

THE IMITATION OF MARY



IN FOUR BOOKS

BY

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PREFACE

NO sooner had the incomparable *Imitation of Christ* appeared than the faithful began spontaneously to wish for an *Imitation of Mary* that might be set beside Kempis' great work. Finally, a sixteenth-century Spanish Jesuit, Francisco Arias, published a little book entitled *The Imitation of Our Lady* (Valencia, 1588), and it seemed that the prayers of many devout souls had been answered. But the work was not what they were waiting for. It was a short pamphlet of twelve chapters that dealt in a very general way with the virtues of Mary and was in no way comparable to the great book that had already won the name of "Fifth Gospel."

The book here translated, on the contrary, was indeed what devotees of Mary had been looking for. It was published in French in 1768 and did not bear its author's name. Italian translations of a later date did, however, have an author's name on the title page: the Abbé d'Hérouville. Who was the Abbé d'Hérouville, and how is the initial anonymity to be explained?

The author was in fact a French Jesuit, Alexandre Joseph de Rouville (born at Lyons in

1716). After the Society of Jesus had been suppressed by Pope Clement XIV in 1773, he took the name Abbé d'Hérouville, thus assimilating himself, as far as title went, to the secular clergy. But even before the suppression by the Pope, Louis XIV had expelled the Society of Jesus from France in 1764; for this reason when the *Imitation of Mary* was first published in 1768 it had to appear anonymously.

The book quickly won a wide readership in France and Belgium and was translated into many languages. The first Italian translation, for example, was published at Padua in 1772, only four years after the book first appeared.

In the *Imitation of Mary* the author follows the Blessed Virgin through the different mysteries and circumstances of her life, from her Immaculate Conception to her Assumption into heaven. At each point he reflects on her conduct and her sentiments, thus providing instructive insights which will help every Christian in the varying situations of his or her own life.

In order to hold the reader's attention the author varies the manner in which he presents his reflections. Sometimes he speaks to God, sometimes to Mary, sometimes to the reader; at times he reflects as though he were by himself in meditation, and very often he has the Blessed Virgin speak to her child, the reader.

The order provided by the mysteries of Mary is pursued through the first three books. The fourth takes a different approach, but the devotees of Mary will be pleased that the author here tries to sum up in a few chapters the various aspects of devotion to the Mother of God and the various helps for fostering, maintaining, and reviving the sentiments of respect, love, and trust which her children ought to have for her.

The reader will not judge this book as though its author were claiming to rival the perfection of his model, Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*; he professed, on the contrary, to be fully satisfied if only his book were not totally unlike its model. In fact, however, if we judge by the devotion and solid piety toward God and His Blessed Mother which fill these pages, we must say that author has not been unworthy of his more famous forerunner.



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BOOK 1

*Life and Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary
from Her Immaculate Conception
to the Birth of Jesus*

CHAPTER I

IMITATION OF THE VIRTUES OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

BLESSED those who do not abandon the way I have bidden them go! Blessed those who listen to what I tell them (Prov 8:32-33) and who follow the models of virtue I offer them.

In putting these words on the lips of Mary, the Church urges us to study the life of the Queen of Saints and to imitate her splendid example.

Happy the man who imitates our Lady, for in imitating her he imitates Jesus, king and incomparable model of all virtue.

The Blessed Virgin's life contains lessons for everyone. If we study it, we learn how to live in prosperity and adversity, prayer and work, honors and humiliations.

We shall never attain the perfection she brought to every action; but our perfection can be measured by our closeness to her.



MARRIAGE OF MARY AND JOSEPH

When Mary was about sixteen years old, she married a young carpenter named Joseph. They both took a vow of virginity in the married state.



BOOK 2

*Life and Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary
from the Birth of Her Divine Son, Jesus,
to His Death*

CHAPTER I

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

The Believer

HOLY Virgin, I love to think of the deep peace that filled your soul in the stable at Bethlehem where Jesus was born.

Even the scornful refusals you met with as you sought for lodging could not lessen that peace.

The Queen of the angels was glad to be surrounded by poor shepherds, and the Mother of the Lord of time felt glad that she was left in a stable to face the severe weather of that harsh time of year. In that stable, Mary, you were infinitely more content with your great poverty than the rich of Bethlehem were with their wealth.