

CHAPTER XVIII

Other Afflictions Continue for Our Queen, Some of which the Lord Permitted by Means of Creatures and the Ancient Serpent.

686. The Most High continued to hide and conceal Himself from the Princess of heaven, and to this affliction (which was the greatest) His Majesty added others in order to increase her merit, her grace, and her reward, thus inflaming more and more the most pure love of the heavenly Lady. The great dragon and ancient serpent was not unwatchful of the heroic works of most holy Mary. Although he could not obtain the knowledge of her interior acts, since they were hidden from his view, yet he scrutinized the exterior ones, which were so high and so perfect as to arouse the pride and indignation of that envious enemy, for the purity and sanctity of the child Mary tormented him beyond all surmise.

687. In his restless fury he called an assembly of the infernal leaders in order to consult about the matter with the higher powers of hell. He addressed them as follows: "The great triumph which we have until now obtained in the world by the possession of so many souls who are altogether subject to our wills is, I suspect and fear, about to be undone and counteracted by a Woman. We cannot make light of such a danger, for we have been warned since our creation, and afterward heard the sentence confirmed against us, that the Woman shall crush our head (Gen. 3:15). Therefore we must be watchful and avoid all carelessness. You have already been notified of a Child who was born of Anne and is growing in age, and is at the same time distinguishing Herself in virtue. I have focused my attention upon all her actions and movements, and I have not been able to discover in Her the effects of our seed and malice at the common time of the beginning of speech and the sensing of their natural passions which are manifested in the rest of the children of Adam. I have always seen Her composed and most perfect, without being able to incline or induce Her to fall into the slightest human imperfections which are so natural in other children. For this reason I fear lest She be the one chosen as Mother of Him who is to become Man.

688. "Yet I cannot convince myself of this, for She was born as the rest of women, and subject to the common laws of nature, and her parents offered prayers and sacrifices in atonement for Her and their own sins, and brought Her to the temple just like other women. Despite all this, though She may not be the one chosen against us She has had great beginnings in her childhood which give promise that She will later signalize Herself in virtue and sanctity, nor can I bear the prudence and discretion with which She acts in all her affairs. Her wisdom enrages me, her modesty irritates me, her humility annihilates me and oppresses me, and her whole behavior provokes me to unbearable wrath. I abhor Her more than all the children of Adam. There is in Her a special power which often makes it impossible for me to approach Her; if I assail Her with suggestions She does not admit them, and all my efforts in her regard until this hour have been entirely fruitless. Hence it is important for us all to find a remedy, and we must take the greatest care lest our power be ruined. I desire the destruction of this soul more than that of the entire world. Now tell me what means and schemes we must use in order to overcome Her. I will certainly offer high and liberal rewards to anyone who shall accomplish her downfall."

689. The matter was ventilated in that confused synagogue, convoked solely for our ruin, and one of the chiefs of the horrible council said: "Our chief and lord, do not allow thyself to be tormented by such a small matter, for a weak little Maiden cannot be so invincible and powerful as all of us who follow thee. Thou hast deceived Eve (Gen. 3:4), dragging her down from the

high position which she held, and through her thou didst also conquer her head Adam; why then would thou not be able to overcome this Woman, her descendant, who was born after the first fall? Promise thyself even at this moment such a victory, and in order to follow our determination we will persist in tempting Her, though She resists us many times, and if necessary we will not stop at yielding some of our greatness and haughtiness in the hope of finally deceiving Her. If that does not suffice, we will try to destroy her honor or her life.”

690. Other demons added their advice and said to Lucifer: “By experience we know, O powerful chief, that to bring about the downfall of many souls the most effective way is to make use of other creatures, and by their means we often succeed where we otherwise fail. Let us then plan and contrive the ruin of this Woman in this way, first finding out the best time and the most favorable opportunity. Above all it is necessary that we apply all our sagacity and astuteness to make Her lose grace by some sin. As soon as this mainstay and bulwark of the just is lost to Her, we can persecute and ensnare Her as one who is alone, since there will be no one to snatch Her from our grasp, and we must exert ourselves to reduce Her to despair of all remedy.”

691. Lucifer expressed his thanks for these encouraging counsels of his followers and cooperators in crime. He commanded and exhorted the most astute in malice among them to accompany him as leader in this arduous enterprise, for he did not wish to entrust it to other hands. Although the demons assisted him, Lucifer himself in person was always at the fore in tempting Mary, as well as her most holy Son in the desert, and during the whole course of their lives, as we shall see later on.

