Me how I am to behave... I have neither father nor mother. Please be My guide. »

« God will give You Your husband and he will be a holy man, because You have entrusted Yourself to God. You will tell him Your vow. »

« And will he agree? »

« I hope so. Pray, my child, that he may understand Your heart. Go now. May God always accompany You. »

TO BE THE HUSBAND OF THE VIRGIN

(Vol. 1, p. 61-6)

(The scene is a rich hall with beautiful furnishings. There are priests (one of whom is Zacharias, the husband of Mary's cousin Elizabeth), and there are many men of different ages, dressed in their best clothes. Joseph is in a corner of the hall...)

He is talking to a hale and hearty elderly man. Joseph is about thirty years old. He is a handsome man with short and rather curly hair, dark brown like his beard and his moustache, which cover a well shaped chin and rise towards his rosy-brown cheeks, which are not olive-coloured as is normal in most people with a brown complexion. His eyes are dark, kindly and deep, very serious and perhaps somewhat sad. But when he smiles, as he does now, they become gay and young looking. He is dressed in light brown, very simple but very tidy. A group of young Levites comes in and they take up position between the door and a long narrow table, which is against the same wall as the door, which is left wide open. A single curtain hanging down to about twenty centimetres from the floor is drawn to cover the empty space.

The curiosity of the group increases. It grows more so when a hand pulls the curtain to one side to admit a Levite, who is carrying in his arms a bundle of dry branches on which one in blossom is gently laid: it looks like a light foam of white petals, with a vague pinkish hue that spreads softer and softer from the centre to the top of the light petals. The Levite lays the bundle of branches on the table very gently to avoid detracting from the miracle of the branch full of flowers among so many dry ones.

Whispering spreads in the hall. They all stretch their necks and sharpen their eyes to see. Zacharias, who is near the table with the other priests, also endeavours to see. But he can see nothing.

Joseph, in his corner, gives a quick glance to the bundle of branches and when the man he was speaking to says something to him, he shakes his head in denial as if to say: Impossible and smiles.

A trumpet is heard beyond the curtain. They all become quiet and turn in an orderly way towards the door, which is now completely clear as the curtain has been pulled to one side. The High Priest enters surrounded by elders. They all make a deep bow. The Pontiff goes to the table and begins to speak, standing up.

« Men of the race of David, gathered here at my request, please listen. The Lord has spoken,

glory be to Him! From His Glory a ray has descended and, like the sun in springtime, it has given life to a dry branch which has blossomed miraculously, whereas no other branch on earth is in bloom to-day, the last day of the Feast of Dedication, and the snow that fell on the mountains in Judah has not yet melted and everything is white between Zion and Bethany. God has spoken and has made Himself the father and the guardian of the Virgin of David Who has Him alone as Her protection. A holy girl, the glory of the Temple, She deserved the word of God to learn the name of a husband agreeable to the Eternal One. And he must be very just to be chosen by the Lord as the protector of the Virgin so dear to Him! For this reason our sorrow in losing Her is alleviated and all worries about Her destiny as a wife cease. And to the man appointed by God we entrust with full confidence the Virgin blessed by God and by ourselves. The name of the husband is Joseph of Jacob of Bethlehem, of the tribe of David, a carpenter in Nazareth in Galilee. Joseph: come forward. It is an order of the High Priest... »

There is a lot of whispering. Heads move round, eyes cast inquisitive glances, hands make signs: there are expressions of disappointment and relief. Someone, particularly amongst the older people, must be happy that it was not his fate.

Joseph, blushing and embarrassed moves forward. He is now near the table, in front of the Pontiff, whom he has greeted reverently.

« Everyone must come here to see the name engraved on the branch. And everyone must take his own branch to make sure that there is no deception. »

The men obey. They look at the branch gently held by the High Priest and then each takes his own: some break it, some keep it. They all look at Joseph. Some look and are silent, others look and congratulate him. The elderly man to whom Joseph was speaking before, exclaims: « I told you, Joseph! Who feels less certain, is the one who wins the game! » They have all now passed before the Pontiff.

The High Priest gives Joseph his branch in bloom, he lays his hand on his shoulder and says to him: « The spouse the Lord has presented you with, is not rich, as you know. But all virtues are in Her. Be more and more worthy of Her. There is no flower in Israel as beautiful and pure as She is. Please, all go out now. You, Joseph, stay here. And you, Zacharias, since you are Her relative, please bring in the bride. »

They all go out, except the High Priest and Joseph. The curtain is drawn once again over the door.

Joseph is standing in a very humble attitude, near the Priest. There is silence, then the Priest says to Joseph: « Mary wishes to inform you of a vow She made. Please help Her shyness. Be good to Her, Who is so good. »

« I will put my strength and my manly authority at Her service and no sacrifice on Her behalf will be heavy for me. Be sure of that. »

Mary enters with Zacharias and Anna of Phanuel.

« Come, Mary » says the Pontiff. « Here is the spouse that God has destined to You. He is Joseph of Nazareth. You will therefore go back to Your own town. I will leave You now. May God give You His blessing. May the Lord protect You and bless You, may He show His face to You and have mercy on You. May He turn His face to You and give You peace. »

Zacharias goes out escorting the Pontiff. Anna congratulates Joseph and then she goes out, too.

The betrothed are now facing each other. Mary, full of blushes, is standing with Her head bowed. Joseph, who is also red in the face, looks at Her and tries to find the first words to be said. He eventually finds them and a bright smile lights up his eyes. He says: « I welcome you, Mary. I saw You when You were a little baby, only a few days old... I was a friend of Your father's and I have a nephew, the son of my brother Alphaeus, who was a great friend of Your mother. He was her little friend, because he is only eighteen years old, and when You were not yet born, he was only a little boy and he cheered up Your sad mother who loved him so much. You do not know us because You were only a little girl when You came here. But everyone in Nazareth loves You and they all think and speak of Joachim's little Mary, Whose birth was a miracle of the Lord, Who made the barren old lady blossom wonderfully... And I remember the evening You were born... We all remember it because of the prodigy of a heavy rain that saved the country and of a violent storm during which the thunderbolts did not damage even a stem of heather and it ended with such a large and beautiful rainbow that the like has never been seen again. And then... who does not remember Joachim's happiness? He dandled You showing You to his neighbours... As if

You were a flower that had descended from Heaven, he admired You and wanted everyone to admire You, a happy old father who died talking about his Mary, Who was so beautiful and good and Whose words were so full of wisdom and grace... He was quite right in admiring You and in saying that there is no other woman lovelier than You are! And Your mother? She filled Your house and the neighbourhood with her songs and she sang like a skylark in springtime when she was carrying You, and afterwards when she held You in her arms. I made a cradle for You. A tiny little cradle, with roses carved all over it, because Your mother wanted it like that. Perhaps it is still in the house... I am old, Mary. When You were born I was beginning to work. I was already working... I would never have believed that I was going to have You as a spouse! Perhaps Your parents would have died a happier death if they had known, because they were my friends. I buried Your father, mourning over his death with a sincere heart, because he was a good teacher to me. »

Mary raises Her face, little by little, taking heart, as She hears Joseph speak to Her thus, and when he mentions the cradle She smiles gently and when Joseph speaks of Her father, She holds out Her hand to him and says: « Thank you, Joseph. » A very timid and gentle « thank you. »

Joseph holds Her little jasmine hand in his short and strong hands of a carpenter and he caresses it with an affection that expresses more and more confidence. Perhaps he is waiting for more words. But Mary is silent once again. He then goes on: « As You know, Your house is still intact, with the exception of the part that was demolished by order of the consul, to build a road for the wagons of the Romans. But the fields, what is left of them - You know that because of Your father's illness much of the property had to be disposed of - have been rather neglected. For over three years the trees and the vines have never been pruned and the land is untilled and hard. But the trees that saw You when You were a little girl are still there, and if You agree, I will at once take care of them. »

« Thank you, Joseph. But you have your work... »

« I will work in Your orchard in the morning and in the evening. The days are getting longer and longer. By springtime I want everything to be in order for Your happiness. Look: this is a branch of the almond tree near the house. I wanted to pick it - the hedge is so ruined that one can enter anywhere, but I will remake it solid and strong - I wanted to pick it, because I thought that if I should be the chosen one, You would have been pleased to have a flower

from Your garden. But I was not expecting to be the chosen one as I am a Nazirite and I have obeyed because it is an order of the Priest, not because I wish to get married. Here is the branch, Mary. With it I offer You my heart, that, like it, has bloomed up till now only for the Lord and is now blooming for You, my spouse »

Mary takes the branch. She is moved and looks at Joseph with a face that has become more and more confident and bright. She feels certain of him. When he says to Her « I am a Nazirite », Her face becomes bright and She takes courage: « Also I am all of the Lord, Joseph. I do not know whether the High Priest told you... »

« He only told me that You are good and pure, that You wish to inform me of a vow, and that I must be good to you. Speak, Mary. Your Joseph wants You to be happy in all Your desires. I do not love You with my body. I love You with my soul, holy girl given to me by God! Please see in me a father and a brother, in addition to a husband. And open Your heart to me as to a father and rely on me as on a brother... »

« Since My childhood I have consecrated Myself to the Lord. I know this is not the custom in Israel. But I heard a voice requesting My virginity as a sacrifice of love for the coming of the Messiah. Israel has been waiting for Him for such a long time!... It is not too much to forgo the joy of being a mother for that! »

Joseph gazes at Her as if he wanted to read Her heart, then he takes Her tiny hands which are still holding the branch in blossom and he says: « I will join my sacrifice to Yours and we shall love the Eternal Father *so much* with our chastity that He will send His Saviour to the world earlier, and will allow us to see His Light shining in the world. Come, Mary. Let us go before His House and take an oath that we shall love each other as the angels do. Then I will go to Nazareth to prepare everything for You, in Your house, if You wish to go there, or elsewhere if You wish so. »

« In My house... There was a grotto down at the bottom... Is it still there? »

« It is, but it is no longer Yours... But I will build another one for You where it will be cool and quiet during the hottest hours of the day. I will make it as much as possible identical to the older one. And tell me: whom do You want with You? »

« Nobody. I am not afraid. Alphaeus' mother, who has always come to see Me, will keep Me company during the day. At night I prefer to be alone. No harm can befall Me. »

« And now I am there, too. When shall I come and get You? »

« Whenever you wish, Joseph. »

« Then I will come as soon as the house is ready. I will not touch anything. I want You to find it as Your mother left it. But I want it to be bright and clean, to receive You without any sadness. Come, Mary. Let us go and tell the Most High that we bless Him. »

THE ENGAGEMENT OF MARY AND JOSEPH

(Vol. 1, p. 68-72)

(Mary is dressed as a bride, assisted by Elizabeth, her cousin, and by Anna of Phanuel, Her teacher. Anna asked Mary what Joseph said about Her vow. Mary says:)

« He made no objection. On the contrary, when I told him the reasons, he said: “I will join my sacrifice to Yours”. »

« He is a holy young man » says Anna of Phanuel.

The « holy young man » is coming in just now in the company of Zacharias.

He is really magnificent. All dressed in gold yellow he seems an eastern sovereign. A splendid belt supports his bag and his dagger, the former of morocco embroidered in gold, the latter with a morocco sheath and gold decorations. On his head he is wearing a turban, that is the usual piece of cloth worn like a hood, as is still customary amongst certain people in Africa, such as the bedouins, and it is held by a precious ring, a thin wire of gold, to which there are tied some small bunches of myrtle. He has on a new mantle, with fringes, and he wears it with great dignity. He is sparkling with joy. He has in his hands small bunches of myrtle in bloom.

« Peace to you, my spouse! » he greets Her. « Peace to everyone. » When he has received a reply to his greetings, he says: « I saw Your joy the day I gave You a branch from Your garden. I thought I should bring You some myrtle which I picked near the grotto You love so much. I wanted to bring You some of the roses that are already beginning to bloom near Your house. But roses do not last long. After a journey of several days I would have arrived

here with only the thorns. And I want to offer You, my dear, only roses and spread Your way with soft scented flowers, so that Your feet may rest on them without touching anything dirty or harsh. »

« Oh! Thank you, you are so good! But what did you do to keep it so fresh? »

« I tied a vase to the saddle and I put in it the branches of the flowers in bud. During the journey they have burst into flower. Here they are, Mary. May Your forehead be garlanded with purity, the symbol of a bride, which, however, is much inferior to the purity of Your heart. »

Elizabeth and the teachers adorn Mary with a little garland of flowers which they form attaching to the precious ring the little white bunches of myrtle and they insert small white roses which they take from a vase placed on a small chest.

Mary is on the point of taking Her large white mantle to put it on Her shoulders, but Joseph precedes Her and helps Her to fasten it at the top of Her shoulders with two silver buckles. The teachers then arrange the folds with loving care.

Everything is ready. While they are awaiting I do not know what, Joseph takes Mary to one side and says to Her: « I have pondered a lot on Your vow these last days. I told You that I will share it with You. But the more I think of it, the more I realise that a temporary Naziritism is not sufficient, even if renewed several times. *I have understood You, Mary.* I do not yet deserve the word of Light, but a murmur of it comes to me. And it causes me to read Your secret, at least in its main lines. I am a poor ignorant man, Mary. A poor workman. I know nothing of letters and I have no treasures. But I place at Your feet my treasure: my *absolute* chastity, for ever, to be worthy of being beside You, Virgin of God, “my sister spouse, enclosed garden, sealed fountain”, as our Ancestor says, who perhaps wrote the Song of Songs seeing You... I shall be the guardian of this garden of spices in which are the most precious fruits and from which a spring of living water gushes out in a gentle surge: Your kindness, o spouse, has conquered my soul with Your innocence, O most beautiful one. You are more beautiful than dawn, You are a sun that shines because Your heart shines, You are full of love for Your God and for the world, to which You wish to give a Saviour with Your sacrifice of a woman. Come, my beloved spouse » and he takes Her gently by the hand and leads Her towards the door. All the others follow them and outside

the joyful companions, all dressed in white and wearing veils, join them.

They go through yards and porches, among the crowds that watch them, up to a point that is not the Temple, but seems to be a hall used for ceremonies, because there are lamps and rolls of parchment as in synagogues. They go as far as a tall lectern, almost a desk, and they wait. The others stand orderly behind them. Other priests and curious people gather at the end.

The High Priest enters solemnly.

There is whispering amongst the curious crowd: « Is he going to marry them? »

« Yes, because She is of royal and sacerdotal rank. A flower of David and Aaron, the bride is a virgin of the Temple. The groom is of the tribe of David. »

The Pontiff joins the right hand of the bride with the right hand of the groom and he blesses them solemnly: « May the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob be with you. May He join you and fulfill His blessing in you giving you His peace and numerous descendants with a long life and a happy death in the bosom of Abraham. » He then withdraws as solemn as when he entered.

The promise has been exchanged. Mary is Joseph's spouse.#

They all go out and they orderly move to a hall where they stipulate the wedding contract in which it is stated that Mary, the daughter heiress of Joachim of David and of Anne of Aaron gives Joseph, as Her dowry, Her house and the estate attached to it, Her personal property and what She has inherited from Her father.

It is now all over.

The betrothed go out into the yard and they move toward the exit near the dwellings of the women assigned to the Temple. A comfortable heavy wagon is waiting for them. A tent is laid over it as a shelter and Mary's heavy trunks are already loaded on it.

After farewell words, kisses and tears, blessings and advice, Mary gets into the wagon with Elizabeth, while Joseph and Zacharias sit in the front. They have taken off their best mantles and are all wearing dark ones.

The wagon departs at the heavy trot of a big dark horse. The Temple walls and then the city walls are receding and here is the country, new, fresh, blooming in the early springtime

sunshine, with the corn a few inches off the ground, its little leaves, which look like emeralds, waving at a gentle breeze, which carries the scent of peach and apple flowers, of clover flowers and of wild mint.

Mary is weeping silently, under Her veil, and now and again She removes the tent and looks at the far away Temple and the city She has left...

(Jesus says:)

« ...You have seen how Joseph, not by human culture, but by supernatural education can read in the sealed book of the Immaculate Virgin and how he borders upon prophetic truths by his “seeing” a superhuman mystery where others could only see a great virtue. Since he is imbued with this wisdom, which is a breath of the power of God and a definite emanation of the Almighty, he sails with a secure spirit the sea of this mystery of grace which is Mary. He penetrates with Her spiritual contacts, in which, rather than the lips, the two spirits speak to each other in the sacred silence of their souls, where God only can hear voices and those who are well liked by God, because they are His faithful servants and are full of Him.

The wisdom of the Just man, which increases by his union and Closeness to Mary, Full of Grace, prepares him to penetrate the deepest secrets of God and enables him to protect and defend them from the snares of man and demon. And in the meantime it invigorates him. It makes the just man a saint, and the saint the guardian of the Spouse and of the Son of God.

Without removing the seal of God, he, a chaste man, now elevating his chastity to angelical heroism, can read the word of fire written by God on the virginal diamond, and he reads what his wisdom does not repeat, but is greater than what Moses read on the stone tablets. And to prevent profane eyes from prying into the mystery, he places himself, seal upon the seal, as an archangel of fire on the threshold of Paradise, within which the Eternal Father takes His delight, “walking in the cool of the evening” and talking to Her Who is His love, Garden of lilies in bloom, Air scented with perfumes, fresh morning Breeze, lovely Star, Delight of God. The new Eve is there, in front of him, not bone from his bones, nor flesh from his flesh, but companion of his life, living Ark of God, Whom he receives in guardianship and Whom he must return to God as pure as he received Her.

“Spouse to God” was written in the immaculate pages of that mystical book... And when in

the hour of trial suspicion hissed its torture, he suffered *as a man and as a servant of God, as no man suffered*, because of the suspected sacrilege. But this was to be the future trial. Now, in this time of grace, he *sees* and he puts himself at the most true service of God. Then the storm of the trial will come, as for all saints, to be tested and made coadjutors of God.

What do you read in Leviticus? “Tell Aaron, your brother, that he must not enter the sanctuary beyond the Veil in front of the Throne of mercy that is over the Ark, whenever he chooses. He may die; for I appear in a cloud on the Throne of mercy, unless he has done these things first: he will offer a young bull for a sacrifice for sin and a ram for holocaust, he is to wear a linen tunic and cover his nakedness with a linen girdle”.

And Joseph really enters the sanctuary of God, when and as far as God wants, beyond the veil that conceals the Ark on which the Spirit of God hovers and he offers himself and will offer the Lamb, a holocaust for the sin of the world and in expiation of such sin. And he does that dressed in linen, and mortifying his virile limbs to abolish their faculty of sensation, which once, at the beginning of times, did triumph, impairing the rights of God on man and which will now be crushed in the Son, in the Mother and in the putative father, to lead men back to Grace and restore the right of God on man. He does that with his perpetual chastity.

Was Joseph not on Golgotha? Do you think he is not amongst the co-redeemers? I tell you solemnly that he was the first and therefore he is great in the eyes of God. Great for his sacrifice, his patience, his perseverance, his faith. Which faith is greater than this one that believed without seeing the miracles of the Messiah?

Praise be to My putative father, an example to you of what you lack most: purity, faithfulness and perfect love. Praise be to the magnificent reader of the sealed Book, imbued with Wisdom to be able to understand the mysteries of Grace and chosen to protect the Salvation of the world from the snares of all enemies. »

In Israel, also at the time of Our Lady, a marriage comprised two phases: the engagement and the wedding. The rite of the engagement, by which the marriage was essentially established, implied that the young couple should be blessed by a priest while holding each other's right hand; a legal contract was made in regard to property and rights. During this first phase they did not live together. The wedding was the solemn accomplishment of the

contract and the couple began to live together.

JOSEPH ASSERTS HIMSELF

(Vol. 1, p. 74-7)

(It is early morning as Mary and Joseph, together with Elizabeth and Zacharias, arrive in Nazareth in a wagon. Mary had not returned to Nazareth since She had left for Jerusalem as a little girl. Under a rustic arch of flowers and branches, children and women greet Joseph, who is well known to them, and welcome his Bride. The men are somewhat more grave and solemn in their welcome. Mary, white and blonde as an angel, smiles lovingly at everybody...)

« There is Your house, Mary » says Joseph, pointing with his whip to a little house which is just under the edge of an undulation of the hill. Behind the house there is a lovely large kitchen garden all in bloom, at the end of which there is a small olive-grove. Behind the olive-grove there is the usual boundary hedge of hawthorn and cactus. The fields that once belonged to Joachim, are farther beyond...

« As You can see, very little is left for You » says Zacharias. « Your father's illness was a long and expensive one. Also the expenses to repair the damage done by the Romans were heavy. See? The road took away the three main rooms and the house was cut down in size in order to enlarge it, without excessive expenses, a part of the mountain was adapted, where the grotto is. Joachim kept his supplies there and Anne her looms. You will do as You think best. »

« Oh! It does not matter if only little is left. It will be sufficient for Me. I will work... »

« No, Mary. » It is Joseph who is speaking. « I will work. You will do nothing but weave and sew things for the house. I am young and strong and I am Your husband. Please do not humiliate me with Your work. »

« I shall do as you wish. »

« Yes, *in this case I do want it.* In everything else Your wishes are the law. But not in regard to this. »

(They arrive at the house, and Mary meets Joseph's brother Alphaeus, his wife Mary, and their children – two of whom are destined to become apostles of Jesus...)

