

PEARLS FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE FOR OUR LITTLE ONES

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*'Unless you be converted and become as little children,
you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'*—
St. Matt. xviii. 3.

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XXIV.—A NOBLE VIRTUE.

'Jesus humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above all names.'—Philippians, ii. 8. 9.

Some people, my dearest, talk loudly of independence and liberty; but a great writer says very justly that, though the word liberty is often heard among men, it is the word 'by which the luxurious mean license, and the reckless mean change; by which the rogue means rapine, and the fool equality; by which the proud mean anarchy, and the malignant mean violence. Call it (freedom) by any name rather than this (liberty), but its best and truest is Obedience' (Ruskin: *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, chap. vii.). Obedience, indeed is a noble virtue, a virtue by which all that is good, beautiful, and strong in human character is nourished and preserved, and it is the only path to the enjoyment of true freedom. Hence, when God delivered to us His holy law on Mount Sinai, He gave Ten Commandments as a light and source of strength and happiness during our pilgrimage on earth, and He laid upon us the obligation of obeying His precepts. His yoke is sweet and His burden light to His true children, and, if we desire to enter into eternal life, it should be a pleasure to keep all His commandments in a spirit of hope and love. Among those great precepts He has set one which you should regard as especially addressed to yourselves. The words of it are familiar to you: 'Honor thy father and thy mother.' By this commandment you are bound to show your parents due honor by giving them all respect, love, and obedience. God has placed them in authority over you, in order that you may honor your Creator Himself in honoring them. To the fulfilment of this commandment a promise is attached: 'that thou mayest be long-lived in the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee.' The same promise is repeated in another part of the Bible in these words—'He that honoreth his father shall enjoy a long life'; and again, 'He that honoreth his mother is as one that layeth up a treasure' (Eccles., chap. 3).

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has left you an example of how you should observe this commandment, for He was obedient for many long years to Mary and Joseph. As the Eternal Father has recompensed His Son's humility and obedience by exalting Him and giving Him a Name that is above all names, so He will reward you when you obey your parents and strive manfully to observe all the precepts of His holy law. No doubt, when you grow older you will desire to have much of your own way; but be determined always to keep every kind of badness out of your heart. You will succeed in this fight against evil if you follow the advice of your father and mother, who love you dearly and seek to preserve you from injury and sorrow.

Throughout all the ages of the world, the noblest and wisest men were distinguished for the honor they gave their parents and for their obedience to the restraint of duty and of law; and we should be desirous to be of their company rather than be reckoned among fools and criminals. The Holy Scripture says: 'Cursed is he that honoreth not his father and mother' (Deut. 27. 16).

It is related in the life of Sir Thomas More, Lord

High Chancellor of England, that even in the day of his greatest influence and power, he never left his house without asking on his knees the blessing of his aged father.

The mother of Pope Benedict XI. was the wife of a poor shepherd, and when she went to Rome to visit her son, the Supreme Pontiff, she wore her usual humble dress. As soon as she appeared in his presence, the Pope left his throne and court and embraced her with tears of affection, saying: 'There is no one can love his mother more than I do mine.' Ought not this beautiful and edifying fact show us that we should never be ashamed of our parents, no matter how lowly is their condition, but should always respect and love them.

Once in a certain city in Syria which a Mahomedan ruler governed, a Christian young man had lodged his father in the best room on the first floor of his house, but he afterwards deprived him of it and made him go down stairs to live. The governor, hearing what he had done, summoned him to appear in his presence, and said: 'What is your religion?' 'I am a Christian,' replied the young man. 'Make the Sign of the Cross.' The young man obeyed. 'What do you say when you make it?' 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.' 'When you name the Father, you touch your forehead; when you name the Son you touch your breast, that is, you place the Father above and the Son below. Now, my man, you must put your father above in your house, and do you, the son, go below, or I shall certainly cut off your head.' The young man hastened to restore the best room to his father, and ever after showed him all due honor and affection. You must not, of course, gather from this anecdote that the Eternal Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, is inferior to the Father, the First Person, for the Three Divine Persons of the adorable Trinity are equal in all things.

You are aware, no doubt, that if any one in authority—parent, or magistrate, or king—wished you to do what is forbidden by the Divine law, you should not obey, and in such a case you must answer, like the Apostles when they were told not to preach the Gospel, 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'

A young boy was preparing for his First Communion, whose family did not keep the law of the Church regarding abstinence from meat on Friday. When the boy learned that he should abstain on Friday, he refused to eat meat on that day, and his father put him in prison, saying that he was to get no food till he had consented to eat meat. During the father's absence, the mother carried to her son something to eat. But the boy would not touch it. He said: 'My father is punishing me for refusing to disobey the Church, and he commands me to do without food: this command of his I can obey without sin, and that is why I will not eat.' When the father heard of this reply, he was touched and he reflected on it, with the result that he and his wife were converted and became good practical Christians.

As this instruction is the last I shall give you, allow me to add that what I have said of the noble virtue, Obedience, may be said also of all other virtues, namely, that they will give you an upright, strong character, capable of resisting temptation and of enabling you to live a praiseworthy life, with the help of God's grace, to the end of your days. All who love you wish to see you good now, that you may be good also when you are grown up. Therefore, I am sure that you will do your best to prize and practise humility, truthfulness, self-denial, and modesty. Let it be your care and pleasure to keep all the commandments of the Divine law, to go to Mass and often receive Holy Communion, and to have true devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to our Lady, St. Joseph, and the Angels, especially to the beautiful Spirit who is your Guardian. Thus you will enjoy the testimony of a good conscience, you will live a happy life, and, dying a holy death, you will at last win the Kingdom of Heaven.