

LETTERS AT SEA.

ON BOARD THE PÉRIÈRE, October 30, 1879.

MY DEAR DAUGHTERS:

It is 12 o'clock, and we are already 276 miles from New York. Never did any vessel enter upon the sea with a more propitious wind or more beautiful weather. All wonder at it, except myself. I expected it. I see the effect of fervent prayers in the smooth surface of the ocean and in the gentle breeze blowing directly from the West, and especially from Notre Dame and St. Mary's. Each time I look upon our white sails, widely spread to the rays of an autumnal sun, I recognize the warm-breathing spirits of heaven, lovingly carrying out the burning aspirations of angelic hearts, swiftly and directly bringing us to the East without the least deviation. Our passengers' company is, I may say, a select one: only twelve in the first cabin, and fourteen in the second,—all pleasant, and in the best mood of mind,—all on deck, and enjoying the beauty of the sky and of the sea. My meditation this morning lasted until breakfast time, 9.30 a.m. I felt so thankful to the many dear souls praying for us so successfully! Ingratitude, I trust, will never be a vice of mine. But precisely as I abhor the very thought of it, I find a special delight in acknowledging before God every kind act, every mark of affection, of which I may have been the object. Such a retrospective view, undisturbed for some hours, proves to me a sweet meditation.

Age has made in me already some little invasions. To many I may appear indifferent and cold; but my heart hitherto has undergone no change. I feel at this moment, more sensibly than ever, that I left it all behind. May God bless our beloved twin-institutions with all their precious inmates and dependences! May our Blessed Mother keep pure, humble and devoted so many hearts whose happiness, twined together, ever made mine in this life! Shortly hence, I hope, we will, each and all, be moving around her magnificent and glittering statue, until we all rest at her feet, among her glorified children above. In the calm of our quietly sliding retreat, I realize that I am more entirely among those I parted with than when I was present with only a few of them at a time. To the eyes of the body, individuals and persons very soon disappear as the number increases. From a distance, a fresh and pleasant memory embraces in its scope a great many more, and holds with each one a much more gratifying and undisturbed intercourse, especially when the interview takes place under God's own eye, and by the side of a Mother—as Christian faith reveals to us—whose very thought makes the charm of our existence, while we know we cannot please her more than by loving ourselves each other in God—for

whom, it seems to me, I wish to live only to secure our common and endless bliss in heaven.

OCTOBER 31.

334 miles in twenty-four hours, making already a little total of 600 miles in forty-four hours. Wind and sea continue favorable, and I trust that under the immediate protection of All Saints, now secured by the recitation of the First Vespers of the Feast for a full week, we will safely reach the end of our voyage before the Second Vespers of the Octave of the same.

Every year my love for this glorious Feast of All Saints increases in proportion as each return of the solemnity fills my heart with the joyful confidence that we have added, since the last twelve months, to the number of the elect, and that our own day approaches nearer to be admitted to them, ever to praise God and His Holy Mother; never to dread any new vicissitudes or changes, or separation from friends. From the broad ocean one, it seems, can see and realize more sensibly the wonderful grandeur and beauty of heaven; whatever direction the eye may take between these two immensities, it may rest on God's own work, without ever falling on man's little improvements, or decorations of nature, as we daily meet in cities. David called on the sea to bless God: the sea calls on us, more eloquently than anything in the world, to praise the Lord who created all. I saw it for the first time, in 1837, and ever since I loved and admired it, above all I could see, as the most perfect mirror reflecting both the greatness of God and the littleness of man. Nowhere as here can a man feel how little he is; and yet even here he feels that his heart is larger than the boundless water beneath and the immense sky above; for its aspirations reach beyond their limits: God alone can fill it.