Joseph takes Mary by Her hand and they go in. On the threshold he says to Her: « And now, on this threshold, I want a promise from You. That whatever may happen to You, whatever You may need, there is no other friend whom to apply to but Joseph and that, for no reason whatsoever, may You worry all by Yourself. Remember that I am everything for You and it will be a joy for me to make Your life happy and, since happiness is not always in our power, I will at least make it peaceful and safe. »

« I do promise, Joseph. »

The door and windows are opened. The last searching rays of the sun enter.

Mary has now taken off Her mantle and veil, because, with the exception of the myrtle flowers, She has still Her bridal dress on. She then goes into the kitchen garden in bloom. She looks and smiles. Still held by the hand by Joseph, She goes round the garden. She looks as if She were taking possession of a lost place.

And Joseph shows Her his work: « See? I dug a hole here to gather the rain water, because these vines are always thirsty. I cut off the oldest branches of this olive tree to strengthen it and I transplanted these apple trees because two of them had withered. Over there I planted some fig trees. When they grow up they will shelter the house both from the excessive heat of the sun and from inquisitive people. The pergola is the old one. I only changed the rotten poles and I did some trimming. It will give You a lot of grapes, I hope. And here, look » and he leads Her proudly towards the side of the hill at the back of the house, which limits the northern side of the garden « there I dug a grotto and I have reinforced it and when these little plants take roots, it will be almost identical to the one You had. There is no spring... but I hope to convey a little stream there. I will work in the long summer evenings, when I come to see You... »

« What do you mean? » asks Alphaeus. « Are you not getting married this summer? »

« No. Mary wants to weave Her woollen clothes, the only things missing from Her trousseau. And I agree with Her. Mary is so young that it does not matter if we wait for a year or more. In the meantime She will get used to the house... »

« Well! You have always been somewhat different from other people and you still are. I do not know who would not be in a hurry to get married to a beautiful flower like Mary, and you are delaying things by months!... »

« A joy awaited for a long time is a joy to be taken delight in more intensely » replies Joseph with a gentle smile.

His brother shrugs his shoulders and asks: « Well, then, when are you thinking of getting married? »

« When Mary is sixteen. After the feast of the Tabernacles. The winter evenings will be sweet for the newly weds!... » and he smiles again looking at Mary. A smile of a gentle secret understanding. A smile of a brotherly chastity giving comfort. He then resumes his tour of the garden. « This is the big room under the mountain. If You agree, I will use it as a workshop when I come here. It is joined to the house, but not in the house. So I will not annoy You with noises and disorder. However, if You wish otherwise... »

« No, Joseph. That is perfectly all right. »

They go back into the house and light the lamps.

« Mary is tired » says Joseph. « Let us leave Her in peace with Her cousins. »

They all say goodbye and go out. Joseph stays for a few moments and speaks to Zacharias in a low voice.

« Your cousin is leaving Elizabeth with You for a little while. Are You happy? I am. Because she will help You... to become a perfect housewife. With her You will be able to arrange Your things and Your furniture, and I will come every evening to help You. With Elizabeth You can purchase the wool and whatever You may need. And I will see to the expenses. Remember, You have promised to come to me for *everything*. Goodbye, Mary. Sleep the first night as the landlady of this house and may the angel of God make Your sleep peaceful. May the Lord be always with You. »

« Goodbye, Joseph. May you also be under the wings of God's angel. Thank you, Joseph.

For everything. As far as I can, I will requite your love with Mine. »

ELIZABETH'S PREGNANCY, AND MARY'S SECRET

(Vol. 1, p. 91-4)

(It is evening in the little house in Nazareth. Mary has just eaten the meal of a little girl. There is a knock on the door...)

Mary gets up and opens it. Joseph comes in. They greet each other. Then Joseph sits on a stool in front of Mary, on the opposite side of the table.

Joseph is a handsome man in the prime of life. He must be thirty-five years old at most. His face is framed by his dark brown hair and a beard of the same colour and his eyes are very sweet and very dark, almost black. His forehead is large and smooth, his nose thin and slightly aquiline, his cheeks are roundish of a brown hue, but not olive-coloured, on the contrary they are rosy near the cheek-bones. He is not very tall, but he is strong and well built.

Before sitting down he has taken off his mantle and it is the first I have seen of its kind, because it is a full circle. It is held close at the neck by a kind of hook and it has a hood. The colour is light brown and it seems to be made of a cloth of coarse wool proof against water. It looks like the mantle of a mountaineer suitable to shelter from inclement weather.

Also before sitting down he offers Mary two eggs and a bunch of grapes, somewhat withered, but well preserved. And he smiles saying: « The grapes were brought to me from Cana. I was given the eggs by a Centurion for some repair work I did to his cart. A wheel was broken and their carpenter is ill. They are new laid. He took them from the hen house. Drink them. They will do You good. »

« Tomorrow, Joseph. I have just finished My meal. »

« But You can take the grapes. They are good, as sweet as honey. I carried them very carefully, so that they would not get spoiled. Eat them. There are plenty more. I'll bring them to-morrow in a little basket. I couldn't this evening, because I came straight from the

Centurion's house. »

« Well, then, you have not had any supper yet. »

« No, I haven't, but it does not matter. »

Mary gets up at once and goes into the kitchen and She comes back with some milk, some olives and cheese. « I have nothing else » She says. « Take an egg. »

But Joseph does not want it. The eggs are for Mary. He eats with relish his bread and the cheese and he drinks the lukewarm milk. He then accepts an apple. And his supper is over.

Mary takes Her embroidery after cleaning the table and Joseph helps Her and he remains in the kitchen even when She comes back here. I can hear him putting things away. He pokes the fire because it is a cool evening. When he comes in, Mary thanks him.

They speak to each other. Joseph tells Her how he spent the day. He talks of his little nephews and he takes an interest in Mary's work and in Her flowers. He promises to bring Her some beautiful flowers which the Centurion has promised him. « They are flowers we haven't got here. They were brought from Rome. And he promised me some little plants. Now, when the moon is in the right quarter I will plant them for You. They have lovely colours and a beautiful scent. I saw them last year, because they bloom in summer. They will scent the whole house for You. Then I will prune the trees when the moon is right. It is time. »

Mary smiles and thanks him. Then there is silence. Joseph looks at Mary's fair head bowed over Her embroidery. A look of angelical love. Certainly, if an angel were to love a woman with the love of a husband, he would look at her thus.

Then Mary, as if She were taking a sudden decision, lays the embroidery on Her lap and says: « I also have something to tell you. I never have anything to say, because you know how retired I live. But today I have some news. I heard that our relative Elizabeth, Zacharias' wife, is about to have a child... »

Joseph opens his eyes wide and exclaims: « At her age? »

« At her age » replies Mary smiling. « The Lord can do everything, and now He is giving this joy to our relative. »

« How do you know? Is the news certain? »

« A messenger came. One who would not tell lies. I would like to go to Elizabeth's, to help her and tell her that I am rejoicing with her. If you will allow Me... »

« Mary, You are my lady and I Your servant. Whatever You do is well done. When would You like to go? »

« As soon as possible. But I shall be away for some months. »

« And I will count the days waiting for You. Go and don't worry. I will look after the house and Your little garden. You will find the flowers as beautiful as if You had taken care of them. Only... wait. Before Passover I must go to Jerusalem to buy certain things for my work. If You can wait for a few days, I will come with You as far as Jerusalem. I can't go any farther, because I must hurry back. But we can go there together. I will be happier if I know that You are not on the road by Yourself. When You want to come back, You can let me know and I will come and meet You. »

« You are so good, Joseph. May the Lord reward you with His blessings and keep sorrow away from you. I always pray Him for that. »

The chaste couple smile at each other angelically. There is silence again for a little while.

Then Joseph gets up. He puts his mantle on and he covers his head with the hood. He says goodbye to Mary Who has also got up, and he goes out.

Mary looks at him going out and She sighs rather sadly. She then lifts Her eyes to Heavens. She is certainly praying. She closes the door carefully. She folds the embroidery. She goes into the kitchen, puts out or covers up the fire. She makes sure that everything is in order. She then takes the oil lamp and goes out closing the door. With Her hand She shields the feeble flame that flickers in the cool evening breeze... She enters Her room and prays once again.

The vision ends.

(Mary says:)

« My dear daughter, when I came back to the reality of earthly life after the ecstasy that had filled Me with inexpressible joy, My first thought was for Joseph: a thought as sharp as a rose thorn, that pierced My heart enraptured among the roses of Divine Love, Who had become My Spouse only a few moments before.

By this time I loved My holy and provident guardian. Since the time when by the will of God, manifested to Me by the word of the Priest, I had become married to Joseph, I had the possibility of knowing and appreciating the holiness of that Just man. When I became united to him, My dismay at being an orphan disappeared and I no longer regretted the lost retreat of the Temple. He was as sweet as My deceased father. With him I felt as safe as with the Priest. All perplexity had disappeared, nay it had been forgotten, so far it was from My virginal heart. I had in fact understood that there was no reason whatsoever for hesitation or fear with regard to Joseph. My virginity entrusted to Joseph was safer than a child in his mother's arms.

But now, how could I tell him that I was a Mother? I endeavoured to find suitable words to give him the news. A difficult task, as I did not want to boast of God's gift and on the other hand there was no way of justifying My maternity without saying: "The Lord has loved Me amongst all women and has made Me, His servant, His Bride". Neither did I wish to deceive him by concealing My condition from him.

And while I was praying, the Spirit of Whom I was full, said to Me: "Be silent. Entrust Me with the task of justifying You with Your spouse". When? How? I did not ask. I had always relied upon God, and I had always allowed Myself to be led by Him exactly as a flower is led away by running water. The Eternal Father had never abandoned Me without His help. His hand had always supported, protected and guided Me so far. It would do so also now.

O My daughter, how beautiful and comforting is faith in our Eternal Good God! He holds us in His arms as in a cradle, like a boat He steers us into the bright harbour of Goodness, He warms our hearts, comforts and nourishes us, He bestows rest and happiness, light and guidance on us. Reliance in God is everything, and God grants everything to those who trust in Him: He gives Himself.

That evening I elevated to perfection My reliance as a creature. Now I was able to do so, because God was in Me. Before I had the confidence of a poor creature, such as I was: a mere nothing, even if I was so much loved as to be the Faultless One. But now I had a divine confidence, because God was Mine: My Spouse, My Son! Oh! What a joy! To be One with God. Not for My own glory, but to love Him with a total union and say to Him: "You, only You are in Me: please assist Me with Your Divine perfection in everything I do".

If He had not said to Me: “Be silent!”, I would probably have dared say to Joseph, with My face bowed to the ground: “The Spirit has penetrated Me and now the Embryo of God is in Me”, and he would have believed Me, because he held Me in high esteem and because like those who never lie, he could not believe that others lied. Yes, to avoid hurting his feelings in future, I would have overcome My reluctance to praise Myself. But I obeyed the divine command. And for months after that moment, I felt the first wound pierce My heart.

It was the first pain in My destiny of Co-Redeemer. I offered and suffered it in atonement and to give you a guidance for similar circumstances in life, when it is necessary to suffer in silence for an event that casts a bad light on you in relation to those who love you.

Entrust God with the protection of your reputation and affections. If you deserve God's protection with a holy life, you can proceed safely. Even if the whole world is against you, He will defend you with regard to those who love you and will cause the truth to be known... »

TRUST IN GOD

(Vol. 1, p. 108)

(Mary is staying with Elizabeth, and it is nearing the time for John the Baptist to be born. Elizabeth asks Mary whether She has told Her secret to Joseph, and offers to tell Joseph herself. Mary says:)

« No. I have entrusted God with the task of informing him of his happy destiny of putative father of the Son of God, and He will do so. The Spirit said to Me that evening: “Be silent. Entrust Me with the task of justifying You”. And He will do so. God never lies. It is a great trial, but with the help of the Eternal Father, it will be overcome. »

THE FIRST PASSION OF JOSEPH AND MARY

(Vol. 1, p. 121-5)

(John the Baptist has been born, and is taken by Elizabeth, Zacharias and Mary to the Temple at Jerusalem to be circumcised. Afterwards, they wait for Joseph to take Mary home to Nazareth...)

The time passes quickly, but there is no sign of Joseph. Mary controls Her grief lulling the baby, but it is obvious that She is worried. Although it is so warm that everybody is perspiring, She has not taken off Her mantle, concerned as She is to conceal Her condition.

At long last, Joseph is announced by a loud knocking at the door. Mary's face shines, cheerful again.

Joseph greets Her, because She is the first to go and meet him and greet him reverently.
« The Lord's blessing on you, Mary! »

« And on you, Joseph. And praised be the Lord that you have come! Here, Zacharias and Elizabeth were about to leave, to be at home before night. »

« Your messenger arrived in Nazareth, when I was at Cana, working there. I was told the other evening. And I left at once. But although I have travelled without stopping, I am late, because the donkey lost one of his shoes. Please forgive me. »

« I am to be forgiven by you, because I have been away from Nazareth for such a long time! But see, they were so happy to have Me with them, that I decided to please them up till now. »

« You have done well, Woman. Where is the baby? »

They enter the room where Elizabeth is giving suck to little John, before departing. Joseph congratulates the parents on the sturdiness of the child, who screams and kicks, as if they were thrashing him, because he has been taken away from his mother's breast to be shown to Joseph. They all laugh at his protests. Also Zebedee's relatives, who have come in with fresh fruit, milk and bread for everybody, and a large tray of fish, laugh and join in the conversation.

Mary speaks very little. She is sitting quiet and silent in Her little comer, with Her hands on Her lap under Her mantle. Also when She drinks a cup of milk, and eats a bunch of golden grapes with a little bread, She speaks very little, and hardly moves. Her looks at Joseph are a mixture of pain and enquiry.

He also looks at Her. And after some time, bending over Her shoulder, he asks Her: « Are You tired or are You not well? You look pale and sad. »

« I am sorry I have to part from little John. I am very fond of him. I held him on My heart only a few minutes after he was born... »

Joseph does not ask any more questions.

It is time for Zacharias to depart. The wagon stops at the door and they all go towards it. The two cousins embrace each other fondly. Mary kisses the baby many times before putting him in the lap of his mother, who is already sitting in the wagon. She then says goodbye to Zacharias, and asks him to bless Her. When kneeling before the priest, Her mantle slips off Her shoulders, and Her figure appears in the bright light of the summer afternoon. I do not know whether Joseph notices Her figure at this moment, because he is intent on saying goodbye to Elizabeth. The wagon leaves.

Joseph goes back into the house with Mary, Who sits down again in the dim comer. « If You do not mind travelling by night, I would suggest we leave at sunset. It is very warm during the day. The night instead is cool and quiet. I am saying that for You, because I don't want You to get sunstroke. It makes no difference to me to be in a scorching sun. But You... »

« As you wish, Joseph. I also think it is better to travel by night. »

« The house has been all tidied up. And the little orchard. The flowers are beautiful, as You will see. You are arriving just in time to see them all in bloom. The apple-tree, the fig-tree, the vines are laden with fruit as was never seen before, and I had to put a support for the pomegranate, because its branches were so heavily laden with fruit already fully grown, a thing which has never been seen before at this time of the year. The olive-tree... You will have plenty oil. It blossomed in a miraculous way, and not one flower was lost. All the flowers are now little olives. When they are mature, the tree will seem full of dark pearls. There isn't another orchard as beautiful in the whole of Nazareth. Also Your relatives are surprised. Alphaeus says it is a miracle. »

« Your hands have worked it! »

« Oh! no! Poor me! What can I have done? I took care of the trees and I gave some water to the flowers... Do You know? I built a fountain for You down at the end, near the grotto, and I put a large basin there. So You will not have to go out to get water. I brought the water down from the spring which is above Matthew's olivegrove. It is pure and plentiful. I brought a little stream down to You. I dug a small duct in the ground, I covered it properly, and now the water comes down, singing like a harp. I was not happy that You should go to the village fountain, and then carry back home the jars full of water. »

« Thank you, Joseph. You are so good! »

Joseph and Mary are now silent, as if they were tired. And Joseph is also dozing. Mary is praying.

It is now evening. The host insists that they should eat something before leaving. Joseph, in fact, eats some bread and fish, while Mary takes only some milk and fruit.

They then depart. They get on their donkeys. Joseph has fastened Mary's little trunk to his saddle, as he had done when coming to Jerusalem. And before She gets on Her donkey, he makes sure that Her saddle is properly fastened. I see that Joseph looks at Mary when she mounts Her saddle. But he does not say anything. Their journey starts when the first stars begin to twinkle in the sky.

They hurry to the town gates to reach them before they close. When they come out of Jerusalem, and they take the main road towards Galilee, the clear sky is already crowded with stars. There is solemn quietness in the country. One can hear only a few nightingales singing, and the beating of the hooves of the two donkeys on the hard road, baked by the sun.

(Mary says:)

« It is the eve of Maundy Thursday. Some people may think that this vision is out of place. But your grief of lover of My Jesus Crucified is in your heart and will remain there even if a sweet vision is shown to you. It is like the tepidity emanating from a flame, which is still fire but is no longer fire. The flame is fire, not its tepidity which comes from it. No beatific or peaceful vision will be able to remove that grief from your heart. And regard it as something precious, more precious than your own life. Because it is the greatest gift that God can grant

a believer in His Son. Further, my vision is not discordant, in all its peace, with the commemorations of this week.

Also My Joseph suffered his passion. It began in Jerusalem when he noticed My condition. And it lasted several days, exactly as it had happened to Jesus and to Me. Neither was it less painful for his soul. And only because of the holiness of My just spouse, it was contained in such a dignified and secret form, that it has been hardly noticed throughout centuries.

Oh! Our first Passion! Who can feel its intimate and silent intensity? Who can describe My pain when I realised that Heaven had not yet heard My prayer by revealing the mystery to Joseph?

I understood that he was not aware of it when I saw that he was respectful to Me as usual. If he had known that I bore in Me the Word of God, he would have adored that Word enclosed in My womb, with the acts of veneration which are due to God and which he would not have failed to accomplish, as I would not have refused to receive, not for My own sake, but for Him Who was within Me and that I bore, as the Ark of the Alliance carried the stone code and the vases of manna.

Who can measure My struggle against the dismay that endeavoured to overwhelm Me in order to convince Me that I had hoped in vain in the Lord? Oh! I think it was the furious rage of Satan! I perceived doubt rising behind My back, and stretching its icy claws to imprison My soul and prevent it from praying. Doubt is so dangerous and lethal to the spirit. It is lethal because it is the first agent of the deadly disease called “despair”, against which we must react with all our strength, so that our souls may not perish, and we may not lose God.

Who can truly tell Joseph's pain, his thoughts, the perturbation of his feelings? Like a little boat caught in a great storm, he was in a vortex of conflicting ideas, in a turmoil of reflections, of which one was more piercing and painful than the other. He was, to all appearances, a man betrayed by his wife. He saw his good reputation and the esteem of his world collapse around him; because of Her he saw scornful fingers pointed at himself and felt pitied by the village people. Above all, he perceived that his love and esteem for Me had fallen, struck to death, before the evidence of a deed.

In this respect, his holiness shines brighter than Mine. And I give this witness with the

affection of a spouse, because I want you to love My Joseph, this wise, prudent, patient and good man, who is not separated from the mystery of Redemption, on the contrary, he is closely connected to it, because he suffered for it, consuming himself in sorrow for it, saving your Saviour at the cost of his own sacrifice because of his holiness.

Had he not been so holy, he would have acted in a human way, denouncing Me as an adulteress so that I should be stoned, and the Son of My sin should perish with Me. If he had been less holy, God would not have granted him His light as guidance in his trial. But Joseph was holy. His pure spirit lived in God. His charity was ardent and strong. And out of charity he saved your Saviour for you, both when he refrained from accusing Me to the elders, and when he saved Jesus in Egypt, leaving everything with prompt obedience.

The three days of Joseph's passion were short in number, but deep in intensity. And they were tremendous also for Me, those days of My first passion. Because I was aware of his suffering, which I could not alleviate, in fact I had to obey God's command Who had said to Me: "Be silent!"

And when, after we arrived in Nazareth, I saw him go away with a laconic goodbye, and bent as if he had aged in a short time, and I noticed that he no longer came to see Me in the evening as he used to do, then I tell you, My children, that My heart wept very bitterly. Closed in My house, all alone, in the house where everything reminded Me of the Annunciation and the Incarnation, and where everything reminded Me of Joseph, married to Me with spotless virginity, I had to fight despair and Satan's insinuation, and hope, hope, hope. And pray, pray, pray. And forgive, forgive, forgive Joseph's suspicion, his disturbance and just despair.

My children: it is necessary to hope, to pray, to forgive to obtain God's intervention in our favour. You must live your passions, because you deserved them with your sins. I can teach you how to overcome them and turn them into joy. Hope beyond measure. Pray with confidence. Forgive to be forgiven. God's forgiveness will be the peace you desire, My children... »

FAITH, CHARITY AND HUMILITY

(Vol. 1, p. 126-9)

(Three days later, Mary is spinning in the shade of an apple-tree overloaded with fruit. There are shadows under Her eyes, which are swollen as if from crying...)

