

SPIRITUAL WORKS OF LOUIS OF BLOIS

by Louis of Blois

A devotional work exploring faith and personal spiritual transformation.

67 Chapters

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Spiritual Works of Louis of Blois

CHAPTER I: THE CONFIDENCE IN GOD OF A REPENTANT SINNER,

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FEAR and love God (Levit. xxv. 17, 30; 1 Pet. ii. 17), With all watchfulness keep thy heart (Proverbs iv. 2:)): in all places take heed that thou keep it pure; be always solicitous lest thou offend God by sin. But yet if thou hast sinned, distrust not His mercy. How ever many and enormous may have been thy sins, thou shouldst never despair of pardon. Hast thou fallen? arise, turn to the Physician of thy soul, and the bowels of His pity will be open to thee. Hast thou fallen again! again arise, groan and cry out; and the mercy of thy Redeemer will receive thee. Hast thou fallen three, four times, yea oftener? arise again, weep, sigh, humble thyself; and thy God will not desert thee. He never has despised nor will He ever despise a contrite heart (Psalm l. 19); He never has rejected and never will reject those who fly to Him in true repentance, If thou cease not to arise, He will not cease to receive thee. Wherefore, if thou shalt have fallen a hundred, yea even a thousand times within the space of one short hour, do thou arise as many times as thou hast fall on, with the holy hope of pardon; and arising give thanks to thy Lord, who has not permitted thee to fall more grievously, or to lie longer in perdition. And even if, after receiving innumerable gifts of grace, thou hast denied thy God (though far be it from thee), and hast trodden under foot His Sacraments; do thou humbly acknowledge thy guilt, detest thy wickedness, heartily determine to sin no more, firmly resolve to lead a better life, and feel secure of pardon.

For thy malice or thy infirmity cannot be so great as to surpass the mercy of God, which knows neither measure nor limit. God is omnipotent;

He remits in one moment innumerable myriads of sins with the same facility as one single sin. He is most gracious; He is most willing to spare thee, to be propitious to thee; if thou wilt humble thyself, if thou wilt abstain from sin, and amend thy life. Therefore let not the memory of past sins disturb thee; but let these words of the Apostle console thee: "And such some of you were; but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the spirit of our God." (1 Cor. vi. 11.)

Thou canst not put too much confidence in His goodness, if only thou dost not abuse it by sinning more easily.

Oh! if thou knewest how ready is Christ our Lord to appease God the Father by His innocence, and to reconcile to Him His elect, who have sinned through human frailty, and resolve for the future to avoid sin! He is our advocate and pleads for us; that repenting of evil, we may always obtain a most ready pardon. For thus saith the elect disciple, St. John: "If any man sin, we have an advocate, Jesus Christ the Just; and he is the propitiation for our sins " (1 St. John ii. 1, 2).

Therefore, let not thy crimes make thee faint hearted, but humble: since thou dost indeed love that which is evil, and desirest to please God.

CHAPTER II: ON THE CONSIDERATION OF THE GOODNESS AND JUSTICE OF GOD.

ON THE CONSIDERATION OF THE GOODNESS AND JUSTICE OF GOD.

ACCORDING to the admonition of Scripture, think of the Lord in goodness (Wisdom i. 1); thou must not suspect Him to be cruel or inexorable; but believe Him to be pious, clement, sweet, and liberal towards those who are of good will and who repent with all their hearts. For He knows what He hath fashioned, He contemplates His own image, He considers our frailty, our wanderings, our blindness. When He is said to be terrible, or to rebuke the wicker! in His wrath, it is said not as if He were terrible in Himself, but only towards those who, having cast away holy shame, persist in the defilements of their sins: He repels and punishes their sins, as most foreign to His sweetness and purity, remaining all the while sweet and tranquil in Himself. Do thou, therefore, when thou dost meditate on Him, exclude every thought of terror or bitterness; and be persuaded that He looks with most merciful and benignant eyes on those things which He has created; that He also watches over them and ever keeps thee, as if thou wert the only living creature on the earth. Let those fear the justice and the anger of God, who turn not to God, who heap sins upon sins, and say, What have I done? who will not understand that they might do well (Ps. xxxv. 4): for these indeed justly fall under His anger, while they remain as they are. But the sinners who, repenting within themselves, arise, and, turning with their whole hearts to the Father of mercies, say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee" (St. Luke, xv. 18), have mercy on me: let these sinners, I say, trust in the Lord; for He will doubtless receive them, and being received He will justify them, and

being justified He will at length admit them into His kingdom.

It is beyond comprehension with what charity, with what bowels of paternal love, He everywhere desires and procures our salvation. No mother ever delighted in the son of her womb so tenderly as He delights in us. A huge fire does not so quickly consume a bundle of tow cast into it as God, through His ineffable pity and mercy, pardons our sins, if we truly repent of our ill-spent life and, humbly turning to Him, seek forgiveness, resolving with our whole will to lead henceforth a better life. Nor doth He desire the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live (Ezech. xviii. 21, and xxxiii. 11).

"If we confess our sins," saith the Scripture, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all iniquity" (1 St. John i. 9). The more numerous and grievous are the sins which He forgives, and the more unworthy and miserable are we whom He pardons, the more doth His glory shine forth.

And who can worthily praise His unspeakable goodness, who can worthily give Him thanks for it? For since no one can attain to salvation who has not even so little charity as to repent for the love of God, at least in the last moments of his life, and to turn from his sins; behold, God, the most merciful lover of mankind, often shows himself in the hour of death benignant and amiable even to desperate sinners, (whom he knows to be distinguished by the merits of some virtue), in order that they may grieve from their inmost hearts for having offended so gracious a Creator and Redeemer.

By this repentance they are rendered capable of being saved, and having passed through such purgation from their sins as the divine justice may require, they are admitted to the eternal joy of the heavenly kingdom.

For in the deepest and most secret abyss lies hidden that inexhaustible fountain from which so much pity flows out to us, from which so much

mercy is poured forth upon us; and whosoever despairs of this mercy denies that God is good and true, and blasphemes the Holy Spirit.

The devil in his malignity is accustomed to make use of this deceit; to one who intends to sin he promises that God is most clement and merciful; but when anyone having sinned wishes to repent, he uses every art to persuade him that He is implacable and most severe. But we must not listen to the crafty impostor. Wherefore be of good courage, and how ever much thou mayest have sinned, let nothing cast thee down from holy hope,

See, however, that thou dost not deceive thyself, and promising thyself certain forgiveness, dost not persevere in thy evil courses and put off thy conversion: for many perish through this delusion. Remission of sins is promised thee indeed, if even in the last extremity of life thou truly repentest, that is for love of God rather than for fear of punishment; but thou art not promised that thou wilt then truly repent. This sort of repentance which is deferred to the end of life is very doubtful, very perilous, and it is not always true. Therefore, in order that at the hour of death thou mayest safely pass hence, do penance, and amend thy life while thou art in health and hast still the power to sin. For if thou ceasest to sin when thou canst sin no longer, thou dost not abandon sin, but sin abandons thee.

CHAPTER III: HOW EASY IT IS FOR THE FAITHFUL SOUL TO BLOT OUT SINS, ESPECIALLY VENIAL ONES.

HOW EASY IT IS FOR THE FAITHFUL SOUL TO BLOT OUT SINS, ESPECIALLY VENIAL ONES.

IF thy soul is grievously sick, if thou labourest under the malady of pride, vainglory, anger, envy, gluttony, avarice, or any other still more dangerous vice, cast not away on that account the hope of salvation; but approach with confidence to the heavenly Physician, draw near to Jesus, beseech Him that He will deign to stretch forth His hand to thee, He is most merciful. He is most pitiful: He does not reject nor repel the sick, He abhors not their companionship, but compassionates them beyond what words can say. He is ever ready to heal thee, if thou dost lay open thy sickness, if thou from thy heart desirest to be healed, if thou humblest thyself, and trustest in Him. Be not, however, downcast on account of the daily sins which thou unwillingly committest. For as we offend in many things at least slightly every day: so we have at hand daily expiations, by which sins of this sort are effaced. There is holy confession, there are groans, there are tears, there is spiritual reading of the word of God, there is almsgiving, there is hospitality, there is the Prayer in which we say to our Lord, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us" (St. Matt. vi. 12); there are other prayers, and other works of piety, mercy, and charity. Therefore acknowledge thy fault, weep, sigh, renew thy holy purpose; labour peacefully for this end, that thou mayest avoid those same offences; committing the rest to God and casting thyself upon Him. For He, in the counsels of His inscrutable wisdom, often permits the stains of these negligences to

adhere to us, that we may be ever more humbled; that utterly distrusting ourselves, we may hope in Him: and that manfully resisting these vices, we may be practised in virtue and at length gloriously crowned.

It is one thing to fall into venial sins through unlooked-for occasions or human frailty; and another to fall through wilful negligence. For he falls from weakness alone who when he is free in his own mind hates sin and avoids the occasions of it; and yet when occasions offer themselves, readily offends by an unbridled tongue, or too great liberty of the senses, or any similar transgression; but who, as soon as he has returned to himself, grieves and turns away from the least stain of sin, quickly seeking for pardon. On the other hand, he who sins from wilful negligence, when in the absence of occasions he might be free, strange to say, desires these occasions and gives way to them, not indeed for the sake of the sin but for the sake of the pleasure. He too, may perhaps fall from frailty, but not from frailty only; however, if immediately after having yielded, he truly repents with renewed resolution, he also may speedily obtain remission of his sin.

Many are also permitted by God to fall grievously, that taught by their own misfortune, they may become better. Yet no one rises again after a fall better than he would have been if he had not sinned, and if without falling had done all the good that he has done since his fall.

Thou must know, however, that thou wilt be more effectually cleansed from these lighter faults, if, acknowledging thy sin, thou turnest humbly and lovingly to God, than if thou shouldst dwell upon them within thyself, and occupy thyself long and timidly with the consideration of them. Be they grievous or be they slight, remain unshaken in thy holy trust in God, casting them into the abyss of His mercies, that there they may utterly perish and be consumed. "There is

now, therefore, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh" (Rom. viii. 1), but rather "being justified by His blood, shall they be saved from wrath through Him" (Rom. v. 9).

CHAPTER IV: WHAT IS THE BEST KIND OF CONTRITION AND SATISFACTION.

WHAT IS THE BEST KIND OF CONTRITION AND SATISFACTION.

BE not thou disturbed because, perchance, thou canst not offer to God sensible contrition of heart for thy crimes. For if there be sorrow in thy intellect and will, if it truly displease thee that thou hast offended thy most merciful God, if thou grieveest that thou art not more grieved, if thou resolvest to lead a better bio for the future; this sort of contrition is most pleasing to God, though the heart may remain with out sensible sorrow. For it is possible for the mind in a moment so to detest sin, that having obtained perfect forgiveness it is rendered worthy of heaven. If exterior tears be absent, let not interior ones be wanting: without the first thou canst lament thy sins and be pleasing to God, which without the latter is impossible. Thou art not wanting in interior tears when the offence against God truly displeases thee; when in thy mind thou turnest utterly away from sin, when with great earnestness thou seekest God and sighest after Him. Whatever good works thy hand is able to do, do earnestly (Eccles. ix. 10); yet not with the idea that thou art able of thyself to make satisfaction to God for thy sins; but do them all that thou mayest please Him whom thou hast offended. Pray to the Lord Jesus that He would deign to blot out thine iniquities by His most innocent Passion, and to satisfy for them before His Father. Place thy hopes of salvation in the adoption of sons, [1] which we have received through His Incarnation and Death, and the shedding of his Precious Blood. We certainly do not deny nor reject the merit of good works, as heretics now do; but we say that all our hope must rest chiefly on the

merits of Jesus Christ. When we are weak and dejected, these words of the blessed Apostle St. Paul ought to reanimate us: "A faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners" (1 Tim. i. 15). He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and might cleanse to himself a peculiar people, acceptable, a pursuer of good works" (Tit. ii. 14).

According to His mercy He hath saved us, "that being justified by his grace, we may be heirs, according to hope of life everlasting" (Tit. iii. 7). It is, indeed, a faithful saying. He, being God, willed to be made man for us: for us He was born, He suffered and died; for us He rose again, for us He ascended into heaven. In Him we have already risen again; in Him this miserable flesh has already been raised up and freed from corruption; in Him we already ascend into heaven and obtain the inheritance of the kingdom. For where the Head has preceded, the rest of the body will also follow. This is truly a saying worthy of all acceptance, sweetly penetrating the very marrow of the interior man. Our humility, by which we acknowledge our own unworthiness, and by which we judge our good actions to be vile and imperfect, and our confidence in God, by which we hope in Him, extolling the merits of His Life and Passion, outweigh all the satisfactions we can make. It is necessary, however, that we should always do whatever we can easily accomplish; and that we should ascribe, the good that we do, not to ourselves, but to Him without whom we can do nothing (St. John xv. 5). The good is a gift from the Lord, who is also pleased to reward what He has given.

[1] Rom. viii. 15; Galat. iv. 3; Ephes. i. 5.

CHAPTER V: REMEDIES FOR PUSILLANIMITY IN THE CONVERTED SINNER.

REMEDIES FOR PUSILLANIMITY IN THE CONVERTED SINNER.

IF the devil persecutes thee, if he afflicts thy spirit with his defilements, if thou art now forced against thy will to suffer what thou didst once willingly admit, let it not disturb thee. Whatsoever thou bearest against thy will, will not ruin thee, nor make thee offend God. For sin must be voluntary; what is not voluntary, is not sin. Resist, struggle, keep thy will free from consent, and then permit the devil and the flesh to rage. Although there may sometimes arise in the inferior animal powers of thy soul either a criminal delight in prosperity, or an inordinate sadness in adversity; although thou mayest feel in thyself an impulse of vainglory, anger, or any other vice; although thou mayest find thyself indisposed to obey; this interferes not at all with thy spiritual progress, nor mars the uprightness of thy life, provided that thou remainest quiet and undisturbed in the superior powers of thy mind, and clingest to God, without ever consenting to the absurd motions of the affections and passions. Those things which belong to faith, do thou believe to be more certain than those which are discerned by the eyes. But, if thou shouldst begin against thy will to waver or to doubt, fly to God, and humbly exclaim, "I believe, Lord, help my unbelief."

Contemn Satan, the suggester of impious or unclean thoughts. Oppose to him the salutary sign of the cross of our Lord; and, turning away thy thoughts from his pestilent suggestions, occupy thyself with some pious meditation. Esteem him who thus barks at thee unworthy to be answered. But, if thou desirest to speak, say this or something similar; "Be

silent, impudent tongue; begone, wicked one, with thy impiety and uncleanness. I hear thee not; thou art nothing to me, wretched one."

And say to God. "O Lord, help me; I would rather a thousand times undergo death than consent to iniquity; I would rather cease to live, than live having offended thee and lost thy grace."

If the cunning serpent entices thee to vainglory, recall to mind the multitude and the enormity of thy sins. If he persuades thee to fail in confidence, bring to mind the abyss of the mercies of God, and his singular love and pity for thee. If he whispers some foolish thoughts on predestination or the other counsels and judgments of the Holy Trinity into which we ought not to enquire: do thou, despising the barking of that unclean dog, turn to God, and commit all things to His merciful dispensation; being fully persuaded that He is most desirous of thy salvation. They fall into a dangerous snare who dare rashly to scrutinise the judgments of God. Certain it is that every thing is just which the Lord does, which He ordains, which He permits: do thou believe this and rest upon it, seeking nothing farther.

If thou shouldst suffer in thy sleep any defilement, be not cast down; for it will not be imputed to thee, provided that on awaking and recovering consciousness, thou dost detest whatever is impure. It will not, I say, be imputed to thee, although thou mayest seem to have given occasion for what thou now sufferest by the impurity of thy former life. For thou hast already laid down the burden of thy past sins, by salutary confession; thou hast already repented of thy former conversation, and thou strivest to amend it. Therefore let nothing of this kind cast thee down from the stability of holy confidence.

CHAPTER VI: THE SKILL AND DILIGENCE WITH WHICH WE ARE TO RESIST TEMPTATIONS.

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THAT crafty deceiver will not rest, but will try all means by which he may overcome and ruin thee. He will usually be most active in the beginning, or after the beginning of a better life; namely, while vicious passions and affections are still raging within thee, he will stir up the war, sometimes from within, some times from without; he will entrap then, now by prosperity, now by adversity; sometimes he will lay snares for thee by foolish joy, sometimes by untimely sadness; at one time he will aim at destroying thee through too great security, at another through too great dejection. He will sometimes retire for awhile, and cease from assailing thee, that he may soon after more grievously wound thee unawares. Sometimes he will lay his snares secretly, and, as it were, creep in by degrees under the pretext of piety; sometimes he will try to inflict a wound by breaking in openly and unexpectedly. Sometimes, when repulsed, he will come again and again to the attack, and assiduously persevere in it; that so he may conquer by very boldness one whom he could not overthrow either by force or by stratagem. Thou wilt be sometimes so perplexed, and such darkness will overshadow thy mind, that thou wilt not know what to do, nor what to think; therefore thou wilt be carried to and fro, and miserably agitated. Sometimes thy spirit, thy heart, and thy senses will be so constrained, depressed, and distracted, that thou wilt not wish to open thy mouth to praise God, nor wilt thou be able to attend when thou prayest. Sometimes thou wilt be so afflicted and buffeted on all sides by misfortunes, that, like one deprived of the help of God,

and surrounded by the shadow and horror of death, thou wilt say with the Apostle St. Paul, "We were pressed out of measure above our strength, so that we were weary even of life" (1 Cor. i. 8).

Lastly, sometimes not one only, but many of these temptations, or even all at once may assail thee, if God permits it; for, unless He permits, thou wilt not be tempted; and, if He should permit, it will be for thy great advantage.

Hut do thou guard against these temptations; and, like one placed on a watch-tower, look round diligently, to see where the enemy may either rush or creep in. It is often a very frivolous thing, or even a very holy thing, which excites within us, if we are not on the watch, a great tumult, and a dangerous temptation. Therefore we must be suspicious even of those things which are not evil in themselves.

Prudent circumspection is always necessary, but chiefly in the beginning of temptations. For the enemy usually keeps this order in his attacks; he first instils into our minds the simple thought of the thing coveted; then, if he sees that what he has suggested pleases us, he renders the thought vehement and complicated, binding as it were the mind with chains, and confining it on every side. If we resist not while we are still free, we shall with greater difficulty resist after he has thus inwardly bound us.

If, however, we have been negligent in the beginning, we must not, therefore, yield to the adversary, but by all means resist and struggle, and courageously shake off our fetters. Wherefore, as far as is in thy power, resist the beginnings of temptation; trusting not in thy own endeavours, nor in thy own efforts, but in the mercy of God: "Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it" (Psalm cxxvi. 1).

Unless He ever upholds thee, thou wilt not stand; if He withdraw His

Hand, thou wilt straightway fall. But, while He is with thee by His grace, see that thou art not wanting to thyself through negligence.

Join thy free will to His grace, and labour in union with it.

If it should happen to thee to fall, overcome by temptation, throw not the blame on God, nor on the devil, nor on fate; for pious Christians utterly deny and execrate those ideas of fate and fatal necessity which have been invented by the heathen or by impious Christians. As I have said, if, overcome by temptation, thou hast fallen and sinned, accuse not God, who is not the author of iniquity; but accuse thyself, who didst consent to the devil: (for no one can force thee to consent to him against thy will;) accuse thyself, I say, and quickly rise again.

For as recent wounds are easily healed by fomentations and plasters applied at once, but are cured with difficulty if the remedies are long delayed; so thou wilt recover thy former grace without great labour if thou dost return and do penance immediately after having allowed thyself to sin; but if thou remainest long in thy sinful state, thou wilt not easily arise from it, since the very weight of the sin and the habit of sinning depress and overpower thy interior. Lest, therefore, the devil overcome thee, do thou always fly to God, call upon Him, put thyself under the wings of His protection; groan and sigh before Him.

Doing this, thou wilt not be overcome; or if thou shouldst be overthrown, arising thou wilt not perish. If great temptations encompass thee not, acknowledge the mercy of thy pitiful Father towards thee, and be grateful. Reflect that He spares thee, and removes those temptations, lest thou who art so weak shouldst fall under them.

CHAPTER VII: WE ARE TO FIGHT AGAINST VICES BY IMITATION OF THE HUMILITY AND THE OTHER VIRTUES OF CHRIST

WE ARE TO FIGHT AGAINST VICES BY IMITATION OF THE HUMILITY AND THE OTHER VIRTUES OF CHRIST.

THOU shalt allow thyself to make neither peace nor truce with the devil and with sin; but fight against the devil with untiring and indomitable courage, and ever pursue thy vices with unceasing hatred. For although, during the exile of this pilgrimage, thou canst not so entirely avoid faults and the allurements of vices as not often to slip and be entangled by them; yet thou must always detest and carefully avoid offences, be they grave or trifling. Therefore, thou must always hate whatever is displeasing to God.

Do thou abominate the pest of pride and vainglory. Repress with care the turbulent motions of anger and impatience, and the sharp darts of indignation. that thou mayest not only repress, but, by the grace of God, utterly extinguish them! It is, perhaps, in human nature to be sometimes angry; but it is diabolical to continue in anger and hatred. There is no mode by which thou wilt be able more easily to restrain and overcome the impulse of anger than by recalling to mind the patience and meekness of Christ the Lord thy God. In the same way thou canst apply no more efficacious remedy to the ulcers of pride, than to place before the eyes of thy mind the humility of thy Saviour. For not without cause He said, "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart" (St. Matt. xi. 29). Let the disciple be ashamed of swelling and being lifted up with pride, when he sees that his Master is humble. Let man be ashamed of being fierce and burning with anger, when he sees that God is meek. Let the creature be ashamed of his repugnance and

want of submission, when he contemplates the obedience of the Creator.

This is the sum of all Christian philosophy: that we strive to follow Jesus our leader in true humility. For "unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven " (St. Matt. xviii. 3).

The more humble a man is, the nearer he is to God, and the more he excels in evangelical perfection. Blessed are they who deserve to be of the number of those who are esteemed by the world as fools, but by God as wise,

Listen willingly to every one: suffer any one to teach and admonish thee, though he may be thy junior and inferior. Despise none: but put all men above thee, and submit thyself in thy heart to all. For though some may now be wicked, they may yet by the mercy of God become in a moment good and even holy. And it sometimes happens that those who seem imperfect possess some hidden virtues which render them most pleasing to God. Be fully persuaded that there is no sinner, however impious and however wicked, who would not lead a much more holy life than thou dost, if he had received as much grace from God as thou hast. In this way thou wilt think humbly of thyself and wilt easily prefer others to thyself. that thou mightest attain to such lowliness of mind that thou wouldst submit thyself not only to any man, but to any creature; judging thyself unworthy to see the light and to walk the earth, but meriting that all should revenge upon thee the injuries done to their Creator!

