

# A MOTHER AND MYSTIC AT HOME

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Let me warn you at once that this is the story of an unconventional heroine—a woman who breaks not one, but all the rules of our present-day code of romance; the code, that is, of film-land and ninety per cent. of novels.

"Elisabeth Charles" had only one husband. She was faithful to him. She bore him ten children. She remained at home and looked after it well. Often she had to cook, wash, mend, and rear her children without any domestic help. And this practical, busy, Catholic French mother was a very holy woman, a mystic. Elisabeth Charles (the only name by which the world knows her), had little time for prayer, yet she contrived to make her life an endless prayer. This she did by keeping a spiritual journal. She wrote her prayers because she found it the only means of surmounting the thousand-and-one distractions and cares of a busy mother. While minding the children, and, often, with a baby on her lap, she wrote to God. These precious pages were, she tells us, written hastily, and by a hand more accustomed to cooking than to holding a pen. Later, under obedience, they became a book, published under the simple title of *A Mother's Journal*.

"At twenty," writes Elisabeth Charles, "we dream great dreams, but how often they remain unrealized. Life goes on, and we come to know suffering, sometimes so terrible, that we are tempted to rebel. The Cross seems too heavy for us; nevertheless we must accept it, and if we cannot carry it, let us at least draw it courageously. Little by little, the great weight will grow lighter, we shall be able to raise it to our shoulder, and end by clasping it to our hearts. Then we feel like a traveller who has wandered for a long time in a dark valley until, having at last climbed a great hill, we are lost in contemplation of a beautiful panorama spread before our eyes. I am that traveller. I found happiness through suffering. But I had to search for it a long time."

. . . At the end of her foreword, Elisabeth Charles writes: "O Mary, giver of peace, I dedicate these pages to you. Offer them to your Divine Son, and with them, all the tears that have fallen upon them; ask Him to bless them, and to use them for His glory."

The *Journal* was first published in 1927, and in a few months the entire edition was sold out; the author had not even a copy to leave her children. Another edition appeared in a few months and that too was quickly sold out. A year later, for the third edition, the author contributed a brief preface in which she tells us "To allow the publication of the *Journal* has cost me a good deal of suffering. I did it, however, in obedience, and God has blessed my sacrifice; I have received many letters, some of them so touching they made me weep. My dream of making God loved has been realized."

From the very first page, Elisabeth Charles is graciously at home to us and we are at home with her. Meeting us at the threshold, with a child in her arms, she admits us at once to her hearth and home; more than that, she allows us to enter the inner sanctities of her heart. We have no desire to gnaw at the secret of her identity. From the first page we have forgotten that it is a secret, for we have become immersed in the fascinating story of a soul. We see her children "as olive plants round about her table." We may stoop with her over the cot of a sleeping child. When her infant is brought home from the Baptismal font and placed in her arms, we see her bow her head and whisper: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, before this new little dwelling of the Blessed Trinity; and later we shall be with her when, a veritable *mater dolorosa*, she stands at the open grave of her child.

As a child, she had a great desire to love God as much as it was possible to love Him, but beyond this desire, she had no devotion and prayed very little. She tells us: "I prayed more or less badly and was always distracted." . . . She did not like long prayers or offices. She did not like going to Vespers, and often slept through them on hot Sunday afternoons in summer. When, however, she wished to obtain some special grace or other intention, "which was pretty often," she would go to a quiet corner of the house, or run away to the end of the garden and there, with arms outstretched in the form of a cross, she would say a few short but very fervent prayers; her only devotion was the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. Humbly she tells us "I had the desire to love God, but alas, I gave Him very little proof of this love." Then, late one evening, when she was about seventeen, she was thinking of a friend whom she loved very much when, suddenly, it was revealed to her that God was a "Person" who claimed her thoughts and heart, as if

"Someone" was making her see how far she was from giving Him a place in her heart as she was giving her friend.