Mary starts at a loud resolute knocking at the door. She lays the distaff and spindle down and rises to go and open. Although Her dress is loose and wide it does not conceal the rotundity of Her pelvis.

Joseph is standing in front of Her. Mary turns pale, also in Her lips. Her face is so bloodless that it looks like a host. Mary looks at Joseph with sad enquiring eyes. Joseph looks at Her with imploring ones. They are both silent, looking at each other. Then Mary says: « At this time, Joseph? Is there anything you need? What do you want to tell Me? Come in. »

Joseph enters and closes the door. He is still silent.

« Speak, Joseph. What is it you want from Me? »

« I want You to forgive me. » Joseph bends down as if he wanted to kneel down. But Mary, Who is always so reserved in touching him, seizes him resolutely by his shoulders and stops him.

Mary's face blushes and blanches in rapid succession, one moment it is all red and immediately afterwards it is as white as snow, as it was before. « You want Me to forgive you? I have nothing to forgive you, Joseph. I can but thank you once again for everything you have done here while I was away and for your love for Me. »

Joseph looks at Her, and I can see two large tears welling up in the cavity of his deep eyes, they remain there as if they were on the rim of a vase, and they then roll down on to his cheeks and his beard. « Forgive me, Mary. I mistrusted You. Now I know. I am not worthy of having such a treasure. I lacked in charity, I accused You in my heart, I accused You unfairly, because I did not ask You to tell me the truth. I sinned against God's law, because I did not love You as I loved myself... »

« Oh! no! You have not sinned! »

« Yes, I have, Mary. If I had been accused of such a crime, I would have defended myself. But You... I was not giving You the possibility of defending Yourself, because I was about to take a decision without questioning You. I have been unfair to You, because I offended You with my suspicion. Also a single suspicion is an offence, Mary. Who suspects does not know. And I did not know You as I should have done. But for the torment I suffered... three days of torture, forgive me, Mary. »

« I have nothing for which to forgive you. On the contrary, I ask you to forgive Me for the pain I caused you. »

« Oh! Yes, it was a great pain! What a torture! Look! I was told this morning that my temples are white haired and my face wrinkled. These past days have been more than ten years of my life! But why, Mary, have You been so humble as to conceal Your glory from me, Your spouse, and thus allow me to suspect You? »

Joseph is not on his knees, but he is bent so low that he is as good as kneeling down, and Mary lays Her tiny hand on his head and smiles. She seems to be absolving him. And She whispers: « If I had not been humble in the most perfect manner, I would not have deserved to conceive the Expected One, Who is coming to pay for the sin of pride that ruined man. And then I obeyed... God had requested such obedience. It cost Me so much... because of you, because of the pain that you were to suffer. But I could but obey. I am the Handmaid of the Lord, -and servants do not discuss the orders they receive. They fulfill them, Joseph, even if they cause bitter tears. » Mary weeps quietly while speaking. So quietly that Joseph, bent down as he is, does not notice it until a tear falls on the floor.

He then lifts his head and - it is the first time I see him do this he presses Mary's little hands in his dark strong ones and he kisses the tips of the rosy slender fingers that protrude like fresh buds of a peach-tree from the circle formed by his own hands.

« Now we shall have to arrange for... » Joseph does not say anything else, but he looks at Mary's body and She becomes purple and sits suddenly, to avoid Her figure being exposed to eyes watching Her. « We shall have to make haste. I will come here... We will complete the wedding... Next week. Is that all right? »

« Whatever you do is all right, Joseph. You are the head of the family, I am your servant. »

« No. I am Your servant. I am the happy servant of my Lord Who is growing in Your womb.

You are blessed amongst all the women of Israel. This evening I will warn my relatives. And after... when I am here, we will work to prepare everything to receive... Oh! How can I receive God in my house? God... in my arms? I will die of joy!... I will never dare touch Him! I will never be able... ! »

« You will be able, as I will, by the grace of God. »

« But You are... I am a poor man, the poorest of God's children!... »

« Jesus is coming to us, poor people, to make us rich in God, He is coming to us two, because we are the poorest and we admit it. Rejoice, Joseph. The House of David has the King long waited for and our home will become more splendid than Solomon's palace, because Heaven will be here and we shall share with God the secret of peace that men will be acquainted with later. He will grow among us, our arms will be the cradle for the Redeemer and our work will procure bread for Him... Oh! Joseph! We will hear the voice of God calling us "father and Mother!" Oh!... » Mary cries with joy. Such happy tears!

And Joseph, who is now kneeling at Her feet, is weeping with his head almost hidden in Mary's wide dress, which falls in folds on to the plain pavement of the room.

The vision ends here.

(Mary says:)

« No one must interpret My pallor erroneously. It was not caused by human fear. From a human point of view I should have expected to be stoned to death. But I was not afraid because of that. I was suffering because of Joseph's pain. Neither was I upset by the thought that he might accuse Me. I was only sorry and afraid that he might be lacking in charity if he should insist in his accusation. That is why all My blood rushed to My heart when I saw him. It was the moment when even a just man might have offended Justice by offending charity. And I would have been extremely upset if a just man were to commit an error since he never erred.

Had I not been humble to the very extreme limit, as I told Joseph, I would not have deserved to bear within Me Him Who was lowering Himself: God, to the humiliation of being a man in order to make reparation for the pride of the human race.

I have shown you that scene which is not described by any of the Gospels, because I want to

draw the excessively misguided attention of men to the conditions which are essential to please God and receive His continuous calls to your hearts.

Faith: Joseph believed the heavenly messenger's words unquestioningly. He wanted but to believe, because he was sincerely convinced that God is good and that since he had hoped in the Lord, the Lord would not have reserved for him the torture of being betrayed, disappointed and sneered at by his neighbours. He asked for nothing, but to believe in Me, because, being honest, it was painful for him to think that other people were not honest. He lived according to the Law and the Law says: "Love your neighbour as you love yourself". We love ourselves so much that we think we are perfect even when we are not. Can we therefore not love our neighbour simply because we think he is faulty?

Unrestricted Charity. A charity that knows how to forgive, that wants to forgive, and forgive in advance excusing wholeheartedly the imperfections of our neighbours. It is necessary to forgive immediately, accepting every extenuating circumstance.

Humility, as unrestricted as charity. You must admit that you can be faulty even in simple thoughts, and you must not be so proud as to refuse to say: "I made a mistake", because such pride would be more harmful than the previous fault. Everybody makes mistakes, with the exception of God. Who can say: "I am never wrong" ? And there is a more difficult humility: the one that knows how to keep silent about God's wonderful things in us, when it is not necessary to proclaim them for His glory, so that we might not discourage our neighbour who has not received such special gifts from God. If He wants, oh! if He only wants, God reveals Himself in His servant! Elizabeth "saw" Me for what I was, My spouse knew Me for what I was, when it was time for him to know.

Leave to the Lord the care of proclaiming you His servants. He is anxious to do so, because every creature that rises to a particular mission, is a new glory which is added to His infinite glory, and is a witness of what man is, as God wanted him to be: a lesser perfection that reflects its Author. Remain in shadow and silence, you who are beloved by Grace, so that you may hear the only words of "life", that you may deserve to have on you and in you the Sun that shines eternally.

Oh! Most Blessed Light, God, joy of Your servants, do shine on those servants of Yours that they may exult in their humility, praising You, only You, because You disperse the proud

but raise the humble, who love You, to the splendour of Your Kingdom. »

THE CENSUS EDICT

(Vol. 1, p. 131-3)

(It is late in the afternoon, in the little room in the little house in Nazareth. Mary is no longer the young girl, but is fully “the woman”, beautiful and pregnant with Her child...)

Joseph comes in. He seems to be coming from the village, because he comes in through the main door, not from the workshop. Mary lifts Her head and smiles at him. Also Joseph smiles. But his smile seems to be a forced one, as if he were worried. Mary looks at him inquisitively. She then gets up to take the mantle that Joseph is taking off and She folds it and lays it on a chest.

Joseph sits at the table. He rests one elbow on it and lays his head on one hand, while with the other hand, absentmindedly, he combs and ruffles his beard with alternate strokes.

« Is there anything worrying you? » asks Mary. « Can I help you? »

« You always comfort me, Mary. But this time, I have a *big* problem... that concerns You. »

« Me, Joseph. And what is it? »

« They have posted an edict on the synagogue door. It orders the census of all Palestinians. And everybody must go and register in his place of origin. We must go to Bethlehem... »

« Oh! » exclaims Mary, interrupting him and putting one hand on Her bosom.

« It's a shock, isn't it? And a sad one. I know »

« No, Joseph. That's not it. I am thinking... I am thinking of the Holy Scriptures: Rachel, Benjamin's mother and Jacob's wife of whom the Star will be born: the Saviour. Rachel buried in Bethlehem, of which it is said: “But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, the least of the clans of Judah, out of you will be born the Ruler”. The Ruler who was promised to the House of David. He will be born there... »

« Do You... do You think it is already the time?... Oh! What shall we do? » Joseph is completely dismayed. He looks at Mary with two pitiful eyes.

She realises this and smiles. But She smiles more at *Herself* than at him. A smile that seems to say: « He is a man, a just man, but a man. And he sees as a man. He thinks as a man. Have pity on him, o soul of Mine, and guide him so that he may see as a spirit. » But Her kindness induces Her to reassure him. She is not untruthful. She simply diverts his anxiety. « I do not know, Joseph. My time is very close. But could the Lord not delay it to relieve you from this worry? He can do everything. Don't fear. »

« But the journey!... Think of the crowds. Will we find good lodgings? Will we be in time to come back? And if... if You are to become a Mother there, what will we do? We have no home there... We do not know anybody any longer. »

« Don't be afraid. Everything will be all right. God finds a shelter for the animal about to give birth. Do you think He will not find one for His Messiah? We trust in Him, don't we? We always trust in Him. The harder the trial, the more we trust. Like two children we put our hands in His fatherly ones. He is our guide. We rely entirely on Him. Consider how He has led us with love so far. A father, even the best of fathers, could not do it with greater care. We are His children and His servants. We fulfill His will. No harm can befall us. Also this edict is His will. What is Caesar after all? An instrument in the hands of God. Since the time when the Father decided to forgive man, He pre-arranged the events so that His Christ may be born in Bethlehem. Bethlehem, the smallest town in Judah did not yet exist and its glory was already destined. And there... a powerful man has risen, very far from here, and he conquered us, and now he wants to know all his subjects, now, while the world is in peace... so that the glory of Bethlehem may be accomplished and the word of God may not be belied, - as it would be if the Messiah were to be born elsewhere. Oh! What is our small trouble if we consider the beauty of this moment of peace? Just think, Joseph: a period of time when there is no hatred in the world! Can there be a happier hour for the rising of the "Star", the light of which is divine and its influence is redemption? Oh! Do not be afraid, Joseph. If the roads are not safe, if the crowds will make the journey a difficult one, the angels will defend and protect us. Not us: but their King. If we find no accommodation, their wings will be our tents. No mishap will befall us. It cannot: God is with us. »

Joseph looks at Her and listens to Her, happy. The wrinkles on his forehead smooth away.

He gets up, no longer tired or worried. He smiles. « You are blessed, Sun of my soul! You are blessed, because You see everything through the Grace, of which You are full! Don't let us waste time, then. Because we must leave as soon as possible, and come back as soon as possible, because everything is ready here for the... for the... »

« For *our* Son, Joseph. *He must be such in the eyes of the world*, remember that. The Father has covered His coming with the veil of mystery and we must not lift that veil. Jesus will do it, when the time comes... »

The beauty of Mary's face, look, expression and voice, when She says this « Jesus » cannot be described. It is already an ecstasy. And the vision ends on it.

(Mary says:)

« I will not add much more, because My words are already a lesson.

But I wish to draw the attention of wives to one point. Too many marriages break up through the fault of women, who do not possess that love, which is everything: kindness, pity and solace to their husbands. The physical suffering that lies heavy on women does not lie heavily on men. But all the moral worries do: necessities of work, decisions to be taken, responsibilities before the established authorities and one's own family... oh! how many things weigh on man! And how much comfort he also needs! And yet, a woman's selfishness is such that she adds the weight of useless and sometimes unfair complaints to the burden of her tired, disheartened, worried husband. And all this because she is selfish. She does not love. Love is not the satisfaction of one's senses and utility. To love is to satisfy him whom we love, beyond senses and utility, giving him the help he needs so that he may always be able to keep his wings open in the skies of hope and peace.

There is another point to which I wish to draw you attention. I have already spoken of it. But I wish to insist: trust in God. Trust summarises the theological virtues. Who trusts has faith. Who trusts hopes. Who trusts loves. When we love, we hope, we believe in a person, we trust. Otherwise we do not. God deserves our trust. If we trust poor men who may fail, why should we not trust God Who can never fail?

Trust is also humility. The proud man says: "I will do it by myself. I do not trust him because he is an incapable man, a liar, an overbearing fellow..." The humble man says: "I trust him. Why should I not? Why should I think that I am better than he is?" And more

rightly he says of God: “Why should I mistrust Him Who is so good? Why should I think that I can do it by myself?” God gives Himself to the humble, but withdraws from the proud.

Trust is also obedience. And God loves the obedient man. Obedience implies that we acknowledge ourselves as His children and we acknowledge God as our Father. And a father can but love when he is a *real* father. God is our real Father and a perfect Father.

The third point I want you to consider. It is always based on trust. No event can happen unless God allows it. Are you powerful? You became so, because God permitted it. Are you a subject? You are such, because God permitted it. Endeavour, therefore, powerful one, not to turn your-power to your own detriment. It would always be "your detriment", even if at the beginning, it may appear detrimental to others. Because if God allows, He does not over-allow, and if you go beyond the mark, He will strike you and crush you. Endeavour, therefore, o subject, to make of your condition a magnet that will draw the protection of Heaven upon You. And never curse anyone. Leave that to God's care. It is for Him, the Lord of all, to bless and curse His creatures.

Go in peace. »

TO BETHLEHEM, AND THE BIRTH OF JESUS

(Vol. 1, p. 134-42)

(The main road to Bethlehem is crowded, with people and loaded donkeys. It is very cold...)

Mary is on a little grey donkey. She is all enveloped in a heavy mantle. In front of the saddle there is the fitting already seen in Her journey to Hebron, and on it there is the little trunk with the basic essential things.

Joseph is walking on the side holding the reins. « Are you tired? » he asks Her now and again.

Mary looks at him smiling and replies: « No, I am not. » The third time She adds: « You must be tired walking. »

« Oh! Me! It's nothing for me. I was only thinking that if I had found another donkey You would have been more comfortable, and we could have travelled faster. But I just could not find another one. Everybody needs a mount nowadays. But take heart. We shall soon be in Bethlehem. Ephrathah is beyond that mountain. »

They are both silent. The Virgin, when She does not speak, seems to concentrate on internal prayer. She smiles mildly at one of Her thoughts and if She looks at the crowd, She does not seem to see it for what it is: a man, a woman, an old man, a shepherd, a rich or a poor man, but only for what She sees.

« Are you cold? » asks Joseph when the wind starts blowing.

« No, thank you. »

But Joseph is not too happy. He touches Her feet, which are shod in sandals and are hanging down along the side of the donkey and can hardly be seen coming out from under Her long dress, and he must feel them cold, because he shakes his head and takes a blanket which he has across his shoulders and envelops Mary's legs in it and he spreads it also on Her lap, so that Her hands may be kept warm, being covered by the blanket and Her mantle.

They meet a shepherd, who cuts across the road with his herd, moving from the grazing ground on the right-hand side of the road to the one of the left-hand side. Joseph bends down to say something to him. The shepherd nods in assent. Joseph takes the donkey and drags it behind the herd into the grazing ground. The shepherd pulls a coarse bowl out of his knapsack, he milks a big sheep with swollen udders and hands the bowl to Joseph who offers it to Mary.

« May God bless you both » exclaims Mary. « You for your love, and you for your kindness. I will pray for you. »

« Are you coming from far? »

« From Nazareth » replies Joseph.

« And where are you going? »

« To Bethlehem. »

« A long journey for a woman in Her state. Is She your wife? »

« Yes, She is. »

« Have you got a place where to go? »

« No, we haven't. »

« That's bad! Bethlehem is overcrowded with people who have come from all over to register there, or are on their way to register elsewhere. I don't know whether you will find lodgings. Are you familiar with the place? »

« Not very. »

« Well... I will explain it to you... for Her... (and he points to Mary). Find the hotel, but it will be full. But I will tell you just the same, to guide you. It's in the square, in the largest one. This main road will take you to it. You can't miss it. There is a fountain in front of it, it is a long and low building with a very big door. It will be full. But if you do not find room in the hotel, or in any of the houses, go round to the back of the hotel, towards the country. There are some stables in the mountain, which are used sometimes by merchants to keep their animals there, on their way to Jerusalem, when they don't find room in the hotel. They are stables, you know, in the mountain: they are damp and cold and there are no doors. But they are always a shelter, because your wife She can't be left on the road. Perhaps you will find room there and some hay to sleep on and for the donkey. And may God guide you. »

« And may God give you joy » answers Mary. Joseph instead replies: « Peace be with you. »

They take to the road again. A wider valley can be seen from the crest they have climbed over. In the valley, up and down the soft slopes surrounding it, there are many houses. It is Bethlehem.

« Here we are in David's land, Mary. Now You will be able to rest. You look so tired »

« No. I was thinking I think... » Mary gets hold of Joseph's hand and says to him with a blissful smile: « I really think that the time has come. »

« O Lord of mercy! What shall we do? »

« Don't be afraid, Joseph. Be steady. See how calm I am? »

« But You must be suffering a lot. »

« Oh! No. I am full of joy. Such a joy, so great, so beautiful, so uncontainable, that My heart

is thumping and thumping and it is whispering to Me: “He is coming! He is coming!” It says so at each beat. It is My Child knocking at My heart and saying: “Mother, I am here and I am coming to give You the kiss of God”. Oh! What a joy, My dear Joseph! »

But Joseph is not joyful. He is thinking of the urgent need to find a shelter and he quickens his pace. He goes from door to door asking for a room. Nothing. They are all full. They reach the hotel. Even the rustic porches surrounding the large inner yard are full of campers.

Joseph leaves Mary on the donkey inside the yard and he goes out looking in other houses. He comes back thoroughly disheartened. He has not found anything. The fast winter twilight is beginning to spread its shadows. Joseph implores the hotel-keeper. He implores also some of the travellers. He points out that they are all healthy men, that there is a woman about to give birth to a child. He begs them to have mercy. Nothing.

There is a rich Pharisee who looks at them with obvious contempt and when Mary goes near him, he steps aside as if he had been approached by a leper. Joseph looks at him and his face blushes with disdain. Mary lays Her hand on his wrist to calm him and says: « Don't insist. Let us go. God will provide. »

They go out and they follow the wall of the hotel. They turn into a little street which runs between the hotel and some poor houses. They then turn behind the hotel. They look for the stables. At last, here are some grottos, a kind of cellars, I would say, rather than stables, because they are so low and damp. The best have already been taken. Joseph is utterly disheartened.

« Ehi! Galilean! » an old man shouts. « Down there, at the end, under those ruins, there is a den. Perhaps there is nobody in it yet. »

They hurry to the « den ». It is really a den. Among the ruins of an old building there is a hole, beyond which there is a grotto, an excavation in the mountain, rather than a grotto. It seems to consist of the foundations of the old building, with the roof formed by rubble supported by coarse tree trunks.

There is hardly any light, and to see better Joseph pulls out tinder and flint and he lights a little lamp that he takes out of the knapsack he is carrying across his shoulders. He goes in and is greeted by a bellow. « Come in, Mary. It is empty. There is only an ox. » Joseph smiles. « It's better than nothing!... »

Mary dismounts from Her donkey and goes in.

Joseph has hung the little lamp on a nail of one of the supporting trunks. They see the vault covered with cobwebs, the soil stamped ramshackle earth, with holes, rubbish, excrement - the soil is strewn with straw. In the rear, an ox turns its head round and looks with his large quiet eyes while some hay is hanging from its lips. There is a rough seat and two big stones in a corner near a loop-hole. The blackness in that corner is a clear sign that a fire is generally lit there.

Mary, goes near the ox. She is cold. She puts Her hands on its neck to feel its warmth. The ox bellows but does not stir. It seems to understand. Also when Joseph pushes it aside to take a large quantity of hay from the manger and make a bed for Mary, the ox remains calm and quiet. The manger is a double one: that is, there is one out of which the ox eats, and above it there is a kind of a shelf, with some spare hay, which Joseph pulls down. The ox makes room also for the little donkey that, tired and hungry as it is, starts eating at once.

Joseph discovers also a battered bucket, turned upside down. He goes out, because he saw a little stream outside, and he comes back with some water for the little donkey. He then takes possession of a bunch of twigs in a corner and he tries to sweep the floor with it. He next spreads the hay and makes a bed with it near the ox, in the most sheltered and dry corner. But he realizes that the poor hay is damp, and he sighs. He then lights a fire, and with the patience of Job, he dries the hay, a handful at the time, holding it near the fire.

