

CHAPTER XIII

Calumny And Rash Judgement

Translated From The French By MRS. J. Sadlier.
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IV. - ON CALUMNY.

369. The Book Stolen by its Owner. - The black venom of calumny never glides into hearts save those that are gnawed by envy; the holiest states are not always sheltered from it. I have read, in the Lives of the Fathers of the Desert, that St. Paphnucius, a solitary in the desert of Scete, not far from Alexandria, in Egypt, could not escape the shafts of malice. His virtue was so admirable, so perfect, even in his early age, that a solitary, already old, was jealous of it. This was a wicked man, who had nothing of the monk but the habit, and who was tolerated from pure charity. To destroy the reputation of St. Paphnucius, he conceived the following shameful project: One Sunday, whilst the people were going to Mass, this unhappy man introduced himself stealthily into the cell of St. Paphnucius with his prayer-book, which he hid under some mats, heaped in a corner, and went to church with the others, as though he had a very quiet conscience. After Mass, availing himself of the moment when the solitaries were still there, he complained to the Abbot Isidore, who was the priest of that desert, saying that some one had gone into his cell and taken away his book. This accusation threw every one into a stupor of astonishment and indignation, for such things had never been heard of amongst those holy religious. The wretched plotter, profiting by this circumstance, besought St. Isidore to send some brothers to make a search in all the cells, and to forbid any one to go out until they returned. Three were chosen, and immediately went to institute the search; they searched every cell, and, of course, found the book in that of St. Paphnucius. Every one was greatly surprised and afflicted at this sad result; it was only the wicked solitary who had the heart to rejoice. As for the saint calumniated, his humility closed his mouth; he allowed himself to be accused, said not a word to justify himself, and accepted the penance imposed upon him. That lasted about fifteen days; but, at the end of that time, God himself took up the defence of His servant in a miraculous manner: He permitted the calumniator to be possessed by the devil. The unhappy man did his best to free himself from the evil spirit, and for that purpose made application to the holiest monks of the desert of Scete; but no one could cure him. That glory was reserved for him whom he had not been ashamed to represent as a robber; yes, dear friends, this calumniator, this envious man came humbly to throw himself at the feet of Paphnucius, and there, in presence of all the solitaries, confessed the infamous means he had employed to ruin his reputation. After this humiliating confession, he besought the Saint to deliver him from the demon, and Paphnucius, returning good for evil, knelt down, and had no difficulty in obtaining from God what he had already merited by his patience and his charity. - CASSIAN, Conferences, XVIII.

370. A Saint Dying Under Interdict. - There are few Saints, my young friends, who have not been the victims of calumny, and that is easily understood. The malice of their enemies being unable to discover anything blameable in their conduct, invented calumnies concerning them and sought to

circulate them. One of them who had most to suffer from that kind of persecution was the venerable Jean Baptiste de la Salle, (now canonized,) founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, as, I suppose, you are all aware. In 1719, that is to say, the last year of his life, when he lived in retirement at our house at Saint Yon, near Rouen, it was the will of God that he should be once more exposed to contradiction. The pastor of St. Sever, his parish, a virtuous priest animated by the best intentions, but deceived by evil reports and false appearances, conceived a very bad opinion of him. He succeeded in infusing similar suspicions into the mind of a vicar-general of Rouen, who, on his side, far from persuading the archbishop out of his prejudice against the holy founder, sought to envenom him still more. The result of all this calumny was very sad, for the archbishop of Rouen launched a rash interdict against the venerable De la Salle, took from him all the powers he had given him and forbade him thenceforward to exercise any of them in his diocese. It required a saint to see himself unjustly condemned only a little while before his death, and yet say nothing. But what was the consequence? It was this. The venerable De la Salle died on the 7th of April, 1719; well! he had scarcely breathed his last when God permitted that his very enemies, or rather those who had believed the calumnies against him, were the first to proclaim his innocence. The vicar-general, on hearing of his death, exclaimed - "He was a Saint! - he died a Saint!" As for M. du Jarrier-Bresnard, the pastor of St. Sever, he was so ashamed of the bad opinion he had of him, that he caused the reparation of it to be inscribed on the public register of his parish, where these words may still be seen: "He signalized and rendered himself commendable by the practice of every Christian virtue." - Abbe BLIN, Vie de M. de la Salle, II., 167.