CHAPTER VIII: THE STRIFE OF THE TRULY HUMBLE AGAINST VAIN GLORY AND SELF-LOVE.

THE STRIFE OF THE TRULY HUMBLE AGAINST VAIN GLORY AND SELF-LOVE.

DESPISE the favours and the praise of men. Desire not greatly to please nor fear to displease any one: study, however, to live so as to please all good men who truly love God. If God has denied thee beauty of form, acuteness of intellect, or the grace of eloquence, be not ashamed on that account, Nor be ashamed of such meanness of exterior as God and thy condition require; but be greatly ashamed of sin alone. Let those things only, I say, distress thee, which are contrary to the honour of God and the salvation of souls; although the true servant of God ought not to neglect a reasonable propriety of manners.

When thou art about to do any work of importance, if the desire of human favour assails thy heart, continue not thus the work; but, changing thy intention, desire to serve and to please God by what thou art doing; and so if the beginning or even the middle of the work has been corrupt, the end will be whole and undefiled. However praiseworthy may have been thy performance of the work, however much thy soul may be tempted by the solicitations of vain-glory; do thou oppose by thy reason the enticements of this evil passion, and, as far as lies in thee, keep thy mind free and tranquil. Imagine thyself to have put on the person of another, and that it was done not by thee but by some one else. Ascribe to God all that is good and worthy of praise.

Learn to listen with a patient and willing mind to those who point out to thee thy faults: esteeming their judgment to be more correct when they reprove thee, than thy own when thou excusest thyself. O that thou wert no more moved by just praises or unjust reproofs than if they were

not spoken of thyself! thou wouldst ascribe the first to God, and impute the last to thyself, committing them to God. O that thou wouldst rather suffer contumely than receive praise! for it is safer and more useful to thee; unless thou wishest not that thou thyself be praised, but that God be praised in thee.

No doubt he who is truly humble wishes rather to be thought vile and abject, than humble and holy. For since he acknowledges himself before God to be a useless, unworthy, and ungrateful sinner; he desires not to seem other before men. When thou art justly reproached, humble thyself; be ready to correct whatever faults are in thee: and commending the rest to the divine care, remain at peace.

If thou hast rested thy peace of mind on the words of men, and not on the testimony of thy conscience and on thy God, thou wilt easily lose it, and be troubled. Let men have what opinion they will of thee; let it be enough for thee that thou art pleasing to Him who is "the searcher of hearts and reins" (Psalm vii. 10; Wisdom i. 6; Rum. viii. 27). Nevertheless, after the example of the Apostle St. Paul, "provide" good things not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men (Rom. xii. 17).

CHAPTER IX: ADVERSITY IS TO BE ACCEPTED AS SENT TO US BY THE FAVOUR OF GOD. OUR DUTY IN

ADVERSITY IS TO BE ACCEPTED AS SENT TO US BY THE FAVOUR OF GOD. OUR DUTY IN ADVERSITY.

AS soon as ever thou feelest that any tribulation or adversity is coming upon thee, turn thy mind to the Lord, and commit thyself utterly to Him, without murmuring or seeking a reason for the injury. If thou wilt lament, instead of laying thy complaints before men, lay them humbly before the Lord, treating with Him of whatever grieves thee, as with a most pitiful Father and most present Helper. For His sake bear all things with equanimity. Though the devils lie in wait, and spread the snares of temptations; though thou findest the path of virtue and justice difficult; though one slanders and another oppresses thee; though the cold pinches and the heat burns thee; though thy stomach is weak and thy head aches; though rottenness enter into thy bones, and swarm under thee (Habac. iii. 16); though thy mind is overclouded and covered with darkness, and tormented by uncertainty; though thy weary spirit slumbers and is chilled by interior coldness; do thou ever remember to preserve thy patience.

Receive all adverse; things lovingly, as most precious gifts sent to thee from God; whether they arise from the heavens, or the elements, or from the devil, or from adversaries, or from a minister of satanic art, or from wild beasts. Think not that anything happens to thee except by the dispensation of divine Providence; for, unless the Lord permitted it, thou wouldst suffer no adversity.

When our common enemy inflicted on the blessed Job the loss of his goods and of his children, the holy man said not, the Lord gave, and

the devil hath taken away; but what saith he? "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done: blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job i. 21).

In the misfortunes which befall thee, look for relief not from fortune-tellers or soothsayers, but from thy Creator and Redeemer. For those who apply to fortune-tellers, and professors of magic, and seek wicked counsel from them, abandon God, and turn to the devil. If God knows that health of body will be for thy good, He will doubtless grant it to thy prayers; but if He grant it not, thou must believe that the want of it is expedient to thy soul. It is want of faith, yea rather the greatest madness, that drives Christians to seek such pestiferous remedies.

And, lest those who have recourse to him should perceive that they are grievously sinning, the crafty serpent cunningly takes care that in his very spells the names of Christ and of saints are often mingled, and that other divine things are made use of. For, if he did not dilute the poison of superstition with this honey of piety, no Christian would so readily drink of it. And what says the Scripture? "Go not aside after wizards, neither ask anything of soothsayers" (Levit. xix. 31). And again, "Neither let there be found among you any wizard, any one that consulteth soothsayers, or observeth dreams and omens; neither let there be any wizard or charmer, nor anyone that consulteth pythonic spirits, or fortune-tellers, or that seeketh truth from the dead (Deut. xviii. 10, 11). These things therefore do thou abominate, and place all thy hope in thy God.

Be not angry with men who injure thee; but, recognising in them the instruments of the Divine dispensations, love them, and give thanks to God. Regard with the eyes of thy heart Him who allows thee to be tried by troubles, rather than those who trouble thee. And if, while thou

aimest at this, thy infirmity begins to strive against thee, and to suggest hatred of thy persecutors, cease not, but persevere, and pray to the Most High that thou mayest prevail.

Even if the Lord should, as it were, cast thee from Him, and give thee over to Satan, so that, abandoned within and without, thou art on all sides encompassed with extreme calamities, driven to horrid thoughts, and oppressed with unspeakable sorrows: yet thou must never suspect any failure in the love of thy most pitiful Maker for thee; thou must not on that account withdraw from Him, nor evade the present tribulation, nor seek for useless or forbidden remedies, nor turn to any impure consolation: but in simple faith and simple love keeping to Him, allow thyself to be chastised and scourged as He wills and as long as He wills. Await in silence the end that He has ordained. Say in thy heart, "The will of God be done, for it cannot be evil." Waver not, I say, at all in thy holy resolution, though He may not speedily put an end to thy temptations; but, full of good hope and unflinching courage, remain steadfast.

Although God may purge, purify, and prove thee, He deserts thee not. For "the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart, and He will save the humble of spirit" (Psalm xxxiii. 19). Perhaps thou knowest not now why He thus bruises and chastises thee; but, when thou art come to Him, thou wilt recognise that those scourges with which He now tries thee, came only from His love of thee. He permits no misfortune, however trilling, to happen without its being for the exceeding advantage of him who suffers it, if he is patient. The humble endurance of interior dereliction is more pleasing to Him than great sweetness of devotion. He will not suffer thee to be tempted beyond thy strength (1 Cor. x. 13), provided thou trustest not in thyself, but in Him; provided thou art patient, and waitest in holy confidence for His

help.

CHAPTER X: INDIFFERENCE OF OUR WILL AND CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD IN ADVERSITY.

INDIFFERENCE OF OUR WILL AND CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD IN ADVERSITY.

THOU shalt never say, such and such tribulations are not fit for me, I could bear others better and with greater fruit. Thou shalt not, I say, speak any such words in the impatience of thy heart; but, whatever God has laid on thy shoulders for thee to bear, that bear without any murmuring, and believe it to be most useful to thy soul, as indeed it is. Thou art ever to labour for this end, that thou mayest subdue and adapt thy will in all things to the divine will and ordering; and, having relinquished thy own, thou wilt become accustomed to follow it as promptly as the shadow follows the substance. If thou art able thus to renounce the inclinations of thy senses and affections for God, it is not to be told what peace and tranquillity thou wilt enjoy; for thou wilt begin in this world, as it were, to inhabit a paradise.

The only thing which disturbs thy soul, defiles it, and keeps it from the embrace of the heavenly Spouse, is the preposterous love with which thou seekest thyself, reflectest on thyself, and delightest not in God, but in thyself. From this perverse self-love arise all vicious passions and affections, all confusion and irregularity, and indeed all evil within thee. Inasmuch as this pernicious love is diminished or extinguished in thee, insomuch will thy vices be vanquished.; and thou wilt increase in true liberty and true love of God.

Therefore thou shalt not choose for thyself what evils thou wilt bear, nor again, prescribe what thou wilt not bear; but receive with readiness whatever God has willed to send thee. Neither shalt thou be disturbed, if perchance thou hast brought these misfortunes on thyself

by thy sins; but, whether thou hast caused them or not, be tranquil. Impute them all, indeed, to thine own iniquity, and humble thyself, but yet, as I said, be not unduly affrighted, but preserve thy evenness of mind. Let the Passion of thy God satisfy for thy sins; but do thou suffer for the love of that God. Let the wicked cause of thy evils be hateful to thee; but do thou endure with calmness the evils themselves, offering them in sacrifice to the Most High. Thus they will be to thee, as it were, a baptism most efficacious in washing away thy sins, nay more, they will be, so to speak, a most glorious martyrdom.

CHAPTER XI: PERSEVERANCE IN CONFESSION OF THE FAITH UNDER TRIALS, AFTER THE EXAMPLE OF

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CHRIST.

IF by the permission of God thou shouldst fall into such sir; sits as to be forced either to deny the Christian faith, or to undergo torments, and even death itself; do thou rather die a thousand times, so to speak, than say a word, or give a sign of impious denial. Flatter not thyself, say not to thyself, I am weak, I have a horror of tortures: what harm will it do if, compelled by fear, I deny Christ by a word or a sign, provided I confess and adore Him meanwhile in my heart? Does He not regard the mind rather than words or works? I will outwardly deny Him, but I will not deny Him inwardly. Thou art utterly mistaken if thou thus persuadest thyself. For it is written, "With the heart we believe unto justice; but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. x. 10). The Christian faith must be confessed not only in secret, but openly, when occasion requires it. He says who is Truth itself, "He that shall deny me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven" (Matth. x. 33).

If thou hast denied Him, thou hast fallen away from God, and art cut off and separated from the communion of the faithful; nor canst thou be again received into their number, unless thou dost boldly confess the faith which thou hast, impiously denied; and, having imitated the Apostle St. Peter in his denial, dost imitate him also in his penance (St. Luke xxii. 62).

If thou fearest thy own weakness, avoid persecution, if thou canst. But

if, when thou fliest from it, thou art caught and questioned, know that then thou canst no longer evade it. Blessed is that martyr, who humbly and patiently lays down his life, even though with fear and sadness, either for the Christian faith, or for the good of his neighbour, or for the sake of justice and truth. For our Lord, wishing to console His elect, who, from human frailty, are overcome with fear, and tremble at the prospect of death, transferred their weakness to Himself, when, at the approach of His Passion, full of fear and sadness, He said, "My soul is sorrowful, even unto death," (St. Mark, xiv. 31).

Whatever troubles may befall thee, whether they be great or small, accustom thyself to commend and offer them to the eternal praise of the Most High in these or similar words; "O Lord, I commend and offer Thee, to the everlasting praise of Thy name, this necessity, this misery, this difficulty, this temptation; I offer Thee this calamity, in union with the Passion and sorrows of Thy only begotten Son, to Thy eternal glory." Thou mayest in the same way offer to God any of thy works or exercises. This oblation can be made even in a moment without words, namely, by the simple and placid elevation of the mind to God. From this custom thou wilt reap immense fruit. For thus thy works, which of themselves are vile and imperfect, being united to the merits of Christ, will become perfect and most worthy.

CHAPTER XII: ON TRUE CONFIDENCE IN GOD, AND VAIN ANXIETY CONCERNING THE FUTURE; AND AGAINST THE FOLLY OF ASTROLOGERS.

ON TRUE CONFIDENCE IN GOD, AND VAIN ANXIETY CONCERNING THE FUTURE; AND AGAINST

THE FOLLY OF ASTROLOGERS.

WAIT everywhere on the Providence of God: in every event that occurs, lean steadfastly on Him, believing that nothing can happen without a cause, nor without a cause proceeding from the reasonable order of things. Attribute what happens neither to fortune nor to the stars.

Detest the superstitious and impious fables of astrologers, who put the life, the manners, the actions and designs of man under subjection to the stars, and attempt by them to pry into and predict future events, beyond the natural properties of the elements, and of corruptible things. This temerity partakes of the remains of idolatry, and is most baneful to the Christian religion; and, for that reason, it is assiduously condemned and forbidden by the oracles of the Prophets, and the opinions of the orthodox Fathers. For God thus speaks by Isaias to the Chaldeans, who were familiar with the profession of this science:

"Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, this hath deceived thee. Evil shall come upon thee, and thou shalt not know the rising thereof" (Is. xlvii. 10, 11). And, a little after, he saith to the city that was to be laid waste, "Let now the astrologers stand and save thee, they that gazed at the stars, and counted the months, that from them they might toll the things that shall come to thee. Behold, they are as stubble, fire hath burnt them, they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flames" (Is. xlvii. 13, 14). And by Moses it is said, "These nations hearken to soothsayers and diviners; but thou art otherwise instructed

by the Lord thy God" (Deut. xviii. 14). Again, we read in Jeremias, "Be not afraid of the signs of heaven, which the heathens fear" (Jerem. x. 2). Therefore, the Christian should neither grieve nor rejoice at the vain judgments of astrologers.

And, if anyone objects that some of their predictions prove true, we answer, that many do not, and those which do, so happen by the secret dispensation of God, not by their foolish skill; though they commonly happen to those who believe in the predictions. For, as true Christians for their faith in God always receive what is for their good, so evil often happens by the just judgment of God to those who are not true Christians, in punishment for the faith they put in demons or in the professors of superstition.

The devil, however, has not the knowledge of future events; but sometimes foretells the end of things from the beginning, which he sees. When he beholds some one preparing for a journey into Italy, what wonder if, impelled by the malice of his nature, he looks forward, and announces that such a one is coining to Italy? And, when he sees that heavy rain is falling all over Ethiopia, is it a great thing that he should dare to promise that there will be an inundation of the Nile in Egypt? By these means the deceiver induces many to have faith in him. Neither the predictions of astrologers, nor the wonders of magic, nor the arts or charms of Satan can effect anything against those who trust in God, and commit themselves wholly to Him. For, if they ever afflict the just, the Lord permits it for the good of the just themselves. Do thou, therefore, despising the inventions of those who foretell I know not what, either from the positions of the stars, or the examination of the countenance and the hands, turn to the Creator and Governor of the whole world; cling to Him, cast thyself upon Him.

Let nothing that happens disturb thee, whether the season be favourable

or inclement; whether the fruits of the earth abound or are scarce; whether God sends peace or the sword, thou shalt not murmur; but, humbling thyself under His mighty hand, cast down thine eyes and remain tranquil, yet not without feeling. Consider not anxiously whether thou art to have much repose in this exile, whether thou art to receive the more perfect gifts of grace, whether thou art to pass from hence to purgatory, and to remain there long, or to enter straightway into heaven: but trust thyself entirely to thy Lord, and desire that all things that concern thee as well in the next as in the present world be disposed according to His will; loving the justice of God no less than His mercy; and esteeming it more grievous to sin, than to pay the penalties of sin.

CHAPTER XIII: ON SCRUPULOUS CONFESSIONS AND FAINT-HEARTEDNESS.

ON SCRUPULOUS CONFESSIONS AND FAINT-HEARTEDNESS.

DO thou repel inordinate sadness, hurtful dejection of mind, superfluous scruples of conscience, untimely and confused repetitions of confessions once made, and other similar disquietudes of mind. It is not pleasing to God that we should be uneasy when we commit trifling offences, as if it were over with our salvation; and as if He were ready to ensnare and ruin us, because, through inattention, we had forgotten and omitted such and such a circumstance in our confession. He wishes us to give reasonable attention, that we may recollect what we have done amiss; and to declare before the Priest all that we remember, openly, simply, and without dissimulation. It is most useful frequently to confess our sins in this manner: lest, if the sacramental relation of them be long delayed, our sins should be forgotten; and, moreover, great benefits of grace result from frequent and humble confession.

For those who wish to lead a spiritual life, and especially for new beginners, the devil is accustomed with great assiduity to lay the snares of timidity, sadness, mistrust, and sloth; which thou wilt not escape but by pious confidence in God, and spiritual alacrity and promptitude, seeking also the divine assistance, Great timidity and excessive fear bring with them many evils; he who is possessed by them is involved in many errors, and fancies all that he does to be sinful; whence it happens that, being in perpetual anguish and disturbance of mind, he torments himself miserably without cause. Such persons are to be treated with great commiseration; but if they will promptly and

boldly acquiesce in the counsels of a prudent guide, rather than in their own judgment, they will easily be cured.

When thou art wavering, when thou art anxious and doubtful, when arduous and difficult matters arise, do thou instantly fly to God, consult God, and with, all thy heart, with steadfast confidence, commit the whole affair to Him. Trust not to thine own industry, nor to thine own powers, but to the mercy of God; acknowledging thyself to be unable to conduct things rightly. And thus all things will end prosperously. For God will never neglect what thou hast humbly committed to Him; but will arrange, direct, and complete every affair, as He sees best for the good of thyself and others.

CHAPTER XIV: ON PERFECT PEACE AND QUIET OF THE SOUL.

ON PERFECT PEACE AND QUIET OF THE SOUL.

O THAT God alone occupied thy thoughts! For, so long as thy heart is not detached from all other things, so long as thou adherest to anything transitory, so long as thou lovest thy own will rather than the will of God, thou canst not be perfectly united to Him. Blessed is he, who is inwardly detached from all things, who is neither unworthily disturbed by losses, nor foolishly elated by success, who meets all inequalities of fortune with an equable mind, who has learnt to relinquish, and, as it were, to go out of himself, who at length, by self-denial, has attained to perfect charity. What peace, thinkest thou, does such a one possess? So great is it that no words suffice to express it.

Such persons are sometimes interiorly inundated by so profuse a torrent of divine consolation that, being scarcely able to bear it, they are as if forced to withdraw from it, and to cry out, saying: Lord, withhold the streams of Thy grace! Hence it often happens that their very bodies are wonderfully changed by the benignity of the divine visitation. They may, indeed, rightly sing with the Psalmist: "In peace in the self-same I will sleep, and I will rest" (Ps. iv. 9).

O desirable peace, which surpasses all sense, and transcends all understanding! joyful peace, by which the mind is absorbed in the interior life, and, forgetful of all external things, reposes happily in the Lord! sweet peace, through which and in which the spirit, soaring above itself, and absorbed in the riches of ineffable glory, passes wholly into God! Happy, thrice happy is that soul, which deserves to be often thus cherished in the bosom of her Spouse, and

frequently to repose, in this manner in the embraces of her Beloved. It is not to be told what joy she feels in this peace, while she cannot contain herself for the abundance of spiritual delights, while she is all filled with an incomprehensible and inestimable sweetness, and being filled she is inebriated, and being inebriated she is brought into the haven of holy security.

But, alas! while we bear about us a corruptible body, we cannot long enjoy this holy and secret union with God. For the Spouse approaches and with draws; now He shows Himself, and again He hides Himself. O what distaste for present things, what groans, what sighs, invade the holy soul when it returns to itself from those raptures, when it falls back from such riches to such poverty, from such delights to such misery, from so grateful a tranquillity of spirit to such unwelcome distractions and temptations! But yet these groans and sighs bring her meanwhile no little consolation; and they induce the Spouse to hasten His return.

There are few to be found who attain to this perfection, who shine with such purity and simplicity, who dwell in the citadel of highest charity and contemplation; nor does God allow all to reach it. Other pious souls, indeed, whose lives are not so holy, also enjoy interior peace in this pilgrimage, but not to such a degree as those who are perfect.

CHAPTER XV: GOD IS TO BE LOVED WITHOUT MEASURE, BUT MEN WITHIN LIMITS.

GOD IS TO BE LOVED WITHOUT MEASURE, BUT MEN WITHIN LIMITS.

THE more free thou art interiorly from the burden of passing things, and the more simple are thy affections, the more easily and happily wilt thou be able to devote thyself to God. Whatever is sought for, except God, occupies the mind, but satisfies it not. God alone will fulfil thy desires; in God alone thou wilt find true rest. He is that one thing necessary, and that Supreme Good, in which consist the plenitude and perfection of all things that are beautiful and give delight. Wherefore, it is meet to seek and to desire seriously Him alone; other things are not to be sought after, except so far as they may assist us in loving and honouring Him. He is to be loved above all things; He is to be loved with all our mind, with all our heart, and with all our soul. As much as thou understandest, as much as thou knowest, as much as thou canst, so much do thou love Him. Love Him according to the measure of thy strength and the degree of grace that is given thee. If thou canst love but imperfectly, keep alive within thee the desire, at least, of loving more perfectly: humble thyself, and say to Him: "Thy eyes did see my imperfect being" (Ps. cxxxviii. 16).

Woe to that man who loves not God! For he is never truly serene, never truly tranquil; he is a slave to his vices, he follows vanity; he lives not, indeed, but remains in death; he is dead, he is nothing. Let not the soul fear that seeks after God; but let her tremble that seeks Him not. Endeavour, as much as lieth in thee, to condemn and reject whatever calls thee away or distracts thee from the love of thy

Creator. Learn to expel vain desires, and to reject useless cares and solicitude.

Strive to break the bonds of unseasonable familiarity with men, and to sever the ties of inordinate love of relations, or of any temporal things. In short, thou must accustom thyself skilfully to repel and avoid whatever may entangle and dissipate thy heart. Thou must never seek to be especially loved by any one, but seek that God may be perfectly loved by all men. Thou shalt not greatly desire the bodily presence of any one, except for the sake of spiritual advancement; and even in that case, it must not be desired with disturbance and impatience of mind. If thou lovest spiritually those who live piously, thou wilt easily endure their absence; for those whom thou lovest sincerely in the Lord, will always be present to thee in the Lord.