Mary is sitting on the stool, She is tired, She watches and smiles. The hay is now ready. Mary sits down more comfortably on the soft hay, with Her back leaning against one of the tree trunks. Joseph completes... the furnishings hanging his mantle as a curtain on the hole that serves as a door. It is a makeshift protection. He then offers some bread and cheese to the Virgin, and he gives Her some water out of a flask.

« Sleep now » he says. « I will, sit up and watch that the fire does not go out. There is some wood fortunately, let us hope that it will burn and last. Thus I will be able to save the oil of the lamp. »

Mary lies down obediently. Joseph covers Her with Her own mantle and with the blanket that She had round Her feet earlier.

« But you... you will be cold. »

« No, Mary. I'll be near the fire. Try and rest now. Things will be better tomorrow. »

Mary closes Her eyes without insisting. Joseph creeps into his little comer, sits on the stool, with some dry shoot near him. They are very few. I do not think they will last long.

They are placed as follows: Mary is on the right hand side, with Her back to the... door, half hidden by the tree trunk and the ox which has lain down on the litter. Joseph is on the left side, towards the door, and since he is facing the fire, his back is turned towards Mary. But he turns round now and again to look at Her, and he sees She is lying quietly, as if She were sleeping. He breaks the little sticks as noiselessly as possible and throws them one at a time on to the little fire, so that it may not go out and may give some light and yet make the wood last longer. There is only the dim light of the fire: at times bright at times very faint. The lamp in fact has been put out and in the half light only the whiteness of the ox and of Joseph's hands and face can be seen. All the rest is a confused mass in the dull dim light.

(Some time later...)

The little fire is dozing together with its guardian. Mary lifts Her head slowly from Her bed and looks round. She sees that Joseph's head is bowed over his chest, as if he were meditating, and She thinks that his good intention to remain awake has been overcome by tiredness. She smiles lovingly and making less noise than a butterfly alighting on a rose, She sits up and then goes on Her knees. She prays with a blissful smile on Her face. She prays with Her arms stretched out, almost in the shape of a cross, with the palms of Her hands facing up and forward, and She never seems to tire in that position. She then prostrates Herself with Her face on the hay, in an even more ardent prayer. A long prayer.

Joseph rouses. He notices that the fire is almost out and the stable almost -dark. He throws a handful of very slender heath on to the fire and the flames are revived, he then adds some thicker twigs and finally some sticks, because the cold is really biting: the cold of a serene winter night that comes into the ruins from everywhere. Poor Joseph must be frozen sitting as he is near the door, if we can call a door the hole where Joseph's mantle serves as a curtain. He warms his hands near the fire, then takes his sandals off and warms his feet. When the fire is gaily blazing and its light is steady, he turns round. But he does not see anything, not even Mary's white veil that formed a clear line on the dark hay. He gets up and

slowly moves towards Her pallet.

« Are You not sleeping, Mary? » he asks.

He asks Her three times until She turns round and replies: « I am praying. »

« Is there anything you need? »

« No, Joseph. »

« Try and sleep a little. At least try and rest. »

« I will try. But I don't get tired praying. »

« God be with You, Mary. »

« And with you, Joseph. »

Mary resumes Her position. Joseph to avoid falling asleep, goes on his knees near the fire and prays. He prays with his hands pressed against his face. He removes them now and again to feed the fire and then he resumes his ardent prayer. Apart from the noise of the crackling sticks and the noise made now and again by the donkey stamping its hooves on the ground, no other sound is heard.

(And Maria Valtorta describes, in a most beautiful and detailed manner, how the Baby Jesus is born...)

Joseph, who almost enraptured, was praying so ardently as to be isolated from what was around him, now rouses and he sees a strange light filter through the fingers of his hands pressed against his face. He removes his hands, lifts his head and turns round. The ox, standing as it is, hides Mary. But She calls him: « Joseph, come. »

Joseph rushes. And when he sees, he stops, struck by reverence, and he is about to fall on his knees where he is. But Mary insists: « Come, Joseph » and She leans on the hay with Her left hand and, holding the Child close to Her heart with Her right one, She gets up and moves towards Joseph, who is walking embarrassed, because of a conflict in him between his desire to go and his fear of being irreverent.

They meet at the foot of the straw bed and they look at each other, weeping blissfully.

« Come, let us offer Jesus to the Father » says Mary. And while Joseph kneels down, She stands up between two trunks supporting the vault, She lifts up Her Creature in Her arms and says: « Here I am. On His behalf, O God, I speak these words to You: here I am to do Your will. And I, Mary, and My spouse, Joseph, with Him. Here are Your servants, O Lord. May Your will always be done by us, in every hour, in every event, for Your glory and Your love. »

Then Mary bends down and says: « Here, Joseph, take Him », and offers him the Child.

« What! I?... Me?... Oh, no! I am not worthy! » Joseph is utterly dumbfounded at the idea of having to touch God.

But Mary insists smiling: « You are well worthy. No one is more worthy than you are, and that is why the Most High chose you. Take Him, Joseph, and hold Him while I look for the linens. »

Joseph, blushing almost purple, stretches his arms out and takes the Baby, Who is screaming because of the cold and when he has Him in his arms, he no longer persists in the intention of holding Him far from himself, out of respect, but he presses Him to his heart and bursts into tears exclaiming: « Oh! Lord! My God! » And he bends down to kiss His tiny feet and feels them cold. He then sits on the ground, and holds Him close to his chest and with his brown tunic and his hands he tries to cover Him, and warm Him, defending Him from the bitterly cold wind of the night. He would like to go near the fire, but there is a cold draft there, coming in from the door. It is better to stay where he is. No, it is better to go between the two animals which serve as a protection against the air and give out warmth. Thus, he goes between the ox and the donkey, with his back to the door, bending over the New-Born to form with his body a shelter, the two sides of which are a grey head with long ears, and a huge white muzzle with a steaming nose and two gentle soft eyes.

Mary has opened the trunk and has pulled out the linens and swaddling clothes. She has been near the fire warming them. She now moves towards Joseph and envelops the Baby with lukewarm linen and then with Her veil to protect His little head. « Where shall we put Him now? » She asks.

Joseph looks round, thinking... « Wait » he says. « Let us move the animals and their hay over here, we will then pull down that hay up there and arrange it in here. The wood on the

side will protect Him from the air, the hay will serve as a pillow and the ox will warm Him a little with its breath. The ox is better than the donkey. It is more patient and quiet. » And he bustles about, while Mary is lulling the Baby, holding Him close to Her heart, and laying Her cheek on His tiny head to warm it.

Joseph makes up the fire, without economy this time, to have a good blaze, and he warms the hay and as it dries up, he keeps it near his chest, so that it will not get cold. Then, when he has gathered enough to make a little mattress for the Child, he goes to the manger and sorts it out as if it were a cradle. « It is ready » he says. « Now we would need a blanket, because the hay stings, and also to cover Him. »

« Take My mantle » says Mary.

« You will be cold. »

« Oh! It does not matter! The blanket is too coarse. The mantle is soft and warm. I am not cold at all. Don't let Him suffer any longer! »

Joseph takes the wide mantle of soft dark blue wool, he double folds it and lays it on the hay, leaving a strip hanging out of the manger. The first bed for the Saviour is ready.

And the Mother, with Her sweet, graceful gait, moves to the manger, lays Him in it, and covers Him with the strip of Her mantle. She arranges it also around His bare head, almost completely covered by the hay, from which it is protected only by Mary's thin veil. Only His little face, the size of a man's fist, is left uncovered. Mary and Joseph, bending over the manger, are blissfully happy watching Him sleep His first sleep...

THE SHEPHERDS

(Vol. 1, p. 150-4)

(An angel appears to some shepherds, telling them that the Saviour has been born. They are uncertain where to find the Child and His Mother, and one of the shepherds remembers talking with a man, and a woman on a donkey, the night before...)

« Come with me, I know where He is. I saw the woman and I felt sorry for Her. I told them

where to go, for Her sake, because I thought they might not find lodgings, and I gave the man some milk for Her. She is so young and beautiful, and She must be as good and kind as the angel who spoke to us. Come. Let us go and get some milk, cheese, lambs and tanned hides. They must be very poor... and I wonder how cold He must be Whose name I dare not mention! And imagine! I spoke to the Mother as I would have spoken to a poor wife!... »

(The shepherds collect some food for the Holy Family, go to the stable, and listen outside. One of them makes a noise...)

Joseph turns round and comes to the door. « Who are you? »

« Shepherds. We brought you some food and some wool. We have come to worship the Saviour. »

« Come in. »

They go in, and the stable becomes brighter because of the light of the torches. The older men push the young ones in front of them.

Mary turns round and smiles. « Come » She says. « Come! », and She invites them with Her hand and Her smile, and She takes the boy who saw the angel and She draws him to Herself, against the manger. And the boy looks, and is happy.

The others, invited also by Joseph, move forward with their gifts and they place them at Mary's feet with few deep-felt words. They then look at the Baby Who is weeping a little and they smile moved and happy.

And one of them, somewhat bolder than the rest, says: « Mother, take this wool. It's soft and clean. I prepared it for my child who is about to be born. But I offer it to You. Lay your Son in this wool. It will be soft and warm. » And he offers the sheep hide, a beautiful hide, well covered with white soft wool.

Mary lifts Jesus, and puts it round Him. And She shows Him to the shepherds, who, kneeling on the hay on the ground, look at Him ecstatically!

They become bolder, and one suggests: « He should be given a mouthful of milk, better still,

some water and honey. But we have no honey. We give it to little babies. I have seven children, and I know... »

« There is some milk here. Take it, Woman. »

« But it is cold. It should be warm. Where is Elias? He has the sheep. »

Elias must be the shepherd who gave the milk. But he is not there. He remained outside and is looking from the hole, but he cannot be seen in the dark night.

« Who led you here? »

« An angel told us to come, and Elias showed us the way. But where is he now? »

The sheep declares his presence with a bleat.

« Come in. You are wanted. »

He enters with his sheep, embarrassed because they all look at him.

« It's you! » says Joseph, who recognizes him, and Mary smiles at him saying: « You are good. »

They milk the sheep and with the hem of a piece of linen dipped into the warm creamy milk, Mary moistens the lips of the Baby Who sucks the sweet cream. They all smile, and even more so, when Jesus falls asleep in the warmth of the wool, with the little bit of linen still between His lips.

« But You can't stay here. It's cold and damp. And... there is too strong a smell of animals. It's not good... it's not good for the Saviour. »

« I know » replies Mary with a deep sigh. « But there is no room for us in Bethlehem. »

« Take heart, Woman. We will look for a house for You. »

« I will tell my mistress » says Elias. « She is good. She will receive You, even if she had to give You her own room. As soon as it is daylight, I will tell her. Her house is full of people. But she will find room for You. »

« For My Child, at least. Joseph and I can lie also on the floor. But for the Little One... »

« Don't worry, Woman. I will see to it. And we will tell many people what we were told. You will lack nothing. For the time being, take what our poverty can give You. We are

shepherds... »

« We are poor, too. And we cannot reward you » says Joseph.

« Oh! We don't want it. Even if You could afford it, we would not want it. The Lord has already rewarded us. He promised peace to *everybody*. The angels said: "Peace to men of good will". But He *has already given it to us*, because the angel said that this Child is the Saviour, Who is Christ, the Lord. We are poor and ignorant, but we know that the Prophets say that the Saviour will be the Prince of Peace. And he told us to come and adore Him. That is why He gave us His peace. Glory be to God in the Most High Heaven and glory to His Christ here, and You are blessed, Woman, Who gave birth to Him: You are holy, because You deserved to bear Him! Give us orders as our Queen, because we will be happy to serve You. What can we do for You? »

« You can love My Son, and always cherish the same thoughts as you have now. »

(One of the shepherds knows Zacharias, and promises to send a message to him and Elizabeth about Jesus' Birth. They each introduce themselves by name, and promise to return, and bring others to worship the Baby Jesus. Then one more question from the youngest shepherd:)

« Will You let us kiss His dress? » asks Levi, with an angelic smile.

And Mary lifts Jesus slowly, and sitting on the hay, envelops the tiny little feet in a linen, and offers them to be kissed. And the shepherds bow down to the ground and kiss the tiny feet, veiled by the linen. Those with a beard clean it first; almost everyone is crying, and when they have to go, they walk out backwards, leaving their hearts there...

The vision ends thus, with Mary sitting on the straw with the Child on Her lap and Joseph who, leaning with his elbow on the manger, looks and adores.

(Notebooks 1943, p. 512, 515-6)

(Jesus describes Mary's ecstasy, and Joseph's love:)

“...Pale and meek, (Mary) was going to meet Love, no longer only an embrace of spiritual fire, but the warmth of real flesh that was a woman's, but that was God, and when Joseph would interrupt that ecstasy, respectfully penetrating it as if stepping across God's threshold, to give his Wife the comfort of food and rest, they were not drawn-out words, but just a single gaze, one word - 'Joseph!' - a handclasp, and the wave of ecstasy poured into Joseph as if from a cup filled to the brim.

“Words disturb the atmosphere where God lives. Nor, for the just, are words needed for them to be convinced of the presence of God and of the wonderful effects of that presence in a heart...”

“Joseph was filled with this emanation to the point of being made thereby almost like the Woman Full of Grace. Blessed tears fell from the Just One over the joy flooding him, the mystical joy of the contemplator bending over a miracle of divine manifestation. Adoration and silence were the characteristics of Holy Joseph. Venerating respect for the Blessed One whose natural protector he was. And love.

“The first chaste love of a spouse, love as that of men ought to have been, according to the Creator's thought: love without the sting of sense and the mire of malice. A love at once natural and angelic, for in the souls of Adam and his children, according to the thought creating them, there was to be the angelic purity of the spirit mingled with human tenderness, and like a flower opening sinlessly from the stem bearing it, so, without the worm of lust, love was to arise in spouses and give children to chaste marriage beds.

“To be chaste does not mean to prohibit union. It means to fulfill it while thinking of God, who makes two reasoning animals into two lesser creators, and as God created the male and the female without introducing malicious thought into them and did not place in their pupils a fleshly light to reveal the flesh to the innocent, so spouses ought to make marriage a holy creation gladdened by cradles, but not sullied by lust.

“The spouse who is honest and loving in a holy way seeks to become like the other spouse, for those who love tend to take on the likeness of the beloved creature, so that marriage, when well understood, is a mutual elevation, for there is no one who is completely wicked, and it is enough for each to improve one point by taking as an example the other's good side

in order to climb up the stairway of sanctity, competing with one another Like a plant putting forth a branch higher than the preceding one and rising and rising towards the sky, such is conjugal and individual holiness. Today it's one virtue. Tomorrow from this virtue another, higher one sprouts forth, and from the human virtues of mutual forbearance one rises to the peaks of supernatural heroism.

“Joseph, the holy and chaste spouse of the Holy and Chaste Woman, like a child alongside his teacher, learned day by day the science of being like God, and since in his heart as a just man nothing was an obstacle to Grace, day by day he took on the likeness of his beloved Teacher, thus resembling God, whose most perfect copy Mary was.

“In the holy night, what roused Joseph, praying so forcefully that he reached the point of being surrounded by a mystical barrier isolating his soul from the exterior, was the light.

“In the grotto, first barely illuminated by a little fire of dry twigs which was already fading out from a lack of fuel, there had spread a peaceful light which was gradually increasing like the radiance of the moon, which, first covered by veils of clouds, then gets free of them and descends clearly to make the Earth silver.

“In the luminosity was Mary, still kneeling-for I was born while She was praying-but lowered back on her heels. It was Mary that, with tears and smiles, kissed my Flesh as an infant.

“Not many words then, either - the usual ‘Joseph!’ - and the presentation to him of the Fruit of her holy womb.

“The Family was the first reality redeemed by God. Reconstructed as the Eternal had conceived it. Two who love one another in a holy way and in a holy way join to bend over a newborn babe, and in the kiss they exchange over that cradle there is no savor of lust, but mutual gratitude and the mutual promise to love one another with reciprocal love which aids and comforts.

“When the first shepherds came in, they found the two Holy Ones still united that way by love and adoration, and that tenderness devoid of carnality which, unfortunately, is not seen except in the eyes of a father was so visible on Joseph's face that he, a mature man, seemed to be the father of the Virgin and of the Child...”

TO STAY IN BETHLEHEM?

(Vol. 1, p. 155-9)

(Jesus, Mary and Joseph are now staying in the hospitable house of the shepherd Elias' mistress. There is a knock at the door...)

Joseph opens the door, and he utters a cry of joy when he sees Zacharias. He takes him into a little room, as small as a corridor. « Mary is suckling the Child. She will not be long. Sit down, you must be tired. » And he makes room for his guest on his couch, and sits beside him.

I hear Joseph asking after little John and Zacharias replies: « He is growing as strong as a little colt. But he is teething now and he is suffering a little. That is why we did not want to bring him. It is very cold, and that is why Elizabeth did not come either. She could not leave him without milk. She was very upset, but the season is so rigorous! »

« It is rigorous indeed » replies Joseph.

« The man you sent me told me that you were homeless when He was born. You must have suffered a lot. »

« Yes, quite a lot. But our fears were greater than our discomfort. We were afraid the Child's health might be injured. And we had to stay there for the first days. We lacked nothing, for ourselves, because the shepherds gave the good news to the people of Bethlehem, and many of them brought us gifts. But we had no house, not even a decent room, a bed... and Jesus cried so much, particularly at night, because the wind was blowing in from all directions. I used to light a little fire. Only a little one, because the smoke made Jesus cough... and it was still cold in any case. Two animals do not give out much heat, especially when the cold air comes in from all directions! We had no warm water to wash Him, nor dry clothes to change Him. Yes, He suffered quite a lot! And Mary suffered seeing Him suffer. I suffered... so you can imagine His Mother's anguish! She fed Him with milk and tears, milk and love... Now here it is much better. I had made for Him such a comfortable cradle and Mary had fitted it with a soft little mattress. But it is in Nazareth! Ah! If He were born there, it would have been different! »

« But Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. It was prophesied. »

Mary comes in, She heard their voices. She is all dressed in white wool. She has taken off the dark dress She was wearing during the journey and in the grotto, and She is all white, as I have seen Her dressed before. She is not wearing anything on Her head, and She is holding Jesus in Her arms: He is sleeping, sated with milk, in His pure white swaddling clothes.

Zacharias stands up reverently and bows down in veneration. He then goes nearer, and looks at Jesus with the greatest respect. He bends down, not so much to see Him better, as to pay Him homage. Mary offers the Child to him, and Zacharias takes Him with such adoration that he seems to be holding up a monstrance. It is in fact the Host that he takes in his hands, the Host already offered and that will be sacrificed after being given to men as a nourishment of love and redemption. Zacharias hands Jesus back to Mary.

They all sit down, and Zacharias explains once again to Mary the reason why Elizabeth has not come and how upset she was. « During the past months she has prepared some linens for Your blessed Son. I have brought them to You. They are downstairs in the wagon. »

He rises and goes out, then comes back with a large parcel and a smaller one. Joseph relieves him of the heavier one and Zacharias starts pulling his gifts from both of them: a soft handwoven woollen blanket, some linens and little dresses. Then from the other one, some honey, some snow-white flour, butter, apples for Mary and cakes baked by Elizabeth and many more little things which are a token of the motherly love of the grateful cousin for the young Mother.

« Please tell Elizabeth that I am very grateful to her, as I am grateful to you, too. I would have been so happy to see her, but I understand the situation. And I would also have loved to see little John... »

« But You will see him in spring. We will come and see You. »

« Nazareth is too far away » remarks Joseph.

« Nazareth? But you must stay here. The Messiah must grow up in Bethlehem. It is David's town. The Most High, through Caesar's will, brought Him to the town in David's land, the holy land of Judaea. Why take Him to Nazareth? You know in what opinion the Jews hold the Nazarenes. This Child is to be in future years the Saviour of His people. The capital town must not scorn its King because He comes from a despised land. You know as well as

I do how captious the Sanhedrin is and how disdainful its three main castes are... And then, here, near me, I will be able to help you somehow, and put everything I have, not so much in the way of material things, but of moral gifts, at the service of this New-Born Baby. And when He is old enough to understand, I will be very happy to be His teacher, as I will be for my own son, so that later, when He is grown up, He will bless me. We must consider that He is destined for great things and, consequently, He must be in a position to present Himself to the world with all the necessary means to win His game. He will certainly possess Wisdom. But also the simple fact that He was educated by a priest, will make Him more agreeable to the difficult Pharisees and Scribes and will render His mission easier. »

Mary looks at Joseph, and Joseph looks at Mary. Above the rosy innocent head of the Child, sleeping unaware of it all, there is a silent exchange of questions. And they are questions full of sadness. Mary is thinking of Her little house, Joseph is concerned about his work. Here, where only a few days ago they were completely unknown, they must start from scratch. Here they have none of the dear things they left at home, and which they had prepared with so much love for the Child.