371. Story of a Singular Ghost. - Of all calumnies disguised under false appearances of which there is any record, few have struck me so much as this one, from which you will see, children, that if God sometimes permits the calumniator to be believed, He never suffers his crime to go unpunished. A farmer of Southam, in Warwickshire, England, was murdered on his way home. On the following day, a man came to the farmer's wife, and asked if her husband had got home the evening before. "Alas! no," she replied, "and I assure you I am very uneasy about him." - "Your uneasiness, madam, can scarcely equal mine, and for this reason: Last night, as I lay awake in my bed, your husband appeared to me; he showed me several wounds he had received on his body, and told me positively that he had been murdered by such-a-one, and that his body had been thrown into a marl-pit situated at a certain place on the road." The woman, terribly alarmed by this sad disclosure, caused a search to be made. The marl-pit was discovered, and in it was found the dead body, bearing wounds in the places which had been pointed out. The person whom the ghost had accused was seized and delivered up to justice, as being strongly suspected of the murder. His trial took place in Warwick, and the jurors would have condemned him as rashly as the magistrate had ordered his arrest, if Lord Raymond, the principal judge, had not suspended the warrant. Addressing himself then to the jurors, he said: - "I think, gentlemen, you appear to give more weight to the testimony of a ghost than it deserves. I cannot say that I put much faith in such stories; but, however that may be, we have no right to follow our own inclinations in this matter. We form a court of justice, and must act according to law; now, I know of no law that admits, in justice, the testimony of a ghost. And even if there were any such, it seems to me only fit and proper that the ghost should appear here to make his deposition himself. Crier, call the accusing ghost." The crier called three different times, without the ghost appearing, as you may well suppose. "Gentlemen of the jury," continued the judge, "the prisoner at the bar is proved to be of unblemished reputation; it has not appeared, in the course of the trial, that there was any sort of quarrel between him and the deceased. I believe him innocent. As there is no proof against him, either direct or indirect, it seems to me that

he ought to be discharged. On the other side, from several circumstances that struck me during the trial, I strongly suspect the person who says he saw the ghost of being himself the murderer; hence it was not difficult for him to point out the position of the wounds, the marl-pit into which the body was thrown, etc. In consequence of these suspicions, I think it my duty to have him arrested, until further investigation takes place. Police, arrest such-a-one!" Hearing this address, so wise and so energetic, every one agreed that Lord Raymond was right. The accuser became the accused; a search was made in his house, where several articles were found belonging to the deceased. Finally, he himself confessed his crime, and was sentenced to death at the next assizes. - FILASSIER, Dict. d'Educ., II., 158.

372. The Blind Man of Nanterre. - Speaking of calumny, my dear friends, allow me to tell you a circumstance that occurred some years before the French Revolution. There was in Nanterre, - a large village, the birthplace of St. Genevieve, a short distance from Paris, - a poor blind man who was asking charity in the public square before the church. He had the misfortune, I know not well how, to displease a wicked woman who was engaged in business, that brought her once or twice a week from St. Germain to Paris. She vowed vengeance against the poor man. And for more than six months, she had the persevering wickedness to say, every place she went, that this blind man was unworthy of public pity. - "If you knew how matters stand with him," said she, "only fancy, - that man has a whole bag of silver that fell from a stage-coach, and by his begging he has actually become so rich that he owns a great portion of the rich plains around Nanterre; consequently, he takes from the real poor the alms that belong to them, and of which they have more need than he has." Little by little this absurd calumny spread abroad, and was believed. When the poor blind man approached stages or carriages he was shamefully driven away with harsh, cruel words. Then no more alms for the unfortunate man; for almost three months he scarcely received a farthing. He was reduced, therefore, to the greatest destitution, together with his wife who was sick in bed and four young children. Meanwhile the Mayor of Nanterre, who knew that this poor man did not own a foot of ground, was touched with his misfortune. He took the trouble of having notices posted up in various places, warning all persons passing through Nanterre that the stories told of the poor man were exposing himself and his family to die of hunger; that there was not a word of truth in what was said of him, and that it all came from the malice of a dealing woman from St. Germain-en-Laye, who came to Nanterre three or four times a week, etc. It took some time, my friends, to counteract the sad effects of this calumny; but finally the truth prevailed, and the poor blind man became again the object of public charity as before. - FILASSIER, Dict. d'Educ., II., 122.