So disturbed was she by this strange experience, that, although already in bed, and sharing a room with her elder sister, she got up and went to the window where she remained for a long time looking at the sea. (House and garden were immediately over the sea, so that when one was in bed it was as though one were on board ship.) The wind had risen and high seas were running against the rocks below. Elisabeth was glad that all nature was disturbed as though it shared this new and frightening agitation in her own soul. "I had understood what the love of God could mean, and it terrified me." The fear did not last, and gave place to a great desire to be better. Before she slept she asked God to help her, and promised to love Him more. In spite of herself, however, she remained, she tells us, "for a long time all too indifferent until, one morning after Holy Communion, God revealed Himself present in me with all the vividness of the earlier occasion, making me realize what a small place I was giving Him in my heart." From that moment there was no more failure to respond to grace. Henceforth, her fidelity would be marked by the high and generous courage that meets us on the very first page of her Journal.

### **Nothing Impossible to a Brave Heart**

"When we are writing to a friend, distance seems to disappear. In thought and heart we draw near to the one addressed. O Jesus, in all the distractions of my life, as mother of a large family, I find it difficult to remain united to you.

"To help this union I shall try to make, as often as possible, a sort of written prayer. And as I have such a bad memory I shall make notes also of my resolutions.

"At eighteen, I took for my motto: 'Nothing is impossible to a brave heart.' I have kept it always.

"It should not be impossible—even for an over-worked mother of a family—to live united with God. So, I shall write in order to remain thus united with God. Near Him I shall find my healing, strength, and rest, for 'virtue went out from Him and healed all.'

"We are poor weak creatures, always so eager for human happiness. O my God, You alone can enable us to carry our Cross. You alone can make us love it and welcome it as the labourer welcomes work and hardship, knowing that the harvest time will come.

"In order to carry our Cross courageously we must have high and holy ambitions. We must understand that God, in leading us by painful paths, is giving us a special mark of His love in thus uniting us with Himself. 'The servant is not above his Master.'

"This morning I felt very discouraged, and could not see that suffering serves any useful purpose. Then, X's letter telling me of the great grace she hopes to obtain, and asking me to offer my prayers and sufferings for that intention, made me see the meaning of it all. I am happy now knowing that I hold in my hands the means of obtaining such great favours from God."

### **Contemplatives Are Practical People**

"Why should my potatoes be less well peeled if, while doing them, I remain in adoration before Thee, O my God." . . . So prays Elisabeth in her kitchen. How surprised many of us were when we first learned that contemplatives are the most practical people on earth. Had we thought of them at all, it was figuratively as of some strange, not to say queer, beings maintaining uneasy poise somewhere over the rooftops and under the stars. And when we read of Teresa of Avila, or heard a sermon, our eyes were opened and we began to discover something of the fecundity of contemplation. This fecundity is exemplified in the life of Elisabeth Charles. After God, the love of husband, children, and home making up her life's vocation; but, always, God is first. In Him she lives and moves and has her being, and as her love for Him deepens, so too, zeal and alertness grow in vital intensity for all that concerns her loved ones, spiritually and temporarily.

"Yesterday morning after Holy Communion, more perfectly than ever I felt Jesus within me. I had a definite consciousness of the presence of God. I shall never forget my emotion. What happiness I enjoyed in the possession of Jesus, contemplating with my whole being.

"When I left the church, it seemed as though I saw everything in a new light. For me, there was no longer anything

in the world but God. You, O my God, dominating all, creation and creatures. . . . No longer have I any other desire than to love You and to make You loved. Nothing can henceforth separate me from Thee, O my God. In this union, which seems unchangeable, I feel an increase of love for my dear ones. That they may love Thee, that we all may love Thee with a love that will grow more and more perfect." . . . She prays, too, for courage never to omit a reprimand through fear of being less well loved by anyone in her charge. After Holy Communion, so great was her joy in bringing God back with her into the midst of her family that sometimes she could hardly restrain her tears; but at the same time, she would ask Our Lord not to allow her to become too quickly absorbed in material cares and the desires of the heart. "Forgive me, O my God, and help me to do better, so that no hour will pass without making an act of love. Doing my housework, whether in the kitchen, or sewing, my whole being can be turned to Thee in adoration." Someone has defined adoration as love in ecstasy.