And Mary says so: « How can we do that? We have left everything there. Joseph had worked so hard for My Jesus, without sparing labour or money. He worked at night, so that during the day he could work for other people and thus earn enough to buy the best wood, the softest wool, the finest linen, and prepare everything for Jesus. He built beehives, and he even worked as a mason to make certain modifications in the house, so that the cradle could be placed in My room and remain there until Jesus had grown up and the cradle could then be replaced by a bed, because Jesus will stay with Me until He is an adolescent »

« Joseph can go and get what you left there »

« And where will we put it? You know, Zacharias, that we are poor. We have only our work and our home. And they both enable us to live without starving. But here... perhaps we will find some work. But we will always have the problem of a house. This good woman cannot give us hospitality for ever. And I cannot sacrifice Joseph more than he has already sacrificed himself for My sake! »

« Oh! Me! It's nothing for me! I am concerned with Mary's grief. Her grief in not living in Her own house... »

Two big tears well from Mary's eyes.

« I think that house must be as dear to Her as Paradise, because of the mystery which was accomplished in it. I speak little, but I understand a lot. If it wasn't for that, I would not be upset. I will work twice as much, that's all. I am young and strong enough to work twice as much as I used to and see to everything. And if Mary does not suffer too much... and if you say that we must do so... well, here I am. I will do whatever you think is best. Provided that it will help Jesus. »

« It will certainly help. Think it over, and you will see the reasons. »

« It is also said that the Messiah will be called Nazarene... » objects Mary.

« True. But at least, until He is grown up, let Him grow up in Judaea. The Prophet says: "And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, will be the greatest, because out of you will come the Saviour". He does not speak of Nazareth. Perhaps that title was given to Him for some reason unknown to us. But this is *His* land. »

« You say so, you, priest, and we... we listen to you with sad hearts, and we believe you. But how painful it is!... When shall I see that house where I became a Mother? » Mary is weeping, silently...

(Mary comments to Maria Valtorta about the difference between Joseph and Zacharias, and about the soul of a priest...)

He was a man, that is, he had no other help for his spirit, except his holiness. I had all the gifts of God, in My condition of Immaculate. I did not know I was such. But the gifts were active in My soul, and gave Me spiritual strength. But he was not immaculate. Humanity was in him with all its heavy weight and he had to rise towards perfection with all that burden, at the cost of continuous efforts of all his faculties to reach perfection and be agreeable to God.

Oh! My holy spouse! Holy in everything, also in the most humble things in life. Holy for his angelical chastity. Holy for his human honesty. Holy for his patience, his activity, for his constant serenity, for his modesty, for everything. His holiness shines also in this event. A priest says to him: "You ought to settle here" and he replies, fully aware of the greater

hardships he would have to face: “It is nothing for Me. I am concerned with Mary's grief. If it was not for that, I would not be upset. Provided that it will help Jesus”. Jesus, Mary: his angelical loves. My holy spouse loved nothing else on earth. And he sacrificed himself to that love.

They elected him protector of Christian families, of workers and many other categories. But he should be appointed protector not only of dying people, of married couples, of workmen, but also of those consecrated to God. Who, of all the people in the world consecrated to the service of God, has consecrated himself as he did, to the service of his God, accepting everything, foregoing everything, bearing everything, fulfilling everything with quickness, with a cheerful mind, a constant humour? There is no one like him...

Zacharias is a priest. Joseph is not. But you must note how he, who is not a priest, has a more heavenly soul than the priest. Zacharias thinks in a human way, and in a human way he expounds the Scriptures because he allows himself to be led by his good human sense, and it is not the first time he does so. And he was punished for it. But he relapses, although less gravely. With regard to John's birth he said: “How can that happen, if I am old, and my wife is barren?” Now he says: “To smooth His way, Christ is to be brought up here.” And with that subtle root of pride that persists also in the best people, he thinks that *he* can be useful to Jesus. Not useful in the sense that Joseph wanted to be, by serving Him, but by teaching Him... God forgave him, because of his good intention. But did the "Master" need teachers?... »

THE PRESENTATION OF JESUS

(Vol. 1, p. 160-3)

(Accompanied by Joseph, Mary, a very young mother, leaves from the house, carrying the child Jesus in Her arms. Mary is pale, blonde, agile, and kind in Her behaviour...)

She is dressed in white, with a pale blue mantle and a white veil on Her head. She is carrying Her Child so carefully.

Joseph is waiting for Her at the foot of the steps with a little grey donkey. Joseph is dressed entirely in light brown: both his tunic and his mantle being the same colour. He looks at Mary and smiles at Her. When Mary arrives near the little donkey, Joseph places the animal's bridle on his left arm, he takes for a moment the Child, Who is sleeping peacefully, and thus allows Mary to sit more comfortably on the donkey's saddle. He then hands Jesus back to Her and they set out.

Joseph is walking beside Mary, holding the bridle all the time and ensuring that the donkey goes straight on without stumbling. Mary is holding Jesus in Her lap, and lest He might feel cold, She spreads the edge of Her mantle over Him. Joseph and Mary speak very little but they often smile at each other.

The road, which is not a model road, winds along a country made barren by the season of the year. Only a few other travellers meet them on the road or overtake them.

Then I see some houses and the walls around a town. They go in through a gate and start walking on the pavement which is all broken up, and very irregular. Progress is now much more difficult, both because the traffic causes the donkey to stop every moment and because the holes where stones are missing make the poor animal jerk continuously and thus Mary and the Child are also disturbed.

The road is not flat. It is uphill, although but slightly. It is a narrow road running between high houses with small narrow low doors and only a few windows on the road. High above, the sky can be seen peeping with many thin blue strips between the houses, nay between the terraces. Down in the street there are many people and much shouting. They meet other people on foot or riding donkeys or leading loaded donkeys and a crowd following a cumbersome camel caravan. At a certain moment, a patrol of Roman legionaries passes by with a great noise of hooves and arms and they disappear beyond an arch built across a narrow stony road.

Joseph turns left along a wider and more pleasant road. I can see the embattled town walls, with which I am already familiar, at the end of the street.

Mary dismounts from the little donkey near a gate where there is a kind of stall for other donkeys. I say « stall » because it is a kind of shed, or better still, a kind of shed, spread with straw; there are also some poles with rings to which the animals are tied.

Joseph gives some coins to a little man who has gone up to him and with them he buys some hay and he draws a pail of water from a rustic well in the corner. He then feeds the donkey. He joins Mary and they both enter the enclosure of the Temple.

At first, they turn their steps towards an arcade where the merchants are, to whom Jesus later will give a good lashing: the vendors of lambs and doves and the money-changers. Joseph buys two little white pigeons. He does not change any money: he obviously has what is required.

(They enter the Temple, and the Baby Jesus is offered to the priest, who carries out the rite of Presentation. Among some onlookers is a tearful old man, Simeon, who takes the Child and kisses Him...)

I hear the words of the holy old man and I see the astonished gaze of Joseph, the deeply moved look of Mary as well as the glances of the little crowd, partly surprised and moved, partly laughing at the words of the old man. Amongst the latter there are some bearded and conceited members of the Sanhedrin, who shake their heads giving Simeon an ironic pitying look. They must think he is a dotard.

Mary's smile fades into paleness when Simeon mentions sorrow. Although She *knows*, that word pierces Her soul. She goes closer to Joseph, to be comforted, She presses Her Child to Her breast passionately and like a thirsty soul, She takes in the words of Anna of Phanuel, who being a woman, has mercy on Her suffering and promises Her that the Eternal Father will soothe the hour of sorrow with a supernatural strength. « Woman, He Who gave a Saviour to His people, will not lack the power to send His angel to console Your tears. The great women of Israel never lacked the help of the Lord and You are far greater than Judith and Jael. Our God will give You a heart of the most pure gold to withstand the storm of sorrow, so that You will be the greatest woman in Creation: the Mother. And You, Child, remember me in the hour of Your mission. »

(Notebooks 1943, p. 541-2)

(Mary says:)

“When speaking of the Presentation in the Temple, Luke says that 'the father and the mother remained in amazement over the things which were being said about the Child'.

“The two spouses felt this wonder in different ways. I, to whom the Spouse Spirit had revealed the whole future, felt supernatural wonder, adoring the Will of the Lord, who was robing Himself in flesh because He wanted to redeem man and was revealing Himself to the spiritually alive. I felt wonder once more at the fact that God had chosen me, his humble handmaid, to be the Mother of the Incarnate Will. Joseph felt wonder *in a human manner, too*, for he did not know anything except what the Scriptures had told him and the angel had revealed. I kept silence.

“The secrets of the Most High were as if deposited in a closed ark in the Holy of Holies, and only I, the supreme Priestess, knew them, and the Glory of the Lord concealed them from the eyes of men with his unbearable splendor. They were abysses of splendor, and only the virginal eye kissed by the Spirit of God could look fixedly at them. That is why both Joseph and I felt wonder. In different ways, but equally in awe.

“The other passage in Luke should also be interpreted in this way: 'But they did not understand what he had said to them' (2:50).

“I understood. I knew even before, and if the Father permitted my anguish as a mother, *He did not conceal from me the sublime meaning of the words of my Son.* But I remained silent so as not to mortify Joseph, to whom the fullness of grace was not granted.

“I was the Mother of God, *but that did not exempt me from being a respectful wife towards the good man who was my loving companion and vigilant brother. Our family did not experience defects, for any reason or under any aspect. We loved one another in holy fashion, concerned about one thing alone: our Son.*

“Oh, Jesus, as only He could do, restored to my Joseph every comfort in the hour of death, in remembrance of all that He had received from that Just Man. Jesus is the model for children, as Joseph is for husbands. I have received much pain from the world and on account of the world. *But my holy Son and my just husband made no other tears come to my eyes except those of their pain...*”

ADORATION OF THE MAGI

(Vol. 1, p. 171-4, 178)

(The Holy Family is now staying in a house in Bethlehem. It is night-time, and the heavens are lit up by a star of unusual size and brightness, which moves across the sky and stops over the house. A cavalcade with three Magi, many servants and animals arrives. The vision ends as the Magi venerate the house, and retire for the night. Next afternoon the Magi, sumptuously dressed and accompanied by servants carrying gifts, walk towards the house...)

The Magi climb the steps and go in. They enter a room that extends from the road to the back of the house. The little kitchen garden at the back can be seen through a window which is open to the sun. There are doors in the other two walls, and the owners, that is a man, a woman and some boys and younger children cast sidelong glances through them.

Mary is sitting with the Child in Her lap and Joseph is standing near Her. But She also gets up and bows when She sees the Magi entering. She is all dressed in white. She is so beautiful in Her plain white dress which covers Her from Her neck down to Her feet, from Her shoulders to Her slender wrists. She is so beautiful with Her head crowned with Her blond plaits, Her face more rosy for the emotion, with Her eyes smiling so sweetly while Her mouth gives a greeting: « May God be with you », that the three Magi stop for a moment, completely astonished. They then proceed and prostrate themselves at Her feet.

(The oldest of the Magi explains how each of them, from places very distant from each other, saw the star, and recognised it as heralding the arrival of the Messiah. They were each guided by the star, met one another beyond the Dead Sea, and continued to follow the star as far as Jerusalem, where they met King Herod, whose chief priests and scribes advised that the Child was to be born in Bethlehem. In presenting their gifts, the man told a frightened Mary what he knew of the prophesied Passion of Jesus. Then with due ceremony the three Magi knelt and kissed the feet of Jesus, the little Child about nine months old and just attempting to walk, and leave the house...)

The three Men go down the steps. The caravan is already there waiting for them. The horses' studs shine in the setting sun. People have gathered in the little square watching the unusual sight.

Jesus laughs clapping His hands. His Mother has lifted Him up on the wide parapet of the landing and is holding Him against Her breast with an arm so that He may not fall. Joseph has gone down with the Magi and is holding the stirrup to each of them while they mount their horses and the camel.

Servants and masters are now all on horseback. The starting command is given. The three Men bow down as low as the necks of their mounts in a final gesture of homage. Joseph bows down. Also Mary bows and then She guides Jesus' hand again in a gesture of goodbye and blessing.

(Jesus gives us a lesson on the behaviour of Joseph, “who knows how to keep ‘his’ place”:)

He is present as the guardian of Purity and Holiness. But not as the usurper of their rights. It is Mary with Jesus who receives the homage and the words. Joseph rejoices because of Her and does not grieve because he is a secondary figure. Joseph is a just man: *he is the Just Man*. And he is always just. Also at the present moment. The fumes of the feast do not go to his head. He remains humble and just.

He is happy for the gifts. Not for himself, but because he thinks that with them he will be able to make his Spouse's and the sweet Child's lives more comfortable. There is no greed in Joseph. He is a workman and will continue to work. But he is anxious that “They”, his two loves, should be comfortable. Neither he nor the Magi know that those gifts serve for a flight and a life in exile, when riches vanish like clouds scattered by winds, as well as for their return to their country, where they have lost everything, customers and household furnishings, and where only the walls of their house have been saved, which were protected by God, because there He was united to the Virgin and became Flesh.

Joseph is humble, in fact, although he is the guardian of God and of the Mother of God and Spouse of the Most High, he holds the stirrups of these vassals of God. He is a poor carpenter, because sustained human pressures have deprived David's heirs of their royal

wealth. But he is always the offspring of a king, and has the manners of a king. Also of him it must he said: "He was humble, because he was really great".

JOSEPH - THE JUST MAN AND THE PROTECTOR

(Vol. 1, p. 179-87)

It is night. Joseph is sleeping in his little bed in his very small room: the peaceful sleep of a man after a hard day's honest and diligent work.

I can see him in the dark room, because a thin ray of moonlight filters in through the window shutters left ajar, either because Joseph is too warm in the little room or because he wants to be woken by the early rays of light at daybreak and get up at once. He is lying on one side and is smiling at some vision he sees in his dream.

But his smile turns into an expression of anxiety. He is now sighing deeply as if he had a nightmare and he awakes with a start. He sits up on his bed, rubs his eyes and looks around. He looks at the little window where the feeble light comes in. It is the dead of night but he grasps his robe which is lying at the bottom of the bed, and still sitting on the bed he pulls it on over the white shortsleeved tunic which he is wearing next to his skin. He pulls the blanket away, puts his feet on the floor and looks for his sandals. He puts them on and ties them. He stands up and goes towards the door facing his bed, not the one at the side of his bed leading into the big room where the Magi were received.

He knocks very gently, a very soft knocking with the tips of his fingers. He must have heard a voice asking him to enter because he opens the door carefully and sets it ajar without making any noise. Before going to the door he has lit a small one-flamed oil lamp, and lights his way with it. He goes in. The room is a little larger than his own, and there is a low bed in it, near a cradle, with a night lamp in a corner, the flickering flame of which seems a little star with a soft golden light that allows one to see without disturbing any sleeper.

But Mary is not sleeping. She is kneeling near the cradle in Her light dress and is praying, watching Jesus Who is sleeping Peacefully. Jesus is the same age as I saw Him in the vision of the Magi: a Child about one year old, beautiful, rosy and fair haired. He is sleeping with His curly head sunk in the pillow and a clenched fist under His chin.

« Are You not sleeping? » Joseph asks Her in a low surprised voice. « Why not? Is Jesus not well? »

« Oh, no! He is all right. I am praying. Later I will sleep. Why have you come, Joseph? » Mary speaks, kneeling on the same spot.

Joseph speaks in a very low voice lest he should awaken the Child, but it is an excited voice. « We must go away from here at once. *It must be at once.* Prepare the coffer and a sack with everything You can put in them. I'll prepare the rest, I'll take as much as I can... We will flee at dawn. I would go even sooner but I must speak to the landlady... »

« But why this flight? »

« I will tell You later. It's because of Jesus. An angel said to me: "Take the Child and His Mother and escape into Egypt." Don't waste any time. I'm going to prepare what I can. »

There is no need to tell Mary not to waste time. As soon as She heard Joseph mention an angel, Jesus and flight, She understood that Her Creature was in danger and She jumped to Her feet, Her face whiter than wax, holding one hand against Her heart, completely distressed. And She began to move about, quick and agile, laying the clothes in the coffer and in a large sack which She placed on Her bed still untouched. Although She is disheartened, She does not lose Her head: She acts quickly but orderly. Now and again, when passing near the cradle, She looks at the Child Who is sleeping calmly.

« Do you need help? » Joseph asks now and again, peeping into the room through the door ajar.

« No, thank you » replies Mary every time.

Only when Her sack is full, and it is obviously very heavy, She calls Joseph to help Her to close it and take it off the bed. But Joseph does not want any help, he prefers to do it himself, and he takes the long sack into his little room.

« Shall I take also the woollen blankets? » asks Mary.

« Take as much as You can. We will lose the rest. Do take as much as You can. Things will be useful because... because we will have to stay away for a long time, Mary!... » Joseph is very sad in saying so. And one can easily imagine how Mary feels. She folds Her blankets and Joseph's, sighing deeply. Joseph ties the blankets with a rope and while doing so, he

says: « We will leave the quilts and the mats. Even if I take three donkeys I cannot overload them. We will have a long and uncomfortable journey, partly in the mountains and in the desert. Cover Jesus well. The nights will be cold both up in the mountains and in the desert. I have taken the gifts of the Magi because they will be very useful down there. I am going to spend all the money I have to buy two donkeys. We cannot send them back, so I will have to buy them. I'll go now, without awaiting dawn. I know where to find them. You finish preparing everything. » And he goes out.

Mary gathers a few more things, then, after looking at Jesus, She goes out and comes back with some little dresses which appear to be still damp: perhaps they were washed the day before. She folds them, wraps them up in a cloth, and adds them to the other things. There is nothing else. She looks round and in a corner She sees one of Jesus' toys: a little sheep carved in wood. She picks it up sobbing, and kisses it. On the wood there are traces of Jesus' little teeth and the ears of the little sheep are all nibbled. Mary caresses the thing without any value, a plain piece of light wood, which, however, is of great value to Her, because it tells Her of Joseph's love for Jesus and speaks to Her of Her Child. She adds it to the other things placed on the closed coffer.

Now there is really nothing else. Except Jesus in the little cradle. Mary thinks She ought also to prepare the Child. She goes to the cradle and shakes it a little to wake up the Baby. But He whimpers a little, turns round and continues to sleep. Mary pats His curls gently. Jesus opens His little mouth yawning. Mary bends down and kisses His cheek. Jesus wakes up completely. He opens His eyes, sees His Mother and smiles and stretches His little hands towards Her breast.

« Yes, love of Your Mummy. Yes, Your milk. Before the usual time... But You are always ready to suck Your Mummy's breast, My little holy Lamb! »

Jesus laughs and plays, kicking His little feet out of the blankets, moving His arms happily in a typical childish style, so beautiful to see. He pushes His feet against His Mummy's stomach, He arches His back leaning His fair head on Her breast, and then throws Himself back and laughs, holding with His hands the laces that tie Mary's dress to Her neck, endeavouring to open it. He looks most beautiful in His little linen shirt, plump and as rosy as- a flower.

Mary bends down and in that position, looking through the cradle, as if for protection, She smiles and cries at the same time, while the Child prattles, uttering words which are not the words of all little children; among them the word « Mummy » is repeated very clearly. He looks at Her, surprised to see Her crying. He stretches one little hand towards the shiny traces of tears and it gets wet while patting Her face. And, very gracefully, He leans once again on His Mother's breast, He clings to it and pats it with His hand.

Mary kisses His hair, takes Him up in Her arms, sits down and dresses Him. His little woollen dress has now been put on Him and His sandals have been tied on His feet. She nurses Him and Jesus avidly sucks His Mother's good milk, and when He feels that only a little is coming from Her right breast, He looks for the left one, laughing while doing so and looking up at His Mother. Then He falls asleep again on Her breast, His rosy round little cheek resting against Her white round breast.

Mary rises very slowly and lays Him on the quilt on Her bed. She covers Him with Her mantle, She goes back to the cradle and folds its little blankets. She wonders whether She ought to take also the little mattress. It's so small. It can be taken. She puts it, together with the pillow, near the other things already on the coffer. And She cries over the empty cradle, poor Mother, persecuted in Her Little Creature.

Joseph comes back. « Are you ready? Is Jesus ready? Have You taken His blankets and His little bed? We can't take His cradle, but He must have at least His little mattress: poor Baby, Whose death they are seeking! »

« Joseph » shouts Mary, while She grasps his arm.

« Yes, Mary, His *death*. Herod wants Him dead... because he is afraid of Him, that filthy beast, because of his human kingdom he is afraid of this innocent Child. I do not know what he will do when he realises that He has escaped. But we will be far away by that time. I don't think he will revenge himself by seeking Him as far as Galilee. It would be very difficult for him to find out that we are Galileans, least of all that we are from Nazareth and who we are precisely. Unless Satan helps him to thank him for being his faithful servant. But... if that should happen... God will help us just the same. Don't cry, Mary. To see You crying is a greater pain for me than having to go into exile. »

« Forgive Me, Joseph. I am not crying for Myself, or for the few things I am losing. I am

crying for you... You already have had to sacrifice yourself so much! And now once again you will have no customers, no home. How much I am costing you, Joseph! ».

