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FLOWERS

FOR THE

ALTAR OF MARY.



HERE are ways, Our Lady knows them,
And her children all should know

How to find a flower for Mary,
Underneath the deepest snow.

How to weave a lovely garland,
Winter though it be, and cold,

How to buy the rarest offering,
Costing something,—but not gold.

How to buy, and buy them dearly,
Gifts that she will love to take,

Nor to grudge the cost, but give it
Cheerfully for Mary's sake.

Does this seem so strange an offering ?

Nay indeed, 'tis nothing new,
All can give her noble presents,

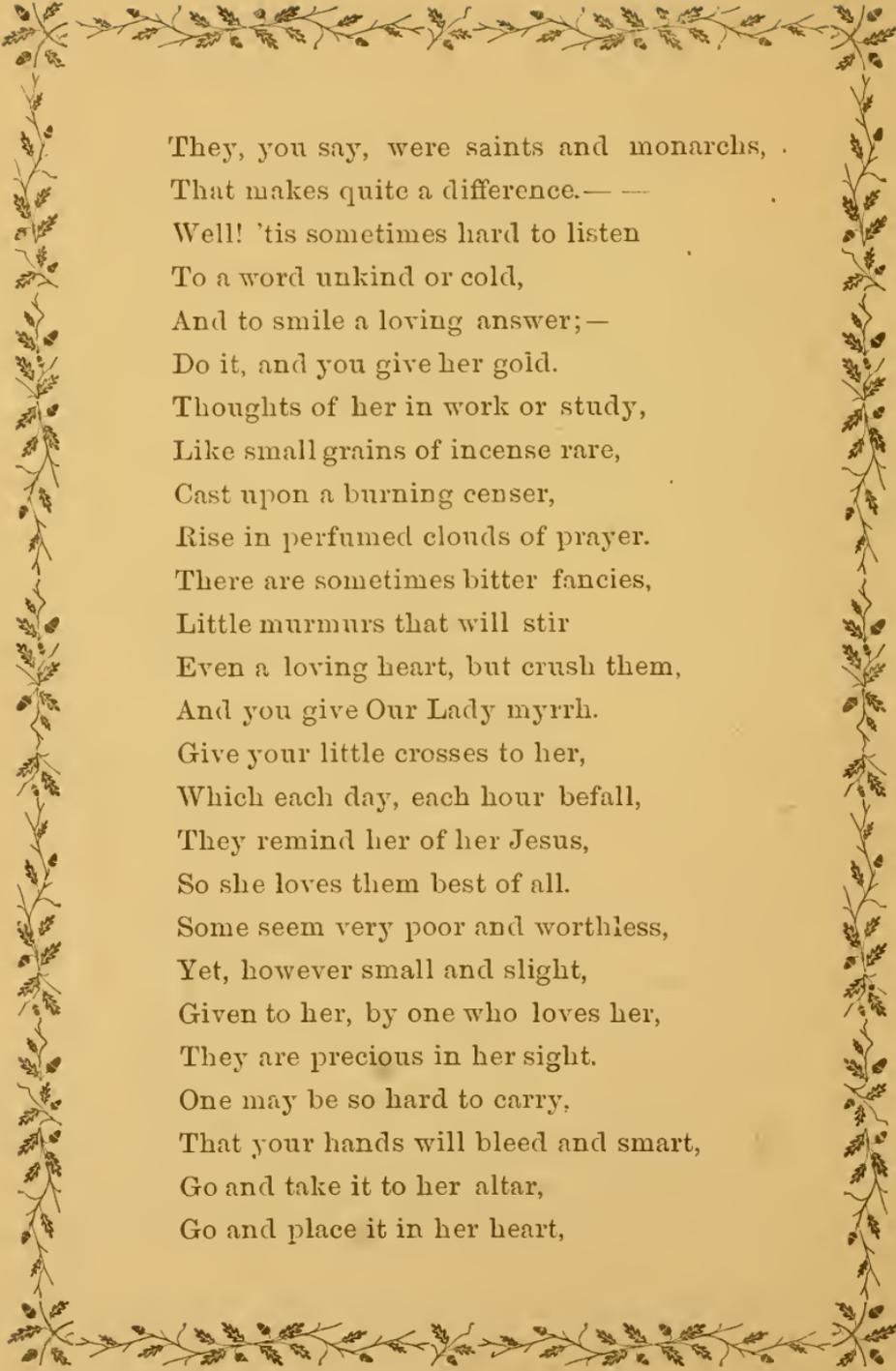
Shall I tell you of a few ?

What were those the Magi offered ?

Gold, and myrrh, and frankincense.

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They, you say, were saints and monarchs,
That makes quite a difference.— —
Well! 'tis sometimes hard to listen
To a word unkind or cold,
And to smile a loving answer;—
Do it, and you give her gold.
Thoughts of her in work or study,
Like small grains of incense rare,
Cast upon a burning censer,
Rise in perfumed clouds of prayer.
There are sometimes bitter fancies,
Little murmurs that will stir
Even a loving heart, but crush them,
And you give Our Lady myrrh.
Give your little crosses to her,
Which each day, each hour befall,
They remind her of her Jesus,
So she loves them best of all.
Some seem very poor and worthless,
Yet, however small and slight,
Given to her, by one who loves her,
They are precious in her sight.
One may be so hard to carry,
That your hands will bleed and smart,
Go and take it to her altar,
Go and place it in her heart,

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Check your tears and try to love it,
Love it as His Sacred Will,
Thus you set your crown with jewels,
Make your gift more precious still.
There are souls, alas! too many,
Who forget that Jesus died,
Who forget that sin forever
Is the lance to pierce His side.
Hearts that turn away from Jesus,
Sins that scourge Him, and betray
Cold and cruel souls, that even
Crucify Him day by day.
Ah! poor sinners! Mary loves them,
And she knows no royal gem,
Half so noble or so precious,
As the prayer you say for them.
Then, resign some little pleasure,
Give it to her instead, to win
Help for some poor heart in peril,
Grace for some poor soul in sin,
Mercy for poor sinners, pleading
For their souls as for your own;
Thus you weave a lovely garland,
Fit to lay befor her throne.
Flowers! why I should never finish,
If I tried to count them too,

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If I told you how
In what garden plot they grew.
Yet, I think that each one guesses,
They are emblems, and we trace
In the rarest, and the loveliest,
Acts of love, and gifts of grace,
Modest violets, meek snowdrops,
Holy lilies, white and pure,
Faithful tendrils, herbs for healing,
If they only would endure.
And they will, such flowers fade not,
They are not of mortal birth,
And such garlands given to Mary,
Die not like the gifts of earth.
Surely now you cannot tell me,
That you have no gift to lay,
At the feet of our dear Mother,
Any hour,—any day.
Give her now, to day, forever,
One great gift, the first and best,
Give your heart to her, and ask her
How to give her all the rest.



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