692. In the meanwhile our heavenly Princess continued to sigh and grieve over the absence of her Beloved, and in this state the infernal squadron found Her when they rushed forward to begin their temptations. But the divine power which overshadowed Her hindered the assaults of Lucifer, and thus he could not approach very closely to Her nor execute all he had intended. By permission of God the hellish host excited in her faculties many suggestions and various thoughts of highest iniquity and malice, for the Lord did not judge it to be alien to the Mother of Grace that She be tempted in all things, though She was to be without sin in temptation as her most holy Son was afterwards (Heb. 4:15).

693. It cannot easily be conceived how much in this new conflict the most pure and innocent Heart of Mary suffered, seeing Herself assailed by suggestions so foreign and so distant from the ineffable purity and nobility of her heavenly mind. When the ancient serpent perceived the affliction and tears of the great Lady, he imagined he had because of this more power over Her, being blinded by his own pride and not knowing the secrets of heaven. Therefore, animating his infernal helpers, he said to them: “Let us persecute Her now, let us persecute Her; already it seems we are gaining our end, for She feels sorrowful, which is an opening for discouragement.” In this mistaken conviction they suggested new thoughts of dejection and despair, and they assailed Her with terrible imaginations, but in vain, for as this flawless stone was struck by occasions of more exalted virtues, so also it gave forth more generously the sparks and flames of divine love. Our invincible Queen was so superior to this infernal battery that her interior showed no signs of change nor even of an understanding of such terrible suggestions, except insofar as to concentrate Herself all the more in the exercise of her incomparable virtues and allow the flames of divine love which burned in her breast to ascend so much the higher.

694. The dragon, though seeing her courage and constancy, and feeling the force of the divine assistance, knew nothing of the hidden wisdom and prudence of our sovereign Queen; hence he persisted in his pride and besieged the City of God in diverse ways and with several kinds of warfare. The astute enemy during this warfare often changed his engines of war, but his

machinery was like the sting of a weak hornet against a diamond or adamantine wall. Our Princess was that strong Woman (Prov. 31:11) in whom the Heart of her Spouse confidently relied without the least anxiety lest his desires be frustrated in Her. Her adornment was fortitude (Ib. 25) which filled Her with beauty, and her vestments were purity and charity which served Her as a helmet. The unclean and proud serpent could not look upon this creature without being blinded anew in the fury of his confusion; hence he resolved to take away her life, and the horde of malignant spirits began to exert their utmost powers toward this end. In this attempt they spent some time, but with just as little success.

695. The knowledge of such a hidden mystery caused in me great admiration, especially considering how far Lucifer extended his fury against most holy Mary in her first years, and on the other hand the hidden and vigilant protection of the Most High in defending Her. I saw how attentive the Lord was toward his chosen and only One among creatures, and I saw at the same time all hell lashed into fury against Her and exerting against Her in fullest indignation such a wrath as had never until then been exerted against any other creature, as well as the facility with which God neutralized the infernal power and astuteness. O more than unhappy Lucifer! How much greater is thy pride and arrogance than thy strength (Is. 16:6)! Very weak and miniscule art thou due to such insane presumption; begin to mistrust thyself, and do not promise thyself such triumphs, for a tender Child crushes thy head and sends thee back conquered in all things and altogether vanquished. Confess thou dost avail and knowest but little, since thou wast even ignorant of the sacrament of the King. Acknowledge that his power has humiliated thee by the instrument thou didst despise, a feeble Woman, a Child in her natural weakness. O how evident would thy ignorance also become in regard to men if they would avail themselves of the protection of the Most High, and the example, imitation and intercession of that victorious and triumphant Lady of the Angels and of men!

696. During these varying temptations and combats the fervent prayers of most holy Mary never ceased, and She spoke to the Lord: "Now, my most high God, while I am in tribulation, be with me (Ps. 90:15); now when with all my heart I call upon Thee and seek thy justifications (Ps. 118:145), let my petitions come to thy ears; now that *I suffer* such great *violence*, *answer Thou for me* (Is. 38:14). Thou, my Lord and Father, be my strength and my refuge (Ps. 30:4), and by thy holy Name Thou shalt deliver me from danger; Thou shalt lead me along the sure way and nourish me as thy daughter." She repeated also many mysteries of the Holy Scriptures, especially passages from the Psalms, to invoke his aid against the invisible enemies. With these invincible arms, without losing an ounce of interior peace, equanimity and resignation, but rather confirming Herself more therein, She raised her spirit on high and battled, resisted and conquered Lucifer to the inexpressible delight of the Lord and for her greater merit.