« How much? No, Mary. You do not cost me. You comfort me. Always. Don't worry about the future. We have the gifts of the Magi. They will serve for the first days. Later I will find some work. A good clever workman will always make his way. You have seen what happened here. I haven't got enough time for all the work I have. »

« I know. But who will relieve your homesickness for your native land? »

« And what about You? Who will relieve Your longing for Your home which is so dear to You? »

« Jesus. Having Him, I have what I had there. »

« And I, having Jesus, have my native land, in which I had hope up to some months ago. I have my God. You can see that I lose nothing of what is dear to me above all things. The only important thing is to save Jesus, and then we have *everything*. Even if we should never see this sky again, or this country or the even dearer country of Galilee, we shall always have everything, because we shall have Him. Come, Mary, it is dawning. It is time to say goodbye to our hostess and load our things. Everything will be all right. »

Mary gets up obediently. She puts on Her mantle while Joseph makes up a last parcel and goes out with it.

Mary lifts the Child gently, envelops Him in a shawl and clasps Him to Her heart. She looks at the walls that have given Her hospitality for some months and She touches them caressingly with one hand. Happy house, that deserved to be loved and blessed by Mary!

She goes out. She goes through Joseph's little room, into the big room. The landlady, in tears, kisses Her goodbye and, lifting the edge of the shawl, she kisses the forehead of the Child Who is sleeping calmly. They go down the outside steps.

The first light of dawn enables them to see faintly. In the dim light, three little donkeys can be seen. The strongest is loaded with the goods and chattels. The other two are saddled. Joseph is busy fastening the coffer and bundles on the pack-saddle of the first one. I can see his carpenter's tools tied in a bundle on top of the sack. After more tears and goodbyes, Mary mounts the little donkey, while the landlady is holding Jesus in her arms, and kissing

Him once again. She then hands Him back to Mary. Also Joseph mounts after tying his donkey to the one loaded with the goods, in order to be free to hold the reins of Mary's donkey.

The flight begins while Bethlehem, still dreaming of the phantasmagoric scene of the Magi, is sleeping peacefully, unaware of what is impending over it.

(Jesus says...)

The last vision clarifies a detail quoted twice in the Gospel by Matthew, a sentence which is repeated twice: "Get up, take the Child and *His Mother* with you, and escape into Egypt"; "Get up, take the Child and *His Mother* with you and go back to the land of Israel". And you saw that Mary was by Herself in Her room with the Child.

Mary's virginity after Her delivery and Joseph's chastity have been strongly denied by those who being putrid mud themselves, are not prepared to admit that one like them can be as pure and clear as light. They are wretched people whose souls are so corrupted and their minds so prostituted to the flesh, that they are incapable of thinking that one like them can respect a woman seeing in her not her flesh but her soul, neither can they elevate themselves to live in a supernatural atmosphere, craving not for what is flesh, but only for what is God.

Well, I wish to tell those deniers of the most beautiful things, those worms incapable of becoming butterflies, those reptiles covered with the slaver of their own lewdness, incapable of understanding the beauty of a lily, I wish to tell them that Mary *was and remained a virgin*, and that *only* Her soul was married to Joseph, exactly as Her spirit was united *only* to the Spirit of God by Whose deed She conceived Her Only Son: I, Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of the Father and of Mary.

This is not a tradition embellished afterwards, out of loving respect for the Blessed Virgin Who was My Mother. It is the truth and has been known since early times.

Matthew was not born after centuries. He was a contemporary of Mary. Matthew was not a poor ignorant man brought up in a forest and likely to believe any idle story. He was a clerk in the taxation office, as you would say nowadays, he was an excise man, as we said then. He could see, hear, understand, and tell the truth from the false. Matthew did not hear things reported by third parties. He heard them directly from Mary's lips to Whom he applied for

information, prompted by his love for his Master and for the truth.

I do not believe that those repudiators of Mary's inviolability will dare think that She may have lied. My own relatives could have given Her the lie, had there been other children: James, Judas, Simon and Joseph were disciples together with Matthew. Therefore Matthew could have easily compared their versions, had there been more than one account.

But Matthew does not say: "Get up and take your wife". He says: "Take His Mother". Before he says: "A virgin betrothed to Joseph"; "Joseph Her spouse". Neither those repudiators of Purity should tell Me that it was a way of speaking particular to the Jews, as if to say "wife" was a disgrace. No, deniers of Purity. At the very beginning of the Bible we read: "And he will join himself to *his wife*". She is called "companion" up to the moment of the sensual consummation of the marriage, and afterwards she is called "wife" in various circumstances and in different chapters. And these are the expressions referred to the wives of the sons of Adam. And so Sarah is called the "wife" of Abraham: "Sarah your *wife*". And: "Take your *wife* and your two daughters" is said of Lot. And in the book of Ruth it is written: "The Moabitess, the wife of Mahalon". And in the first book of the Kings it is said: "Elkanah had two *wives*". And further on: "Elkanah then had intercourse with his *wife* Hannah". And again: "Eli blessed Elkanah and his *wife*". And again in the Book of the Kings it is said: "Bathsheba, the *wife* of Uriah the Hittite, became the *wife* of David and bore him a son". And what do you read in the blue book of Tobias, what the Church sings to you at your wedding, to advise you to be holy in your marriage? You read: "Now when Tobias arrived with his *wife* and his son..."; and again: "Tobias succeeded in escaping with his son and with his *wife*".

And in the Gospels, that is in times contemporary with Christ, when therefore they wrote in a modern style of language, as compared to the ancient kind, and therefore no error of transcription could be suspected, it said and just by Matthew in Chapter 22: "... and the first, after marrying his *wife* died and left his *wife* to his brother". And Mark at Chapter 10: "The man who divorces his *wife*..." And Luke called Elizabeth the *wife* of Zacharias for four times running, and in the eighth Chapter of his Gospel he says: "Johanna, the *wife* of Chuza".

As you can see, this name was not a word banished by those who walked in the ways of the Lord, it was not an impure word not worthy of being uttered and least of all written when

there was a mention of God and of His wonderful work. And the angel, saying: “The Child and His Mother”, proves to you that Mary was His real Mother. But She was *not* a wife of Joseph. She remained for ever: “*The virgin betrothed to Joseph*”.

And this is the last teaching of the vision. And it is a halo which shines on the heads of Mary and Joseph. The Inviolable Virgin. The just and chaste man. The two lilies amongst whom I grew up, receiving only the perfume of purity. »

LIVING IN EGYPT

(Vol. 1, p. 189-94)

(A year or more has gone by. Jesus, Mary and Joseph are living in Egypt, in a poor house with two rooms. Jesus is playing, while Mary is weaving. A man comes along the road. He is not very tall, but he is well built, and forty years old at the most. It is Joseph, and he is smiling...)

His hair and beard are thick and black, his skin is rather tanned, his eyes are dark. An honest pleasant face, inspiring confidence.

When he sees Jesus and Mary, he quickens his step. On his left shoulder he has a kind of saw and a kind of plane, and he is holding in his hand other tools of his trade, not exactly like the ones we use now, but almost similar. He is probably coming back after working in somebody's house. He is wearing a tunic the colour of which is between hazel and dark brown; it is not very long - it reaches a good bit up from his ankles - and its sleeves are short. I think he is wearing a leather belt at his waist. It is the proper tunic of a workman. On his feet he has sandals tied at his ankles.

Mary smiles and the Child utters cries of joy and He stretches out the hand which is free. When the three meet, Joseph bends down and offers the Child a fruit which I think is an apple, by its colour and shape. He then stretches his arms and the Child leaves His Mother, and cuddles in the arms of Joseph, bending His little head into the cavity of Joseph's neck; he kisses Him, and is kissed by Him. A scene full of loving grace.

I was forgetting to say that Mary had promptly taken Joseph's work tools, to leave him free to embrace the Child.

Then Joseph, who had crouched down to the ground to be at the same height as Jesus, stands up, takes his tools with his left hand and holds little Jesus tight to his strong chest with his right arm. And he moves towards the house, while Mary goes to the fountain to fill Her amphora.

After entering the enclosure of the house, Joseph puts the Child down, takes Mary's loom into the house, and then he milks the goat. Jesus watches all these activities carefully and in particular the closing up the little goat in a little closet in one side of the house.

It is now getting dark. I can see the red of the sunset becoming violet on the sands which seem to be trembling because of the heat. The pyramid looks darker.

Joseph goes into the house, into a room which must be his workshop, the kitchen, the dining room all in one. The other room is obviously the bedroom. But I do not go in there. The fire is lit in a low fireplace. There is a carpenter's bench, a small table, some stools, some shelves with two oil lamps and some kitchenware on them. In a corner, there is Mary's loom. And a great deal of order and cleanliness. A very poor dwelling, but very clean.

And this is a remark I wish to make: in all the visions concerning the human life of Jesus I have noticed that both He and Mary, as well as Joseph and John, are *always* tidy and clean both in their garments and their bodies. They wear modest' and simple garments, but they are so clean that they look like gentlemen in them.

Mary comes back with the amphora and the door is closed on the rapidly growing dusk. The room is illuminated by a lamp which Joseph has lit and placed on his bench, where he now starts working on some little boards, while Mary is preparing supper. Also the fire illuminates the room. Jesus, with His little hands leaning on the bench and His little head turned upwards, is watching what Joseph is doing.

They then sit down at the table after saying their prayers. Obviously they do not bless themselves with the sign of the cross, but they pray. It is Joseph who says the prayers, and Mary answers. I do not understand anything at all. It must be a psalm. But it is said in a language which is entirely unknown to me.

They then sit down at the table. The lamp is now on the table. Mary is holding Jesus in Her

lap, and makes Him drink some of the goat's milk, into which She dips some small slices of bread which She has cut off a little round loaf. The crust of the loaf, as well as the inside, is very dark, it looks like rye bread or bread made with barley. It certainly contains a lot of bran, judging by its colour. In the meantime, Joseph eats some bread and cheese, a small slice of cheese and a lot of bread. Then Mary sits Jesus on a little stool near Her, and brings some cooked vegetables to the table - they appear to be boiled and dressed as we use them nowadays - and She also eats some of them after Joseph has helped himself. Jesus is nibbling happily at His apple, and He smiles displaying His little white teeth. Their supper ends with some olives or dates. I cannot tell exactly which because they appear to be too light to be olives and too hard to be dates. There is no wine. The supper of poor people.

But there is so much peace in this room that not even the sight of the most solemn royal palace could give me as much. And how much harmony!

(Jesus says:)

« The things you see teach you and others the lesson. It is a lesson of humility, resignation and good harmony. A lesson given as an example to all Christian families, and particularly to the Christian families in this especially sorrowful age.

You have seen a poor house. And what is more saddening, a poor house in a foreign country.

Many people, only because they are fairly good Catholics who pray and receive Me in the Holy Eucharist, and they pray and receive Me for “their” needs, not for the needs of their souls and for the Glory of God - because only seldom those who pray are not selfish - many people would pretend to have a prosperous, happy, easy material life, well-protected even from the least pain.

Joseph and Mary had Me, True God, as their Son, yet they did not even have the meagre satisfaction of being poor in their own country, where they were known, where at least there was their “own” little house and the problem of a dwelling did not add a harassing thought to their many problems, in the country where, as they were known, it was easier for them to find work and provide for the needs of their lives. They are two refugees just because they had Me. A different climate, a different country, so sad in comparison with the sweet countryside of Galilee, a different language, different habits, living amongst people who did

not know them, and who generally distrusted refugees and people they did not know.

They are deprived of those comfortable and dear pieces of furniture of “their” little house, of so many humble and necessary things they had there, and which did not seem to be so necessary, whereas here, in the void that surrounds them, seem even beautiful like the luxurious things that make the houses of rich people so charming. And they felt nostalgia both for their country and for their home, they worried about the poor things they had left behind, about the little kitchen garden where probably no one would take care of their vines and their figs, and the other useful plants. And they had to provide every day for food, clothes, fire, and for Me, a Child, Whom they could not feed with the same food they took themselves. And they were sad at heart: because of their homesickness, because of the uncertainty of the future, and the lack of trust of people who are reluctant, particularly at first, to accept the offer of work of two unknown people.

And yet, as you have seen yourself, that house is pervaded with *serenity, smiles, harmony*, and by mutual consent they endeavour to make it more beautiful, even in its scanty little kitchen garden, that it may be more like the more comfortable one they had to leave behind. They have only one thought: that the land may be less hostile and less unpleasant for Me, since I come from God. It is the love of believers and relatives which reveals itself in many ways: from the little goat they purchased with many hours of extra work, to the little toys carved in scraps of wood, to the fruit purchased only for Me, while they denied themselves a morsel of food.

O beloved father of mine on the earth, how loved you have been by God, by God the Father in the Most High Heavens, by God the Son, Who became the Saviour on the earth!

In that house there is no quick temper, no sulkiness, no grim faces, neither is there any reproach against each other, and least of all against the God Who has not loaded them with material wealth. Joseph does not reproach Mary as being the cause of his discomfort, neither does Mary reproach Joseph because he is incapable of procuring greater worldly goods. *They love each other in a holy way*, that is all. And therefore they do not worry about their own comfort, but only about the comfort of their consort. True love is not selfish. And true love is always chaste, even if it is not perfect in chastity as the love of the two virgin spouses. Chastity united to charity yields a suite of other virtues and therefore two people who love each other chastely become perfect.

The love of Mary and Joseph was perfect. Therefore it was an incentive to every other virtue and in particular to charity towards God, blessed every hour, notwithstanding His holy will is painful for the flesh and the heart, blessed because, above the flesh and above the heart, the spirit was more lively and stronger in the two saints, and they exalted the Lord with gratitude because they had been chosen as guardians of His Eternal Son.

In that house they prayed. You pray too little in your homes, nowadays. The sun rises and sets, you start your work, and you sit at the table without a thought for the Lord, Who has granted you to see a new day, and then to live and see a new night, Who has blessed your work and has made it the means for you to purchase the food, the fire, the clothes, the house which are so necessary for your human lives. Whatever comes from Good God is “good”. Even if it is poor and meagre, love gives it flavour and body, the love that allows you to see in the Eternal Creator, the Father Who loves you.

In that house there is frugality and it would be there even if there was plenty money. They eat to live. They do not eat to satisfy their gluttony, with the insatiability of gluttons and the whims of epicures who fill themselves to the extent of being sick and squander fortunes on expensive food, without giving one thought to those who are without or with little food, without considering that if they were moderate, many people could be relieved of the pangs of hunger.

In that house they love work, and they would love it even if there was plenty money, because the working man obeys the command of God and frees himself from vice, which like tenacious ivy clutches and suffocates idle people, who are like immovable rocks. Food is good, rest is serene, hearts are happy, when you have worked well and you enjoy the resting time between one job and the next one. Neither in the houses nor in the minds of those who love work, can many-sided vice rise. And, in its absence, love, esteem, reciprocal respect prosper and tender children grow in a pure atmosphere and they thus become the origin of future holy families.

Humility reigns in that house. What a lesson of humility for the proud. Mary, from a human point of view, had a thousand reasons to be proud and to be adored by Her spouse. Many women are proud only because they are a little better educated, or of nobler birth, or of a wealthier family than their husbands. Mary is the Spouse and the Mother of God, and yet She serves - and does not expect to be served - Her consort, and She is full of love for him.

Joseph is the head of the family, judged by God so worthy of being the head of a family, as to be entrusted by God with the guardianship of the Word Incarnate and the Spouse of the Eternal Spirit. And yet he is anxious to relieve Mary of Her work, and he takes care of the most humble jobs in the house so that Mary may not get tired, not only, but whenever he can he does his best to please Her and make Her house more comfortable and Her little garden more beautiful.

In that house order is respected: supernatural, moral, material. God is the Supreme Head and He is worshipped and loved: *supernatural order*. Joseph is the head of the family and he is loved, respected and obeyed: *moral order*. The house is a gift of God as well as the clothes and the furnishings. The Providence of God is shown in everything, of God Who supplied wool to sheep, feathers to birds, grass to meadows, hay to animals, grains and branches to birds, Who weaves the dress of the lily of the valley. The house, the dresses, the furnishings are accepted with gratitude, blessing the divine hand that supplies them, looking after them with respect as gifts of the Lord, without any bad humour because they are poor, without ill use, without abusing Divine Providence: *material order*.

You did not understand the words they exchanged in the dialect of Nazareth, neither did you understand the words of the prayer. But the things you saw are a *great lesson*. Meditate on them, you all who now suffer so much because you failed in so many things towards God, also in those things in which the holy Spouses never failed, the Spouses who were my Mother and father.

A FATHER TO JESUS

(Vol. 1, p. 194-8)

(Maria Valtorta, whom Jesus calls His “little John”, describes a vision, and conveys an explanation...)

I see my little Jesus appear as sweet as a ray of sun on a rainy day; He is a little child about five years old, completely blond and most beautiful in His simple blue dress which reaches down to half His well-shaped calves. He is playing with some earth in the little kitchen

garden. He makes little heaps with it and on top He plants little branches as if He were making a miniature forest, with little stones He builds little roads and then He would like to build a little lake at the foot of His tiny hills. He therefore takes the bottom part of an old pot and inters it up to its brim and then fills it with water with a pitcher which He dips into a vessel, which is certainly used either for washing purposes or to water the little garden. But the only result is that He wets His dress, particularly its sleeves. The water runs out of the chipped pot which is probably also cracked and... the lake dries up.

Joseph appears at the door and for some time he stands very quietly watching the work of the Child and smiles. It is a sight, indeed, that makes one smile happily. Then, to prevent Jesus from getting more wet, he calls Him. Jesus turns round smiling, and when He sees Joseph, He runs towards him with His little arms stretched out. Joseph with the edge of his short working tunic dries the little hands which are soiled and wet, and kisses them. And then there is a sweet conversation between the two.

Jesus explains His work and His game and the difficulties He met in it. He wanted to make a lake like the lake of Gennesaret. (I therefore suppose that they have either spoken to Him about it or they had taken Him to see it.) He wanted to make a little one for His own delight. This was Tiberias, there was Magdala, over there Capernaum. This was the road that took to Nazareth going through Cana. He wanted to launch some little boats in the lake; these leaves are boats, and He wanted to go over to the other shore. But the water runs away...

Joseph watches and takes an interest as it were a very serious matter. He then proposes to make a small lake, the following day, but not with an old cracked pot, but with a small wooden basin, well coated with pitch and stucco, in which Jesus would be able to launch small real wooden boats which Joseph would teach Him how to make. Just then, he was bringing Him some small working tools, suitable for Him, that He might learn to use them, without any fatigue.

« So I will be able to help you! » Jesus says, smiling.

« So You will help me, and You will become a clever carpenter. Come and see them. »

And they go into the workshop. Joseph shows Him a small hammer, a tiny saw, some very small screwdrivers, a plane suitable for a doll, which are all lying on the bench of a budding carpenter: a bench suitable for little Jesus' size.

« See, to saw, You must put this piece of wood like that. You then take the saw like that, and making sure that You do not catch Your fingers, You start sawing. Try... »

And the lesson begins. And Jesus, blushing with the effort and pressing His lips together, saws the piece of wood carefully and then planes it, and although it is not perfectly straight, He thinks it is nice. Joseph praises Him and with patience and love teaches Him how to work.

Mary comes back. She had certainly gone out, and She looks in at the door. Joseph and Jesus do not see Her because She is behind them. Mother smiles seeing how zealously Jesus is working with the plane and how loving Joseph is in teaching Him.

But Jesus must have perceived Her smile. He turns round, sees His Mother and runs towards Her, showing Her the little piece of wood not yet finished. Mary admires it, and She bends down to kiss Jesus. She tidies up His ruffled curls, wipes the perspiration on His hot face, and listens with loving attention to Jesus, Who promises to make Her a little stool so that She will be more comfortable when working. Joseph standing near the tiny bench, with one hand resting on his side, looks and smiles.

I have thus been present at the first work lesson of my Jesus. And all the peace of this holy Family is within me.

(Jesus says:)

« I have consoled you, My dear soul, with a vision of My childhood, which was happy in its poverty, because it was surrounded by the love of two saints, the greatest the world ever had.

They say that Joseph was My foster-father. Oh! If, being a man, he could not feed Me with milk, as My Mother Mary did, he worked very hard indeed, to give Me bread and comfort and he had the loving kindness of a real mother. From him I learned - and never had a pupil a kinder teacher - I learned everything that makes a man of a child, and a man who is to earn his own bread.

If My intelligence, that of the Son of God was perfect, you must consider and believe that I did not want to deviate from the attributes and attainments of My own age group ostentatiously. Therefore, by lowering My divine intellectual perfection to that of a human intellectual perfection I submitted Myself to having a man as My teacher, and to the need of

a teacher. If I learned quickly and willingly, that does not deprive Me of the merit of submitting Myself to man, neither does it deprive the just man of the merit of being the person who nourished My young mind with the ideas which are necessary to life.

Not even now that I am in Heaven can I forget the happy hours I spent beside Joseph, who, as if he were playing with Me, guided Me to the point of being capable of working. And when I look at My putative father, I see once again the little kitchen garden and the smoky workshop, and I still appear to see Mother peep in with Her beautiful smile which turned the place into Paradise and made us so happy.

How much families should learn from the perfection of this couple who loved each other as nobody else ever loved!

Joseph was the head of the family, and as such, his authority was undisputed and indisputable: before it the Spouse and Mother of God bent reverently and the Son of God submitted Himself willingly. Whatever Joseph decided to do, was well done: there were no discussions, no punctiliousness, no oppositions. His word was our little law. And yet, how much humility there was in him! There never was any abuse of power, or any decision against reason only because he was the head of the family. His Spouse was his sweet adviser. And if in Her deep humility She considered Herself the servant of Her consort, he drew from Her wisdom of Full of Grace, light to guide him in all events.