We may learn much from our fellow-beings. We hear with pleasure the voices of those we venerate and love; but on the sea it is God's voice we hear—*Vox Domini super aquas!* In our common walks a variety of voices fall upon our ears, distracting, disturbing, grieving, offending, moving us to all sorts of feelings; but here, all we hear is the voice of God upon the great waters; the voice of Majesty in power and in magnificence; it is God's voice speaking out in loud, unmistakable accents, *Deus Majestatis intonans!* and yet that terrible Voice that shakes the deserts does not terrify me; I love to hear it. "It is good for me to be here"; for here better, I fancy, than anywhere else, less disturbed and more composed, I may speak with a filial and confident heart to our Eternal Father, not only of myself and of my wants, but also of all I love best on earth, and call His blessing on each of them.

FEAST OF ALL SAINTS.

345 miles is our last run, under the protection of our blessed friends

above, and therefore the best day thus far on our little voyage. do not know what sort of weather you have in the prairies of north-western America, but we certainly could not wish for anything more beautiful here, where we see fully one-half of heaven without a shadow of hinderance or interception; and the other half we shall calmly contemplate by a soft and clear moonlight after a few hours; thus in twenty-four hours here the whole court of heaven can be seen and admired, worshipped and prayed to. Not a sick person on board; every eye wondering at the extraordinary beauty of the day. I tell some of them it is precisely what I expected from the many fervent, pure and devoted souls praying for us in the far West. How consoling, rich and delightful the Communion of Saints is for separated hearts in our pilgrimage here below! Not only do we commune among ourselves, regardless of distances, but, under the pressure of reciprocal, tenderest wishes, our hearts naturally surge and raise themselves heavenward, until they mingle ultimately among our glorious ancestors in that kingdom of endless bliss. I write in an enviable position, just between the two worlds,—in both of which so many loving hearts are beating in unison with mine under the direct inspection of a countless multitude of interested angels and apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins,—all inviting me not only to admire them, and praise God in them, but above all to pray to them for all that I love beneath the heavenly sky. Never did I understand better such sweet invitations. Never did I make a more thorough commemoration of my beloved friends all around the globe. God alone knows how my heart feels in the balmy atmosphere of favors and marks of real love. He alone knows how quickly and fervently I turn to Him to repay what is above my feeble returns. Oh! may He render, on this beautiful day, a hundred times more than I ever received from countless generous souls through my whole life! May we all, from the spot obedience sanctifies for us, raise our hearts daily higher and nearer to the splendid mansions prepared for each of us above! Oh, when will the day dawn upon us that shall close our wanderings over land and sea! When shall we hear the voice of the Supreme Judge saying: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

Here I stop, anxious to go and spend the rest of the day more profitably—remembering, presenting, and recommending to God all my precious living friends, that we may all occupy the thrones prepared for us in the Eternal Kingdom.

COMMEMORATION OF ALL SOULS.

Well, this noon our figure is 314. The sun has disappeared, and left us in a gloomy atmosphere, cheerless and chilly. No wind from our dear home; but instead of it an accident—a silly little

blast, as inefficient as uncalled-for and unpleasant. Such a material change in the elements, spreading sadness all around, comes in admirable keeping with the impressive character of the day. Can we not see, clearly and unmistakably, in each element a faithful harbinger from beneath, carrying an important message to which our individual attention should be paid at least once in a day?