Her living love of Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist made her sensitive about everything concerning the Blessed Sacrament and the Tabernacle. "There are," she writes, "several ways of turning a key in a lock. If one is in a hurry one turns it quickly, abruptly. On the other hand, if one is leaving a loved one, one turns it slowly, showing one's regret. I do not like to hear the key of the Tabernacle turned abruptly. It jars upon my heart. When I see the little door being closed I feel sorry that I cannot enclose my heart near Jesus. For me, that little door is a magnet! When I leave the church, it draws me back again and, if I am alone, I send Him a kiss. In these moments it seems to me that Jesus Himself, in order to console me for being unable to remain always near His Tabernacle, whispers in my ear: 'If anyone love me, my Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him.' I believe in these words as one believes in something that one has experienced. Since God loves me, it does not surprise me that He is in me. Does not human love seek to unite its life, to give its life to those whom it loves? Does not Jesus love us with a maternal love, and what does a mother wish if not to be always with her children? If they are separated she would like to be able to divide herself in order to be with each one of them. If Jesus wishes to dwell in each one of us it is because He knows how we benefit by being united to Him, and what joy it brings to those who understand 'the gift of God.'"

She was never afraid that the noise of the children, or her household duties, would make her lose Jesus. Experience had taught her to find Him in the duty of the moment, were it ever so humble. "One finds God," she tells us, "more perfectly with a sweeping brush in hands if it is the time for housework, then with hands joined if it is not the time for prayer." . . .

Should any of us still think of this modern mystic and mother as living in the clouds, the following prayer of hers should dispel the notion:

"Today has been sad, very sad. O my God, help me to know how to economize. Give me strength so that I shall be able to work even harder in order to economize. Nevertheless, help me to work without feverish anxiety, so that I may pass the time in contemplation while working, entrusting myself to and relying on the bounty and Providence of God. In the Gospel, Jesus says to us: 'Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them.'

. . . "Wistfully she continues: "I have neither cellar nor barn, I have only what is given to me, and it is not always sufficient. Trusting in God, however, I shall remain in peace, even giving alms every time I think it my duty to give, without worrying too much about tomorrow. Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth; where the rust and the moth consume and where thieves break through and steal. Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven. . . ."

### **Contrast and Contradiction**

Pondering this story of sane and simple Christian living, and Christian motherhood, one cannot but be startled by the contrast and contradiction it offers to so much that is common in our times: mass murder of the unborn; shirking parents, illegitimate parents; and now, if the latest excursion into the abuse of science succeeds—anti-natural maternity. As recently as yesterday, a French newspaper carried an account of this, compared with which the crimes of Sodom and Gomorrah are less revolting. Turning from it to the pages of Elisabeth's Journal is like running from a dark and foul dungeon out into God's fresh air and sunlight:

"Once more I am about to become a mother. O my God, I am so happy, but I cannot say this to anyone but You! Having eight children already, and no servant, and being so tired, some might look upon my joy as foolishness!

"It is for You that I wish to have this child. 'Increase and multiply. Your children who are to be Mine in Heaven, can never be too numerous on earth.' More than ever, I wish to sanctify my life—a life of union with Jesus and Mary, so that I might store up treasures of grace for the day of my child's Baptism, which will be a source of joy for Thee, O God.

"The better to realize my vocation, I hunger and thirst for Thee, O Jesus. 'He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, shall live by Me, as I live by the Father. I am the Vine, and you the branches; he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing.' What happiness to be able to give God another soul to love Him! For this happiness I ignore the sufferings and fatigue of these months of waiting."

Elisabeth Charles often smiled on hearing the children say, "Mother said it." In her preface, she tells us that she is sure she will smile in Heaven whenever they say, "Mother wrote it." . . . Would she, we wonder, smile at this world of today, as we know it? On all sides we hear it is "a man's world," and, evidently, what is meant by these few words is that it is a man's world to destroy! Drunk with the power of his discoveries, he shouts exultingly at us that two—only two atomic bombs "properly handled" ( I ) will destroy five hundred thousand lives in a certain number of minutes. No wonder if, hearing him, Elisabeth would smile in Heaven. We can be sure that she would smile, and would want to infuse into us some of her heavenly confidence. We can imagine her reminding us that "Jesus stood in the midst and said to them Peace be to you. . . . And did He not also say: In the world you shall have distress. But have confidence. I have overcome the world."