CHAPTER XVI: FOR WHAT END AND IN WHAT MANNER THE HOLY SCRIPTURES SHOULD BE READ.

FOR WHAT END AND IN WHAT MANNER THE HOLY SCRIPTURES SHOULD BE READ.

BE thou given to reading, to sermons, and to other spiritual exercises.

Let reading prevent weariness in prayer let prayer or meditation season the study of books; and let both reading and prayer be relieved and strengthened by the interposition of some suitable manual labour. For variety in our exercises is of great assistance, especially to those who have not yet received the more perfect gifts of the Holy Spirit.

If, therefore, when thou art reading, thou dost leave it before thou art weary of it, to occupy thyself with prayer or meditation; and again, before thou art weighed down by the effort of prayer, thou dost seek afresh the exercise of reading, and dost opportunely intermingle writing or some other external employment; thou wilt retain the strength and alacrity of thy mind. But if, forgetting thy own weakness, thou wilt persist in prolonging thy reading or thy prayer beyond the proper time, and even till it becomes distasteful, thou wilt be utterly inert and worthless, and thou wilt be reluctant to return to the exercise with which thou hast been satiated.

Do thou read willingly that which is of spiritual profit; labouring earnestly to learn the manner of a holy life, and how to know and love God. That reading is vain which does not subserve either piety or a just and reasonable necessity. When thou preparest to read holy books, let thy intention be simple; be thou led by the desire of pleasing God, joined with holy humility; otherwise, if thou shouldst be led by evil curiosity and pride, the result of thy reading will be full of peril.

For thou mayest easily convert into poison to thyself the wholesome

honey which thou shouldst suck from the flowers of Holy Scripture; either working out for thyself I know not what marvellously perverse interpretations, or approving those which have been devised by others. It behoves us to lean in all things upon the Catholic Faith, humbly to follow the footsteps of the orthodox Fathers, and to adhere most firmly to the dogmas of Mother Church, not pertinaciously following our own opinion. If, having leisure, and God giving the grace, thou dost devote thyself in earnest to spiritual reading, and dost bring a pious mind to the study of the word of God, thou wilt be marvellously strengthened in thy holy resolutions; thy spirit will be exhilarated, and thou wilt experience unspeakable delights, utterly unknown to those who are devoted to vanity and worldly pursuits, and seek not after eternal things. To such, indeed, holy reading is not bread but a stone.

Remember also that the good of the soul consists not in eloquence nor in beauty of words. Wherefore, thou shalt never mock nor despise what is spoken holily indeed, but not politely nor eloquently; for such levity is an evident sign of a vain and arrogant mind. In reading require not, I say, refined language, if it is absent; nor rashly despise it when thou dost find it; but receive with thankfulness all that is good and useful, whether it be expressed in rude and simple words, or in cultivated and elegant language; and be not weary of often reading or hearing the same things. Those who look for the attractiveness of words rather than for the fruit of their teaching, are like those who chase butterflies instead of stags, or collect leaves and straws for apples. The excessive love of eloquence very easily turns away the minds of the careless from God and from piety, and bringing them to the precipice of pride and self-love, renders them, as it were, atheists. The heathen, who are ignorant of the humility of the Gospel, extol and admire eloquence; but Christians

commend and embrace holiness of life. He who thinks not humbly of himself, who loves not God, is in reality dumb and childish, though he be thought learned and accomplished. Yet, it is not eloquence itself, but the abuse of eloquence, which is to be condemned.

Do thou confine thyself prudently to a certain course of reading, and observe some rule; for unsteady reading, if there is no good reason for it, dissipates rather than improves the mind.

When any obscure passages occur in Holy Scripture which thou canst not understand, hold them in veneration, and pass on simply, unless there be any cause for doing otherwise; for thus thou wilt happily avoid both curiosity and labour. Such is the virtue of divine words, that they bring forth great fruit in the faithful soul, not only when they are perfectly understood, but also when they are piously received without being clearly understood; nor did our Lord say in vain, "The words that I have spoken to you, are spirit and life" (St. John vi. 64).

Again, be not grieved because thou canst not remember all that thou readest or hearest. For, as a vessel through which water is often poured remains clean, though all the water has run off; so the pious mind through which spiritual doctrine often passes is kept pure, even if the holy words themselves remain not.

When thou derives t from thy reading spiritual consolation, tranquillity of mind, pious affections, and a will prompt to fulfil the commands of God, thou dost reap truly great and important fruit from it. Do thou not always refer to others, but rather apply to thyself what is written or spoken about vices: lest thou embarrass and taint thy mind with various suspicious and rash judgments.

CHAPTER XVII: ON THE NECESSITY AND UTILITY OF DEVOUT PRAYER.

ON THE NECESSITY AND UTILITY OF DEVOUT PRAYER.

DILIGENCE in prayer is of the first necessity to thee, for prayer is an impenetrable armour, a certain refuge, a secure haven, and a most safe asylum. This one thing repels from the mind all evils, and brings into it all that is good. It purities the soul, remits the punishment due to sins, repairs former negligence, impetrates divine grace, extinguishes evil desires, quells the unruly passions of the soul, conquers the enemy, overcomes temptations, softens calamities, puts to flight sadness, infuses joy, brings peace, unites man to God, and thus united raises him to eternal glory. By prayer thou wilt obtain all that can be useful to thee.

But if thou dost not at once obtain what thou askest, see that thou be not disturbed: for God in His mercy sometimes defers to grant those things which are rightly asked: not that He desires to refuse, but that He may afterwards grant more abundantly and more profitably, and that He may exceedingly reward the faith, the patience, and perseverance of him who asks.

Thou shalt never say to thyself that which was said by the blind man in the Gospel, whose bodily eyes were indeed enlightened, but the eyes of whose mind were not yet perfectly opened: "Now we know that God doth not hear sinners" (St. John ix. 31). Thou shalt not, I say, speak thus: for, in truth, God hears sinners, when, they pray with a humble heart; otherwise, it would be sad indeed for the people of God, since they are all sinners, and need the mercy of God.

And if anyone asserts with the blind man restored to sight, that

sinners are not heard by God; that opinion holds good of those only who will not amend their lives. Therefore, although thou mayest be a sinner, thou must not on that account despairingly condemn thy prayer, which God condemns not, but holds in esteem, and keeps recorded. Nor let it move thee if, when thou prayest, God Himself, or an Angel, or one of the Blessed from heaven, appear not to announce to thee that thy prayers are heard; for that is neither necessary, nor indeed expedient. Otherwise, what would be the merit of faith? Although, such is the goodness of God, that when required, He vouchsafes visible apparitions. Do thou, therefore, pray humbly, nothing hesitating, but firmly believing that whosoever prays piously, will always be heard by God. Be strenuous, and persevere; and, without doubt, thou wilt in the end experience what Christ truly said; "Ask, and it shall be given you" (St. Luke xi. 9).

He will certainly give what thou askest, if it is expedient for thee to receive it; if not, He will give something else that is for thy good.

He knows when and how far to satisfy our desires. When from human weakness thou dost ask what is not for thy good, may He never grant thee thy request. When thou knowest not whether what thou desirest is pleasing to Him, learn to pray in this or some similar manner: Lord, grant this if it is pleasing to Thee, if it is expedient; but if it is not pleasing to Thee, and is not expedient, let it not come to pass.

Thy holy will be done in all things.

Strive to be recollected when thou prayest and praisest God. Do it diligently, and with due reverence; never deliberately consenting to the foolish wanderings of the mind. If, however, thy mind is so unstable and volatile that thou canst not attend to the words of thy prayers, be not on that account angry with thyself, nor cast down; but with a grateful, placid, and tranquil mind do all that is in thy power,

offering thy good will to God, and exercising untiring patience. Be humble rather than pusillanimous. Although thou passest over many words without attention, and then attendest to only one little word; or even though thou canst not pronounce one word with attention, thy labour will not be lost, if thou art watchful and right at heart. Do thou ever wisely avoid interior perplexity, impetuosity, over anxiety, and vehement efforts, and beware of seeking after many various methods of keeping thyself attentive; for these things are apt to produce confusion in the mind, and to exclude the influence of divine grace.

Let the sense of the sacred words, which the Holy Spirit may suggest to thy understanding, sweetly affect and simply occupy thy mind; and let it not be fatigued or confused by images derived with labour from other sources. If the Holy Spirit should call away and attract thy spirit to more sublime thoughts, thou must not rashly oppose it, but ever follow His leadings; for He knows intimately where, in what manner, and how far thou oughtest to penetrate.

As I have said before, when thou prayest, thy will must be determined always to attend to what thou art saying; and thou must calmly free thy heart from unseasonable thoughts, especially at the beginning of thy prayer. In order that thou mayest the more easily do this, study to keep thy mind free at other times. Having done this, commit the rest to God, and remain tranquil and joyful. For God will not impute to thee the distractions by which through frailty thou art carried away against thy will. Thou wilt fully satisfy Him, even if thou art unable to attend. Humble patience, cheerful gratitude of heart, and holy confidence in Him, will fully compensate for what may be sinful in the dissipation of the senses. God regards and delights no less in our reasonable endeavours and pious desires to do right, than in our work itself. He knows wherefore He permits us to be sometimes so unstable in mind; He

knows in what manner He intends either to defend or to purify our souls from the stains of pride, self-love, and vain-glory.

CHAPTER XVIII: ON THE WORSHIP OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND OF THE SAINTS. ON PSALMODY.

ON THE WORSHIP OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND OF THE SAINTS. ON PSALMODY.

DO thou frequently turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God; invoke her, love her, praise her; she is, indeed, most worthy of all honour; and however much we, may exalt her, she surpasses all our praise. Her Son is the Son of the Heavenly Father; she conceived God in her virginal womb, she brought forth God, she nourished God at her own breast, she carried God in her arms, and nursed Him in her lap. What can be more sublime, what more honourable, than to be called and to be the Mother of God? What dignity is higher or more admirable than this? It is certain that, beneath God, nothing can be imagined more divine than the Mother of God.

Woe to the wretched and unhappy heretics, who are wickedly opposed to so great a Virgin, who strive to obscure her glory and splendour! Woe, I say, to those who despise the worship of so great an Empress! They shudder and are indignant because we call her the hope of our life, and our saving reconciliation. What, say they, do you esteem Mary a goddess? do you thus place your hope in man? We do not, indeed, adore Mary as a goddess; but we venerate her as the Mother of God, as next to God, (although she might deserve to be called goddess, since the Saints in Scripture are called gods) (Ps. lxxxix. 6). We do not so place our hope in man, we do not so trust in Mary, as if she had not received from God all that she is, all that she has, and all her power; but we confess that she has received every thing from Him by whom she was created and chosen, and that she can do all things in Him whom she has brought forth. The Creator has given to His creature, the Son to His

Mother, unspeakable power, and has willed to honour her with a singular privilege: and for that reason we place in her our hope of salvation, not indeed before the Lord, but after the Lord; for we look for salvation chiefly from the Lord, whom we acknowledge to be the source of all good.

Do thou abominate the blasphemies and the impudence of those Anti-Marians (praying for them, nevertheless), and hold the honour of Mary dear: for she is the perfect example of all purity and holiness, the singular refuge of sinners, the most safe asylum of all who are pressed by temptation, misfortune, or any sort of persecution. She is the most powerful Queen of Heaven, the most liberal dispenser of graces, the most merciful Mother of all the faithful. She is all mild, all gracious, all sweet, all benignant, not only to the just and perfect, but also to sinners and to the desperate; and when she perceives that they call upon her from their hearts, she instantly assists, receives, and encourages them, and with maternal confidence reconciles them to their Judge, whom they fear. She spurns no one, she refuses no one; she consoles all, she opens the breast of her pity to all, and quickly helps even those who call upon her ever so little. By her innate goodness and sweetness she often strongly attracts and excites to the love of her those who are not inclined towards God; that so they may be prepared for grace, and rendered at length fit for the kingdom of heaven. Such she is, such she has been made by God, such she has been given to us: that no one may abhor her, no one fly from her, no one fear to approach her. It is impossible that the assiduous and humble worshipper of Mary should perish. Do thou, therefore, make her thy friend above all.

Thou must also pay devout homage to the other Saints of God, fully believing that they receive thy prayers and the pious affection of thy

heart. If thou wishest to choose some to venerate more especially, and to whose patronage thou wouldst more frequently commend thyself, it is praiseworthy to do so.

Happy wilt thou be if thou occupiest thyself sedulously in psalmody; and dost deserve to taste the sweetness and gift of peace which it contains. For psalmody is the most grateful tranquillity of the mind, the joyful serenity of the heart, the sweet consolation of the mourner, and the becoming composure of the joyful. Psalmody puts to flight demons, invites angels, opens heaven, and, as it were, compels God to have mercy. I would far rather taste the sweetness of psalms even without fully understanding them, than know their exact sense without any interior savour.

CHAPTER XIX: OF MEDITATION ON OUR LORD'S PASSION.

OF MEDITATION ON OUR LORD'S PASSION.

I ADVISE thee, above all things, faithfully to exercise thy mind in reflecting on those things which our Lord Jesus Christ did for us, which He said, and which He suffered for us: for thou wilt nowhere find so prompt a remedy against the allurements of vanities and trifles, against the corruption of vicious passions and affections, against the storms of temptations and calamities, against the depression of sadness and pusillanimity; nowhere wilt thou find so certain a means of attaining to all virtue and to the perfection of all virtue, as in the Life of our Saviour. By the frequent consideration of it the mind is most efficaciously purified from the stains of sins and vices, and, being brought to a certain holy confidence and intimate familiarity with our Lord Himself, it is illuminated with celestial light. For this same Jesus to whom it clings, is "a consuming fire" (Deut. iv. 24), making purgation of sins (Heb. i. 3); the same Jesus whom it loves is "the true light which enlighteneth every man " (St. John i. 9).

Therefore, according to the grace that is given thee, do thou study the Life of the Lord Jesus; meditate upon it, delight in it. Let this be thy repose in labour, thy solace amid difficulties, thy defence against temptations, thy joy under contumely. Keep it hid den day and night, like a precious pearl, in the secret of thy heart; bear it about with thee everywhere; look upon it lovingly with the eyes of thy mind, whether thou art at home or abroad, according to the gift of God, by which He insinuates Himself into thy heart.

Thou shalt not run through the sacred history at intervals nor in haste; but keep thyself present in spirit, as if thou couldst see

before thine eyes the things that were done, and couldst hear the things that were, said. Receive and embrace them all with a grateful mind, for they all have the power, if thou art attentive, to relieve and diminish greatly the sorrows of thy exile. No greater benefit has been bestowed on us by God than that which He conferred when He willed to be made man and to suffer for us; wherefore it is but just that we should very frequently dwell in thought upon the dispensation of our redemption, and sedulously give thanks for it; for this is most pleasing to God, and most advantageous to ourselves.

CHAPTER XX: SOME METHODS OF MEDITATION ON THE INFANCY OF CHRIST OUR LORD.

SOME METHODS OF MEDITATION ON THE INFANCY OF CHRIST OUR LORD.

WHEN thou wishest to recall to mind the beginnings of our salvation, if thou delightest in that which is humble, thou canst consider with what peace the Angel Gabriel enters into the chamber of the most holy Virgin Mary, and with what reverence he salutes her. Do thou also enter with him, and attend diligently to every word that is spoken, as well by him as by her. Contemplate the modesty, the purity, the prudence, the humility, the bashfulness, and holiness of this most blessed Maiden; reflect that when she spoke these words, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word " (St. Luke i. 38), immediately the Son of God, the omnipotent God, was ineffably conceived in her most chaste womb by the power of the Holy Ghost, became incarnate, and was made Man. Marvel at the wonderful mystery, at the immense charity of the Lord, who for us did not disdain to become our Brother. Venerate that most sacred womb; exult, and give thanks. Then, arising together with the most pure Virgin, follow her when she ascends to the hills. Draw near, so that when she enters the house of her cousin Elizabeth, thou mayest hear the mutual salutation of the Virgin and the aged woman, and their mutual colloquy. happy women, of whom one bears in her womb the King of Glory, and the other the herald of grace! odoriferous vessels, breathing the perfume of perpetual gladness! blessed wombs, about shortly to pour forth new joys over the world! At length, when this most sweet Virgin returns thence, do thou also return; offering thyself to be her faithful companion and lowly servant. Lastly, in company with her, being with child, and with her

holy guardian St. Joseph, proceed to Bethlehem: and arriving there, commiserate that most tender Virgin, who chose a stable for her resting-place after her long fatigues. Behold her occupied in prayer, and intent upon heavenly contemplation; behold, admire, and love. Rejoice that in the darkness of the night our Lord, arising out of the deep, hath visited us; rejoice that, without pain and without detriment to her virginity, she hath brought forth for us a Saviour, God and Man. Be glad, for the Messias is born; be glad, for the oracles of the Prophets are fulfilled. Enter thou into the palace of the everlasting King, enter into the stable; see what is the cradle of the Lord of lords; behold the Creator of the world, a little infant wailing with the sharpness of the cold. Kneel before that divine crib; embrace the tender little feet of thy Redeemer; fix thy lips on them, and kiss them again and again. Let love conquer shame, and let affection overcome fear. Say with devotion, say with humility and gratitude: We adore thee, dearest Babe; we adore thee, sweetest Infant; we adore thee, King Emmanuel, the Prince of Peace, the light of the Gentiles, glory be to thee for ever and ever. Hold Him, let Him not go, except He bless thee (Is. vii. 14, and ix. 6; Cant. iii. 4; Genes. xxxii. 26).

In like manner thou mayest occupy thyself with the remainder of the Life and conversation of the same Christ our Lord; space does not permit us here to treat of all that the Gospel history relates. And the little meditations which thou wilt make for thyself may perhaps be more sweet than those which we have proposed. Those which we have prescribed are certainly very simple, and yet they are very sublime. Do thou, however, so consider the Life and actions of the Saviour, that thou mayest desire to love Him, and to imitate His humility, patience, charity, and compassion.

Even the bare reading of the Life of Christ will bring forth much fruit

in thee, if thou receivest piously and reverently the words of the Holy Ghost, which have an unspeakable power concealed within them. For that woman who was suffering from an issue of blood, was healed by touching with faith the hem of our Lord's garment, The letter of the Gospel is the hem of His garment.

CHAPTER XXI: A METHOD OF MEDITATION ON THE PASSION OF OUR LORD, AND ON THE MOST HOLY TRINITY.

A METHOD OF MEDITATION ON THE PASSION OF OUR LORD, AND ON THE MOST HOLY TRINITY.

CHIEFLY thou must meditate on the blessed Passion of the Redeemer. Thou mayest, if it so please thee, place on each day before the eyes of thy mind some one part of His Passion. For example; one day thou wilt propose to thyself Christ in the garden, full of grief, kneeling on the ground in prayer, and sweating blood under the pressure of that stupendous agony (St. Luke xxii. 39-44). During that day thou wilt meditate on that portion, and, God giving thee grace, thou wilt placidly direct thy interior sight to it, whenever thou shalt be at leisure from other serious thoughts, and free from legitimate impediments.

On the following day thou wilt in like manner represent to thyself what our Lord suffered, when He was betrayed by Judas, taken captive, bound and led away with insults (St. Mark, xiv. 13, 66). Thou wilt thus go through the Passion of our Lord in order, and, having completed it, thou wilt repeat it from the beginning.

If thou shouldst prefer each day to go through several portions of the Passion, or to keep for many days to the meditation of one small portion, or every day to consider that part which represents Christ hanging on the Cross (St. John xviii.), thou mayest follow thine inclination. Adopt freely that method which may be most suitable to thy capacity, and most conducive to devotion.

Do thou in this manner occupy thyself according to thy measure with the Humanity of Christ. Let this so possess thy mind, that, whatever evil

phantasy may enter it from other sources, shall quickly be dispelled. Choose this thought in which to repose in safety, so long as thou art not carried on to higher things; for it is a ship in which thou mayest without danger cross the seas of this world, and happily reach thy most blessed home. While thou art still navigating it, God may, however, sometimes powerfully sustain thee in regions where thou wilt be inwardly stripped of all forms and images of things; where all action will cease within thee; where at length, losing thyself, thou wilt happily pass into God. To this the Hand of the Lord will sometimes lead thee, if it is expedient for thee to be thus led during the time of thy exile; if it is not expedient, thou wilt not be so led.

But take care that thou seek not anxiously for a visible image of the Saviour, if it does not readily occur to thy heart; do thou rather, putting aside a closer representation of his lineaments and bodily appearance, conceive in thy mind God as a Spirit present to thee within and without; conceive His sweet and most amiable goodness, benignity, and love; dwell upon the same Lord of unspeakable majesty every where present, knowing all things, penetrating all things, giving life to all things, sustaining all things without effort, encompassing all things without limit, disposing all things without disquietude, governing all things without weariness. Conceive these things; but make not great efforts in doing so; for some of these thoughts will readily and even necessarily offer themselves to the faithful soul reflecting on the Redeemer of the world.

Nor does the faithful soul venerate in Christ the Humanity only, but also the Divinity. It acknowledges the Word to have been so made flesh, that He ceased not to be the Word (St. John i. 14). It loves both, the Flesh and the Word; it worships both, Man and God, the One Lord Jesus Christ.

When the thought of the Holy Trinity enters into thy mind, thou shalt not fabricate for thyself any absurd idols; thou shalt not imagine the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to be as it were three men or three gods; but confess the unity of the Godhead in the Trinity of Persons. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are not three gods, but one God. There are three Persons, but the substance of the Persons is one. This mystery is believed by faith, but is not within the ken of human reason. In the Most Holy Trinity there is one and the same nature, one and the same essence, one and the same eternity, one and the same glory, one and the same majesty, one and the same will, one and the same omnipotence. And, as we believe this same Blessed Trinity to be inseparable in substance, so do we confess it to be inseparable in works. Whatever is said to be done by the Father, the same is done by the Son, and by the Holy Ghost; whatever is said to be done by the Son, the same is done by the Father, and by the Holy Ghost; whatever is said to be done by the Holy Ghost, the same is done by the Father, and by the Son: for the Trinity is inseparable in its works. So, when we worship the Father, we worship also the Son, and the Holy Spirit; when we worship the Son, we worship also the Father, and the Holy Spirit; when we worship the Holy Spirit, we worship also the Father and the Son: for the Trinity is inseparable in substance.

It is not expedient for those who are not well versed in Divine things to enquire too curiously into the nature of the Holy Trinity. Let them simply and faithfully believe the Trinity to be such as the Catholic Church confesses it to be; for we shall not be condemned in the day of judgment, because we have not exactly known the nature of our God; but, if we shall have spoken anything rashly, we shall pay the penalty of our rashness.