While we all rejoiced yesterday in the warm and glorious rays of an autumnal sun, so beautifully adapted to the grand celebration that was going on above, and of which we almost fancied at times we caught a glimpse, to-day, promptly entering, as it were, into the spirit of the Church, the elements, having changed the whole scenery, and, shutting from our sight the brilliant canopy of heaven, have left us in a thick, cold, dark gloom that forces down every thought and sentiment to the forlorn and sad abode of the dear departed souls whom the Hand of Divine Justice has touched. On such a day I really thank the sea for putting on this cheerless and gloomy appearance; for it prepares us to visit our suffering friends, and to enter fittingly, not only into their dismal dungeons, but even into their deep afflictions and excruciating pains, to which nothing on earth can be compared. From this centre of boundless space on the deep, away from the reach of any terrestrial voice, it seems one can hear and almost realize the voices of known, familiar, sweet and beloved ones, snatched from our midst, and now crying from those fiery, melting, and atoning flames, "*Misereмини*—at least you, my friends, have pity on me!—pity, pity on me!" Good God! I know that voice! Let all nature be still; let me hear that dear voice again! Oh! God, have mercy on that dear soul! But what do I see? what a vast range of tortures and of terrible pains! Dear soul! you are there yet! And you also! And again another! and from each the same answer: "Yes, and you know it! and you might have saved me from it—nay, you are the cause of it! Will you not put out this dreadful fire? You have an ocean at your disposal!"

The above is no drawing of fancy. Not only is it too real, it is a personal concern. I myself will soon be a party in the actual drama. Until then, let us remember our departed friends. But then, may I, too, be remembered by all who know me.

NOVEMBER 3.

325 miles just added to our former figures bring us, not to a half-way station (for there has been no hotel built here yet to receive passengers from either hemisphere), but only an ideal line dividing the ocean into two equal parts; and this much-coveted line we have just touched, and left behind us.

It is now precisely a week since I bade adieu to Notre Dame, and behold! I am already two thousand five hundred miles off from

my beloved home. The glorious sun you have brought back by prayer to its warm zenith will not be seen before three hours, thirty minutes, reaching its culminating point over you. May it bring upon the precious spot the same splendor it spreads here so magnificently! Unquestionably, this is the brightest noon we have had since we left port. To me it is a consoling evidence that our prayers have raised a number of dear souls from their gloomy dungeons to the blissful realms, where they now add to the number and brilliancy of the countless luminaries ever increasing the unspeakable glory of the elect. My poor prayers could never have inspired me with such confidence, but I never felt more in earnest to gain a point, and therefore I seized on every means within my reach to secure the end in view. The day was so propitious! nothing, absolutely nothing, to interfere with our negotiations. Our Blessed Mother never seemed to me more attentive, more interested, or better pleased. She heeded all our pleadings so lovingly, so effectually that I almost saw the moment she was going to empty the atoning regions from all their captives. I believed she promised to try again for the freedom of the rest in a few weeks. In the multitude she took with her, I fancied I recognized some well-known faces, whose warm advocacy is secured now to the end of time for the best interests of our dear family. I feel so rejoiced that I scarcely know how to testify my gratitude, unless it be by making the devotion to the souls in purgatory more than ever my own to the end of my life. In this, I confess to no small degree of selfishness. I am sure if I know myself at all, I will try and not be ungrateful. If I ever reach heaven, I shall owe it chiefly to my friends. Oh! then, what an additional happiness to remember them, to assist them, and insure them the same joy forever! The first thousand dollars I received after the calamity of the 23d of April went, thank God, to the relief of the dear souls in purgatory. No act in my life has ever given me greater consolation. In presence of our immense ruins at that time, human prudence would have suggested a different use. In the distress of my soul, I looked to Heaven first, and tried my best to multiply there interested advocates sooner than among our best friends in this world.

NOVEMBER 4, 1879.

Whoever will presume to read the following scribblings will pay the penalty of her curiosity, even if she be the best reader at St. Mary's. My previous twenty pages were elegant writing compared to this, owing to an unfortunate and deplorable habit our steamer contracted when she was young, and in which she now indulges almost shamefully, at least to our judgment—rolling and rolling continually, to the detriment of all speed (only 315 miles in

twenty-four hours), and to the great annoyance of everyone attempting to complain on paper of her misbehavior.

MORAL:—Mind your habits, especially while you are young.