373. The Poor Girl Justified. - Nothing is easier than to make use of the dangerous weapon called calumny to wound one's neighbour; but, my friends it is not so easy to repair the wrong when done. In a village of Prussia, the name of which I do not know, a very pious young person, known by the name of Matilda, was obliged to earn her living by going out to work by the day either at washing or sewing, or whatever she could get to do. Her virtue excited the envy of a person of her own age, who was inspired by the devil to ruin her reputation by calumnies the most atrocious. So persistently was this carried on that very soon the poor girl could obtain no more work; no one would even allow her into their house, and she was forced, at last, to beg her bread from door to door. All this took place in 1846. The following year there was a special jubilee, on the occasion of the accession of Pius IX to the pontifical throne. It was preached with so much zeal in the village of which I have spoken to you, dear friends, that the calumniator entered into herself and wished to repair, as far as possible, the evil she had done. One day the mayor of the village enters the cottage of the poor workwoman, then reduced to beggary, and says to her: "Matilda, I am commissioned to

repair the crying injustice that has been committed in your regard. You are a worthy girl, you have piety and virtue, but an envious neighbour of yours has spread reports very dangerous to you, and which it was wrong for us to believe. Come with me!" Matilda only half understanding what was meant, followed the mayor to the square in front of the church. What was her surprise to find there nearly all the inhabitants of the village, apparently waiting for her. On her approach they all clapped their hands, crying out, "Poor girl! who could have the heart to belie her as they did? Who could have believed anything bad of her?" The mayor conducted the young girl, more and more astonished, to the church door, and showed her in the glass box, where notices are usually posted, a letter written in large characters. It contained these words, which explained the whole mystery: "I, the undersigned, declare, by this present writing, that all I said in the village concerning the unhappy Matilda was a pure calumny, and had no foundation whatever. I retract it completely, and ask pardon for it of God and of all the inhabitants of this village. Signed, ANNE GEISEL." This public and solemn reparation produced the desired effect, as every one was then anxious to employ a person so trustworthy and so deserving of respect. - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist., III., 194.

V. - ON RASH JUDGEMENT.

374. The Viper that Bit St. Paul. - Here is another example of rash, unfounded judgement. Thousands of them might easily be found, my very dear friends, in the history of human errors. The following I take from the Acts of the Apostles, written by the Evangelist St. Luke. The Apostle St. Paul, accused by the hardened Jews of the Jerusalem Temple caste, demanded to be taken before the Emperor Nero himself; who was then at the head of the Roman Empire. On his voyage to Rome, the vessel was shipwrecked and went ashore on the coast of the island of Malta, which belonged to the Romans. Every one on board was so wet and cold that their first care was to make a great fire. St. Paul himself took up an armful of sticks and threw them on the fire. A viper coming out of the heat fastened on his hand. The inhabitants of the island, assembled in large numbers around the strangers, seeing the viper hanging from St. Paul's hand, said amongst themselves: "See, that man must be a murderer; he has escaped shipwreck, but divine justice pursues him; he is going to die before our eyes." St. Paul, not at all disturbed by this accident, contented himself with shaking off the viper into the fire, where it was burned; as to him, his arm did not swell, and no harm was done him. The barbarians, expecting to see him drop down dead, completely changed their minds concerning him; they had taken him for a criminal, but they ended by believing him a god. Many converts were made on the island of Malta before St Paul left the island. - Acts of the Apostles, Chap. XXVIII.(Page 485)

375. A Saint's Three Rash Judgements. - I think I have remarked, my young friends, that you are fond of hearing of the little trials and weaknesses of saints; doubtless, because you say to yourselves: "One may then, become a Saint, even with imperfections." Well! yes, my friends, and it is for that reason that I am going to tell you of the Abbot Maquette's three sins. He was a pious solitary who lived in Egypt, I think in the fourth century. During the first years of his solitary life he was guilty of three rash judgements. The first was having accused some of the brethren of impatience and immortification, because they had had recourse to physicians for tumours that came in their mouth. The second, having blamed others for making use of goat skin covers to sleep on or under instead of sleeping on the bare ground. The third was, having taxed some religious with vanity because they had blessed oil asked of them by pious persons who came to see them. - "To punish me for these sins," said the humble solitary, "God permitted that I should fall into the same faults. In fact, having an abscess in my mouth, I suffered so much that my superior ordered me to

consult the doctor; the same ailment obliged me to sleep under a cover; and, finally, some persons urged me so much that in order to get rid of them I gave them a phial of oil which I had blessed. So it was that I learned how wrong I was in judging and condemning my brethren. - RODRIGUEZ, Christian Perfection, I., 446.