697. Having already been conquered in his hidden temptations and battles, the serpent began a new conflict by means of creatures. For this purpose he secretly enkindled the sparks of envy and emulation against most holy Mary in the hearts of her maiden companions in the temple. This contagion was much harder to counteract since it arose from the punctuality with which our heavenly Princess distinguished Herself in the practice of all virtues, growing in wisdom and grace before God and man; for where the ambition for honor goads, the very lights of virtue dazzle the judgment, blind it, and even enkindle the flames of envy. The dragon through his secret suggestions persuaded these simple maidens that the light of this sun, most holy Mary, would obscure them and cause them to be little noticed, that on her account their own negligences were more clearly apparent to the priests and their teacher, and that Mary alone was preferred in the estimation and judgment of all.

698. The companions of our Queen admitted this bad seed into their hearts, for they were heedless and little experienced in spiritual ways. They allowed it to increase until it grew into a sort of interior abhorrence of most pure Mary, and then this into anger. Filled with this anger they began to look upon and treat Her with hatred, not being able to endure the modesty of that most innocent Dove, for the dragon had incited them and had already imbued the incautious girls with some of his own wrath. The temptation continuing, its effects became manifest and the temple maidens began to plot among themselves, ignorant of the spirit which moved them. They agreed among themselves to molest and persecute the unknown Princess of the world until She would be forced to leave the temple. Accordingly they called Her aside and spoke to Her very harsh words, treating Her at the same time very imperiously. They called Her a hypocrite and reproached Her with scheming to obtain the favor of the priests and of their teacher, while seeking to discredit all the other girls by her complaints and her exaggerations of their faults, whereas She was the most useless of them all and therefore deserved their hatred as an enemy.

699. These contumelies and many other accusations the most prudent Virgin bore without disturbance and with equable humility. She answered: "My friends and elders, you are certainly correct that I am the least and most imperfect of all; so you, my sisters, being better informed, must pardon me my faults and instruct my ignorance, directing me to make certain I labor more earnestly to please you. I beseech you, my friends, though I am so useless, do not deny me your favor or believe I desire to spurn it, for I love you and reverence you as a servant, and I will be in all things that which you would like to experience from my good will. Command me then, and tell me what you desire from me."

700. These humble and sweet reasonings of most modest Mary did not soften the hardened hearts of her friends and companions possessed by the furious malice which the dragon had against Her; rather, being more infuriated he further incited and irritated her companions against Her, in order that by the sweet antidote of her humility so he further anesthetize his serpent's bite and the venom spewed forth against the Woman who was the great sign in heaven (Apoc. 12:1). For many days this persecution continued, during which her humility, patience, modesty and tolerance were ineffective in tempering the hatred of her companions. On the contrary the demon was emboldened to inspire them with many thoughts full of temerity, urging them to lay violent hands on the most humble lamb and maltreat Her, even so far as to take away her life. But the Lord did not permit the execution of such sacrilegious suggestions, and the farthest which they were allowed to proceed was to insult Her by words or to shove Her around. This quarreling remained concealed from the teacher of the maidens and the priests, and during this time most holy Mary gained incomparable merits in the sight of the Almighty because She took occasion to exercise all the virtues toward God as well as toward the creatures who were persecuting and hating Her. She performed heroic acts of charity and humility, yielding good for evil, blessings for curses, and prayers for blasphemies (I Cor. 4:13), fulfilling in all things the most perfect and exalted requirements of the divine law. Before the Lord She exercised the most exalted virtues by praying for his creatures who were persecuting Her, and She excited the admiration of the Angels by humiliating Herself as if She was the vilest of mortals and deserved to be treated in that way. In all these things She surpassed the conceptions of men and the highest merits of the Seraphim.