CHAPTER XXII: PIOUS ASPIRATIONS, OR DARTS OF LOVE.

PIOUS ASPIRATIONS, OR DARTS OF LOVE.

THOU shouldst always have in readiness some efficacious words, and prayers in the form of ejaculations, by which thou mayest recall and elevate thy mind to God. We will here subjoin a little collection of such short prayers:

O my soul, behold thy God, behold thy Creator and Redeemer; behold Him who washes away thy sins, and sanctifies thee: behold thy life and thy salvation: behold thy only good!

See how far the King of Kings has humbled Himself for thy sake; consider what bitter things thy Saviour endured for thee; weigh with how much charity He loves thee, since for thee He took upon Himself so great poverty and so many calamities.

Remain with thy Lord, depart not from thy Master; for it cannot be well with thee if thou dost desert thy God, nor can it be ill with thee if thou keepest near Him.

Relinquish the many things, and embrace the one, for one thing is necessary (St. Luke x. 42). There is One who loves thee unutterably; do thou also love One above all.

O good Jesus, compassionate Shepherd, O sweet Master, O King of eternal glory, I adore Thee, I bless and thank Thee, who hast so loved me, who hast done such great things, and hast borne such indignities for me.

"Be merciful to me a sinner" (St. Luke xviii. 13). Cleanse, heal, and strengthen me; direct, teach, and enlighten me.

O that I had not hitherto been ungrateful to Thee! O that I might even now be pleasing to Thee! O that all evil passions and affections were dead in me! O that I could stand before Thee truly humble and gentle,

truly free and tranquil!

O that Thou alone didst possess my heart! O that I utterly despised all transitory things! O that I might seek after Thee alone, attach myself to Thee alone, and inseparably cling to Thee!

O that I might most ardently love Thee! O that I might ever pant after Thee with most burning desires! Alas, O my Lord, when shall I worship Thee with a pure, simple, and joyful mind? when shall I serve Thee with a quiet, steadfast, and serene conscience? when will my spirit be absorbed in the immensity of thy love?

What do I desire besides Thee? or what can all things profit me without Thee? Thou alone sufficest to my soul.

O my God, O my love, O my desire, O my refuge! O my consolation, my hope, and my trust! O my peace, my rest, and my light! O my glory, my happiness, and all my joy! O my sweetness, my treasure, and my only good!

When shall I see Thee? when shall I be with Thee? when will this world be silent to me? when will all the hindrances, all the vicissitudes of this life cease for me? when shall I be delivered from the miserable captivity of this present exile? When will the shadows of mortality retire, and the day of eternity break? (Cant. ii. 17). When shall I have laid down the burden of this body, and happily praise Thee with Thy Saints to all eternity? Have mercy on me, O my Lord Jesus, have mercy on me; for my soul trusteth in Thee (Ps. lvi. 1).

Innumerable other aspirations (for so we name these short ejaculatory prayers) may be made, or may be sought for out of the Holy Scriptures. Those which we have here given may perchance be of use to some; but those which are suggested to each one by his own devotion, and the grace of the Holy Spirit, are sweeter than what are suggested by the feeling and devotion of others.

The exercise which consists in aspirations and short prayers of this sort, is most effectual in extirpating vices, and moving to charity.

However, the faithful soul that is given to this practice must not be disquieted if it perhaps rarely feels itself intimately united with God, to whom it aspires; for God receives its good will and holy desires with the same complacency as if it languished with love, and were perfectly united to Him.

That soul which has not yet entirely come out of Egypt, and which is still much disfigured by the deformity of sin, must not presume; that is, it must not rashly offer itself to the most sacred embraces of the Heavenly Spouse; but, sitting at the feet of the Lord, it must first strive to wash away its stains, to cultivate its beauty, to arrange its garments, to correct its manners; and, when all these have been changed and amended, it may then more freely (still observing due reverence) lift itself up, and humbly rise to the sublime kisses of the eternal King.

CHAPTER XXIII: ON DISCRETION IN UNDERTAKING, CONTINUING, AND GIVING UP PIOUS EXERCISES.

ON DISCRETION IN UNDERTAKING, CONTINUING, AND GIVING UP PIOUS EXERCISES.

WHEN thou art prevented from thinking of divine things by travelling, or conversation, or any other occupation and reasonable cause, see that, at least, thou think not of evil or unworthy things. God docs not command that, rapt in sublime contemplation, thou shouldst be ever intent on heavenly things, nor does He give such grace to all His elect: but He does command thee to withdraw thy mind, as far as in thee lies, from all wicked and foolish thoughts: and if any unworthy idea should suggest itself, He wills that thou shouldst instantly reject it, and, by all possible means, keep thy superior reason free from consenting to it. In the mystical body of Christ, those who are distinguished by the grace of more perfect contemplation, are called the eyes; others are the hands or the feet. But not only the eyes, but also the hands and the feet will be saved, when Christ shall gather together all His members to Himself. Let, therefore, thy thoughts be innocent and sober; let thy heart be pure and tranquil, and avoid with diligence whatever might defile it, whatever might disturb the quiet of thy mind.

God everywhere beholds thee, and perfectly knows thy most secret intentions and affections. He is so present to thee, He is so within thee, that without Him thou canst not even move a finger. Be thou firmly persuaded of this, believe this, and love and reverence His presence; be ashamed to admit anything that might be displeasing to the eyes of so exalted and so intimate a Beholder.

Observe in all things a holy discretion; for it is not expedient that,

without regard to thy infirmity, thou shouldst at once attempt to do whatever good thou readest of, or hearest that others have done. Learn to follow humbly the grace given thee, and not impatiently to forestall it. Thou shalt not, I say, with unruly vehemence, force thy mind into regions to which it cannot yet ascend; nor violently urge thyself to do things that are quite beyond the strength either of thy body or thy mind.

If it is for thy good that thou shouldst penetrate into the sublimity of the heavenly mysteries, the grace of God will lead thee thither better than thy own importunate efforts and endeavours. Thou wishest, perhaps, to reach the heights rapidly, thou wouldst fly rather than walk towards perfection; but this is granted to few, nor would it be expedient for all. Be humble, sit down in the lowest place; one day, perchance, the Father of the family may say to thee, "Friend, go up higher" (St. Luke xiv. 10). Why dost thou shake thy head? why dost thou afflict thy soul? God does not require that thou shouldst cruelly torture thyself in the service which thou renderest Him; but He wills thee to be; whole and vigorous both in mind and body, unless He Himself has otherwise ordained it for thy good.

Why art thou disturbed that thou canst not pursue the practices which are followed by others? It matters not by what road thou goest, so that thou dost arrive at charity. Divers ways lead to it, and the way which is suitable to one is by no means suitable to another; for the same kind of exercise is not adapted for all. Do thou, therefore, take up such exercises as are within thy capacity; not regarding what or how much others have done and are doing, but what and how much thou art able to do.

CHAPTER XXIV: SOME RULES OF DISCRETION WITH REGARD TO EXERCISES.

SOME RULES OF DISCRETION WITH REGARD TO EXERCISES.

BE careful not to lay upon thy weak shoulders too heavy a weight, lest, oppressed and overpowered by the burden, thou shouldst be forced to faint and give way. Even in tears of devotion a measure should be observed, lest the head be weakened, especially if those tears are accompanied by strong emotion.

If thou perceivest thy spirit to be wearied with even a single stroke of sensible compunction, thou must warily avoid it. When thou hast the grace of devotion, urge not thy spirit unseasonably to greater fervour; but persevere in tranquil love.

Bind not thyself irrevocably to any great and in tolerable number of prayers to be said daily, but rather diminish or increase thy exercises according to thy disposition; unless otherwise obliged by vow or by obedience. If, for some reason, thou hast even entirely omitted these same private and voluntary exercises, be not much grieved on that account, but study to be ever free and tranquil in the Lord.

Why art thou distressed that thou canst not be al ways occupied in prayer? If thy life is good, if thou carefully abstainest from sin, if thou employest thy time usefully, if thou dost truly humble thyself in the sight of the Lord, and sigh after God and thy heavenly home, thou dost always pray; for a holy life and holy desires are a continual prayer before God. It is, how ever, fitting that thou shouldst be devoted to the practice of prayer, so that thou mayest, if not continually, at least frequently, use pious doxologies and prayers. When thou desires t to pray at greater length for any of the living or

the dead, or when thou wouldst dwell longer on the worship of any Saint, if thou hast not leisure, or if, for any other reason, thou fearest disturbance of mind, it will not be necessary to change the usual order of thy pious exercises; but it will be sufficient if thou dost determine before God to offer them for the welfare of those persons, living or dead, or for the honour of that Saint. For thy works will be valued and received by the Lord according to thy intention. We truly venerate the Saints, when we worship God, who made and sanctified them; so, again, we truly worship God, when we venerate the Saints, in whom He dwells, and whom He has already united to Himself in heaven. Thou shouldst not deny to thy body the necessary indulgence of food and sleep; thou shouldst not be very severe in that respect, unless thou hast learnt for certain by a revelation of the Holy Spirit that thou wouldst please God by a singular abstinence. For an excessive diminution of those refreshments (like too great exertion of a moderate intellect, or too vehement use of the imagination,) injures for the most part both the spirit and the weak body, and often causes madness. Fasts, vigils, and exterior works, are, indeed, pleasing to God, when they are undertaken with discretion for the sake of God Himself; yet purity of heart is far more pleasing to Him, humility and charity far more acceptable, For these observances are commanded for the sake of the virtues, not the virtues for the sake of them. Therefore, as far as in thee lies, arrange, regulate, and dispose all things, so that thou mayest never lose thy interior liberty, never confuse thy mind, never overtask thy strength; and yet never rashly omit those things to the observing or doing of which thou art bound by vow or by obedience.

CHAPTER XXV: FURTHER RULES OF DISCRETION.

FURTHER RULES OF DISCRETION.

SEE that thou perform not thy exercises with obstinate adherence to thy own choice; but in them also deny thyself. Thou shouldst carefully observe, and promptly follow the interior calls, and the hidden force and impulse of the Holy Spirit, and be ready, in obedience to His will, but not out of levity and in constancy, to change those exercises, to give them up, and to resume them.

In thy private prayers and holy aspirations to God, it will sometimes, perhaps, be best for thee to utter thy prayer peacefully in words; sometimes, it will suit thee better to pray mentally, At one time thou wilt take pleasure in passing through some parts without much delay, at another in dwelling long on parts of thy meditation. Sometimes thou wilt choose to pray by desires alone, or in very few words, repeating them often with sweetness and devotion; sometimes to pray in many and various words. It will be pleasant to thee, sometimes, to read thy prayers out of a book, sometimes to offer them to God without the aid of a book. Sometimes psalmody, sometimes another sort of contemplation may be most sweet to the taste of thy heart. In short, thou wilt be drawn to different practices at different times, and it will be good for thee to follow now one and now another form of exercises. For the Holy Spirit influences the interior man in various ways, and leads him by divers paths to the embraces of divine love; and we must ever be most watchful for His calls and impulses, that we may always bend to His will, utterly abandoning our own choice.

Seek not after sweetness in thy exercises from impure motives; rest not in it, but pass on through it to God. There is great danger in

spiritual greediness. by which we abuse the sweetness of grace, and turn it to our own pleasure. The .soul which is deeply infected with this vice cannot be called a modest and faithful servant of Christ: for she will not serve God generously, but desires God's gifts rather than God Himself. She is a mercenary slave, not a freeborn daughter. If that sensible sweetness passes away, she becomes at once all full of bitterness, indignation, turbulence, and impatience, and abandons the pursuit, of piety; and, shaking off the trammels of fear and shame, she gives herself up entirely to external consolations. That is to say, if God wills to give her pleasure, she serves God; if not, she withdraws from Him. On the other hand, the soul which deserves to be called the faithful handmaid, or the modest spouse of Christ, reposes not in the gift of God, but in God Himself. Whether God bestows on her interior sweetness or not, she remains tranquil, she cheerfully serves her Spouse, faithfully clings to Him, and constantly loves Him. She wishes the will of God to be clone rather than her own. Therefore, be careful that thy intention be ever chaste and pure; seek after the joy of the salvation of God (Ps. l. 14), not so much for thy own delight, as that thou mayest please God.

CHAPTER XXVI: ON SENSIBLE DEVOTION. REVELATIONS, CONSOLATIONS. THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

ON SENSIBLE DEVOTION. REVELATIONS, CONSOLATIONS. THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

IF, when thou art praying, or offering the holy Sacrifice, or meditating on divine things, or occupied in spiritual reading, or doing any other holy work, thou art destitute of the sensible affection of devotion, do thou yet persevere in what thou hast begun; and, with a pious desire of pleasing God, offer to Him the barrenness of thy heart, and thy labour, to His eternal praise. For thus will that dryness which thou sufferest be no less pleasing to Him than the affluence of interior sweetness; yea, verily, more pleasing; because reasonable devotion is, by far, safer and more acceptable to God than sensible devotion. Devotion is reasonable when we hate and execrate ever sin, and worship God with a ready will; and when we strenuously embrace and execute whatever we know to be pleasing to God. If thou hast this devotion, thou wilt in no wise fail of thy reward, even if thou be without the other kind of devotion.

O with what wisdom God cleanses us from pride, if we are infected with it; or defends us from it, if we are yet free! O how mercifully He shuts out the love of this exile from our souls, and compels us to sigh after that, our blessed country. O how graciously He works out our salvation, even when we understand it not! We ought, therefore, to praise Him, even when He seems to leave us exposed to divers miseries and calamities. For, in truth, He never can desert those whom He sees to be humble and of good will.

Be not curious in seeking for heavenly revelations: for those who rashly desire, and lightly give credence to them, lay themselves open

to many dangers, and to many snares of the devil. For our common enemy often transforms himself into an angel of light, that he may deceive the careless. If thou dost not at once believe a vision shown to thee, but remainest humbly in doubt, till thou hast more evident and certain knowledge of it; thou offendest not God, even if it should have been sent by God Himself. Those revelations which are made from heaven to the pious, console and soothe the mind, and make it humble; those visions, on the contrary, which are concocted by the craft of the demons, do nothing but disturb and harden the heart, and render it perverse.

When thou art benignantly visited by God, when all is tranquil and serene, do thou refer what thou hast received to His pure grace and mercy, not to thy own diligence, nor to thy own merits or efforts. On no account do thy own pleasure, nor give thyself up to foolish joy or dangerous security; but keep thyself ever in holy vigilance and fear; prepared to accept spiritual tribulation and dryness, if it should be God's will to send them to thee again, and be not of the number of those thus described by Solomon, saying, "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them" (Prov. i. 32).

Thou shalt not unseasonably magnify to thyself the gift thou hast received, nor love to speak of it every where to others, (though thou mayest reverently and humbly divulge it, if any spiritual good or necessity require it), but rather turn away thy thoughts from the gift itself, as if thou hadst received nothing, and dwell upon God. If thou wishest to dwell upon it more particularly in thy own mind, do it for this end only, that thou mayest be more aware of the goodness of God towards thee, and of thy own ingratitude towards God. Attribute to God all that is of God, and be grateful; but to thyself ascribe nothing but sin. Acknowledge thyself to be an unprofitable servant, unworthy of any

favour or solace; in order that the more progress thou dost make, the more, thou mayest humble thyself. For humility alone will preserve the good that is in thee uncorrupted.

Those feelings of sensible love and sweetness, though they may usually be signs of salvation, must not be considered undoubted indications thereof, unless the Holy Spirit has so revealed it. For they are some times natural feelings rather than divine; and they may arise even in a heart that is far distant from God. Wherefore, we ought ever to grow more vile in our own eyes, and to steer between chaste fear and holy hope, so long as we are tossed upon the waves of this present life.

When thou art about to receive the most Holy Eucharist, see that thou assist not unworthily at that tremendous and heavenly feast. Cast down thy spirit, and hide thyself in the deepest valley of humiliation; confess, most heartily confess thyself to be a sinner. Beseech the Lord that He will deign to purify thy soul, and to adorn it with His merits and virtues. Approach with firm faith, with certain hope, and sincere love, in memory of His most dear Incarnation, Passion, and Death: so that thou mayest be able to say with truth, "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover" (St. Luke xxii. 15). Having at length received the King of glory, be watchful lest thou admit anything that may offend the eyes of so great a Guest. And if, perchance, thou hast done anything amiss, and hast wounded thy soul by sin, fly instantly to the remedy of penance, and to the medicine of the divine mercy.

CHAPTER XXVII: ON OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE. ON A MODEST AND EDIFYING DEPARTMENT.

ON OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE. ON A MODEST AND EDIFYING DEPARTMENT.

THOU shalt always prefer to thy private exercises, the duties to be performed in community, and those which relate to obedience or to the necessities of our neighbour, so that thou mayest cease to belong to thyself. Obedience is the greatest virtue, it is, certainly, the chief of virtues; on the other hand, to refuse acquiescence is the most grievous wickedness. Thou wilt, sometimes, make more progress in perfection of life by an insignificant work done under obedience, than by sublime exercises performed by thy own choice. What thou doest through disobedience, is utterly rejected by God, and, instead of being useful to thee, turns wholly to thy injury. Do thou, therefore, obey God, obey the Catholic Church, obey those who hold the place of God; obey thy Prelates, and reverence them, even if they seem not to lead very good lives. For, if thou obeyest not these, thou obeyest not God: since He saith, "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me" (St. Luke x. 16). Thou shalt prefer nothing whatever to holy obedience; but submit thyself in all things which are not certainly evil.

Heresies have no other origin than pride and disobedience. For what is it that heretics do? They deride the simplicity which is in Christ; they contemn the holy traditions and customs of the Church, they impiously call them vain dreams of men, and empty ceremonies; with presumptuous daring they heap up blasphemies against the Saints of God, against the Virgin Mary the Mother of Christ, against the Sacraments of our religion, and, lastly, even against the Blessed Trinity; they

spurn, ridicule, hate, and persecute all faithful Catholics; they esteem themselves alone to be wise, evangelical, and full of the Holy Spirit; they make a monstrous confusion of dogmas, they adhere pertinaciously to their own opinions; they will not follow the footsteps of the orthodox Fathers, they will not humble themselves at the feet of .Mother Church; but, full of arrogance, full of envy and insane fury, they persist in their perverse dogmas; and many of them are led by their blindness and hardness of heart to such a degree of folly that they undergo death with courage and alacrity for the defence of their errors, becoming in deed martyrs, not of Christ, but of Satan. In the martyrs of Christ, holy humility shines forth; in martyrs of the devil, the harshness of pride is conspicuous. Do thou sedulously pray to God for such men, and hold their pestilent opinions in abhorrence. Submit to the decrees of the Church, which is ever governed by the Holy Spirit; follow her teaching, as thou dost the Gospel itself, even if thou shouldst see that many of her members, not only among the common people, but also among the rulers and those of high rank, give way to vices; for she is a threshing-floor, containing both wheat and chaff. Beware of obstinacy in thy own opinion. Consult willingly spiritual men and those who fear God; prefer their judgment to thine own. For he goes not readily astray, who is humble and leans more on the prudence of others than on his own; and if in his simplicity he should err, the Lord will not impute to him the error. Avoid all blameable singularity, and as much as in thee lies, guard against giving scandal to any. If, how ever, any one is offended at thy doing or saying what it is right for thee to do or to say, desist not on that account from what thou hast begun, but humbly persevering, and praying for those who are scandalized, commit the affair to God. Do thou carefully rule all thy members, and retrain all thy senses. Be

composed and staid in thy manners, joyful and serene, in countenance, modest in aspect, calm and gentle in voice, innocent and pure in thought, faithful and vigorous in works, kind and affable in conversation; but thy affability must never lead to foolish mirth.

Abstain prudently from blame worthy trifling, from violent laughter, from games that are wanting in due propriety and moderation; for by these unbecoming liberties the purity of the heart is injured, and the sanctuary of holy modesty violated, Thou mayest, however, at fitting times relax and recreate thy mind to the honour of God, even in outward amusements, that thou mayest return with the morn vigour to thy spiritual exercises; but it must be done with moderation and from pure motives. God does not command us to refuse all solace from creatures, which He made to praise Him; He does not enjoin us to separate ourselves from them, except inasmuch as they impede our love and familiarity towards Him. They impede us, when we are attached to them more or otherwise than is fitting; when we cling to them and rest in them.

Every inordinate affection must, therefore, be utterly rooted out; after this is done, these same creatures will not separate us from God, but will lead us to Him, as it were, by the hand.

Whatever sweetness, whatever joy, whatever objects worthy of love or admiration, offer themselves to thy senses, receive them with a chaste mind, and learn to refer them to God, or to the state of eternal blessedness. So wilt thou be joyful in the Lord,

CHAPTER XXVIII: THE WORLD IS THE GREAT BOOK OF GOD.

THE WORLD IS THE GREAT BOOK OF GOD.

IF we carefully and wisely reflect upon creatures, they will wonderfully fill our minds with admiration, and greatly inflame us with love of the Supreme Creator. For the whole universe is, as it were, a book written by the finger of God, in which each creature forms a letter. But as one who has not learnt to read, when he looks into an open book, sees indeed the characters of the letters, but understands not their significance and force; in like manner, he who perceives not the things of God, beholds the external aspect of creatures, but comprehends not their interior meaning. "The senseless man shall not know; nor will the fool understand these things" (Ps. xci. 7).

But the spiritual man, whose mental eyes are open, when he contemplates the external works of God, inwardly perceives how wonderful is the Maker of them; and from the fairness of those things which he is contemplating, he parses on to that Divine Beauty, which is fairer than all other beauty, and from whence all beauty springs. To him who is occupied with this joyful contemplation, all things are miraculous; so that in amazement he is forced to exclaim with the Prophet, "How great are Thy works, O Lord! Thou hast made all things in wisdom " (Ps. ciii. 24); "Thou hast given me, O Lord, a delight in Thy doings; and in the works of Thy hands I shall rejoice " (Ps. xci. 5).

It certainly ought not to appear to us less astonishing that the juice of the vine should be every year changed into wine (by the disposition of God), than that formerly in Cana of Galilee, water should, also at His command, have been changed into wine (St. John ii. 7, 8); and it is a greater work to create daily many things which were not, than to

restore life to those which were dead. There is no creature so minute or so vile as not to show forth these three invisible attributes of God--His power, wisdom, and goodness. Therefore, God is known by those things which He has made, as St. Paul asserts, saying, "The invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made " (Rom. i. 20).