I have dedicated the first part of our itinerary to the best soul at Notre Dame. Into whose pious hands it will fall, I know not; Father Provincial will show the discrimination he possesses in that assignment. I say to the *best* soul, because of the splendid weather we have enjoyed since we left New York, which we unhesitatingly ascribe to the fervent prayers and holy aspirations which we could read plainly in the brilliancy of the sky the whole day, in the beautiful and soft light of the moon by night, on this smooth surface of the sea, and in the inflation of our sails, small as they are. Now that we have passed the dividing line, I am going to credit St. Mary's with every favor we may receive until we see the shores of sunny France.

I must acknowledge the first part of the second half has somewhat reminded me of the long sleep sometimes indulged in at St. Mary's; but I already perceived a change since I commenced writing. It is 10 a. m. there, and all are up and doing duty; hence the splendor of the scene and the graceful behavior of the ship.

Of course, my official correspondent never sleeps a minute too long; the accomplished reader who will make out this must present her my best compliments, and thank her in my name for the copious share we owe her in the priceless blessings we have received hitherto, and likewise for all that may be added until we land in Havre de Grâce.

I have myself thanked another directly for her dear fulfilment of promises. She is gone home; if anything could now disturb her peace and happiness it would be her filial anxiety to welcome us where she is; a few miles further on, a few days longer, and we shall meet, never to fear any new separation, forever in the loving arms of our Holy Mother in the kingdom prepared from the beginning by the Eternal Father for everyone of His children! Amen.

NOVEMBER 5.

We are yet within the Octave of All Saints; glorious Feast! My meditations of every day show me more clearly than ever that God is especially admirable in His saints. I delight in the thought itself, not alone for God's honor and glory, but also for our common and best interest, much more, indeed, than in the few simple deeds of Notre Dame and St. Mary's I may leave to my beloved sons and daughters in America; were this all they could expect from their adoption into the Religious Society of the Holy Cross, they would live and die poor enough, surely. But, fortunately, they look, with myself, to a richer inheritance, somewhat in a distant future, it is true, but safe and sure. Naturally, parents here below live in hopes

to leave their children ample means, great wealth, and an illustrious name, all of which is often lost in a day. *Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas!* proclaims in our age, as truly as in Solomon's time, the ups and downs of society throughout the world. But how different the fortune of the children of God! He begins to reveal Himself to them as alone deserving all their love and aspirations; from the beginning He apportions an immense reward to each member of His family. A reward supposes some merit, and ere He bestows it He will test their hearts for a little, very little, while in poverty, in privations, in sufferings, and even in the contempt and persecutions of their fellow-beings; to fortify them in their weakness He will keep before them the image of His only Son, who saved them all from eternal ruin, and whose examples, if followed, will secure to all His disciples the real ends of their creation. Here appears in all its effulgence the splendor of the eternal design,—a throne, a sceptre and a crown, an endless bliss, an imperishable glory, to each one of His royal heirs, and each one will reign in His own kingdom forever. Such is the greatness of our Heavenly Father, that he can and will impart to every child of His love that immense height of glory to which nothing on earth can bear even a faint comparison. Oh, the richness! oh, the boundless love of our Father in heaven! O dear and noble child who now read this for yourself and princely associates, look up and see what has been prepared for you and each of them! open, open your eyes! I see a throne, a sceptre and crown, with your own name inscribed on the inheritance set aside for yourself from all eternity in your loving Father's inscrutable designs, on one simple condition—and prove not unworthy of it—namely, that you accept it. In your baptism you accepted all, in your Profession you confirmed your acceptance; ever since, every breath, every pulsation of your heart ratifies and sanctions your first reason. Blessed child! how your poor Father delights in your glorious destinies! Many a parent I have seen, sad and despondent, because he had more children than he could feed and clothe. Poor and destitute as I may be, I constantly enjoy the unutterable consolation to see in each one of mine a king or a queen, of whose kingdom there will be no end.

NOVEMBER 6.