701. It happened one day these girls, impelled by diabolical temptation, brought the princess Mary to a retired room where they could act with more safety. Here they began to heap unmeasured injuries and insults upon Her in order to excite Her to weakness or anger, and to entrap Her imperturbable modesty into some hasty action. But since the Queen of virtues could

not even for a moment be subject to vice She showed Herself immovable, and She answered them with great kindness and sweetness. Being enraged beyond all bounds because they failed in their purpose, her companions raised their voices in discordant strife, so much so they were heard in the temple, and by such unaccustomed noise caused great astonishment and confusion. The priests and the teacher hastened to the place from where the noise proceeded, and the Lord permitted a new humiliation of his Spouse, for they asked with severity what the cause of this strife was. While the most meek Dove remained silent the other maidens angrily answered and said: "Mary of Nazareth brings us all into strife and quarreling by her terrible conduct, for when you are not present She irritates and provokes us in such a manner that if She does not leave the temple it will be impossible to keep any peace with Her. When we allow Her to have her own way She becomes overbearing; if we reprehend Her She makes fun of all of us by prostrating Herself at our feet with feigned humility, and afterwards She quarrels anew and throws all into uproar."

702. The priests and the instructress brought the Mistress of the world into another room, and there they severely reprehended Her, giving full credit at that time to all the accusations of her companions, and having exhorted Her to reform and behave as one living in the house of God they threatened to expel Her from the temple if She would not amend Her conduct. This threat was the most severe punishment which they could have given Her even if She had been guilty, though She was entirely innocent of any of the faults imputed to Her. Whoever will obtain from the Lord some understanding of only a part of the most profound humility of Mary most holy will also understand something of the effects of these mysteries in her most candid Heart, for She judged Herself to be the most vile of those born of women, the most unworthy to live among them and burden the earth with her presence. The most prudent Virgin was somewhat moved by this determination, and with tears She responded to the priests: "My masters, I am grateful for the favor which thou dost in reprehending me and teaching me as such an imperfect and vile maiden; yet I beseech thee to pardon me, since thou art the ministers of the Most High, and overlooking my defects govern me in all things so from now on I can be able to give pleasure to His Majesty and to my sisters and companions. With the grace of the Lord I resolve this anew and shall begin from today."

703. Our Queen added other words full of sweetest innocence and modesty, and then the instructress and the priests dismissed Her, enjoining anew upon Her that doctrine of which She herself was the most wise Teacher. Immediately She went to her companions and prostrating Herself at their feet She asked their pardon, as if the Mother of all innocence could ever have been guilty of the faults which they had imputed to Her. They received Her this time with more good will because they thought her tears were the effect of the punishment and the warning of the priests and the instructress whom they had induced to act thus in pursuance of their badly governed passions. The dragon, who was secretly contriving this entanglement, urged the incautious hearts of all these girls to still greater haughtiness and presumption, and as they had now made headway in the estimation of the priests themselves they proceeded to greater audacity in discrediting and lowering the good name of the most pure Virgin. Hence by instigation of the demon himself they fabricated new accusations and lies; yet the Most High never permitted them to say anything very grave and dishonorable of Her whom He had chosen as the most holy Mother of his Onlybegotten. He merely allowed the indignation and deceit of the maidens to go so far as to exaggerate very much some small faults of which they accused Her and which were even in themselves altogether fictitious; moreover, they were permitted to practice many feminine intrigues to which their own restlessness drove them. In these different ways and in the

reprehensions of her instructress and the priests our most humble Lady Mary found many occasions of exercising virtues, increasing the gifts of the Most High and exalting her merit.

704. In all this our Queen acted with the plenitude of perfection in the eyes of the Lord, who regaled Himself with the sweetest odor of that humble spikenard (Cant. 1:11), maltreated and despised by the creatures who did not know Her. She repeated and continued her clamors and sighs due to the absence of her Beloved, and on one of these occasions She said: "My highest Good and Lord of infinite mercies, if Thou who art my Master and my Maker hast forsaken me, it is not strange that all creatures abhor me and turn against me. All this I merit by my ingratitude for thy benefits; yet I shall always acknowledge and confess Thee as my refuge and my treasure. Thou alone art my Good, my Beloved, and my rest; and if Thou art such to me, and art absent from me, how can my afflicted heart be quieted? The creatures do only with me what is my due, though they do not go so far in this as I merit, because Thou, my Lord and Father, art sparing in punishing and most generous in rewarding. Discount, O Lord, my negligences by my sorrow for Thee having hid Thyself from my interior, and reward with a generous hand the good which thy creatures gain for me by obliging me to recognize more thy goodness and my vileness. Raise, O Lord, the needy one from the dust of the earth (I Kg. 2:8), and renew her who is poor and the most abject among the creatures, and may I see thy divine face and be saved" (Ps. 79:4).