How worthy is it of admiration that God should have created out of nothing the heavens, and the earth, and all that they contain; and that He is able to create more, since He is an infinite ocean of substance! He made all things (sin alone He did not make; and, indeed, sin ought not to be called a created substance), He also preserves all things. For, if He did not by His power preserve what He has created, all things would instantly return to nothingness; because, in themselves, they are nothing, and depend entirely on God, by whom they were made. His care extends over all things: He "reacheth from end to end mightily," and from the Angel to the minutest worm "ordereth all things secretly" (Wisdom viii. 1); so that not even a leaf can fall from a tree without His Providence.

CHAPTER XXIX: THE USE OF CREATURES AS STEPS TO ASCEND TO GOD.

THE USE OF CREATURES AS STEPS TO ASCEND TO GOD.

THE multitude and greatness of created things manifest the power of the Creator; their beauty and qualities show forth His wisdom; their usefulness declares His goodness. How many things hath God created] Do thou number the stars of heaven, the sands of the sea, the dust of the earth, the drops of rain, the feathers of birds, the scales of fishes, the hairs of quadrupeds, the leaves and fruits of trees. Number the men, the birds, the cattle, the plants, the stones; count all other things, if thou canst; if thou canst not, confess that they are innumerable. How are the things which God hath created? Measure the weight of the mountains, the waters of the rivers, the space of the plains, the height of Leaven, the depth of the abyss. Again, how small are the things which God hath created! For they also relate to quantity; and it requires no less power to create small things out of nothing than the greatest. How small, therefore, are the things created by God! Passing over inanimate things, consider the butterflies, gnats, and flies; the centipedes, ants, and moths; think of all the kinds of insects and animalcules.

Then how fitting, how fair, are all the creations of God! Look into the structure of the human body, behold the fabric of the heavens, consider the disposition of the elements, and the vicissitudes of the seasons, with all other created things; everywhere thou wilt find wonderful harmony, marvellous adaptation and ornament. For, if thou wilt contemplate even the leaf of a tree, thou wilt discover in it a work of stupendous skill. Thou wilt see how fitly it is strongest where it is

nearest to the branch of the tree; thou wilt see how beautifully it spreads out, and forms itself, how skilfully it is guarded all round by serrated teeth, and interwoven here and there with ribs; compare any one with another of the same kind; thou wilt find as many teeth in one as in the other; as many ribs in one as in the other; and the same shape in both. What, again, is fairer than light? What pleasanter than the serene sky? What more glorious than the brilliant sunshine? What more perfect than the order of the moon and the stars? What more lovely than the elegance of the various flowers? What more pleasing than the time of spring? when the gardens, the meadows, the woods, the fields, clothed with reviving beauty, exhibit to us a most delightful spectacle; when the seeds of herbs and little plants, by a power latent in their nature, infused by the Creator Himself, spring forth wonderfully out of the earth, and, with thin stems rising upwards, as if spurning death, appositely illustrate the glory of the future resurrection. I speak not of those things which seem unshapely; for even in their unshapeliness there is, sometimes, a beauty, which not a little modifies their appearance. I pass on to those things which delight the hearing, the smell, the taste, and the touch. What more grateful than the song of the nightingale and the lark? What more pleasing than the modulations of the harp and lyre? What more sweet than the perfume of roses and lilies? What more delightful than the savour of various fruits and condiments? What softer than silk and fine linen? I omit here both rough and bitter things.

But, behold all things, both great and small, beautiful and unsightly, sweet and bitter, soft and rough, were formed by the Supreme Creator for His own praise, and for the benefit, the use, the teaching, and the solace of man. We have mentioned a few things, because our space will not allow us to speak of many; but neither can the mind comprehend all

things, nor can they be expressed in words.

Do thou learn from what hath been said to philosophise on those things of which we have not spoken. Contemplate all things with a grateful mind. Speak occasionally to thyself these or similar words: O how powerful and how great is He who created so many and such immense creatures! O how beautiful and how sweet is He who made things so lovely and so attractive! O how good and how liberal is He who has given us all those things! In this manner do thou pass through creatures to the Creator, in creatures admire their Maker; with creatures praise their Benefactor. If the eyes of the mind are purified, so that thou canst also contemplate the invisible creatures of God, the rational soul adorned with purity and holiness, the Angels, the Virtues, Powers, Dominations, and the other citizens of the heavenly abodes, these miracles will overwhelm thee, and will nigh transport thee altogether beyond thyself.

CHAPTER XXX: THE DEVOUT MAN MUST CAREFULLY STRIVE TO HAVE A RIGHT INTENTION, AND CULTIVATE

THE DEVOUT MAN MUST CAREFULLY STRIVE TO HAVE A RIGHT INTENTION, AND CULTIVATE

PURITY IN ALL THINGS.

LET this thought precede all thy actions, (even when thou hast to eat, to drink, to sleep, or to afford any other solace to thy flesh) that thou desirest to perform them purely for the honour of God. For, as any work, however great and important it may seem in itself, is utterly displeasing to God, if it is done with an impure intention; so a work that in itself is judged to be of no moment, is most pleasing to God when done with a pure intention. Even if, through piety, thou dost but bow thy head before the image of Jesus Crucified, or make a little offering of flowers to the altar of Mary the Mother of God, or take a single step out of charity, thou wilt not be defrauded of thy hope of a just reward.

According to the teaching of St. Paul, make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences (Rom. xiii. 14). Detest gluttony; take thy food and drink composedly and slowly, avoiding all sensual avidity. Burden not thy stomach overmuch; lest thou shouldst be weighed down, and less ready for interior exercises. But be chiefly on thy guard against a free use of wine. In vain wilt thou aspire to a spiritual life, if thou, like a vile slave to impure pleasures, loadest thyself with food, never restraining the desires of greediness. Avoid with equal care too great indulgence and too great abstinence. For thou mayest be sometimes averse even to the little portion of food that is necessary to support nature. If it should happen that thou hast been inattentive, and gone a

little beyond the bounds of holy temperance, the sin is not grievous, but yet it must not be neglected. Acknowledge thy fault, sigh, renew thy resolution; and, putting aside, all pusillanimity, confide in the Lord. Seek not after refined banquets, and when such are before thee, partake of them as if they were the most simple. Let not the scantiness of thy food ever provoke thee to anger, or to childish complaints; but be patient. Christ our Lord for theft was given gall and vinegar to drink (St. John xix. 29). Thou must so admit the satisfaction that is naturally derived from eating and drinking, as not to rest in it; it should occupy thee no more than if thou didst not feel it. Be sedulous in giving thanks for the benefits which are daily bestowed upon thee by God.

Avoid with prudence the occasions of evil. If thou art of necessity present where there are evident occasions of sin, fortify thy weakness with prayers, and call upon God, saying, Let my heart, Lord, and my body be undefiled before thee (Ps. cxviii. 80). Accustom thyself to turn everything that thou hearest and seest to thy spiritual progress and to the honour of God.

Love quiet and silence, dwell in the secret of thy heart, and converse interiorly with thy God. Be not eager to seek out, to hear, to know, or to look into anything that does not concern thee, or that is of no use to thee. Have no curiosity about what is without, nor about the deeds of others; but let thy occupation be within, and about thy own vices. Thou shalt not, I say, attempt to discuss the manners and the lives of others: thou shalt not engage thyself in observing them, unless the duties of thy position require it. And even if duty demands it. this sort of watchfulness must be guarded, so that thy care of others may go only as far as necessity or the good of souls may require, not as far as curiosity or levity of mind might urge thee. In thy affairs, avoid

precipitation and a disturbed and impetuous temper, lest thou shouldst lose thy liberty of spirit.

Abhor idleness, the parent of all evils, and the certain ruin of the soul; sedulously expel indolence from thy mind. Though thy body may some times languish, yet thy reason must never yield to sloth; but thou must be prompt in spirit and in will. Thou shouldst not always give way to unseasonable sleepiness; but when it is very urgent, thou mayest yield to it a little, according to the opportunity of the time and place; so that, refreshed by a light and short sleep, thou mayest return with more alacrity to thy necessary labours.

CHAPTER XXXI: ON THE CUSTODY OF THE TONGUE AND OF THE EARS, AND THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

ON THE CUSTODY OF THE TONGUE AND OF THE EARS, AND THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

REFRAIN thy tongue from uncharitable and unbecoming words. Speak wisely what is useful, true, and fitting, when the time and place or some good reason require thee to speak, putting entirely aside all deceit and all culpable dissimulation. The tongue is a little member, but exceedingly dangerous and prone to evil. Do thou diligently restrain it, and govern it prudently.

Let all hateful bitterness and all immoderate and unseasonable sharpness be absent from thy words. Fly from disputes; do not readily either assert or deny anything with pertinacity, unless the cause of the faith or the good of souls should require it. If thou makest no impression when thou hast calmly given utterance to the truth, leave each one to his own judgments, and committing all things to God, keep thyself in peace; for it is better that thou shouldst consult the quiet of thy own conscience by opportunely yielding, than that thou shouldst inwardly disturb and confuse thyself by unseasonable and clamorous disputes.

Thou shalt neither speak with eagerness of those things which concern thy own praise or the discredit of others, nor listen to them with pleasure. And if it should be necessary to speak or to hear such things, let thy intention be pure and innocent. He labours under a dangerous disease who willingly speaks of the vices of others, and divulges them rashly. Such a one often covers with a false pretext of zeal for piety and justice the things which he says out of mere levity

or from a bad disposition.

When thou hast to reprove any one, do thou exhort and admonish him rather than reproach or revile him, so long as the matter admits of gentleness. If severity is necessary, see that thou art severe without bitterness. Let not anger or any selfish motive urge thee to more vehement correction, but only the love of God and the good of souls. Let thy reason remain ever tranquil. Let holy discretion rule and temper even the severity of thy words. Persecute the sin, not the man. For man is a good thing, created by God; sin is a bad thing, made by man. When thou seemest outwardly to inveigh sharply against any one, do thou inwardly pity him with secret affection, and in thy heart prefer him to thyself. If thou feelest thy mind to be seriously disturbed, either defer the correction till the disturbance has passed away, or speak but a few words without impetuosity.

Do thou cut short as far as in thee lies, without rudeness, all discourse that is immodest or otherwise pernicious, and divert it to other subjects. Thou must abhor not only to consent, but even to lend an ear to detractors. Thou shalt never favour the sins of others. Thou shalt hate no man, nor shalt thou show to any one that thy affection is diminished, however much he may have injured thee. If an aversion to another arises in thy mind, thou must immediately suppress it: and if thou canst not succeed in extinguishing it, let thy reason resist it. When God is offended, then indeed thou mayest suspend thy accustomed familiarity with the delinquent, in order that he, seeing thee changed, may more readily look into his own heart, and, acknowledging his sin, may more quickly correct himself: thou must not, however, lay aside thy benevolence, nor allow thyself to feel harshly towards him.

If a difference should arise between thee and another, do thou on thy

part at once endeavour to restore peace and to treat of reconciliation; so that no vestige of the quarrel may remain in thy heart. Hatred of our neighbour is a huge evil, a huge evil indeed; and while it occupies the mind, nothing that we do can be pleasing to God.

Though thou mayest fast much, though thou mayest give abundant alms, though thou mayest assiduously frequent the church, and pray continually, though thou mayest daily offer the heavenly sacrifice upon the altar: yet if thou hatest thy brother, thou art not of the number of the sons of God. By charity are the children of God distinguished from the children of the devil. This is a tremendous saying, but it is a true one. He who is Himself the Truth saith, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" (St. John xiii. 35). The Apostle of Truth, St. John, saith, "He who loveth not his brother is not of God" (1 St. John iv. 7, 8). Of whom is he, therefore? Every one is clearly either of God, or of the devil. Do thou then love all men purely, and honour all: be of good will, and, as far as thou canst, do good to all: look upon all with friendly eyes, as brothers and sisters, and most excellent creatures of God, capable of eternal blessedness, that thou mayest be pleasing to thy Father who is in heaven.

CHAPTER XXXII: ON JUDGMENT AND CENSURE OF OTHERS. ON WATCHFULNESS OVER OURSELVES BY DAY AND

ON JUDGMENT AND CENSURE OF OTHERS. ON WATCHFULNESS OVER OURSELVES BY DAY AND

BY NIGHT.

REJECT unworthy suspicions and rash judgments: learn to think well of all. We are but men; we may easily be mistaken. God alone knows the heart. Give not credit lightly or rashly to what is said in blame of others. It is better to think that the words may perhaps be false, than to believe them readily. If the care of others is committed to thee, be watchful; and although thou mayest sometimes fear that some evil lies hid where no evil exists, yet thou must never let thy suspicion fix itself where thou art not certain of the evil. And if an unseasonable suspicion intrudes itself violently into thy mind, consent not to it, but strive against it. He who readily thinks evil of others, is truly miserable, and can seldom be at peace.

With regard to those things which are not manifestly offences against God, and of which thou art not sure, accustom thyself to interpret them in the best sense. If any one has sinned, commiserate him, and with pity excuse him to thyself. Recall to mind how frail is the nature of man, and how prone to fall. Consider that it has come to pass through some slight negligence, or by the vehement impulse of temptation; and say within thyself, If I had been pressed by such circumstances, I should perhaps have fallen into more grievous and enormous sins. Turn the eyes of thy mind on thyself. Consider the sins of thy brother to be, as it were, a little mote, but thy own to be like a huge beam (St. Matth. vii. 3; St. Luke vi. 41), because of thy intolerable ingratitude

towards God. With humility, beseech the Most High to forgive both thy own and thy brother's sins.

We do not say, however, that the sins of thy brethren are not to be reprov'd, and even punished, when justice and the honour of God require it, for to overlook vices unseasonably is not mercy, but cowardice; but it is the want of sincere affection that we condemn. He who has true brotherly love, pities in deed those who are in fault, and excuses them in his own mind: he loves them, and prefers them to himself; but yet he does not rashly allow their sins to go unpunished. That which thou art unable to correct in others, do thou commit to God, lamenting meanwhile before Him.

Thou shalt never despair of the salvation of any one; for those who are now the worst, may soon be changed by the grace of God and become most holy. Learn to bear the defects of others patiently, whether they be defects of mind or of body. We all have the same Father, we are all redeemed by the same Blood, we are all truly said to be one body. Esteem, therefore, both the evil and the good of thy neighbours to be thine own; grieve for the one and rejoice in the other; even if thy neighbours should be thy adversaries.

Never let the pest of envy invade thy mind, with thy consent; for if thou enviest, thou lovest not; and if thou lovest not, thou art not of God (1 St. John iii. 10). When thou seest that others possess what thou hast not, when thou considerest that they have received more and higher gifts of grace than thou hast received, regard them not the less with sincere affection; but for this very reason love them more, and venerate in them the Holy Spirit. Rejoice and give thanks to God; for so will their merits become truly thine, and thou wilt be crowned with those of others as if they were thine own. If thou grieveest, grieve not that they are good and perfect, but that thou art wicked and imperfect.

Desire and strive to be as good and perfect as thou perceivest them to be.

Examine thy conscience frequently (keeping to a certain method), and reprove thyself. Do this chiefly at the end of thy daily actions, before thou givest thyself up to sleep. Think over seriously within thyself in what thou hast offended during that day; and, having asked pardon of God, resolve thenceforward more diligently to avoid sin. Commend thyself to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to His Holy Mother, and to thy Guardian Angel: and having made the sign of the cross, compose thyself modestly in bed; and thus calmly wait for sleep, with some pious thought in thy mind.

In the same way when thou risest, make the sign of the cross with attention, and humbly seek pardon of God for thy sins; and casting aside the confusion of useless dreams, meditate on something serious. Praise thy Creator, give thanks, and offer to Him thy soul and thy body; and pray that He will deign to preserve thee during that day. Thus, yea, thus do thou order thy life; thus hasten to the joys of eternal bliss.

CHAPTER XXXIII: IN ORDER TO ERADICATE OUR DEFECTS WE MUST HAVE A FIRM AND COURAGEOUS WILL, AND

IN ORDER TO ERADICATE OUR DEFECTS WE MUST HAVE A FIRM AND COURAGEOUS WILL, AND

CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

THOU wilt say, perhaps: And what hope is there for me, who am liable to various passions, who cannot attain to perfection, who can hardly endure even the least austerity, or the lightest labour? If, indeed, thou canst not lead a sublime life, nor bear hardships, canst thou not be of good will, and love God and thy neighbour? What is easier or more sweet than to love? What, on the other hand, more hard and bitter than to hate? What is pleasanter, what easier, than to lead a good life? What, again, more joyless and laborious than to abandon God, and be a slave to vice? It is certainly true that we may purchase heaven at less cost than hell. If thou lovest God, and hast good will, thou art of the number of the sons of God. And, if thou art a son, however little thou mayest be, thou wilt also be an heir. What then? Will God admit to His kingdom only those children who are great in His sight, and exclude those who are little? By no means: but all who are His, that is, all who pass hence bearing the mark of charity, although they may not be perfect in charity, will be saved, and at length obtain the joys of heaven (Rom. viii. 14; Galat. in. 26). For the Scripture saith: "To everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall abound" (St. Luke xix. 26); that is, to any one possessed of charity, possessed of merit, will a reward be given. It saith not, it will be given to him who has much, but not to him who has little; but it saith, "To every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound." He will surely abound, for he

will have as much as will satisfy him, indeed whatsoever he desires.

Good will is so great a treasure, that the whole world cannot be compared to it in value. For, when thou dost wish and desire to do any good work, but art not able, that holy desire is received by God as if it were the work itself. But, if thou canst work, and workest not, then thou hast not the will to work. "Peace to men of good will" (St. Luke ii. 14).

Be not, therefore, cast down because thou art as yet weak and imperfect; but humble thyself before God, and rejoice in the complete sanctity of those who are perfect. God may grant thee to make further progress. He sometimes bestows greater gifts than man even dares to ask.

Be not afraid; if He sees that it will contribute to thy salvation and to His honour, He will enable thee in time to disperse with the lightest breath that rust of vice, which, in the beginning of a better life, thou couldst hardly scrape off, so to speak, with an iron file.

But, if it is His will that thou shouldst undergo a fierce combat before thou canst perfectly subdue thy vices and unruly passions; if, I say, He should permit these domestic enemies to molest thee even to the very end of thy life, be not dismayed: but, full of faith, bear patiently the weight of His hand, and joyfully embrace His will.

Although he who is naturally prone to sadness, indignation, anger, and similar passions, will find the strife harder than one whose mind is naturally joyful and tranquil; yet, if he strenuously resist these tumults, and endure them with equanimity for God's sake, he will be effectually cleansed from sin, and prepare for himself a more glorious crown in heaven. For the allurements of the flesh and the assaults of vices, when we sedulously resist their attacks, diminish not our virtue, but adorn it, and increase our merit. It is easy for him to

keep his mind placid, who rarely endures internal tumults. It is easy for him to be cheerful who is seldom molested by interior darkness. It is easy for him to be sober who is rarely tempted by gluttony. It is easy for him to be pure whose mind is seldom afflicted by the stings of concupiscence and the obscene images of the night.

Do thou endeavour to bind and repress those vicious passions and inclinations. Do all that is in thy power peacefully. Seek, ask, knock; (St. Matt. vii. 7; St. Luke xi. 9), knowing that thy labours and thy desires are pleasing to thy all-merciful Creator. For He is often more pleased with the diligence of thy endeavours to attain virtue, than with the sweetness of the virtue itself. The deep and humble conviction of our own imperfection is more precious in His sight, than the performance of miracles, or any other great work.

CHAPTER XXXIV: ON DESIRE OF THE TRUE JOYS OF HEAVEN.

ON DESIRE OF THE TRUE JOYS OF HEAVEN.

O THAT love of God and contempt of the present life were so strong within thee that thou mightest truly say with the Apostle St. Paul, "I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ!" (Philip. i. 23). There is nothing which more exhilarates the faithful and loving soul, than the hope that, having fulfilled the appointed course of this life, it will attain to that blessed haven of eternal peace; where it will no more be stained with any sin; where no fear, no danger, no anxiety, no vicissitudes, will afflict it; where, full of charity, it will praise God without impediment; where it will most perfectly please Him, and will love nothing besides Him; where, at length, it will entirely possess God, and be possessed by Him. Since, in this present life, these things cannot be fully and permanently enjoyed, death itself is desirable, or at least, tolerable to the just. For they feel how severe is the winter of this mortal life, and on that account they long for the summer of the life eternal.

This life is, indeed, a gloomy winter, pinched by the frost of our own corruptions, clouded over by the darkness of ignorance, laid waste by the rushing storms of so many calamities, labours, and sorrows. Those who sigh under the afflictions of the winter, will be consoled and rejoice when the summer shall have come.

Happy is the hour, and most desirable the moment, when the heavenly Spouse joyfully meets the holy soul coming forth from the prison of the body with gentle words, and invites it, saying, "Arise, make haste, my love. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. Flowers have appeared in our land; the vines in flower yield their sweet smell, and

the voice of the turtle is heard in our land" (Cant. ii. 10, 11, 12).

Come forth with joy, most dear daughter: tremble not, nor be afraid; thou art brought out of exile, thou leavest the miseries of the calamitous world. For "nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow, shall be any more" (Apoc. xxi. 4). Henceforth, the corruptible body shall not weigh down the soul: for when thou art admitted into the joy of thy Lord, thou shalt rejoice for ever in the gift of immortality.

But some sensual man reading this, who has been used to delight in visible things, or even in carnal pleasures, may perchance say to himself: And what joy can there be where feasts and banquets and all the pleasures of the flesh are absent? Alas, wretched man! the appetite for those carnal delights denotes, not health, but sickness. Thou art sick, thou art consumed by an evil thirst; and if thou couldst satisfy it, thou wouldst esteem thyself happy. But when with thy body thou shalt lay aside thy disease, then will be extinguished that fatal thirst, under which thou unhappily labourest. In the life to come, those who shall attain to God, shall enjoy true and solid delights. They who shall possess God will not need corruptible food and drink, for they will be full of God. God will be to them, food and drink, and whatsoever they can desire; they will have all things in Him, with whose vision they will be filled. They will ever see Him, and ever be satisfied; and they will desire ever to see Him, and ever to be satisfied. They will desire without anxiety, and they will have their fill without satiety.

CHAPTER XXXV: ON THE DELIGHTS OF OUR HEAVENLY COUNTRY.

ON THE DELIGHTS OF OUR HEAVENLY COUNTRY.