Only 295 miles since noon yesterday, and no flattering prospect at that for the remaining 700 miles; high wind, sharp and unpleasant; a dark, gloomy, cheerless and sunless low atmosphere since daybreak. I fear you are all asleep at St. Mary's. But I am seldom left long without some consolation in my earthly disappointments. I spent a most delightful evening yesterday, and the whole forenoon this day with our most gracious and amiable Saint Mary Magdalene de Pazzi; I have had a slight acquaintance with her for a

long time, but so many distractions meet us on land that we scarcely find leisure to study and still less to know ourselves; hence our imperfect knowledge of what we would doubtless most admire and love, could we allow an impression to form itself and remain. Besides, it takes a while to realize any spiritual consideration, as it does to make a general declaration, one in which we may be concerned. What is unreservedly true for all, hardly affects us individually. My doctrine is to receive what is said for the millions as directed to myself; first of all, as Man, God Himself had no one else to care for but me. What an insupportable proud man! you say within yourself. It is true, I should have put forward some one else better known as a model of undoubted humility; but I have it all right now; so take yourself, my kind and modest reader, in place of me, for the precious individual so wonderfully singled out. See what has been done for you,—for you, I say, as if you were alone in this world! You have read, I am sure, what has been said of our Blessed Lord: that had there been but one soul to save, He would have cheerfully come down from heaven and died on the Cross, as He did, for that solitary soul. God Himself has loved you—you, I repeat; to such an extent as to deliver Himself up for you. See your worth in God's own mind and heart! See the perseverance of His love for you! He comes down every morning, absolutely, as though you were the only object of His infinite charity. Only one thing will satisfy Him—the possession of your heart. "My child, give Me thy heart!" He continually repeats. Oh, wonderful condescension! Every morning early He gives Himself to you in preference to His angels, that you may say in truth: "Now I live—but not I; Christ Himself lives in me!" Oh, heavens! who will thank Him! who will praise Him and speak to Him! You, yourself. From your unspeakable elevation, you will not blame me for feeling so much at home with my own lovely Saint Mary Magdalene de Pazzi; I tried to entertain her as if she had no other brother on earth.

NOVEMBER 7.

We are entering on our tenth day, and I seriously doubt if we shall not have to encroach a little on the eleventh before we reach the end of our voyage. In our printed itinerary, published by the steamship company, there is no eleventh day open for any report; who will be responsible for such unexpected delay? Ever since St. Mary's took charge of the *Periere*, her star has gradually decreased in brilliancy; winds have veered from the prow to the stern, the atmosphere, at first so congenial and pleasant, has turned cold and chilly; the sun itself has refused to shine upon us any more, and left us in a narrow, damp, and gloomy little space of air in which any large man might well have feared to breathe more than his

own share to the detriment of his companions' comfort. Thus far, however, we have fared well; but not enjoyed this last part of our journey as we had fancied we would.

Have you not thought, and said, and declared that I was too severe on St. Mary's innocent, faithful, pious and fervent inmates on this point, and honestly feel I should be above suspicion? and my own correspondent, I am sure, will bear me out on this all-important question. But what other inference can be drawn from my repeated remarks on the unfavorable change at sea since St. Mary's succeeded Notre Dame in the management of our east-bound trip? You exult in the idea that you have driven me to the foot of the wall, as we say in polite parlance, when urging a conclusive and irrefragable argument. For the first time in your life, you will see, presently, that you were wrong. I never suspected for a moment that St. Mary's could be slothful in redeeming a promise so solemnly made. Even now my faith is unshaken that all have done their best. But since we crossed the line dividing the New from the Old World we come, I fear,—shall I say it?—into a new hemisphere—a domain now claimed by wicked angels, perverse passions, spirits of darkness and embassies of the Evil One, who would have caused us much greater annoyances had they not been controlled and restricted by our western lovely angelic legions. Poor Europe! her candelabrum, I apprehend, is moving westward. It is sad for the Old World; but it bids us rejoice, provided we shut not our eyes to its saving light.