And I grew like a flower protected by vigorous trees, between those two loves that interlaced above Me, to protect Me, and love Me.

No. As long as I was able to ignore the world because of My age, I did not regret being absent from Paradise. God the Father and the Holy Spirit were not absent, because Mary was full of Them. And the angels dwelt there, because nothing drove them away from that house. And one of them, I might say, had become flesh and was Joseph, an angelical soul freed from the burden of the flesh, intent only on serving God and His cause and loving Him as the seraphim love Him. Joseph's look! It was as placid and pure as the brightness of a star unaware of worldly concupiscence. It was our peace, and our strength.

Many think that I did not suffer as a human being when the holy glance of the guardian of our home was extinguished by death. If I was God, and as such I was aware of the happy destiny of Joseph, and consequently I was not sorry for his death, because after a short time

in Limbo, I was going to open Heaven to him, as a Man I cried bitterly in the house now empty and deprived of his presence. I cried over My dead friend, and should I not have cried over My holy friend, on whose chest I had slept when I was a little boy, and from whom I had received so much love in so many years?

Finally I would like to draw the attention of parents to how Joseph made a clever workman of Me, without any help of pedagogical learning. As soon as I was old enough to handle tools, he did not let Me lead a life of idleness, but he started Me to work and he made use of My love for Mary as the means to spur Me to work. I was to make useful things for Mother. That is how he inculcated the respect which every son should have for his mother and the teaching for the future carpenter was based on that respectful and loving incentive.

Where are now the families in which the little ones are taught to love work as a means of pleasing their parents? Children, nowadays, are the tyrants of the house. They grow hard, indifferent, ill-mannered towards their parents. They consider their parents as their servants, their slaves. They do not love their parents and they are scarcely loved by them. The reason is that, while you allow your children to become objectionable overbearing fellows, you become detached from them with shameful indifference.

They are everybody's children, except yours, o parents of the twentieth century. They are the children of the nurse, of the governess, of the college, if you are rich people. They belong to their companions, they are the children of the streets, of the schools, if you are poor. But they are not yours. You, mothers, give birth to them and that is all. And you, fathers, do exactly the same. But a son is not only flesh. He has a mind, a heart, a soul. Believe Me, no one is more entitled and more obliged than a father and a mother to form that mind, that heart, that soul.

A family is necessary: it exists and must exist. There is no theory or progress capable of destroying this truth without causing ruin. A shattered family can but yield men and women who in future will be more perverted, and will cause greater and greater ruin. And I tell you most solemnly that it would be better if there were no more marriages and no more children on the earth, rather than have families less united than the tribes of monkeys, families which are not schools of virtue, of work, of love, of religion, but a babel in which everyone lives on his own like disengaged gears, which end up by breaking.

Broken families. You break up the most holy way of social living and you see and suffer the consequences. You may continue thus, if you so wish. But do not complain if this world is becoming a deeper and deeper hell, a dwelling place of monsters who devour families and nations. You want it. Let it be so. »

A SCHOOL IN THE HOME

(Vol. 1, p. 202-4)

(The Holy Family is home again in Nazareth. Jesus, Who is now about five years old, is playing with His cousins, two of four sons of Joseph's brother Alphaeus and his wife Mary. (These two boys are to become two of Jesus' apostles – to be known as James of Alphaeus and Judas Thaddeus.) Alphaeus reminds Joseph that it is time Jesus went to school. Jesus' Mother is quick to reply:)

« I will never send Jesus to school » says Mary resolutely. It is most unusual to hear Her talk thus and above all to hear Her talk before Joseph.

« Why? The Child must learn to be ready in good time to pass His exam when He comes of age... »

« The Child will be ready. But He will not go to school. That is quite definite. »

« You will be the only woman in Israel to do that. »

« I will be the only one. But that is what I am going to do. Isn't that right, Joseph? »

« Yes, that's correct. There is no need for Jesus to go to school. Mary was brought up in the Temple, and She knows the Law as well as any doctor. She will be His Teacher. That's what I want, too. »

« You are spoiling the Boy. »

« You cannot say that. He is the best boy in Nazareth. Have you ever heard Him cry, or be naughty, or be disobedient, or lack respect? »

« No. That's true. But He will do all that if You continue to spoil Him. »

« You do not necessarily spoil your children just because you keep them at home. To keep them at home implies loving them with good common sense and wholeheartedly. And that is how we love our Jesus, and since Mary is better educated than a teacher, She will be Jesus' Teacher. »

« And when Your Jesus is a Man, He will be like a silly little woman frightened even of flies. »

« He will not. Mary is a strong woman, and She will give Him a manly education. I am not a coward, and I can give Him man-like examples. Jesus is a creature without any physical or moral faults. He will grow, therefore, upright and strong, both in His body and in His spirit. You can be sure of that, Alphaeus. He will not be a disgrace to the family. In any case, that is what I have decided, and that is all. »

« Perhaps Mary has decided, and you... »

« And if it were so? Is it not fair that two, who love each other, should have the same thoughts and the same wishes, so that each may accept the wishes of the other as if they were his own? If Mary should wish silly things, I would say to Her: "No". But She is asking for something which is full of wisdom, and I agree, and I make it my own. We love each other, we do as we did the first day, and we shall go on doing so as long as we live. Is that right, Mary? »

« Yes, Joseph. And let us hope it will never happen, but when one should die without the other, we will still go on loving each other. »

Joseph pats Mary on the head as if She were a young daughter and She looks at him with Her serene loving eyes.

Her sister-in-law interferes: « You are quite right. I wish I could teach! Our children at school learn evil and good. At home they only learn what is good. But I do not know whether... if Mary... »

« What is it you want, My dear sister-in-law? Speak freely. You know that I love you and I am happy when I can do something that pleases you. »

« I was thinking... James and Judas are only a little older than Jesus. They are already going to school... for what they have learned!... Jesus instead already knows the Law so well... I

would like... eh, I mean, if I asked You to take them as well, when You teach Jesus? I think they would behave better and be better educated. After all, they are cousins, and it is only fair that they should love one another like brothers. Oh! I would be so happy! »

« If Joseph wants, and your husband agrees, I am quite willing. It is the same to speak to one as to speak to three. And it is a joy to go through the whole Bible. Let them come. »

The three children, who have come in very quietly, are listening and are awaiting the final decision.

« They will drive You to despair, Mary » says Alphaeus.

« No! They are always good with Me. You will be good if I teach you, will you not? »

The two boys move near Mary, one on Her left side, the other on Her right, they place their arms around Her shoulders, they lean their little heads on Her shoulders, and they promise all the good in the world.

« Let them try, Alphaeus, and let Me try. I am sure you will not be dissatisfied with the test. They can come every day from the sixth hour until evening. It will be enough, believe Me. I know how to teach without tiring them. You must hold their attention and let them relax at the same time. You must understand them, love them, and be loved by them, if you wish to get good results. And you will love Me, will you not? »

Two big kisses are the answer.

« See? »

« I see. I can only say: “Thank You”. And what will Jesus say, when He sees His Mummy busy with others? What do you say, Jesus? »

« I say: “Happy those who listen to Her and build their dwelling near Hers”. As for Wisdom, happy are those who are My Mother's friends, and I am happy that those whom I love are Her friends. »

« But who puts such words on the lips of the Child » Alphaeus asks, astonished.

« Nobody, brother. Nobody in this world ».

A COMING OF AGE

(Vol. 1, p. 207-10)

(Jesus is now twelve years old, already tall, at home with His Mother and Joseph, His cousins, and His aunt Mary of Alphaeus...)

« Here is our Son » says Mary lifting Her right hand which is holding Jesus' left one. She seems to be introducing Him to everybody and confirming the paternity of the Just man who is smiling. And She adds: « Bless Him, Joseph, before leaving for Jerusalem. There was no ritual blessing for His first step in life, because it was not necessary for Him to go to school. But now that He is going to the Temple to be proclaimed of age, please bless Him. And bless Me with Him. Your blessing... » (Mary sobs softly) « will fortify Him and give Me strength, to detach Myself a little more from Him... »

« Mary, Jesus will always be Yours. The formality will not affect our mutual relationship. Neither will I contend with You for this Son, so dear to us. No one deserves, as You do, to guide Him in life, o my Holy Spouse. »

Mary bends down and takes Joseph's hand and kisses it. She is the respectful, loving spouse of Her consort!

Joseph receives the sign of respect and love with dignity, he then lifts the hand which She has kissed and lays it on the head of his Spouse and says to Her: « Yes. I bless You, o Blessed One, and I bless Jesus with You. Come to me, my only joys, my honour and essence of my life. » Joseph is solemn. With his arms stretched out and the palms of his hands turned down above the two heads which are bent down, both equally blond and holy, he pronounces his blessing: « May the Lord look upon You and bless You. May He have mercy on You and give You peace. May the Lord give You His blessing.. » And then he says: « And now let us go. The hour is favourable for the journey. »

Mary takes a wide dark brown mantle and She drapes it on the body of Her Son. How She caresses Him in doing so!

(They arrive at the Temple in Jerusalem, on a feast day...)

People going in and coming out of the enclosure gates, crossing yards, halls and porches, disappearing in this or that building on the various floors, which form the bulk of the Temple.

Also the group of Jesus' family go in singing psalms in low voices. All the men are in front, the women come behind. Other people have joined them, perhaps from Nazareth, perhaps their friends in Jerusalem. I do not know.

Joseph, after worshipping the Most High with all the others at the point, obviously, where men were allowed to do so, (the women stopped on a lower landing), parts from the rest and with his Son goes back through some yards, he then moves to one side and enters a vast room which looks like a synagogue. I do not know why. Were there synagogues also in the Temple? He speaks to a Levite and the latter disappears behind a striped curtain, then comes back with some elder priests, I think they are priests, they are certainly masters in the knowledge of the Law, and they are therefore appointed to examine the believers.

Joseph introduces Jesus. First of all, they both bow down deeply to the ten doctors, who have sat down with dignity on low wooden stools. « Here » he says, « this is my Son. Three months and twelve days ago He reached the age which the Law prescribes to become of age. And I want Him to comply with the prescriptions of Israel. I would ask you to note that His constitution proves that He is no longer in His childhood or minority. And I ask you to examine Him kindly and fairly, to judge that what I here, His father, have stated, is the truth. I have prepared Him for this hour and for this dignity of son of the Law. He knows the precepts, the traditions, the decisions, the customs of the fringes and the phylacteries, He knows how to say the daily prayers and blessings. Therefore, since He knows the Law in Itself and in its three branches of Halascia, Midrasc and Aggada, He can behave as a man. Therefore I wish to be free from the responsibilities of His actions and of His sins. From now on, He must be subject to the precepts and He must pay Himself the penalty for His failures towards them. Examine Him. »

« We Will. Come forward, Child. What is Your name? »

« Jesus of Joseph, from Nazareth. »

« A Nazarene... can You therefore read? »

« Yes, rabbi, I can read the words which are written and those which are construed in the

words themselves. »

« What do you mean? »

« I mean that I understand also the meaning of the allegory or of the symbol which is hidden under the appearance, as a pearl does not appear but it is inside an ugly closed shell. »

« A clever answer and a very wise one. We seldom hear that on the lips of adults; in a child, and a Nazarene in addition!... »

The attention of the ten has been awakened. Their eyes do not lose for an instant the beautiful blond Child, Who is looking at them sure of Himself, without boldness, but also without fear.

« You honour Your master, who, certainly, was deeply read. »

« The Wisdom of God was gathered in his just heart. »

« But listen to that! You are a happy man, father of such a Son! »

Joseph, who is at the end of the room, smiles and bows down.

They give Jesus three different rolls saying: « Read the one closed with the golden ribbon. »

Jesus opens the roll and reads. It is the Decalogue. But after the first few words, one of the judges takes the roll from Him saying: « Go on by heart. » Jesus continues so sure of Himself, that He seems to be reading. Every time He mentions the Lord, He bows down deeply.

« Who taught You that? Why do You do that? »

« Because that Name is holy and it is to be pronounced with a sign of internal and external respect. Subjects bow down to their king, who is king only for a short time and he is dust. To the King of kings, the Most High Lord of Israel, Who is present even if He is only visible to the spirit, shall not every creature bow down since every creature depends on Him with eternal subjection? »

« Very clever! Man: we advise you to have your Son educated either by Hillel or Gamaliel. He is a Nazarene... but His answers give us hope that He will become a new great doctor. »

« My Son is of age. He will decide according to His own will. If His decision is an honest one, I will not oppose it. »...

THE DEATH OF JOSEPH

(Vol. 1, p. 223-31)

(Jesus is working at a carpentry bench, in the workshop of the house in Nazareth...)

He is by Himself. He works diligently, but peacefully. No abrupt or impatient movement. He is precise and constant in His work. Nothing annoys Him: neither a knot in the wood which will not be planed, nor a screwdriver (I think it is a screwdriver) which falls twice from the bench, nor the smoke floating in the room which must irritate His eyes.

Now and again He raises His head and looks towards the southern wall, where there is a closed door, and He listens. At a certain moment He opens a door which is on the eastern side and opens on to the road, and He looks out. I can see a small portion of the dusty little road. He seems to be waiting for someone. He then goes back to His work. He is not sad, but very serious. He closes the door again and goes back to work.

While He is busy making something, which I think is part of a wheel, His Mother comes in. She comes in by the southern door. She rushes towards Jesus. She is dressed in dark blue and is bareheaded. Her simple tunic is held tight at Her waist by a cord of the same colour. She is worried when She calls Her Son, and leans with both Her hands on His arm in an attitude of prayer and sorrow. Jesus caresses Her, passing His arm over Her shoulder and comforts Her. He leaves His work, takes His apron off and goes out with Her.

I suppose you would like to know the exact words they said. Very few were spoken by Mary: « Oh! Jesus! Come, come. He is very ill! » They are uttered with trembling lips and tears shining in Her reddened and tired eyes. Jesus says only: « Mother! » but that word means everything.

They go into the adjoining room, full of bright sunshine coming from a door open onto the little kitchen garden, which is also full of light and green, and where doves are fluttering around near the clothes hanging out to dry and blowing in the wind. The room is poor but tidy. There is a low bed, covered with small mattresses, (I say mattresses because they are thick and soft things, but the bed is not like ours). On it leaning on many cushions, there is Joseph. He is dying. It is obvious from the livid paleness of his face, his lifeless eyes, his

panting chest, and the total relaxation of all his body.

Mary goes to his left-hand side, takes his wrinkled hand now livid near its nails, rubs it, caresses it, kisses it, She dries with a small piece of cloth the perspiration that forms shiny lines at his temples; She wipes a glassy tear in the corner of his eye; She moistens his lips with a piece of linen dipped into a liquid which I think is white wine.

Jesus goes to his right-hand side. He lifts quickly and carefully the body which has sunk, He straightens him onto the cushions which He then adjusts together with Mary. He caresses the forehead of the dying man and endeavours to encourage him.

Mary is weeping softly, without any noise, but She is weeping. Her large tears run down Her pale cheeks, right down to Her dark blue dress, and they look like bright sapphires.

Joseph recovers somewhat, and stares at Jesus, he takes His hand as if he wanted to say something and also to receive strength, for the last trial, from the divine contact. Jesus bends over that hand and kisses it. Joseph smiles. He then turns round and with his eyes he looks for Mary and smiles also at Her. Mary kneels down near the bed endeavouring to smile. But She does not succeed and She bends Her head. Joseph lays his hand on Her head with a chaste caress that looks like a blessing.

Only the fluttering and cooing of the doves, the rustling of the leaves, the warbling of the water can be heard outside, and the breathing of the dying man in the room.

Jesus goes round the bed, takes a stool and makes Mary sit on it, once again calling Her simply: « Mother ». He then goes back to His place and takes Joseph's hand into His own once again. The scene is so real that I can't help crying because of Mary's pain.

Then Jesus bending over the dying man, whispers a psalm. I know it is a psalm, but just now I cannot tell which one.

It begins thus: « “Look after me, o Lord, because I hoped in You...

In favour of his friends who live on his earth he has accomplished all my wishes in a wonderful way...

I will bless the Lord Who is my advisor...

The Lord is always before me. He is on my right-hand side that I may not fall.

Therefore my heart exults and my tongue rejoices and also my body will rest in hope.

Because You will not abandon my soul in the dwelling place of the dead, neither will You allow Your friend to see corruption.

You will reveal the path of light to me and will fill me with joy showing me Your face”. »

Joseph cheers up a little and with a more lively look he smiles at Jesus and presses His fingers.

Jesus replies to the smile with a smile of His own and to the pressure on His fingers with a caress. And still bending over His putative father, He goes on softly: « “How I love your Tabernacles, o Lord.

My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the Lord.

Also the sparrow has found a home and the little dove a nest for its young. I am longing for your Altars, Lord.

Happy those who live in Your house... happy the man who finds his strength in You. He inspired into his heart the ascents from the valley of tears to the chosen place.

O Lord hear my prayer...

O God, turn Your eyes and look at the face of Your Anointed...” »

Joseph sobbing, looks at Jesus and makes an effort to speak as if to bless Him. But he cannot. He obviously understands, but has an impediment in his speech. But he is happy and looks at his Jesus with liveliness and trust.

« “Oh! Lord” », goes on Jesus. « “You have favoured Your own country, You brought back the captives of Jacob...

Show us, o Lord, Your mercy and bring us back Your Saviour.

I want to listen to what the Lord is saying to me. He will certainly speak of peace to His people for His friends and for those who convert their hearts to Him.

Yes, His saving help is near... and the glory will live in our country. Love and loyalty have now met, righteousness and peace have now embraced. Loyalty reaches up from the earth and righteousness leans down from Heaven.

Yes, the Lord Himself bestows happiness and our soil gives its harvest. Righteousness will

always precede Him and will leave its footprints on the path”.

You have seen that hour, father and you have worked for it. You have cooperated in the formation of this hour and the Lord will reward you for it. I am telling you » adds Jesus, wiping a tear of joy which slowly runs down Joseph's cheek.

He then resumes: « “O Lord, remember David and all his kindness.

How he swore to the Lord: I will not enter my house, nor climb into the bed of my rest, nor allow my eyes to sleep, nor give rest to my eyelids, nor peace to my temples until I have found a place for the Lord, a home for the God of Jacob...

Rise, o Lord and *come to Your resting place, You and Your Ark of holiness* (Mary understands, and She bursts into tears).

May Your priests vest in virtue and Your devote shout for joy.

For the sake of Your servant David, do not deprive us of the face of Your Anointed.

The Lord swore to David and will remain true to His word: 'I will put on your throne the fruit of your womb'.

The Lord has chosen His home...

I will make a horn sprout for David, I will trim a lamp for My Anointed”.

Thank you, My father on My-behalf and on behalf of My Mother. You have been a Just father to Me and the Eternal Father chose you as the guardian of His Christ and of His Ark. You have been the lamp trimmed for Him and for the Fruit of the holy womb you have had a loving heart. Go in peace, father. Your Widow will not be helpless. God has arranged that She must not be alone. Go peacefully to your rest. I tell You. »

Mary is crying with Her face bent down on the blankets (they look like mantles) which are stretched on Joseph's body, which is now getting cold. Jesus hastens to comfort him because he is breathing with great difficulty and his eyes are growing dim once again.

« “Happy the man who fears the Lord and joyfully keeps His commandments...

His righteousness will last for ever.

For the upright He shines like a lamp in the dark, He is merciful, tender-hearted, virtuous...

The just man will be remembered for ever. His justice is eternal and his power will rise and

become a glory...”

You, father, will have that glory. I will soon come to take you, with the Patriarchs who have preceded you, to the glory which is waiting for you. May your spirit rejoice in My word.

“Who lives in the shelter of the Most High, lives under the protection of the God of Heaven”

You live there, o father.

“He rescued me from the snares of fowlers and from rough words.

He will cover you with His wings and under His feathers you will find shelter.

His truth will protect you like a shield and you need not fear the terrors of night...

No evil will come near you because He ordered His angels to guard you wherever you go.

They will support you on their hands so that you may not hurt your foot against stones.

You will tread on lions and adders, you will trample on savage lions and dragons.

Because you have hoped in the Lord, He says to you, o father, that He will free you and protect you.

Because you have lifted your voice to Him, He will hear you, He will be with you in your last affliction, He will glorify you after this life, showing you even now His Salvation”. And in future life, He will let you enter, because of the Saviour Who is now comforting you and Who very soon, oh! I repeat it, He will come very soon and hold you in His divine embrace and take you, at the head of all the Patriarchs, where the dwelling place has been prepared for the Just man of God who was My blessed father.

Go before Me and tell the Patriarchs that the Saviour is in the world and the Kingdom of Heaven will soon be opened to them. Go, father. May My blessing accompany you. »

Jesus has raised His voice to reach the heart of Joseph, who is sinking into the mists of death. His end is impending. He is panting very painfully. Mary caresses him, Jesus sits on the edge of the little bed, embraces him and draws to Himself the dying man, who collapses, and passes away peacefully.