376. Judge not and you shall not be judged. - You doubtless, remember, my good friends, those words of Our Lord: "Judge not, and you all shall not be judged." I remember a story relating to that. Anastatius, abbot of the celebrated monastery of St. Catherine, situated on Mount Sinai, relates it himself of one of his monks, who lived about the year 680. This monk appeared to be somewhat irregular in his conduct, for he often dispensed with the exercises of the community, so that he was in low repute amongst the brethren. He fell ill, and Abbot Anastatius went to see him. He expected to find him sad and penitent, on account of his disedifying life; but he was much surprised to see him gay and tranquil as saints are wont to be at the hour of their death. He was so scandalized at this that he could not help reproaching him with it: "How! brother, you who have led such an irregular life, do not tremble in the hour of death, at the moment when you are going to render an account of your life to the Supreme Judge." - "Excuse me, father, I am very easy on the score of my salvation, because God has deigned to send an angel to assure me of it. Although it is true that I took things easy, and often dispensed with the exercises of the community, either on account of my health, or even from tepidity, I bore patiently all the annoyances and all the reproaches to which I was subjected in consequence thereof; I heartily forgave all that, and I always put the best construction on what I saw others do; so that as I never judged others, I hope not to be judged myself." -- "Well, my dear brother, since that is the case, you may die in peace." And so, my friends, the monk died loaded with consolations, and with every mark of predestination.. Let us, then, never judge others, and we shall not be judged ourselves. - RODRIGUEZ, Christian Perfection, I., 447.

377. The Suspicions of Louis the Severe. - How many persons have had to repent of believing too readily either their own rash suspicions, or the hasty accusations of others! A duke of Bavaria, Louis the Severe, who lived in the thirteenth century, had a hard experience in this way. He was in one of the provinces bordering on the Rhine, when he received by chance from his wife, Mary of Brabant, a letter that was not intended for him. The duchess had written two letters on the same day, both dated from the castle of Donauwoerth; one was meant for her husband, and the other for one of his officers, named Henry Rucho. Unhappily she made a mistake in directing them, and the duke received the letter intended for the officer. As it contained some kind and cordial expressions, he instantly supposed that his wife had betrayed him. A gloomy jealousy then takes possession of his soul, he hastens to Donauwoerth, enters the castle in a rage, knocks the sentinel down, kills a person he met on his way, flings the duchess' first waiting-woman from the top of a tower throws the duchess into prison, and, next day, regardless of either pity, or justice, or the earnest protestations of his wife, he has her beheaded. This was in the year 1255 or 1256. The unhappy man failed not to discover that his wife was innocent, but the discovery came, alas! too late. He was so grieved thereby that his hair became suddenly white in the space of a single night. Such was the chain of crimes and misfortunes that resulted from a rash suspicion and a hasty judgement. - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist., II., 341.

378. The Ring and the Loaf of Bread. - One of the sins most easily committed, my young friends, is that of judging everything we see, and putting always the worst construction on it. And yet how often are we mistaken, even when appearances seem the most evident. Listen to this anecdote. A woman of the middle class of townspeople had placed on a table a gold ring which, an hour after,

had disappeared. Her suspicions immediately fell upon a young student, because he was the only one who had entered the house. He was carefully searched but nothing was seen of the ring. Nevertheless, he was still suspected. Next day, at dinner-time, a loaf of bread was laid on the table, and several slices were cut from it, as usual. All at once, behold the ring falls on the table. It was easily understood that the woman who had placed her ring there on the previous evening, had laid the loaf on it soon after, without paying any attention, and the ring had sunk into the bread still fresh and soft. A singular circumstance, my friends, and an additional proof how careful we ought to be in giving way to this evil tendency, common as it is, to suspect others on the slightest occasion. - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist., II., 442.