O LIFE eternal! most desirable abode! heavenly Jerusalem, who can describe thee? who can speak of thee, or rightly understand thee? In thee is that good, that joy, that solace, which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man" (1 Cor. ii. 9); for the sake of which so many legions of martyrs have most readily welcomed death. Thy gates shine with choice pearls; thy streets are paved with the purest gold; thy walls are bright with most precious stories. In thee, delicious gardens and pleasant vales are ever fresh; in thee, perennial flowers and violets continually flourish; in thee, the cinnamon and balsam incessantly breathe forth an ineffable odour of sweetness; in thee, all kinds of beautiful things abound without fading, remain without passing away, exist without corruption, are eternal without change. In thee is a climate temperate and serene, beyond all human conception; in thee, are peace and repose surpassing all imagination; in thee, is eternal day, and one life in all; in thee, is certain security, and secure eternity, and eternal tranquillity, and tranquil happiness, and happy sweetness, and sweet joy: in thee shall the just shine as the sun (Matth. xiii. 43). No one can seek, or desire, or love anything, which he will not find in thee. That only which is nothing worth, is not in thee.

Oh, what an ocean of unalloyed bliss, what a torrent of unmixed joy, what an abyss of purest delight is it to see the God of gods in Sion (Psalm lxxxiii. 8), to discern that incomprehensible glory of the Most Holy Trinity: clearly to contemplate that surpassing fairness,

perfectly to taste that ineffable sweetness, from whence flows out all the beauty and sweetness of created things; to behold the most Blessed Mother of God, to join the chorus of Angels, to have perpetual fellowship with the holy Patriarchs and Prophets, with the holy Apostles and Martyrs, with the holy Confessors and Virgins: to know all the citizens of heaven, and to rejoice with each of them in their eternal happiness. Love this beatitude, and frequently sigh after it. Thou canst not, indeed, see it now with thy bodily eyes; but thou canst perceive it with the eyes of faith. Believe what thou seest not, that thou mayest deserve one day to obtain what thou hast believed.

CHAPTER XXXVI: ON PREPARATION FOR A HAPPY DEATH. THE PROFESSION OF ONE ABOUT TO DIE, AND HIS

ON PREPARATION FOR A HAPPY DEATH. THE PROFESSION OF ONE ABOUT TO DIE, AND HIS

CONSOLATION.

CEASE to love worldly things, and thy departure out of the world will not be grievous to thee. But perhaps thou art not greatly attached to anything in this world, thou possessest nothing that thou art not ready to relinquish: yet art thou still a prey to fear, because thou knowest not how God will receive thee when thou passest hence, whether into the eternal rest of paradise, or into the temporary pains of purgatory.

This knowledge is not necessary for thee; it is sufficient for thee to be certain that thou hast a most pitiful Lord, who mercifully washes away sins, who has inspired thee with good will, who is both able and willing to save thee, if thou confidest humbly in Him, and trustest not in thyself. Let the consideration of His immeasurable goodness inspire thee with confidence, and with the expectation of being saved.

Be ever vigilant; as far as thou art able, let thy loins be girt, and thy lamp burning; that when the Lord cometh and knocketh, thou mayest open to him immediately (St. Luke xii. 35, 36). But chiefly when the hour of death is evidently near, prepare thyself sedulously for a happy departure. Dismiss from thy heart the cares and solitudes of this world; receive the sacraments for thy viaticum with a grateful mind; and humbly commend thy soul to God. Reflect upon the Passion of thy most pitiful Redeemer; embrace in spirit His blessed cross, kiss His crimson Wounds, and hide thy whole self therein. Beseech Jesus, that He would deign to wash away all thy sins in His Precious Blood. Com mend

thyself also to His most holy Mother, the Virgin Mary, and to the other citizens of heaven, especially those to whom thou hast had a more particular devotion. If thou dost call upon Mary from thy heart, if thou turnest to her with humility and confidence, she will certainly obtain for thee admittance into the kingdom, which was perhaps closed against thee by thy iniquity and by the divine justice: for she is the Mother of mercy and the gate of paradise. Although the infirmity of nature may waver and tremble, though the horror of death may oppress thee, and though thou mayest be tortured to the utmost by the agonizing sharpness of thy pains; be thou ever patient, and persevere in holy hope and in holy confidence in God. Deny thyself in all things, and give thyself up to thy Lord, saying with Christ, Himself in fear and agony at the approach of death, "Father, thy will be done " (St. Matth. xxvi. 42). So shalt thou find rest and refreshment. Let it not seem hard to thee to die, since Christ Himself suffered the death of the body. He went before, and, as it were, prepared the way, and made it smooth; be not thou reluctant to follow Him; for His Death will be the solace of thine. That corruptible body which thou art leaving is now but a vile garment. What is it to thee if it is corrupted, if it is reduced to dust and ashes, when thou hast laid it aside? Put off without fear thy garment, which thy God will one day restore to thee entire, refulgent and incorruptible.

In order that thou mayest pass without danger over the nets of the devil, and happily avoid the snares, with which he is accustomed sometimes to afflict the dying; thou mayest, either mentally or in words, while thou art in possession of thy senses, declare thy forgiveness of all who have ever injured thee, and thy desire to end thy life in that faith in which an obedient son of thy holy Mother the Church ought to die; that thou believest all things which must be

believed by the true and orthodox faithful of Christ; and that if, through the suggestions of the devil, or the violence of thy malady, thou shouldst perchance think, speak, or do anything contrary to this intention, thou dost by no means consent to such follies.

Having made this profession, thou wilt henceforth despise and ridicule all the promptings of impiety, which the devil in his malice may whisper; nay, thou wilt, if possible, cease to notice them. Trust in the Lord; rely upon Him; cast utterly on Him every thought, every fear, yea, thy whole self. For this is most pleasing to Him, this He requires of thee above all things, and therefore He says in the Psalm, "Because he hoped in me, I will deliver him" (Ps. xc. 14). Thy most loving Father will neither mislead thee, nor reject thee: but will surely protect thee. And when thou art under His protection, there is no one who can hurt thee.

CHAPTER XXXVII: CHRIST IS THE SURE HOPE OF OUR SALVATION.

CHRIST IS THE SURE HOPE OF OUR SALVATION.

THOU must place thy chief hope of salvation not so much in the merits of the good works which thou mayest have done, as in the merits and mercies of Jesus Christ. If, however, the enemy should importunately urge thee either to distrust or to despair, thou mayest bring forward against him those things which the grace of God accomplished in thee; but above all, the Passion of our Lord, and the Death of our common Redeemer. Confess thyself to be sinful and miserable, whatever progress thou mayest seem to have made in perfection. For where thou perceivest in thyself no stain, or at most one only, God perhaps may see six hundred, or many more. Thou canst not of thyself obtain salvation; but with God all things are possible.

If thou art of good will, if thou dost earnestly desire to love God; thou art rich in this, although poor and naked in thyself. For thou mayest assume to thyself those things which He did and suffered for thee. For thee made man, He came forth from the womb of the Virgin undefiled; for thee He laboured, for thee He fasted, for thee He watched and prayed; for thee He endured persecutions, injuries, insults, mockery, scourging, pains, and grief; for thee He shed His Blood, and laid down His life; for thee He rose again, and ascended into heaven. Now, if thou comparest thy sins, yea those of all the world, to these exceeding merits of thy God, of what account are they? For what is a grain of sand, compared with a mountain that fills all heaven and earth?

This is said, not that thou mayest be proud in thy confidence, but lest

in thy humility thou shouldst be mistrustful.

Not they alone will come to God, who have long led a holy life, or practised great austerities; but all who manifest "a contrite and humble heart" (Ps. l. 19) are looked upon and received by Him with clemency, however short may be the time of their leading a good life. How brief was the repentance of the thief hanging upon the cross, and how quickly did he obtain eternal life! (St. Luke xxiii. 40, 43.)

But this being granted; it may not happen to all who repent at the last hour to obtain that which he obtained (for all have not the same compunction that he had); yet it is a great thing, to have even begun here an amendment of life. For he will by no means perish who had begun during this pilgrimage to amend his life, but being cut off by death was not able to complete the amendment; for in him there remained the foundation of the love of God. And although he must undergo purgation before he can enter into the joys of eternal blessedness; yet will he not be destitute meanwhile of the consolation of a sure and certain hope.

CHAPTER XXXVIII: AGAINST DESPAIR AND ANXIETY IN THE HOUR OF DEATH.

AGAINST DESPAIR AND ANXIETY IN THE HOUR OF DEATH.

WHAT can be more liberal than this promise of God? "The wickedness of the wicked," He saith, "shall not hurt him, in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness" (Ezech. xxxiii. 12). He saith not, if he shall be converted two years, or two months, or two days before his death; but "in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness," in what day so ever he shall lament over it, he shall be saved, provided that he truly and rightly laments.

If, therefore, thou murmurest and complainest in thy foolish thoughts, crying out that thy life has not been such as to allow thee the hope of attaining to eternal glory: do thou answer with holy humility and pious confidence, "I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim. i. 12). I know that the ineffable charity of God has adopted me as a son. God can do whatsoever He wills; and He wills to have mercy and to save; for this becomes His goodness and clemency. Neither the multitude nor the enormity of my sins, nor the miseries of my daily frailties, can terrify me, while I call to mind His Incarnation, His Passion, and Death. He Himself hath redeemed me, He hath shed His Blood for me, and by His Death hath paid my debt, His mercy is immeasurably greater than can be my iniquity. His most holy Wounds testify that I am reconciled, if I truly repent of my iniquities, if I truly desire to love Him. He stretches forth His blessed arms on the cross, that He may receive and embrace me a sinner; I desire to live and to die in that embrace. I see in my God my own flesh; I trust that I shall one day become glorious where a part of me is already glorified. And although my iniquity would

repel me from that fellowship of glory, yet the nature which I share will admit me to it. God is not so cruel as not to love the members of His body. His mercy is my only merit. So long as He ceaseth not to be merciful, I am not destitute of merit; and if His mercies are manifold, I am also rich in merits. Every pious worshipper of God and orthodox son of the Catholic Church, may at the hour of death in this manner strengthen himself against all suggestions of despair; be thou, therefore, of that number.

Moreover, whether thou shalt depart hence at home or abroad, whether in thy bed or in the fields, whether by a peaceful or a violent death, let not this greatly disturb or distress thee. It cannot be that he who leads a good life should die a bad death. By whatever kind of death he is overtaken, he will be in rest (Wisdom iv. 7); whether his life end by fire or water, by the sword or torments, by the attacks of wild beasts or the fury of the elements, by apoplexy or pestilence, whether suddenly or gradually, whether with many around him or alone.

Do thou, therefore, trust thyself wholly to the Providence of God; and, leading a good life, wait joyfully for death. And, when it is at hand, go forth securely to thy most indulgent Father, eagerly desiring that He should make what use of thee He wills in eternity as well as in time. Go forth, I say, not as about to be cruelly cast by Him into prison, but to be graciously received and cherished in the bosom of His mercy.

Read over this rule frequently, and carefully examine thy life by it; in order that thou mayest easily discover what is amiss in thee, and, having discovered it, mayest immediately set it right.

THE SPIRITUAL MIRROR

PREFACE.

I HAVE written this little book, overcome by the pious importunity of a certain friend. He ceased not to entreat me to compose a sort of spiritual mirror, in which I might briefly note down those things which most conduce to leading a holy life, and carefully insert whatever can give consolation, true hope, and confidence in God to the sinner, or to him who is imperfect, but of good will; so that this mirror might be of use to any Christian. I, therefore, wishing to satisfy in some measure the just desire of my friend, have here put together a few things, as they occurred to my memory. And what I have done, I have done for the honour of God; humbly submitting all that I have collected and written to the judgment of Holy Mother Church.

But those who, casting away the fear of God, remain of their own accord in their sins and iniquities, must on no account imagine that to them belong the consolations spoken of in this little book, since they neither have good will, nor are true Christians. Let them correct themselves, and then they may claim a part in what is said and written of the immense pity and mercy of God. But if they will not amend their perverse lives, they will feel the utmost severity of the Divine justice, and will suffer eternal torments in hell.

CHAPTER I: HOW HE MUST BEGIN, WHO WISHES TO SERVE GOD WITH HIS WHOLE HEART.

HOW HE MUST BEGIN, WHO WISHES TO SERVE GOD WITH HIS WHOLE HEART.

§ 1. The knowledge of God and of self is the foundation of the spiritual life.

§ 2. The knowledge of God must be according to the true and undefiled faith.

§ 3 Thou must exact from thyself first and before all things innocence of life.

§ 4. Thou must have also a humble and courageous hope.

§ 1. On the Knowledge of God and of Self.

I EXHORT and entreat thee, most dear friend, to fear, honour, and love the Lord thy God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, One in substance, Three in Persons. For He is omnipotent, immense, eternal, most high, unchangeable, incomprehensible, supremely just, supremely holy, supremely wise, supremely good, supremely desirable. He created out of nothing the heavens and the earth, and all that is contained in heaven and earth. He sees and perfectly knows not only the actions of all men, but also their thoughts and dispositions. He knows all things, past, present, and to come. He is an exceeding lover of men, and ceases not to do good to every one of them, in this life. Wherefore, He deserves to be feared, honoured, and loved.

Take the utmost care, lest by sinning thou offend Him. Even if thou couldst save thyself and many others from death by consenting to some sin, thou must in no wise consent to it; nor is it permitted to do evil that good may come (Rom. iii. 8). For it would be most foolish

knowingly and deliberately to offend the Creator, who is Infinite Good, for the sake of creatures, who are, as it were, nothing compared with God. The holy fear of God incessantly warns man to abstain from sin, and to "live soberly, and justly, and godly in this world" (Tit. ii. 12).

Reflect seriously, that for this end thou wast created by God, and hast received an immortal soul endowed with reason, that thou shouldst here obey God, and love Him; and that, by obeying Him, and leading a good life, thou shouldst at length clearly behold Him in heaven, and enjoy Him for all eternity. For, if thou dost diligently avoid evil, and do good; if, faithfully serving God, thou dost end this life piously; then shalt thou happily attain to heavenly bliss, through the Passion and merits of Jesus Christ.

§ 2. On the true Faith.

Do thou firmly hold the Orthodox Faith, believing without any hesitation all which is contained in the canonical and holy Scriptures received by the Church, and which the Holy Ghost through the Church reveals to us to be believed. Do thou humbly obey the Catholic Church, even if thou shouldst see some of her pastors not leading a good life. For the Lord Jesus in the Gospel saith, speaking of pastors leading indeed an evil life, but teaching and enjoining what is good; "All things, therefore, whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do; but according to their works do ye not" (St. Matth. xxiii. 3). He who contemns the Church, which is the mystical Body of Christ, contemns also the Head of the Church, that is to say, Christ: as He openly declares in His own words, saying; "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me" (St. Luke x. 16). The Supreme Pontiff, the successor of St. Peter, presides on earth, by the

ordinance of the Lord, over this universal and Apostolic Church, which St. Paul calls "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. iii. 15; St. John xxi. 15, 16, 17.)

Out of this Church, which is One, out of this Ark of Noe, none can be saved. Although there be in it not only good men, but also many wicked ones, who shamelessly commit grave abuses and grievous sins, (for it is a threshing-floor containing not only solid grains of corn, but also, with the grain, barren and light chaff) yet doth the truth remain in it. For there doth the Holy Spirit teach, enlighten, and rule the faithful; and He giveth to the same Church the true understanding of the Holy Scriptures (St. Luke xxiv. 45). It is, therefore, most certain, that all those who hold and defend any opinion contrary to the Roman Catholic Church, and thus separate themselves from its unity, will, if they persist in heresy or schism to the end of their lives, undergo eternal torments in hell, although they may seem to have lived righteously otherwise. Without doubt, heretics and schismatics, even though they may appear modest, gentle, sober, and chaste; though they may give very large alms to the poor; though they may pray to God assiduously, and in their prayers shed many tears of compunction; though they may lead a most austere life, and accomplish wonderful works; though they may offer their bodies promptly and intrepidly to death; nevertheless, because they are proud, and pervert the Scriptures by false expositions, and sever the unity of the Church, they cannot be in true charity. They are an abomination to God, and He repels them from His kingdom as His most bitter enemies; nor will they ever obtain salvation, unless, becoming humble and obedient, they submit themselves to Mother Church, and abandon their evil opinions. Do thou, therefore, (as has been said) persevere in the right, Christian, and true faith; believing, without dissimulation, what the Catholic Church believes,

and practising what she piously practises.

If thou shouldst find thyself in such straits as that thou art forced either to deny this orthodox faith, or to undergo tortures, and meet death; do thou die a thousand times (if it were possible) rather than speak a word, or give a sign, of impious denial. For if thou deniest the faith of Christ, Christ will also deny thee before His Father; (St. Matth. x. 33.) unless thou repentest, and doest penance, as St. Peter repented, who, after his triple denial, wept bitterly (St. Luke xxii. 62). If, indeed, thou dost humbly suffer death for the right faith, and the truth, happy wilt thou be. Such a one is declared to be safe by our Lord Jesus in the Gospel when He saith, "Fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul" (St. Matth. x. 28). Also, "A hair of your head shall not perish. In your patience you shall possess your souls" (St. Luke xxi. 18, 19). And, again, He saith, "He that findeth his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for Me, shall find it" (St. Matth. x. 39).

Detest superstitious observances, and all use of the arts of magic and divination. Never seek remedies or counsel from sorcerers or dealers in enchantments; but flee ever to the Lord thy God, place thy hope in Him, and rest on Him. Listen to Him saying to His people in the book of Deuteronomy: "Let there not be found among you any one that consulteth soothsayers, neither let there be any wizard, nor charmer, nor any one that consulteth pythonic spirits, or fortune tellers. For the Lord abhorreth nil these things. These nations hearken to soothsayers and diviners, but thou art otherwise instructed by the Lord thy God" (Deut. xviii.10, &c.). He who seeketh remedies or advice from such men, assuredly abandons God, and betakes himself to the devil.

§ 3. On Innocence of Life.

Do thou diligently avoid all iniquity, and listen attentively to the Apostle St. Paul, who, with great weight of words and seriousness, saith: "Know you not that the unjust shall not possess the kingdom of God? Do not err: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, nor liars with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor railers, nor extortioners, shall possess the kingdom of God (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10). And again he saith: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest,--which are, fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, luxury, idolatry, witchcrafts, enmities, contentions, emulations, wraths, quarrels, dissensions, sects, envies, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like. Of the which I foretell you, as I have foretold to you, that they who do such things, shall not obtain the kingdom of God " (Gal. v. 19, 20, 21). Thus far the words of St. Paul. Those who do such things shall be utterly condemned, unless they are reconciled to God by true penance and amendment of life (St. Matth. iii. 8). In the tremendous judgment, when the threshing-floor of the Lord shall be thoroughly cleansed, and the chaff shall be separated from the wheat, Christ will say to them in His wrath: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire" (St. Matth. xxv. 41). Be thou ever mindful of these words.

In order that thou mayest obtain purity of conscience, and be interiorly enlightened, recall to mind how thou hast offended God and neglected thy own soul,--in words, deeds, desires, or thoughts,--by want of mortification, and impurity of affections, and by all those things which thou hast unrighteously or inordinately admitted, and which are at variance with holy charity, and repugnant to the most gracious will of God. Examine thyself, and discuss as much as thou canst remember: and, being displeased with thyself, cry out in thy heart with the publican, saying: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner"

(St. Luke xviii. 13). I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned; have mercy on me. So great is the number, and so multiplied the variety of my faults, that they are perfectly known only to thee, O my God. Forgive me, who am so miserable. Wash the face of my soul from all its stains, and adorn it with Thy grace, giving me good will. In this manner search and judge thyself; thus lament before thy Heavenly Father, to whom it be longs always to have mercy and to spare. Grieve purely for the glory of God, and let thy iniquities displease thee chiefly because thou knowest that they are displeasing to God, and contrary to His honour and good pleasure. Consider rather the offence thou hast committed against God, than the punishment thou hast deserved.

Afterwards do thou humbly, completely, sincerely, simply, openly, and in few words, confess these thy sins before a fitting priest who, holding the place, of God, has authority to absolve thee. If thou wishest to confess all the grave faults and offences which thou rememberest to have committed from thy child hood; when thou hast done this once it is enough and sufficeth to the eternal truth of God; although some pious persons may be found who do it more than once. It is most expedient that since thou dost daily offend and contract stains, thou shouldst also frequently purify thyself before the priest. But thou must reject superfluous and foolish scruples; for they shut out interior light, and disfigure by fear, anxiety, and self-love, the conscience which ought to be adorned with faith, hope, and charity. If any remorse remains after a confession well made, it must be borne with patience and humble resignation, and such a confession must not be lightly repeated on account of it.

Therefore, be thou not anxious nor disturbed, if by chance thou hast not mentioned all thy venial sins in confession; for it is enough that these should be declared in general, since it is only mortal sins, and

those of which we are doubtful whether they are mortal, that we are bound by precept and necessity to confess expressly and distinctly before the priest. But before God we ought seriously to confess these venial sins, which may be effaced in many ways; for instance--by contrition, by saying the Lord's prayer, by any burden borne for God's sake, by the use of holy water, by genuflexions, by beating the breast, &c., if these things are done piously and religiously. Yet it is of benefit to the so;1, and pleasing to God, that a man should confess and declare to the priest even his lighter offences; but let him, as we have said, reject ground less scruples.

When thou dost repent of having sinned, and dost grieve that thou hast ever offended God, and intend henceforward to serve Him and to love Him, and hast rightly confessed thy sins, then truly shouldst thou be of good courage and peaceful of heart. Fulfil, therefore, diligently that which is enjoined thee by the priest, and put faith in the power of confession and in the divine promise. Believe in the Lord, who saith to priests lawfully hearing confessions: "What soever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed also in heaven " (St. Matth. xviii. 18).

§ 4. On Courageous Hope.

Hope in the benignity and mercy of God. For since thou hast purified thyself by fitting contrition, confession, and satisfaction, thou art already reconciled to God, even if thou alone shouldst have perpetrated all the iniquities and transgressions of all mankind. He has already received thee into His favour, and He will neither impute to thee nor reproach thee with the past sins which He has pardoned. He has so covered them, He has so blotted them out, (if thy repentance has been true, holy, and supernatural), as if they had never been committed. But it behoveth thee to persevere henceforth in a good and pious life, and

when thou fallest through frailty, quickly to rise again. Thy God is a most liberal King; He most willingly remits all thy debts, how great soever they may be; He is an all-powerful Physician, He speedily heals by His word every disease of thy soul, however grievous and incredible. King David (2 Kings, xii.), St. Mary Magdalen (St. Luke, vii.), the thief on the cross (St. Luke, xxiii. 43), and innumerable others are thy examples. It is indeed as easy to God to forgive many mortal sins as one. And it is extremely pleasing Him that thou shouldst so regard Him, and say to Him with humility: "O Lord Jesus, I trust in Thy measurable goodness, that Thou wilt never suffer me to perish, whom Thou hast created to Thy image and likeness, and hast redeemed with immense labour." Although thy sins be very great, what are they compared to the infinite mercy of God?