The scene is full of a solemn peace. Jesus lays the Patriarch down again and embraces Mary, Who at the last moment, broken-hearted, had gone near Jesus.

(Jesus says:)

« I exhort all wives who are tortured by pain, to imitate Mary in Her widowhood: to be united to Jesus.

Those who think that Mary's heart did not suffer any afflictions are mistaken. *My Mother did suffer*. Let that be known. She suffered in a *holy way*, because everything in Her was holy, but She suffered *bitterly*.

Those who think that Mary did not love Joseph deeply, only because he was the spouse of Her soul and not of Her flesh, are also mistaken. Mary did love Joseph deeply, and She devoted thirty years of faithful life to him. Joseph was Her father, Her spouse, Her brother, Her friend, Her protector.

Now She felt as lonely as the shoot of a vine when the tree to which it is tied is cut down. It was as if Her house had been struck by thunder. It was splitting. Before it was a unit in which the members supported one another. Now the main wall was missing and that was the first blow to the Family and a sign of the impending parting of Her beloved Jesus.

The will of the Eternal Father Who had asked Her to be a spouse and a Mother, was now imposing upon Her widowhood and separation from Her Creature. But Mary utters, shedding tears, one of Her most sublime remarks: “Yes. Yes, Lord, let it be done to Me according to Your word”.

And to have enough strength for that hour, She drew close to Me. Mary was always united to God in the gravest hours of Her life: in the Temple, when She was asked to marry, at Nazareth when She was called to Maternity, again at Nazareth when shedding the tears of a widow, at Nazareth in the dreadful separation of Her Son, on Calvary in the torture of seeing Me dying.

Learn, you who are crying. Learn, you who are dying. Learn, you who are living to die. Endeavour to deserve the words I said to Joseph. They will be your peace in the struggle of death. Learn, you who are dying, to deserve to have Jesus near you, comforting you. And if you have not deserved it, dare just the same, and call Me near you. I will come. With My hands full of graces and consolation, My Heart full of forgiveness and love, My lips full of words of absolution and encouragement.

Death loses its bitterness if it takes place between My arms. Believe Me. I cannot abolish death, but I can make it sweet for those who die trusting in Me.

Christ, *on His Cross*, said on behalf of you all: “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit”. He said that *in His agony*, thinking of your agonies, your terrors, your errors, your fears, your desire for forgiveness. He said it with His Heart pierced by extreme torture, before being pierced by the lance, a torture that was more spiritual than physical, so that the agonies of those who die thinking of Him might be relieved by the Lord and their spirits might pass from death to eternal Life, from sorrow to joy, for ever.

This, My little John, is your lesson for today. Be good and do not be afraid. My peace will always flow into you, through My words and through contemplation. Come. Just think that you are Joseph who has Jesus' chest as a cushion, and Mary as a nurse. Rest between us, like a child in his cradle. »

(Mary comments on the family life of Jesus...)

« The infancy, childhood, adolescence and youth of my Son are only briefly mentioned in the vast picture of His life as described in the Gospels. There He is the Master. Here He is the Man. He is the God Who humiliates Himself for the sake of man. And He works miracles also in the humility of a common life. He works them in Me, because I feel that My soul reaches perfection by the contact with My Son Who is growing in My womb. He works them in the house of Zacharias by sanctifying the Baptist, by helping the labour of Elizabeth and by giving speech and faith back to Zacharias. He works them in Joseph opening his spirit to the light of such a sublime truth which he could not understand by himself, although he was just. And after Me, Joseph is the most blessed by this shower of divine gifts.

Consider how much progress he makes, I mean spiritual progress, from the moment he comes into My house to the moment of the flight into Egypt. At the beginning he was but a just man of his times. Then by successive steps, he becomes the just man of Christian times. He acquires faith in Christ and he relies so securely on that faith that from the sentence he pronounced at the beginning of the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem: “What shall we do?”, a sentence which reveals the whole man with his human fears and his human worries, he passes on to hope. In the grotto, before the birth, he says: “It will be better tomorrow”. Jesus Who is approaching already fortifies him with this hope which is one of the most magnificent gifts of God. And from this hope, when he is sanctified by the contact with

Jesus, he progresses on to daring. He always wanted to be guided by Me because of the venerable respect he felt for Me. Now he manages himself both spiritual and material matters, and as head of the Family, he decides when there is a decision to be taken. Not only, but in the painful hour of our flight, after that months of union with the Divine Son had filled him with holiness, it is he who comforts My affliction and says to Me: “Even if we should have nothing else, we shall always have everything, because we shall have Him”...

It is enough if you say with Joseph: “If Jesus is left with me, I have everything” and we will come with heavenly gifts to comfort your spirits.

I do not promise you human gifts or human comfort. I promise you the same consolations as Joseph had: supernatural ones. Because, everybody should know, the gifts of the Wise Men, in the dire necessities of poor refugees, vanished as fast as lightning when we purchased a home and the bare essential household implements necessary for life, and the food which is also essential for life and could be procured only out of that source of income, until such time as we found work.

Jewish communities have always helped one another. But the community gathered in Egypt was formed almost exclusively of persecuted refugees, who therefore were almost as poor as we, who had come to join them. And a little share of that wealth, which we were anxious to keep for our Jesus when adult, and we had spared out of the expenses for settling in Egypt, was most useful for our return and *just sufficient* to reorganise our house and the workshop in Nazareth upon our return. Because times change, but human greed is always the same and it takes advantage of other people's necessities to suck its part in the most exorbitant way.

No. The fact that we had Jesus with us did not procure us any material wealth. Many amongst you expect that, when they are hardly united to Jesus. They forget what He said: “Set your hearts on things of the spirit”. All the rest is unnecessary. God provides also food. For men as well as for birds. Because He knows that you need food while your flesh is the tabernacle of your soul. But first of all ask for His grace. First of all ask for things for your spirit. The rest will be given to you in addition.

All Joseph had from his union with Jesus, from a human point of view, were worries, fatigue, persecutions, starvation. He had nothing else. But as he aimed only at Jesus, all this was turned into spiritual peace and supernatural joy. I would like to take you to the point

where My Spouse was when he said: “Even if we should have nothing else, we shall always have everything, because we have Jesus”. »

A REMINISCENCE OF MARY

(Vol. 2, p. 359-62)

(The time is now during the second year of Jesus' Public Life. The scene is the grotto of Bethlehem. Traveling near Bethlehem with Jesus, His apostles and some of His women disciples, Mary begins to describe the events of Her journey with Joseph on the night of Jesus' Birth. She says:)

« Come. Let us go to the Grotto. It is useless to enter the town. The best friends of My Child are no longer there. Friendly Nature is quite sufficient to make a fire, with its stones, its stream, its wood. Nature perceived the coming of its Lord... There... come without hesitating... We go round here... There, over there are the ruins of David's Tower. Oh! it is dearer to Me than a royal palace! Blessed ruins! Blessed stream! Blessed tree because, as if by miracle, you allowed the wind to pull down so many of your branches so that we might find firewood and light a fire! »

Mary descends quickly towards the Grotto, She crosses the little stream on a board acting as a bridge, She runs in the open space before the ruins and falls on Her knees at the entrance of the Grotto, She bends and kisses the ground. All the others follow Her. They are touched... The boy, who has not left Her one moment, seems to be listening to a wonderful story and his little dark eyes drink in Mary's words and gestures without missing a single one.

Mary stands up and goes in saying: « Everything is exactly as then!... But then it was night... Joseph lit a lamp when I entered. Only then, dismounting from the little donkey I became aware of how tired and cold I was... An ox greeted us, I went near it, to feel its warmth and lean against the hay... Joseph laid the hay out here, where I am, to make a bed for Me, and he dried the hay for Me and for You, Son, at the fire he had lit in that corner... because he was as good as a father in his love of an angelical spouse... And holding each

other's hand, like brother and sister lost in the darkness of night, we ate our bread and cheese, then he went over there to kindle the fire and he took off his mantle to close the entrance... In actual fact he put a veil before the glory of God descending from Heaven. You, My Jesus... and I lay on the hay, in the warmth of the two animals, enveloped in My mantle and covered with a woollen blanket... My dear spouse!... In that hour of anxiety when I was all alone before the mystery of My first maternity, an hour full of uncertainty for every woman, and in My case, in My only maternity, it was also full of the mystery of what it would be to see the Son of God emerge from mortal flesh, he, Joseph, was like a mother, an angel to Me... he was My comfort then and always afterwards... Then silence and sleep enveloped the Just man... so that he might not see what for Me was God's daily kiss...

And with regard to Me, after the interval of human necessities, there came immeasurable waves of ecstasy from a heavenly sea and they raised Me higher and higher on their bright crests carrying Me up with them into an ocean of light, of joy, of peace, of love, until I was lost in the sea of God, of God's bosom... A voice from the earth whispered: "Are You sleeping, Mary?". Oh! it was so far away!... An echo, a remembrance of the earth!... And so faint it was that My soul did not stir, and I do not know how I replied, while I rose, I rose even higher into the depth of fire, of infinite beatitude, of foreknowledge of God... up to Him... Oh! were You born of Me that night, or was I born of the Trine brightness? Did I give You or did You absorb Me to generate Me? I do not know... And then the descent, from choir to choir, from star to star, from cloud to cloud, a sweet, slow, blissful, placid descent, like a flower carried high in the sky by an eagle and then dropped, descending slowly, on the wings of the air, made more beautiful by a drop of rain, by a tiny piece of rainbow stolen in the sky... alights on its native soil... My diadem: You! You on My heart...

Sitting here, after adoring You on My knees, I loved You. At last I could love You without the barrier of the flesh, and I moved from here to take You to the love of him, who, like Me, was worthy of being one of the first to love You. And here, between these two rustic columns, I offered You to the Father. And here You rested for the first time on Joseph's heart... Then I swaddled You and together we laid You here... And I lulled You while Joseph was drying hay at the fire and when it was warm he placed it on Your chest and then we both adored You, bending over You, as I am doing now, to inhale Your breath,

contemplating the humiliation to which love can lead and shedding tears which are certainly shed also in Heaven for the unexhausted joy of seeing God. »

(Mary goes back to the time of Caesar's edict, discovering that they should go to Bethlehem for the census...)

« That evening, when Joseph brought the news, You and I, Son, leapt for joy. It was the call... because You were to be born here, and nowhere else, as the Prophets had foretold, and that sudden decree was as if merciful Heaven wanted Joseph to erase even the memory of his suspicion. It was what I was waiting for, for You, for him, for the Judaic world and for the future world, for ever and ever. We decided. And we acted accordingly. Wait! Can the bride delay her nuptial dream? Why wait? »

« Well... anything might have happened... » says Mary of Alphaeus once again.

« I was not afraid of anything. I rested in God. »

« But did You know that everything would happen thus? »

« Nobody told Me. And I never thought of it, so much so that to encourage Joseph, I let him and you doubt that there was still time for the birth. But I knew, I really knew that the Light of the World was to be born during the feast of the Dedication. »

« And you, mother, why did you not go with Mary? And why did father not think of it? After all you were both going to come here! Did we not all come? » asks Judas Thaddeus sternly.

« Your father had decided to come after the Dedication and he told his brother. But Joseph would not wait. »

« But at least you... » insists Thaddeus.

« Do not reproach her, Judas. By mutual consent we decided it was just to lay a veil on the mystery of this birth. »

« Did Joseph know that it was to take place with those signs? If You did not know, how could he have known? »

« We knew nothing, except that He was to be born. »

« So? »

« So divine Wisdom guided us, as it was right that it should. Jesus' birth and His presence in the world were to appear devoid of uncommon features, which might rouse Satan... »

THE JOSEPH PRAYER

(Vol. 5, p. 154-5)

(It is nearing the time of Jesus' Passion, and Jesus is saying goodbye to His friend, Joseph of Aramithea...)

« Goodbye, Joseph. Be just. Just like him who was My guardian for so many years and who was capable of every renovation to serve the Lord his God. If he were here, among us, oh! how he would teach you to serve the Lord perfectly, to be just, just, just. But it is right that he should already be in Abraham's bosom!... In order not to see the injustice of Israel. Holy servant of God!... A new Abraham, with a broken heart, but with perfect will, he would not have advised Me to be cowardly, but he would have spoken the words that he used to utter when anything painful weighed heavily on us: "Let us raise our spirits. We shall meet the yes of God and we shall forget that it is men who grieve us. And let us do whatever is burdensome, as if the Most High presented it to us. In this way we shall sanctify also the least things, and God will love us". Oh! He would have said so also to comfort Me to suffer the deepest sorrows... *He would have comforted us...* »

MORE REMINISCENCES

(Vol. 5, p. 294-6)

(Mary is travelling with Jesus and His apostles, near the banks of the Jordan River. Mary of Alphaeus, who is also with Her, reminisces about Her childhood...)

« When You were a little girl, I always remember You with these flowers in Your little hands. You called them the flowers of Your coming. In fact when You were born Your garden was full of them, and that evening when the whole of Nazareth came to see Joachim's daughter, the clusters of these little stars looked like diamonds because of the water from the sky and of the last ray of the sun that lit them up while setting, and since Your name was “Star”, everybody said looking at those tiny shining stars: “The flowers have adorned themselves to give a hearty welcome to Joachim's flower, and the stars have left the sky to come to the Star”, and they all smiled, happy with the omen and with Your father's joy. And Joseph, my husband's brother, said: “Stars and drops. She is really Mary!”. Who could have told him then that You were to become his star? When he came back from Jerusalem, after being chosen as Your spouse? The whole of Nazareth wanted to celebrate the event with him, because great was the honour that had come to him from Heaven and because of his nuptials with You, the daughter of Joachim and Anne, and everybody wanted to feast with him. He kindly but firmly refused all celebrations, amazing everybody. Because which man, destined to such an honourable wedding and by such a decree of the Most High, would not celebrate the happiness of his soul, flesh and blood? But he used to say: “A severe preparation is required for a great appointment”. And with sparing use of words and food, because he had always practised all other continence, he spent that time working and praying, because I believe that every hammer-stroke, every chisel-mark became a prayer, if it is possible to pray working. His face was enraptured. I used to go to tidy up the house, to bleach sheets and all other things left by Your mother and which had yellowed with age, and I used to watch him working in the kitchen garden and in the house, making them as beautiful as if they had never been neglected, and I used to speak to him, too... but he was engrossed in thought. He used to smile. Not at me or at anybody else, but at a thought of his, that was not the thought of every man about to get married. That is a smile of mischievous sensual pleasure... He... seemed to smile at the invisible angels of God, and to speak to them and to consult with them... Oh! I am sure they told him how to treat You! Because later - and this amazed everybody in Nazareth and almost irritated my Alphaeus - he put off the wedding as long as possible, and we never understood why he suddenly made up his mind before the fixed time. And also when we heard You were a mother, how surprised was Nazareth at his contained joy!... Also my James is somewhat like that. And he is becoming so more and more. Now that I watch him carefully - I don't

know why, but since we came from Ephraim he seems to have changed completely - I see him thus... just like Joseph. Look at him even now, Mary, now that he turns round again to look at us. Does he not have the pensive attitude so habitual to Your spouse Joseph? He smiles, but I do not know whether his smile is a sad or vague one. He looks, but he seems to be looking far away, beyond us, as Joseph did so often. Do You remember how Alphaeus used to tease him? He used to say: "Brother, are you still looking at the pyramids?". He would shake his head without speaking, patient and engrossed in thought. He was never talkative. But when You came back from Hebron! He did not even come to the fountain by himself any longer, as he used to do and as everybody does. He was either with You or at his work. And with the exception of the Sabbaths, when he went to the synagogue, or when he went somewhere on business, no one can say that they saw Joseph loitering about during those months. Then you went away... How distressing it was to have no news of you after the slaughter! Alphaeus went as far as Bethlehem... "They went away" they said. But how could we believe them, if they had a mortal hatred of you in town, where the innocent blood was still red and the ruins were still smoking and they blamed you for the blood that had been shed? He went to Hebron and then to the Temple, because it was Zacharias' turn. Elizabeth gave him nothing but her tears, Zacharias only words of comfort. They were both worried about John and fearing fresh cruelties, they had hidden him and trembled for him. They had no news of you and Zacharias said to Alphaeus: "If they are dead, their blood is on me, because I convinced them to remain in Bethlehem". My Mary! My Jesus so beautiful at the Passover after His birth! And to have no news of You for such a long time! But why never any news?... »

« Because it was better to be silent. Where we were, there were many Maries and Josephs, and it was wise to be considered as a normal married couple » Mary replies quietly, then with a sigh She says: « And even in their sadness they were happy days. Evil was still so far away! If as human beings we lacked so many things, our spirits were sated with the joy of having You, My Son! »

« You have Your Son even now, Mary. Joseph is no longer with You, that is true! But Jesus is here and with His full love of an adult » remarks Mary of Alphaeus.

Mary raises Her head to look at Jesus. Although Her lips smile faintly, Her eyes reveal Her torture. But She does not utter another word...

A PORTRAIT OF JOSEPH

(Notebooks 1944, p. 52)

(In a vision of Heaven, Maria Valtorta sees St. Joseph:)

...He is not so tall, more or less like Mary. Sturdily built. With grizzly hair, curly and short, and a squarely-cut beard. A long, thin, aquiline nose. Two wrinkles cut across his cheeks, starting from the corners of his nose and moving down until fading at the sides of his mouth in his beard. Dark, very good eyes. In them I rediscover the lovingly good look of my father. The whole face is good, thoughtful without being sad, dignified, but very, very good. He is wearing a dark blue-purple tunic like the petals of certain periwinkles, and his cloak is the color of camel's skin. Jesus points him out to me, saying, "Here is the patron of all the just."

"MY HOLY AND BLESSED JOSEPH !"

(Notebooks 1944, p. 58-60)

(We re-visit the first passage of this compilation. Mary comments on the bewilderment She felt when the High Priest wanted to arrange Her marriage, and on Her illumination from the Holy Spirit, that this was the will of God...)

"In exchange for my obedience, I asked only that God grant his servant the kind of husband who would not represent a perturbing violence for my virginity, sacred to the Lord, or a scornful mockery, but a respectful, holy companion in whose heart the fear and 43 Luke 1:26-38.

44 Matthew 26:39-44; Mark 14:35-36; Luke 22:41-42.

love of God would be a light to comprehend the soul of his Wife. I asked for nothing else. Attractiveness, youth, social position, and wealth were so negligible for me that they did not warrant even a fleeting thought. *I asked for the 'sanctity' of my future husband.* And did not

concern myself about anything else.

“The first condition - excessively overlooked in your present marriages - is to turn to God to ask for a mate in keeping with your character and your position and, above all, a companion who is 'just' in his sight. You don't ask God for anything in this decisive hour of a woman's life and do not look at either your spirit or that of your mate. It is enough for you that he should be handsome, rich, and influential in the world. Everything else has no weight when it is time to choose. But, unfortunately, it takes on full weight after marriage, and many marriages are a disappointment limited to being such only if the wife is a woman with Christian sentiments. If even these are lacking in her, the marriage becomes a disaster whose expiatory victims are the innocent and often ends in double adultery. You place your souls at risk and frequently lead them to death because you consider only human ends in marriage and do not turn to the Father in Heaven in that solemn hour.

“When I saw Joseph, all my natural anxiety fell like a cloud dissolving into a rainbow. It was enough for me to look into his eyes to read in them that he was an honest, faithful, pure, just man. His age, more than twice my own, had left him with the clear gaze of a child, for Evil had risen up around him as he lived in the world, but had been unable to penetrate into his heart, filled with the love of God.

“With what trust I placed my hand in his, sensing that I had found in him a loving father, a faithful spouse, and a chaste companion who would be like olive and fig trees shading a small house and defending it from winds and the heat, providing the refreshment and comfort of sweetness and nourishment!

“My sweet spouse who did not disappoint me! Who, since he really loved me, believed in me, even going against appearances;⁴⁵ who concealed his tears from me so as not to disturb⁴⁵ Matthew 1:18-19.

me; who had only smiles and help for me; who guided me as his first putative daughter, holding my hand to make me feel he was close by with his love, avoiding obstacles for me, and anticipating my needs-patient, silent, and chaste, chaste as only an angel can be.

“Oh, yes! Blessed be the Lord for this! I, whom the Eternal had destined to be the Queen of his angels, had two angels as my subjects, beginning on earth: my Guardian Angel, whose invisible presence I felt stirring at my side continually, with flashes of light and heavenly

perfume, and my angelic consort, whose flesh, not darkened by the desire of blood, lived close to mine - like that of two lilies blossoming in the same flowerbed scenting each other and blooming for the Lord, each an example for the other in rising ever higher, towards God, in perfuming more intensely out of charity for God and one's companion, but never joining their flowering mouths in a kiss which would sully with pollen the angelic silk of their robes of purity.

“My holy and blessed Joseph! My heart does not cease to thank its Lord for having given him to me as a consort, for as a holy Father He provided for his Servant and created this living defense for my virginity, drawn out of the Temple, and the world's breath thus broke against Joseph, so that the din and stench of human baseness did not penetrate where the eternal Virgin continued to praise the Lord as if she were assigned to the service of the altar, beyond the Holy of Holies, where the glory of the Eternal God was shining.”