### **Charity Is Discreet**

After the publication of the first edition of her Journal, Elisabeth Charles received a great number of letters of appreciation and gratitude for the help obtained from the book. Some of her correspondents— who had, perhaps, expected merely secular biography—regretted that because of her obvious care to shield others concerned she had not revealed more about her sufferings. Unfortunately, such criticism shows that these readers had missed a good deal of the meaning and message of Elisabeth's writings. It is not a biography in the usual meaning of the word, but, rather, an intimate spiritual journal. We know nothing of when she was born, nor in what part of France she lived or died. Of her temporal affairs, her joys and griefs of family life, nothing is disclosed save what must be mentioned as an intrinsic part of her writing. In this it resembles closely an earlier work, also from the pen of a French woman, a mother of five children, and a mystic—the Journal of Lucie Christine. Of her, however, we know that she died in 1908, at the age of 39. The Journals of both women were published solely for the lessons of holiness they contain. The writers are known to us only for their love of God, love of suffering and zeal for the salvation of souls. Their spiritual testaments were permitted by Divine Providence to be given to us for our encouragement and inspiration.

Elisabeth's reply to her critics—conveyed in a note written for a later edition—was tersely expressed in less than two lines:

"Charity is discreet. The more ardent it is the more discreet it should be."

And so we find her fervently praying for charity; begging God to help her not to fail in being kind and agreeable to everyone; not to speak without reflecting on what she was going to say; to be mindful of those who were listening to her as some things ought not be spoken of when children were present. She could not understand the mentality of people who think that charity begins and ends with giving a coin to the poor. Charity—her love of God—infused every thought, word and action of her daily life. For charity she kept silence, she smiled heroically though cut to the heart, and bestowed the kiss that was undeserved. For her, one who lives in charity lives in God and God in him. He is happy in spite of tribulation; his happiness communicates itself to others so that he radiates joy around him. One who abides in love possesses the secret of charity. Charity is gracious, and graciousness attracts and charms. Charity thinks no evil, it does not criticise. Charity bears all, forgetting self entirely. The house of one who thus loves possesses joy and peace. "O my God," she prays, "help me to put this joy into the hearts of all my children."

Of alms-giving she writes: "The rich should give generously in charity. God has given to them in abundance only that they in turn may help the poor. Take care that we do not slip down the slope whither luxury can so easily carry us away. Let us think of those who are morally depressed through want of the necessaries of life. We should never waste anything, and give as much charity as we possibly can; it is part of our apostolate. . . . Christ is living in the poor, the

abandoned, and the suffering. In consoling them we are consoling Jesus. O my beloved children I would like to see your hearts overflowing with charity. Christ is Charity. Give your time to the poor. Give from your hearts. Deprive yourselves for your neighbour's sake. Bestow your money generously, whenever you do so for the love of God you will enjoy real happiness. Happiness is a state of soul, and one who forgets himself for his brothers finds happiness far more easily than selfish people ever do."

Loving the virtue of patience, and to train the children in its practice, she strove—sometimes not without a struggle—to become a living example of It. She loved the beautiful saying of St. Catherine of Siena: "Patience conquers all and remains a lady," pointing out its truth and loveliness to them. Elisabeth saw impatience as a vulgar thing, bringing discord even into the harmony of one's appearance. In the interior life, she saw it as a false note struck in the soul, and taught the children to master themselves, to conquer and forget themselves, to try always to be good-humoured in spite of life's daily contradictions. For herself, she sought her strength in prayer, begging grace to be patient, kind and gentle to all, help to relinquish all useless pleasures; help to fight against herself as often as necessary so that she might prove her love for God and merit new graces for all.

On every other page of her Journal we find ample proof of her fidelity to this ideal. But we do more than that, for we are privileged in this spiritual Journal to glimpse the inner sanctuary of her soul, and follow her to the source and fount of all her super-human constancy—her prayer. For her, meditation was no nebulous day-dream. In her prayer we find her at grips with what she calls "the realities of life," of her state and vocation, the needs of her dear ones, the hidden stress and torment of temptation. Witnessing her sometimes difficult struggle for the conquest of self, emotion is stirred and we feel that such pages ought to be read kneeling.