Some men of little faith abandon the hope of their salvation on account of the evil they have done, or because of the dire temptations with which Satan assails them; thinking that their consciences are so bound and entangled, that God either will not or cannot come to their assistance. They are miserably agitated by unconquerable fear: they imagine that all they do is displeasing to God, and that they are already condemned and lost. This is a great and most hurtful error, and he who consents to it, greatly dishonours God. God wills and is able to forgive every man who is truly contrite, and to deliver him from all that may hinder his salvation, whatsoever it may be. He did not will to forgive the converted sinner, He would not so patiently wait for his conversion, nor give him contrition and good will, but would punish him with eternal damnation when he sinned, according to the measure of his iniquities. Sometimes, however He permits His faithful servants and chosen friends to be assaulted by despair, or other horrible and evidently infernal temptations, and to be vexed by them throughout a

long time; but He does this out of His immense love for them, protecting them meanwhile and sustaining them lest they should fail. There are yet many who, not rightly understanding the greatness of the mercy of God, lose their souls, because they amend not their wicked life, but say, if not in words, at least by their deeds, "Why should we not do what we will? for, whenever we shall be converted to God, God will pardon us, and will remit all our sins." But, alas, such men, promising themselves a long life, and true repentance, often by the just judgment of God obtain neither, and die in their sins. But how is it possible that he who is willing to amend his life should despair of the most gracious mercy of God? For God saith by His Prophet, "If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed, and keep all my commandments, and do judgment, and justice, living he shall live, and shall not die. I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done: in his justice which he hath wrought, he shall live. Is it my will that a sinner should die, and not that he should be converted from his ways, and live?" (Ezech. xviii. 21-23). Again, He saith, "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? and, if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee in my hands" (Isaias xlix. 15, 16). And, again, He speaks thus, "Shall anything be hard for me?" (Jerem. xxxii. 27). He saith also, "I have blotted out thy iniquities as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist" (Isaias xliv. 22). Again He saith, "Wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices from My eyes; cease to do perversely, learn to do well. If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow; and, if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool" (Isaias i. 16-18). God, who willeth that none should perish, consoleth thee by these and many other similar sayings in the Holy Scriptures, that them mayest confide in His

most merciful loving-kindness. Confide, therefore, man of goodwill, confide in the mercy of thy God, even if thou hast to pass out of this world soon after having begun to amend thy life For so doth the Gospel bear witness, that those who had laboured but one single hour in the vineyard, receive the wages of eternal bliss (St. Matth. xx. 9); that is, those who have lived justly and piously for a very short time: and those are pronounced blessed by the Lord who are found ready in the third watch, that is, in their old age (St. Luke xii. 38). But, if thou art not called away out of this life immediately after thou hast been converted and turned to God, do thou persevere with constancy in thy holy resolutions, and in the fear of the Lord.

CHAPTER II: CERTAIN VIRTUES IN WHICH A CHRISTIAN MUST EXERCISE HIMSELF.

CERTAIN VIRTUES IN WHICH A CHRISTIAN MUST EXERCISE HIMSELF.

§ 1. Patience.

§ 2. Resignation.

§ 3. Obedience.

§ 4. Avoiding of vain glory.

§ 1. Patience.

AND in order to do penance in a way most pleasing to God during all the rest of thy life, thou must bear with a meek and gentle heart all the adversities and annoyances which, by His permission, come upon thee and are inflicted by creatures. The Lord is accustomed to gladden at first with many consolations one who is converted to Him, offering him, as it were, assiduously the spiritual milk and white bread of grace; but afterwards, taking away that sweet nourishment, He gives him solid food, and black bread, leads him by a very difficult and dark road, and tries him with daily tribulations and unspeakable anxieties; insomuch that he seems to himself to be utterly abandoned and rejected by God, and in a manner given up to Satan. Meanwhile, he is also grievously afflicted by evil passions rising up within him, and by the persecution of men.

If this should happen to thee. see that thou bear thyself manfully and wisely; trusting firmly in thy God, who out of true love thus chastises thee or permits thee to be chastised. Shake not off from thy shoulders the cross which He imposes on thee; for it is wholly salutary, and far more for thy good than a great abundance of spiritual sweetness. Since

thy Lord is a most skilful physician, He burns, cuts, and offers thee bitter potions that He may heal thee. Knowing this, endure patiently whatever is painful to thee; suffer every affliction for the honour and love of God, for the remission of thy sins.

Never murmur against God, nor blame His works and His judgments, since although these are hidden and unknown, and even incomprehensible to thee, they are yet ever just and most righteous. Think not that anything happens in the world by chance and without the providence of God; but in all things attend wisely to the divine dispensation, without which not even one leaf falls from the tree. God, who created all things, governs also and rules all things, from the highest angelic spirit to the vilest worm of the earth. If thou dost undoubtingly believe this, thou wilt be able more easily to keep thy mind even and undisturbed amid the various circumstances of the present life.

§ 2. Resignation.

Be, I pray thee, resigned and of good-will, and truly humble. Never esteem thyself to be of any account; but remain ever little and of no value in thy own eyes and in thy own esteem. Magnify not the good works thou doest, knowing them to be full of defects; but make great account of the good works of others, and prefer them to thine own. Take not vain complacency in any gift of God; for he who consents thereto defiles the aspect of his soul with a most foul stain. Avoid carefully all hardness and obstinacy in thy own opinion, for they greatly hinder the grace of God and spiritual progress. Flee also unbecoming disputes, choosing rather to seem overcome than to lose the holy virtue of humility. Even if thou art obliged, in defence of the faith and of truth, to assert anything strongly; yet thou must not bear thyself proudly, nor be more violent or agitated than is fitting.

In doubtful cases, seek with a submissive mind to know the will of God from one who fears God, and God will direct thee and protect thee. Learn to abandon readily thy judgment, thy will, and thy desires, for God's sake. Since it is difficult always to know for certain what desires are from God, a man ought to be ready to renounce even those things which he thinks he rightly desires, and to say to God: "O Lord, let not my will be done, but what Thou wilt, and what is most to Thy honour."

§ 3. Obedience.

Be ever ready to obey: because the least work done by true obedience is more pleasing to God than a great work done by thy own will. For it is better to pick up straws out of simple obedience, than of thy own will to give thy mind to the sublime contemplation of heavenly things: and he obtains more of the divine favour who, out of pure obedience, eats soberly and moderately to the praise of God, than he who, of his own will, undertakes the most rigid abstinence. Obedience is the eldest daughter of humility; it renders man fit to receive every grace, and is the safest way to heaven.

If any one will not obey in those things in which he is bound to obey, and is bold, rude, and contumacious towards his superiors, that man is most hateful to God. A certain virgin of exceeding holiness, seeing in spirit the soul of a certain monk who was supposed to have led a good life, grievously tormented in purgatory, she enquired of God for what reason that soul was not in heaven. And the Lord answered her in this manner: "That monk would not humbly obey and consent to the will of his Abbot and Superior in all good things; whatever was done by the Abbot displeased him, for he esteemed himself to be wiser than he, and to be able to act better on all occasions."

When thou art reproved, receive the reproof with a tranquil and gentle mind, and readily acknowledge thy fault. If it be necessary to excuse thyself, do it briefly, modestly, and humbly.

§ 4. Avoiding of Vain-Glory.

Desire not admiration, nor to be held in honour among men. And though thou mayest do some good works before men, yet thou shouldst do them not that thou mayest be seen and glorified, but that men may glorify God, and be edified to the praise of God. The moment thou perceivest a desire of vain-glory arising in thee, correct it, and rejecting and setting aside all impure motives, seek and have regard to God and His honour alone. Let it be more welcome to thee to be despised than to be praised, and to submit rather than to command.

Be not unwilling to perform the lowest and most abject services for the love of thy Heavenly King Jesus Christ, who for thee humbled Himself beyond all measure. Place thyself below all men, and dwell in the quiet valley of humility as in a most safe abode. Hold thyself to be like a vile and cast-off rag, which every one may freely tread under foot. If thou feelest thyself inclined in thy words, gestures, and actions, to please any mortal man, so that thou seekest not purely God, or the honour of God, thou must immediately condemn and detest in thyself this inclination as a most impure source of pride, and lay aside the bad intention. Thou must instantly mortify whatever vanity, boasting, or elation thou discoverest in thyself.

Remember that our Lord Jesus Christ, and the blessed angelic spirits, and all the citizens of heaven are humble and detest pride; that, on the contrary, the wicked demons are proud and pursue humility with hatred. Do thou join thyself to the former, and separate thyself from the latter. Be fully persuaded that thou canst not possibly live for

God, unless thou art humble and resigned, and dost strive to die to the vices and inordinate propensities of thy nature. Inasmuch as thou lessenest the pernicious self-love, by which thou seekest thyself impurely and reflectest on thyself, insomuch will the true love of God increase in thee.

CHAPTER III: HOW A SPIRITUAL MAN SHOULD CONDUCT HIMSELF TOWARDS HIS NEIGHBOUR, AND THE GOOD

HOW A SPIRITUAL MAN SHOULD CONDUCT HIMSELF TOWARDS HIS NEIGHBOUR, AND THE GOOD

OFFICES HE OUGHT TO RENDER HIM.

§ 1. Interior affection.

§ 2. Exterior manner and conduct.

§ 3. Beneficence.

§ 4. Benevolence.

§ 5. Compassion.

§ 6. Judgment of others.

§ 1. Interior Affection.

CHRIST our Lord saith in the Gospel, "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you" (St. John xv. 12). And again, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" (Ibid. xiii. 35). Do thou, therefore, with sincere charity, love all men, even thy enemies and adversaries, as brothers and sisters, having the same heavenly Father, the same Creator and Redeemer as thyself.

Consider within thyself what excellent creatures they are, as being stamped with the most noble image of God in their souls, and capable of eternal blessedness; and let this consideration lead thee to treat them with love and honour. For God made in His own image and likeness only the angelic spirits and men, giving them reason and intelligence; and on account of this admirable dignity, they far excel all other creatures.

When thou seest a man who is deformed or diseased, thou shouldst not love him the less because of his deformity, nor dwell upon the thought of his corruptible and mortal flesh, but pass on to the consideration of the fairness of his immortal soul. For so great is the loveliness and beauty of a rational soul which is undefiled by the stains of sin, that if thou couldst clearly discern it, thou wouldst almost lose thyself for joy and admiration.

True beauty is spiritual, and is beheld by the eye of the mind. A man of ordinary appearance who is righteous, is greatly to be preferred to one who is outwardly beautiful, but in his life and conversation wicked; for the former is in reality the most beautiful. And the body of the just man which is now without beauty, or even repulsive in our eyes, will one day rise again most fair and glorious. Do thou, therefore, love every man with true charity, according to the precept of God.

§ 2. Exterior Manner and Conduct.

Thou shouldst not wear before others a severe countenance, nor be of a perverse or bitter spirit; but, overcoming thy nature, -show thyself to all, sweet, benevolent, affable, and ready to serve them. And if thou art easily moved to anger and indignation, or hast any little feeling of bitterness against any one, consent not to that vice, but repress, mitigate, and extinguish it as much as thou canst, grieving that thy heart should still be so full of harshness.

Humble thyself, and implore the assistance of God. When He shall have abundantly infused into thee the sweetness of charity, thou wilt no longer be so inclined to bitterness. God often permits his chosen friends to be prone to anger, in order that they may the more fully know themselves, and the better keep themselves humble.

§ 3. Beneficence.

Assist with a ready will those who are in need of thy help. And chiefly towards those who have hated thee, or who vex thee, do thou show friendliness in heart, countenance, and words; do good to them, as occasion may require, and faithfully pour forth prayers to God for them, as Christ Himself teaches, saying, "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you " (St. Matth. v. 44). Let thy heart, therefore, be full of mercy towards those who are tempted, afflicted, or oppressed by any necessity. Joyfully relieve the wants of the needy with alms according to the measure of thy possessions. Believe that what thou givest to the poor, thou givest to Christ.

Send also spiritual alms to the faithful souls detained in the pains of Purgatory, praying devoutly for them. Whatsoever thou shalt do for their release and refreshment, Christ, who ardently loves them, will so receive as if thou hadst come to visit Him in prison, and hadst laboured to release Him. For they belong to the mystical Body of Christ, and Christ asserts in the Gospel that what is done to His members is done to Himself. Whence also He saith, "I was in prison, and you came to me " (St. Matth. xxv. 36).

§ 4. Benevolence.

Be greatly desirous of the salvation of all men, and let it seem no light loss to thee, if one single rational soul should perish; for since it is stamped with the image of God, it is more excellent and ought to be held of more account than this whole visible world. "We are all members of one body, of which the Head is Christ. Therefore, wish not ill to another, neither envy any one; but rejoice in the good of

others. In jure no one wittingly. Disturb not, nor distress any one without reason. Reproach not any one readily. Be at peace, as far as lies in thy power, with all.

If by chance there has arisen a difference, or a serious quarrel, between thyself and another, be thou quickly anxious for reconciliation, and do whatever may be required on thy part, as a humble and true servant of Christ. Endeavour, moreover, to bring back to peace and concord others who are at variance, by pious prayer to God, or by any other suitable means.

Thou shalt treat no one with contempt or disdain: for that is very contrary to holy humility and charity. Despair not of the salvation of any one still living: since he who is now perverse may, by the grace of God, quickly become good. The bridge of the divine mercy is not yet broken, but still affords a safe passage to those who repent

§ 5. Compassion.

As thou dost to the afflicted, so also to sinners, do thou show pious compassion and commiseration. Lament over the ignorance and blindness of men. Recall to mind how great is the weakness and corruption of man who is tempted, and how great the malignity and pertinacity of the devil who tempts him. Extenuate the faults of others, and excuse them as far as thou canst; but accuse thyself severely of whatever thou doest amiss.

Think not on any account that the salvation of thy neighbour concerns thee not; for thou (even if thou art not in any way set over him) art bound willingly and sedulously to promote it. Offer, therefore, prayers to God for sinners, and strive to be of use to all; thus wilt thou merit signal favour in the sight of God.

Out of zeal for justice, and the honour of God, thou must also reprove

thy brother, as may be fitting. Never consent to the sins of others, nor flatter any one. If thou art angry in correcting or punishing a sinner, be angry without bitterness, without hatred. Make war upon sin in man, so that thou hate not the man whom God made, on account of the sin which the man committed. Hold sin, but not nature, in abhorrence. For, if thou hatest man, thou art lost, because thou livest out of charity; and thou canst not obtain salvation, unless, laying aside hatred, thou dost return to holy love. For, as the Apostle St. John saith: "He that loveth not, abideth in death" (1 St. John iii. 14). Such a one abideth indeed in death, since love is the life of the soul, and God is love. As thou wouldst have God benignant and merciful towards thee, so be thou benignant and merciful to others, If thou wilt diligently consider how thou didst lately or how thou dost still abound in faults and defects both of mind and body, and how far thou art from the purity, holiness, and fidelity which thou owest to God; thou wilt surely bear with equanimity the burdens and imperfection of others, as discretion and justice may dictate. Confess that it is thy fault, on account of thy wicked and negligent life, that others make little spiritual progress, and often offend God.

§ 6. Judgment of Others.

Interpret favourably, as far as possible, the actions and words of others. Think not ill of others lightly. When evil and absurd suspicions of any one arise in thy heart, let them immediately pass out of it again; suffer them to fly past thee. And although thou sometimes fear lest the devil seduce a man, or lest some evil lurk in him; believe not yet for certain that evil does lie hid, if it is not thoroughly ascertained by thee. In this manner refrain from rash judgments; and be not foolishly curious in observing the defects of

others, but watch for thy own defects, and judge thyself.

Meddle not improperly with those things which are not committed to thy charge; but leave them in their own state and condition. Let good things be good; but evil things judge not readily, leaving them to be judged by God, who sees clearly the hearts of men, and perfectly knows whatever is evil. He who will interfere in all affairs, and loquaciously reprove and judge all things, is far removed from true knowledge of himself, and from true peace and purity of heart, and has not yet reached the very beginnings of the spiritual life.

Accustom thyself to live without many complainings. If thou must often complain, complain to God, or to the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the other Saints; setting before them humbly and calmly those things that oppress and grieve thee.

CHAPTER IV: ON THE ORDERING OF LOVE, PLEASURE, DRESS, REFECTION, AND THE CUSTODY OF THE SENSES, GESTURES, AND THOUGHTS.

ON THE ORDERING OF LOVE, PLEASURE, DRESS, REFECTION, AND THE CUSTODY OF THE

SENSES, GESTURES, AND THOUGHTS.

§ 1. The inordinate love of creatures.

§ 2. Mortification of carnal delights.

§ 3. Moderation in dress and furniture.

§ 4. The manner of bodily refreshment.

§ 5. The government of the tongue.

§ 6. The custody of the senses.

§ 7. Manners and gestures.

§ 8. The control of our thoughts.

§ 1. The inordinate Love of Creatures.

RECALL frequently to mind that thou art a Christian, not for the sake of the present but of the future life; and, despising earthly and transitory things, transfer thy affections to those which are heavenly and eternal. Thy soul is formed of so noble a nature that this whole world is not sufficient to satisfy it. Transitory and worthless things will never satisfy thee; but God alone, who is the supreme and eternal Good, will satisfy thee. And this will be fulfilled in thee when, being received into heaven, thou shalt see God as He is. There is nothing here on earth but a miserable exile, and bitter winter; in heaven is our true home, and a most delicious summer. How short is this life, however long it may be, compared to eternity! It can hardly be called a moment of time. How quickly do all things in this world pass by, flee

away, and decay! If thou attachest thyself to things which pass, thou wilt pass away with them. Attach thyself to God, who remaineth unchanged, and never passeth away. What, I pray, will it avail thee, if, for the present, thou aboundest in riches, honours, and worldly delights and pleasures, and afterwards shouldst be cast into everlasting fire? Reflect within thyself, my friend; think diligently of this.

Make use of creatures here for the honour of God; but beware of clinging to them with faulty affection. Keep thyself free and pure within, as far as thou art able. Do thou refer entirely to the Creator, and to thy heavenly home, whatever beauty, elegance, sweetness, fragrance, melody or perfection, thou perceivest in created things; for all the fairness, sweetness, and perfection of creatures flows from God. Thou mayest indeed receive some solace in God from these created things; but them shouldst not cling to them, nor perversely seek in them thy self-will or thy own delight.

Therefore thou shalt not attach thyself with inordinate love to any man, although he be very pious and holy; nor shalt thou desire that any one should so attach himself to thee, but be content with thy God, and delight in Him. Words cannot express how dangerous and hurtful is an inordinate love and affection towards any one. more especially when a person binds himself to another of different sex by this sort of affection and incautious familiarity. Love thyself and all men in God, and for the sake of God; but love God for His own sake.

I beseech thee, delight in Jesus Christ, thy sweet Creator and Redeemer, thy true riches, thy true and most joyful good. If thou art not able to love Him ardently, love Him as thou canst, and as much as He deigns to give thee grace. Desire that thou mayest be enabled to love Him perfectly by His own merciful will. And if thou feelest not

this desire, do thou at least desire to have the desire. Say to thy gracious Lord: "O good Jesus, I ought and I wish to love Thee with my whole heart; deign to supply for me what is wanting to my ardent desire and love." Thou mayest also say, "O Lord, I ought to be, and I wish to be, humble, resigned, patient, kind, gentle, modest, chaste, sober, active, and devout; do Thou in Thy goodness deign to supply all my deficiencies in these virtues." For as often as thou shalt thus piously and from thy heart pray to Christ Jesus (even if thou shouldst do it a thousand times a day), so often will He doubtless offer Himself to His Father for thee, and perfectly supply thy defects by the love of His Heart, by His humility, resignation, patience, benignity, &c.

§ 2. Mortification.

As a pilgrim and stranger in this world, despise impure delights, that is to say, those of which God is not the cause, and which do not tend to union with God, and are not necessary to the support of nature. If thou still boldest the pleasures of the flesh in esteem and art much given to them, thou dost not yet sufficiently understand that thou art a stranger and pilgrim here.

Remember that thou art not an animal, but a man endowed with reason.

Happy is the truly spiritual man, to whom it is sometimes given to experience how far heavenly and divine delights surpass and exceed those which are earthly and carnal. Happy is he who, beholding with the eyes of faith the pride of the flesh and the pomp and glory of the world, recognises that they are nothing: and in truth they are like a flower that quickly falls and withers away.

§ 3. Moderation in Dress and Furniture.

Seek not vanity, luxury, and unlawful superfluity in dress and

furniture: but observe moderation and measure according to thy condition.

§ 4. Bodily Refreshment.

Be moderate in taking food and drink, and avoid all unbecoming voracity, and eagerness for sensual pleasure. If, perchance, simple and rough fare is provided, let not the patience and peace of thy heart be lost by murmuring: but receive with thanksgiving what is given and provided by God. Even if exquisite dainties be provided; [2] yet seek not by desire the indulgence of thy flesh, nor dwell upon the earthly pleasure that thou feelest. Be ashamed to seek after dainties beyond thy reasonable and just wants, when for thee thy Lord Jesus Christ was given gall and vinegar to drink. [3] Judge thyself unworthy to receive even black bread.

When thou art especially tempted by greediness and an inordinate appetite, reflect how quickly this enticing pleasure passes away, and how pernicious it is. Doubtless, if thou shalt have followed it, and satisfied it without restraint, thou wilt afterwards grieve for having done so; but if thou shalt have curbed thy evil appetite for the sake of God, and kept thyself clean, thou wilt indeed rejoice in thy conscience. In order to feed the devotion of thy mind while thou art eating, thou mayest (if thou art not prevented) mentally dip the morsels which thou takest in the Precious Blood of Christ, and take thy drink from His crimson Wounds. Thou mayest also, while thou eatest, ruminate on these words, "May the virtue of Thy divine love, my beloved Jesus, incorporate me and unite me intimately with Thee;" and when thou drinkest reflect on these, "May the sweetness of Thy divine charity, most loving Jesus, flow into my inmost heart, and penetrate my whole substance, to Thy eternal praise." In places, how ever, where there is

sacred reading during meals, thou shouldst, as is fitting, attend to what is read, if thou canst understand it.