705. It would not be possible, nor is it necessary, to relate all that happened to our great Princess in this test of her virtues. Yet leaving Her at present therein, we have in Her a living example for us to bear with dilation of heart whatever labor is necessary for us, enduring the pains and hard knocks in order to satisfy for our sins and subject our necks to the yoke of mortification. There was neither sin nor any deceit in our most innocent Dove, yet in humble silence and patience She suffered unfounded hate and persecution. Let us then be confounded in her presence, since we deem slight injuries irreparable offenses which must be avenged, whereas all offenses of whatever kind are to be held but slight by those who have God for their enemy. The Most High was mighty to preserve Her from all persecution, but then He could not have shown his power in leading Her out of it unharmed, nor would He have given Her such dear pledges of his love, nor would She have reaped the sweet fruit of loving her enemies and persecutors. We make ourselves unworthy of such great blessings in raising an outcry against creatures whenever we are injured, and our proud heart rises up against God himself who arranges all things, since we refuse to subject ourselves to our Creator and Justifier, who knows what is necessary for our salvation.

INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN, MARY MOST HOLY.

706. Take notice then, my daughter, that the example of these events of my life should serve thee for thy instruction and direction. Treasure up this example lovingly in thy bosom and allow it to dilate thy heart in order to receive with joy the persecutions and calumnies of creatures whenever thou art made partaker of such happiness. The sons of perdition, who serve vanity, are ignorant of the treasure of suffering injuries and pardoning them, and they make a boast of vengeance, which even according to the requirements of natural reason is reprehensible and arises from a heart brutal and bestly rather than human. On the other hand, he who pardons injuries magnanimously and forgets them, though he may not have divine faith nor the light of the Gospel, becomes noble and excellent, and does not pay vile tribute to the fierce and irrational brutality of revenge.

707. And if the vice of revenge is so contrary even to the dictates of nature, consider, my daughter, how much it is opposed to grace, and how hateful and abominable the vengeful are in the eyes of my most holy Son, who became man, suffered and died for no other purpose than to forgive, and so the human race could obtain pardon for the injuries committed against the Lord himself. Against this tendency of his whole life, and against his whole nature and infinite bounty, vengeance is arrayed; as far as in him lies the vindictive man destroys in every respect God himself and all his works, and for this attempt he well merits for God to destroy him with all his might. Between the person who pardons and suffers injuries and the vindictive there is the same difference as between the one and only heir and the deadly enemy; one provokes all the wrath of God, and the other merits and obtains all blessings, because in this grace is a most perfect image of the celestial Father.

708. I desire thee, O soul, to understand that to suffer injuries with equanimity and pardon them entirely for the Lord will be more acceptable in his eyes than if thou choose of thy own will to do the most severe penance and shed thy own blood for Him. Humble thyself before those who persecute thee, love them and pray for them from a sincere heart; by doing this thou shalt turn toward thee in love the Heart of thy God, rise to the perfection of sanctity, and overcome hell in all things. That great dragon, who persecutes all men, was confounded many times by my humility and meekness, and his fury could not tolerate the sight of these virtues; from them he fled more swiftly than the rays of the sun, and thus by these virtues I gained great victories for my soul and won glorious triumphs for the exaltation of the Divinity. When any creature rose up against me I conceived no anger towards him, for I knew in reality he was an instrument of the Most High, governed by his divine Providence for my special good. This knowledge, and the consideration that he was a creature of my Lord, capable of grace, excited me to love him truly with a greater fervor, and I did not rest until I could reward this benefit of persecution by obtaining for him eternal life as far as was possible.

709. Thus strive after and labor for the imitation of that which thou hast understood and written. Show thyself most meek, peaceful and agreeable toward those who molest thee; esteem them truly in thy heart, and do not take vengeance on thy Lord by taking vengeance on his instruments, nor despise the inestimable pearl of injuries. As far as in thee lies always give good for evil (Rom. 12:14), benefits for injuries, love for hate, praise for condemnation, and blessings for curses. Then shalt thou be a perfect daughter of thy Father (Mt. 5:45), a beloved spouse of thy Lord, my friend and my well beloved.