"My God, I am weeping and cannot overcome my sufferings. Help me, come to my aid! I am terribly worried and afraid of the future. I cannot make up my mind what to say or do. I am suffering because of my selfishness and indifference. O my God, have mercy on me! This morning You nourished me with Yourself. Would that I could forget all earthly happiness so that I should see and feel only Thee. But, alas! I am suffering intensely, and today I cannot control my tears. O my God, You Who read our hearts, can see that my tears are shed without bitterness. . . . And may not our tears become a cleansing water? Let my tears efface everything in me that could displease You. Let them cleanse me of all my weakness and imperfections, and not only for myself but for all my dear ones. May they merit all the graces we need.

"I want to write the resolutions I made this morning so that they may root themselves more firmly in me. Grant, O my God, that I may not become discouraged in temptation. Since my will firmly wishes to belong to You, I remain calm, reminding myself that temptations bravely resisted are a means of increasing merit for Heaven. This suffering offered to God increases our credit with Him. Just now, especially, when I have so many graces to purchase, help me, O my God, to use all for Thy joy and glory. I implore You not to let me succumb to temptation!

"There are words and actions that affect the heart like a wound. One grows faint, and feels one's very life slipping away. It is then that Satan, always on the alert, makes use of our sufferings and our need of affection. One must repulse him without giving him a moment's thought. O my Saviour, I love You too much to offend You!"

We know that much of her Journal was written while minding the children, often with a baby on her lap. The noise of the children playing never caused her distraction. For her living faith, it was only a matter of turning to Jesus to find Him and plead with Him about the need of the moment. The following lines might have been taken from the Gospels, so vividly do they remind us of the quiet but insistent voice of the Samaritan woman:

"While waiting for baby to wake, in the quiet and silence, O Jesus, I come to spend a little while with You, imploring You that those whom I love may love You also. How can I live with the thought, the knowledge that among my own there are some who do not love Thee? When You were on earth the lame, the blind, the deaf and the paralytic were brought to You and You healed all. I bring You now my loved ones who do not love You, placing them close to You, close to your wounded Heart, so that its flowing blood may fall on them. Those who touched the hem of Your garment were cured; You heard the prayer of Jairus; to the widow of Naim You gave back her only son. I, too, am weeping for my dear ones. Command them to rise, to make the effort to raise themselves and go to Thee. I am not content to pray and weep, I must also merit for them. O Jesus, since You are so good, so just, I would act in such a way that You will find it impossible not to hear my prayer. I shall mortify myself and sacrifice myself to save the

souls of my loved ones who do not love You. I must go now for Baby is beginning to cry and the older children are coming in from their walk." . . .

Humility is truth. Elisabeth does not exaggerate her suffering and neither does she minimize it; and again we find her battling with realities:

"It is night and everyone is asleep. To console myself, I shall write for a little while.

"Man shall attach himself to his spouse and they shall be two in one flesh,' pondering these words, my mind sees, as in a dream, the man and woman, affectionate, loving, seeking each other, exchanging their thoughts, leaning over the cradle of their children, always mutually ready to excuse and forgive. . . . Immersed in this reverie, my eyes are slowly filling with tears. Love should always be so beautiful, so gracious . . . but, too, how fragile it is, and how little is sufficient—I shall not say to destroy, for Christian love, living always in God, cannot perish—to make it sometimes lose its charm and sweetness, and instead of the heart expanding one sees it broken, and all because of sensitiveness, abruptness, and mutual misunderstanding. . . . I wept, seeking You, O Jesus, in the silence of the night, and in the silence of my heart I found You. You ask me to accept all for love of You; You have made me understand the anguish of your own heart. So many of your children are repudiating You. You said to me: 'Will you console Me? then accept everything, love in spite of all. In thus loving you will give Me. In giving yourself you will communicate Me. I Who see all, see you bestowing the kiss that is undeserved but given for love of Me. What matter human joys if you are saving souls. Ask Me to console you and I shall come.'

"You have come, O my Jesus, my tears are still flowing, but they are tears of joy. In a flash I see again my miserable evening, but, nevertheless, I am now in peace, happy. . . . Jesus is letting me realize His presence in me." . . . It is not difficult to imagine the light of heroism shining in her eyes as she lifts her tearstained face and prays: My soul doth magnify the Lord, and My spirit hath rejoiced in God, My Saviour. . . .

### **Fortitude and Confidence**

Elisabeth Charles awaited the coming of her ninth child with as much joyful anticipation as if it had been her first. The days went quickly in the constant routine of daily duties and active preparation. She was without a servant and tasks were greatly increased by the home-coming of the elder children for the Easter holidays. Sometimes, under the stress of the ceaseless round of work, a cry would go up from her heart: "My God, have mercy on me, You see all my difficulties. You see my physical and moral sufferings. Have pity on me, help me!" But in spite of this surface anxiety the depths of her soul were full of fortitude and confidence, and she would regain peace as soon as she abandoned herself to the goodness of God:

"How right I was to have such confidence! The holidays went off perfectly, and without a servant. God gave me better health and such courage that I was well able for all the work."

Sometimes, in spite of herself, the thought of this birth troubled her. The thought of death would come and she felt afraid: "Why should I be afraid of death?" she writes, "God is infinite goodness itself. I trust Him entirely. This thought brings back peace immediately. Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to Thy word; Joyously I serve you, O my God!"

For three months nothing more is written in the Journal, and then it tells us that Elisabeth is once more the mother of a boy. The birth was premature, and she had been very ill. During the long days of inactivity, suffering, and solitude, she lived with God, relying on Him, confiding in Him, while her baby slept beside her in his cot. He had to be baptized immediately after birth, and when his mother held him in her arms she was as happy as if she held the Infant Jesus. But a shadow soon crept into her joy. Her baby began to have difficulty in breathing, and to his mother he appeared to make only very slow progress.

A whole month passed before the Journal is opened again. The flood-gates of grief are lifted and who can read it unmoved:

"My baby is dead. He died on Friday, August 20th, about six o'clock in the evening. My God have pity on me! Oh what I endured during those two days and nights, watching beside him all the time and seeing his life go, little by little!

"During the nine months of waiting, often I said to Our Lord: 'You are dwelling in me, and so near my child.

Shower your blessings on him. Set on him the seal of Your elect. Make him beautiful even in body, and grant that he will live only for Your glory.' And now, in two months he is dead! Sometimes I waver, but as soon as I say a Credo I feel better again. . . . My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me, nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done.

"Since Sunday, the 22nd of August, I never saw my darling again. I took him from his cot, clasping him close in my arms in a last long embrace. Then I put him into his father's arms, and as soon as he laid him in his coffin I fled to hide my grief. . . . His little body was so supple and beautiful that it seemed as though they put him into his coffin alive. O my Jesus, have pity on me!"

In the weeks that followed, although numbed with sorrow and feeling abandoned and without strength, Elisabeth never once attempted to rebel against her cross, or give voice or thought to bitterness. Meditating on her sorrow, it was brought home to her that while her child lived she had wanted to make him a saint, and to give him a great love of the Cross.

. . . Thus she had prayed for him, and now the prayer had become her own. "O victory of the Cross," she exclaims, "Sweet Cross of my Saviour, you have consoled me. That which I had hoped to do for my little one, You have done for me, O my God. You have taught me to love the Cross."

But it was not all shadow. Her joy in her children shone through her trials like the sun's rays slanting down a cloudy evening sky. As they grew, they quickly learned to help with the household tasks, and sometimes we find them singing in the kitchen while wiping up the ware. Many years were to pass before they learned that in that same kitchen their mother had been wrapped in ecstasy. Many of her pages record the droll sayings of the younger ones. On their First Communion days her joy was intense, so was it too, on days when five or six of them would receive Holy Communion with her. Sometimes there would be an affectionate "battle" between Elisabeth and her elder daughters in their efforts to take over some of her housekeeping so that she might rest more. "No, no," she would demur, "you must let me do it, it's so good for the circulation." "Oh yes," teased her daughters, "we must let Mamma go on killing herself—it's so good for the circulation!"

For Elisabeth, good humour inspired by a supernatural motive was a virtue, and as such she forced herself to practise it. Good humour, she tells us, gives edification and to edify by Christian amiability is to spread the sweetness of Christ around us. Good humour is the visible expression of our love of God, a love that will lead us to renounce ourselves completely and make us love all for Him.

The things of God seem to be little understood by the world, nevertheless the world is quick to see and quick to judge. It judges by externals. She readily admitted that to be always good-tempered requires no small spirit of sacrifice and love of suffering. One must school oneself to accept little contradictions with a smile so that we may be ready to face even great suffering and to do so the depths of our heart must be rooted in the love of God.

Elisabeth found the virtue of discretion sometimes difficult to practise and courageously forced herself to do so, seeking as usual, her help in prayer. Meditating on the Passion, on the silence of Jesus before His accusers, judges, and tormentors, "give me grace, O my God," she pleads, "to know how to practise this silence, give me grace to hold my tongue." . . . Discretion, she tells us, gives us peace, bears witness to our wisdom and reveals the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. To practise it we must remain closely united to Jesus, clinging to Him whenever we are in danger of losing our peace.

Thus through the years. Through joy, sorrow, days of peace and days of courageous struggle, we follow Elisabeth through the story of her soul. No one has read so far without learning the secret of her constancy. She was steadfast in prayer.

As an example of her perseverance in prayer, we have the following incident: A serious crisis arose about the boys' education. Her husband would not agree about her choice of a school and met her suggestion with a blunt refusal, "I shall never consent to it—never"; he exclaimed. Knowing that to prolong such a discussion often only increases obstinacy, Elisabeth said no more. A whole year must pass before the issue would have to be decided and she resolved to make it a year of fervent, persevering petition to Our Lady. Every day, she recited the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, asking that she would obtain her request without further argument. Sometimes, tired out after her day, the Litany would have to be said in bed. One night she fell asleep without saying it, but woke before midnight and finished her

prayer before the hour struck.

At last the day arrived upon which she must know the final decision. With an air of detachment, and while playing with one of the younger children, she said quietly: "Well what are we going to do about the boys?" "It shall be as you wish it," was the answer. An answer that to Elisabeth was nothing short of a miracle. Writing of it fifteen years later, she still could feel how her heart had almost broken with joy.

### **Her Marriage and Her Mass**

Slowly, and clearly, from her writings, the pattern of the spiritual life of Elisabeth Charles has been revealed to us. We see her as a woman whose married life began and remained in unbroken union with her Nuptial Mass. For her, that Mass had never ended. It began many years ago on that morning when as a young woman robed and veiled in white she had entered upon her new life. In that sacred hour, the Church, promising her defence and protection, had prayed that there may be upon her a yoke of charity and peace; faithful and chaste may she marry in Christ. . . . For the rest of her life, except through illness, she had never missed daily Mass or Holy Communion. "Through Him, and with Him, and in Him," she had lived each day in the spirit of the Church's prayer for her: An imitator of holy women . . . pleasing to her husband, like Rachel; prudent like Rebecca; . . . faithful like Sara . . . constant to the Faith and Commandments . . . protecting her weakness by the strength of discipline. . . .

And when, for ten years, she suffered and prayed for her husband's return to the Church, in her Nuptial Mass her anguish had become one with the Victim, pure, holy, immaculate . . . sealed for ever; married in Christ.

"How sweet it is to be a mother, to bring up children according to the beautiful meaning of the words, 'bring up,' to raise up to God."

When first written, these words were meant for the eyes of God alone. Outside the walls of her own home, the apostolate of Elisabeth Charles was essentially a hidden one. The words Wife and Mother summed up the total of her vocation. Since the publication of her Journal, however, an extraordinary thing has happened. She is no longer the mother of ten children only, but of a countless race of women throughout the world, wherever her story is read and understood. She is an emblem of the spiritual motherhood of all women, and of the terrible power of every woman on earth to beget, bear, and bring forth souls unto an eternity of Heaven or Hell. Drawing near to her, we feel the warmth of her great heart that burns itself, a perpetual lamp before the indestructible sanctuary of Christian marriage.

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WILLIAM M. COLLINS,  
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