If thou shouldst, perchance, have slightly transgressed the bounds of temperance (which may easily happen, even to a pious man), pray God humbly to pardon thy want of moderation; and being thus cleansed, be of good courage. He who, setting aside sobriety, gorges himself with much meat and drink, after the manner of swine, leaves no room within himself for the Holy Spirit and the grace of God.

Thou mayest, no doubt, blamelessly grant solace to thy body by eating, drinking, resting, sleeping, and taking care of thy health.

A certain very holy virgin, when she had given such refreshment to her body, rejoiced as if she had given it to Christ, who said, "As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me " (St. Matth. xxv. 40); for she considered herself one of His least brethren.

Refresh, therefore, and revive thy body with discretion, to the eternal glory of God, in union with that love by which the sweet Jesus, made Man for thee, deigned while on earth to eat and drink, to rest and sleep; and offer to Him, in union with the same love, the bodily refreshment which thou permittest to thyself. For when we thus piously receive it. and offer it to God, united by prayer or by desire to the love and charity of Christ, it becomes very pleasing to Him, and very profitable to ourselves.

[2] Rom. xiii. 13.

[3] Ps. lxxviii. 22; St John xix. 29.

§ 5. The Government of the Tongue.

In thy speech be circumspect, honest, chaste, and blameless. Delight in reasonable silence. Utter not vain and trifling words, nor such as

excite immoderate laughter. For Christ saith in the Gospel: "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment " (St. Matth. xii. 36).

Avoid also asperity and pungency of words, and abhor the vice of detraction and evil-speaking. If it be necessary, or evidently useful, to speak of the defects of others, see that thou introduce nothing beyond this, nor with any other intention. And then beware lest thou be impelled to speak by bitterness of spirit or ill-will.

Moreover, thou shalt not affirm for certain those things of which thou art uncertain. Flee most carefully from all falsehood, all hypocrisy, duplicity, and wicked dissimulation, and deceit. For God admits no one into His kingdom who is not simple and far removed from all false appearances.

If thou shouldst happen to hear any one uttering slanderous and evil, or improper words, thou must contrive to cut short that discourse, or even modestly and discreetly reprove him who so speaks. And, if thou art not well able to do this, show nevertheless by the sadness of thy countenance, or by sighs, or by departure, or by any other fitting sign, that those things displease thee which are displeasing to God, and close at least the ears of thy soul, lest thou consent to the evil discourse.

§ 6. The Custody of the Senses.

Thou must guard with the utmost diligence thy tongue, and the five senses of thy body, that is to say, sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling. See, therefore, that thou use them not otherwise than is permitted. For if thou lovest much talking, and art given to indulging thy senses without restraint, thou wilt be unable to make any progress in virtue, and wilt lose the grace of God; for it flows away through

the senses, as it were through crevices.

§ 7. Manners and Gestures.

Be calm and composed in thy manners and gestures. Thou wilt do well to show thyself moderately cheerful, to the honour of God, at fitting times and places, among those with whom thou hast intercourse. Be extremely careful not to incur the guilt of scandalizing any one by thy words or deeds.

§ 8. The Control of our Thoughts.

Keep thy thoughts and affections pure and innocent. When any bad thought, or evil image, or foolish mirth has come into thy mind, and thou feelest some impure affection arise in thy heart; be ashamed, and quickly and simply turn thyself away from it, bringing back the eyes of thy mind to God, or to some harmless subject, or making the holy and salutary sign of the cross.

Against the shameful inclinations and lusts of the flesh, it is of no little avail to reflect on the shortness and vileness of carnal pleasures, and on the corrupt nature of the flesh itself. For what is flesh, how soever fair and attractive it may appear, what is it but filth, and rottenness, and a noisome stench? If that delicate skin were taken off which displays such great beauty, the whole flesh would be hideous. We assuredly have to die, and after death the body will be come a most repulsive corpse.

The Angelical Salutation piously recited is of wonderful avail, and also the invocation of the Saints, and the fear and horror of losing the grace of God, and the diligent consideration of what it would be to be for ever separated from God and all His friends, and to be plunged into eternal torments with the devil in hell. But we most easily and

happily overcome the evil suggestions of the malignant spirit, by despising them as though they were troublesome flies, rather than by answering them with much reasoning.

CHAPTER V: COUNSELS AND PRACTICES OF DISCRETION.

COUNSELS AND PRACTICES OF DISCRETION.

§ 1. Singularity is to be avoided.

§ 2. And also the excess of austerity.

§ 3. God is to be the end of our actions.

§ 4. The assistance of grace.

§ 5. The merits of Christ.

§ 1. The avoiding of Singularity.

IN all thy works and exercises be discreet, prudent, thoughtful, and earnest, and be careful to preserve thy tranquillity and liberty of spirit. Worship God and serve Him, not in a negligent and perfunctory manner, but devoutly and zealously. Diligently avoid all faulty singularity. This vice of singularity is especially to be shunned by those who dwell in monasteries, and are bound to live according to a common and approved rule. There are some who take a strange delight in doing anything that is not done by others. They are better pleased if they have once fasted while their companions were eating, than if they had fasted ten times with others. But they miserably deceive themselves.

§ 2. And of Austerity.

Although thou mayest read or hear of many holy men who have led very severe lives, and although thou mayest perchance be impelled by the first fervour of thy conversion to embrace unusual austerities; thou shouldst not inconsiderately follow the dictates of this fervour, but take counsel of the wise. For what has been clone by holy and perfect

men, they did by the evident guidance and attraction of the Holy Spirit. Evil passions must be mortified, but the weak body must not be oppressed, nor must nature be destroyed. The crosses and afflictions which God lays upon a man are much more safely borne, than those which a man takes upon himself by his own will.

§ 3. Let God be the End of our Actions.

Whatsoever thou doest or omittest, let it be done or omitted for the honour and glory of God: so that in all things thou mayest look simply to God by a pure intention, and be bound to Him by the glorious bond of good will, never knowingly or willingly seeking thyself. The moment thou discoverest in thyself any inordinate self-seeking, repudiate it, and deny thyself; for self-seeking and self-will corrupt and spoil our good works. True self-denial assuredly sounds sweetly in the ear of God, and marvellously delights His Majesty. If thou sayest only one Hail Mary to the perpetual praise of God, with self-denial, it will be more pleasing to God, and of more advantage to thyself, than if thou wert often to recite the whole Psalter of thy own accord or out of self-will.

There is no action so insignificant that it may not be of great advantage to the soul if it be purely referred to God. Wherefore, he who for the sake of God places even one little flower on the altar, or adorns the image of any Saint with a sincere and devout intention, will doubtless receive a great reward. Moreover, he will not lose his reward who only bows the head or bends the knee in honour of God. Seek and ask of God, that the utmost praise of the Creator may result from each of thy words, from each step of thy feet, from every movement of thy body, and from every morsel that thou eatest; seek and ask that every breath thou takest day and night may honour and glorify God, and show thy love

of Him; then, indeed, will come to pass what thou rightly and piously desirest and seekest.

§ 4. The Assistance of Grace.

When thou art going to undertake anything, raise thy heart to God, ask counsel of Him, and call upon Him; knowing that unless He help thee with His grace, thou canst neither do nor say anything acceptable in His sight.

Observe diligently what God may speak to thy heart, and whether it be reasonable and agreeable to Him that thou shouldst do this or that. If thou art uncertain whether thy inclination be from God, observe whether thou wouldst be ready to follow the will of God, if it were made clear to thee. And if thou findest thyself wholly disposed to follow the will of God, and humbly beseechest Him to enlighten and to teach thee; then thou mayest trust that what thou art most drawn to is from God, provided it be in accordance with Holy Scripture and the teaching of the Church.

It is, nevertheless, advisable that thou shouldst seek to ascertain the will of God from some one who is enlightened and fears God; and that chiefly in difficult affairs, on account of the wiles of Satan, who sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. xi. 14).

§ 5. The Merits of Christ.

If thou dost combine and unite thy good works and exercises with the actions and exercises of Christ, and offer them to God to His eternal praise; this offering will be highly acceptable to the Lord, and thy works will receive an ineffable glory and dignity from the actions of Christ with which they are united. Thy lead (so to speak) will be changed into fine gold, and thy water into most excellent wine. Let

Jesus and Mary be thy beloved refuge and hope; and do thou commend to them by devout prayer all thy necessities and all thy affairs.

CHAPTER VI: RULES FOR THE CONSOLATION OF THE TEMPTED.

RULES FOR THE CONSOLATION OF THE TEMPTED.

§ 1. Diligence in custody of the heart.

§ 2. Sorrow in desire; that is to say, sorrow is true when reason vehemently desires to grieve for sin, and to have an intellectual hatred of it.

§ 3. Falls from human frailty.

§ 4. The assaults of vices and temptations.

§ 5. Perseverance in holy resolutions.

§ 6. Confidence in the assistance of the grace of God, not in our own strength.

§ 7. Of prayer.

§ 1. Custody of the Heart.

Avoid with all prudence the occasions of sin, and any companionship which may turn thee away from God; and be ever solicitous to preserve the purity of thy heart. Never give thyself up to inordinate security, since this life is full of snares, temptations, and perils: but always work out thy salvation with reasonable and holy fear. For most true are these words of the wise man, "Unless thou hold thyself diligently in the fear of the Lord, thy house shall quickly be overthrown" (Eccles. xvii. 4). When, however, thou dost fall and sin through human frailty, or when thou seest thyself rather losing than gaining ground through the attacks of evil passions, be not despondent on that account; but, lamenting before thy Lord Jesus, beseech Him to wash away all the stains of thy sin in His most pure Blood, and to confirm thee in well-doing by His grace.

§ 2. Sorrow in Desire.

Neither be thou tormented if perchance thou feelest no sorrow nor contrition. For if thou dost heartily wish and desire that thou hadst not offended God, or even if thou art sorry that thou dost not grieve for it; this sorrow is seen and accepted by God, who considers not so much what thou feelest as what thou desirest. Say often these or similar words, "O Lord Jesus! would that I had never offended thee! O that I might henceforth live according to thy most gracious will, and be pleasing to thee!"

That contrition is most excellent which is combined with love, hope, and humble confidence in God. Lighter offences are doubtless more effectually and quickly effaced, if a man humbly acknowledging his fault, straightway turns lovingly to God, than if he timidly dwells upon his defects, and reflects upon them in his own mind.

§ 3. Sins from Human Frailty.

It is one thing to fall into venial sins only through frailty in occasions of sin; and another to commit them through pure and culpable negligence. That man sins through frailty and unawares, who not being taken captive by the love of any creature, is ever ready to abandon all things which he knows for certain that God wills he should abandon; but who yet is prone to fall when occasion offers, through elation of mind, or impatience, or sloth, idleness, levity, and overabundance of words, or sensual and carnal affections, and who is intemperate in food and drink, or more mirthful than is meet, or immoderately anxious and busy; yet as soon as he recovers himself he grieves that he has not been more guarded, and, utterly abhorring the least stain of sin, immediately seeks pardon for it. His heart is not corrupt, and sins and passions

have not much hold upon him, nor do they greatly impede in him the grace of God.

On the other hand, he certainly offends through pure and culpable negligence, who is wilfully and with his own knowledge held captive by love and affection for creatures, and unrestrainedly seeks from them pleasure and delight. For even though he may possess himself in freedom when occasions of sin are removed, he yet, for the most part, desires those occasions, and he neglects and makes light of the faults he is thus led into, which he ought to hold in detestation. It is evident that the heart of this man is corrupt. Nevertheless, he also may obtain forgiveness, if after his fall he conceives true contrition and makes a resolution to amend.

§ 4. The Assaults of Temptations.

Again, it is one thing to be attacked by evil passions, and another to be overcome by them. So long as thou consentest not, so long as the vices displease thee, and thou resistest them with thy reason and thy will, thou withdrawest not from God, however they may attack and molest thee. Some servants of God are, by nature, placid both within and without, and are but slightly molested by vices. Others are more severely tempted when occasions offer, being by their very nature prone to pride, or vain-glory, anger or greediness, luxury or other faults; but they will not in any way yield their consent to these vices. For when they feel any inclination towards them, they instantly abandon and condemn whatever is adverse to God and to their spiritual good, and, repudiating all sensuality, they flee interiorly to God by faith and humble prayer. These are often more acceptable to God than the others, and excel them in virtue; for the perfection of virtue is attained by efforts. It is possible, however, that some one of those who strive

earnestly against sin, may be detained some what long in Purgatory after his death; but when he shall be fully cleansed, he will obtain a much higher place in heaven than he who did not make such strenuous efforts, though he may have reached heaven without passing through the pains of purgatory. Let not, therefore, the violence of temptation discourage thee.

Even if thou shouldst feel very urgent evil impulses in those inferior and sensitive parts of the mind which we have in common with the brute creation, but with out consenting to them, even if unclean images and unheard-of blasphemies against God and the Saints repeatedly enter into thy mind against thy will, they would not contaminate thy soul, but would cleanse it, and prepare for it wonderful crowns in heaven. Many very pious men are so tormented by temptations of this sort, that they cannot say a single "Our Father," or "Hail, Mary," without diabolical suggestions. They are oppressed by intolerable difficulties, and think themselves guilty of many crimes; but in the eyes of God they are glorious martyrs. On account of these suggestions, anxieties, and afflictions, we must never omit our prayers, even though they may be disturbed by innumerable distractions, nor must we neglect any good work. He who once consents to vain-glory is more displeasing in the sight of God than if he had for many years felt the worst suggestions enter into his mind without consenting to them. Let the malignant spirits rage as they may, let the flesh entice and excite to evil, the soul, which by deliberate will refuses to turn to evil, loses not the grace of God. The intellect is often so occupied by importunate suggestions, and by evil thoughts and temptations, that a pious man may for a time dwell upon them without deliberation or intention: but he turns away as soon as he is clearly aware of his thoughts, and consents not to the temptation which had taken hold of him.

If in thy sleep (when the reason is not free) thou shouldst have some unclean dream, thou must not be too much afflicted and fearful because of it, provided that on awaking, and being fully master of thy reason, thou rejectest what is sinful. Sin depends entirely on the will,--so that if it be not voluntary, it is not sin.

Therefore, I repeat again for thy consolation, if on account of an injury done to thee, or of evil speaking against thee and thine, or for any other cause, thou shouldst feel thyself violently moved to anger, or to feel ill-will or envy towards any one, and meanwhile thou art displeased with thyself, and dost repress to the utmost of thy power the vice which is active within thee, and strivest to expel and mortify it by humble confession and prayer, thy salvation will suffer no detriment. There may, indeed, be a tempest in the lowest regions of thy soul; but in the upper regions, thy reason will remain tranquil and thy will incorrupt and unconquered.

Nothing will altogether separate thee from the friendship of God, if thou consentest not to sin. But neither the devil nor any other creature can force thee to consent, since thou hast free will, which God is ever ready to strengthen by His grace, lest thou shouldst fall by consenting. If, however, thou hast consented to sin, thou mayest (with the help of God) be quickly re-instated in grace before the Lord, by true contrition and penance.

§ 5. Perseverance.

PERSEVERE, therefore, in thy holy resolutions, even if thou fallest a thousand times a day. Hope steadfastly in the Lord, who ever most graciously grants forgiveness to a man of good will humbly acknowledging his fault. It is assuredly impossible for the humble to be repelled by Him and perish. Oh! if being interiorly illuminated by

the light of grace, thou couldst in anywise know and feel how merciful, how gracious, how sweet and good is Jesus; thou wouldst, doubt less, conceive a great and loving confidence in Him, and wouldst feel the utmost exultation. And this joyful confidence would render thee, not idle and negligent, but exceedingly prompt and diligent in well doing. The merciful Jesus often sweetly visits and consoles with His grace one whom He yet knows to be about soon to fall and to commit some sin. Oh! how readily He receives thee, when arising from thy fall, thou returnest to Him with humility and love! Then do the angelic spirits and the other citizens of heaven rejoice with great joy, and embrace thee in most sincere charity; for they also are most benignant and merciful.

When any one labours under an inordinate fear of damnation, and yet strives with all his strength to lead a good life, it is expedient and prudent for him to refrain from dwelling much on the just judgments of God: he must believe undoubtingly in the Holy Scriptures, which abound in heavenly consolation. And who is there whose courage will not be revived by those most sweet words of the Prophet: "The Lord is gracious and merciful; patient and plenteous in mercy" (Ps. cxliv. 8)? "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our iniquities from us: as a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him" (Ps. cxiii. 12, 13).

Let him fear and be terrified at the severity of the judgments of God, who, neglecting God, and spurning his commandments, persists in his iniquity, and will not amend his life. It is no doubt to such a one that the Blessed Paul speaks, when he utters these terrible words: "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness, and patience, and long-suffering? knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance? But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou

treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God" (Rom. ii. 4, 5). But the same St. Paul amply consoles those who depart from sin, and strive to live according to the Spirit, saying: "There is now therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh" (Rom. viii. 1). A man of goodwill should in no wise look upon God as cruel, whose nature is goodness itself, and whose benignity and clemency he daily experiences.

God is often said in Holy Scripture to be terrible, and anger and fury are attributed to Him; but this is meant to signify His spiritual operations and the effects of His justice; for He is unchangeable, and subject to no perturbation; He remains ever tranquil in Himself, and in the same mood.

Hence in the Book of Wisdom it is written: "Thou being master of power, judgest with tranquillity" (Wisdom xii. 18).

§ 6. Confidence in God.

Resist with constancy the temptation to despair and discouragement. Do all that is in thy power to make more and more progress; yet trusting not in thy own labours and efforts, but in the help of the Lord thy God; for they who trust in themselves fail, since man of himself can do no good thing.

7. Prayer.

Beseech God assiduously that He will mortify in thee, and take away from thee whatsoever is displeasing to Him; beseech Him to make thee a man after His own heart. For if thou hast faith, and perseverest in humble petition and prayer, thou wilt without doubt receive whatever is conducive to thy salvation, according to the promise of Christ, who

saith; "Ask, and you shall receive" (St. John xvi. 24). And again, "All things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive." It is indeed certain that thou wilt at a fitting time, if not immediately, obtain by prayer those things which are useful to thee, and which thou mayest rightly and confidently hope to obtain. If two persons prayed to God at the same time, one of whom asked for a thing which seemed almost impossible, but yet trusted that God would grant his petition: while the other sought for a trifling thing, but had not full confidence in God; he who asked for an important and difficult thing, would through the merit of his confidence be much sooner heard than he who with little confidence prayed for a little thing.

If perchance thou seekest piously for what would not be for thy good, God will give thee something that will be profitable to thee. He is a most loving Father; if He denies thee when thou askest for spiritual riches, it is because thou art childish, and knowest not how to make a good use of them. He lays up for thee, however, in heaven each time a hundred-fold what thou dost ask. It is, indeed, impossible that the least prayer rightly offered, the least sigh, or the least pious aspiration to God, should fail to bring forth great fruit.

Recite frequently that most excellent and most sweet prayer, which our Lord Jesus Christ pronounced with His own sacred lips, and taught to us. And in praying to God, thou must not imagine Him to be corporeal and visible; but believing him to be a Spirit, adore and pray to Him in spirit and in truth. [4] Conceive of Him. in thy mind as a supersubstantial Substance; contemplate Him as the supreme Good, and supreme Love, and the supremely desirable intellectual Light. But look and meditate upon the Son of God, who for thee was made man, as God and Man.

[4] St. John iv. 24.

CHAPTER VII: CONSOLATION FOR THE IMPERFECT WHO ARE OF GOOD WILL.

CONSOLATION FOR THE IMPERFECT WHO ARE OF GOOD WILL.

§ 1. There is some imperfection in all men.

§ 2. Good will.

§ 3. Mortification.

§ 4. Union of our works with the merits of Christ.

§ 1. The Perfection consisting in Good Will.

IF them canst not be as perfect as thou wishest to be, humble thyself and be resigned. Congratulate in thy heart those who are perfect, glorifying God, and giving thanks to Him for their perfection. God often permits some fault or imperfection to adhere to His elect, who are most dear to Him, by means of which they may become vile in their own eyes, and remain humble. There are some who have acquired health and vigour of soul, and have risen to such a degree of virtue, that they would be ready to undergo death rather than offend God of their own will and knowledge; and yet, not being aware that they are strong, they are ever in fear and anxiety, and are fully persuaded that they are weak and ailing.

Our most wise and gracious Creator, out of His great faithfulness and the love He bears them, leaves them in this ignorance and fear as long as they live. For He clearly perceives them to be so frail that if they had ascertained that they were sound, they would immediately look upon themselves with vain complacency. It is good for them to endure this misery, under which they resign themselves humbly to God. However, the merciful Lord usually delivers them at the hour of death from this

ignorance and this long darkness; giving them a firm confidence in Him, in which they depart happily out of this life.

§ 2. The Value of a Good Will.

Thou must on no account lose confidence, because thou art imperfect; for God cannot reject a man of good will. He intimately knows thy weakness, and mercifully consoles thee in the Gospel, where the holy Angels are related to have sung at the Birth of Christ those words most ardently longed for: "Peace to men of good will" (St. Luke, ii. 14).

They said not, Peace to men of great or of perfect holiness, (although if they had said this, they would have said what is most true); but in order that the weak and the little ones who are of good will might receive consolation, they joyfully said, "Peace to men of good will."

If thou dost reasonably what is in thy power, and truly desirest to please God, He will, doubtless, at length exceedingly reward thy endeavours, thy labours and desires, and thy good will, even though there be much inequality in thy pious works, exercises and prayers, and many defects be mingled with them. For so long as thou withdrawest not thy will from God, and often grieveest for thy imperfections and thy multiplied offences, God, in His unspeakable goodness, accounts thy works worthy of an eternal reward. So long, I say, as thou retainest a good will, and, carefully abstaining from sin, devotest thyself to humility and the other true virtues, thou wilt be pleasing to God, and thou mayest dwell with joy in thy good conscience as in a delightful paradise.

Assuredly, all good things depend upon the will; and when thou earnestly desirest with thy whole heart, and doest all that lies in thy power to possess humility, charity, or any other virtues, without doubt thou possessest them in the sight of God. In like manner, when thou

desirest from thy heart to do any good work, but art not able, God receives thy good will for the deed. And God accounts thy desire to be as great as thou with thy whole heart wishest it to be. It is, therefore, exceedingly profitable to pray thus: "Would that I might, O my Lord, for the honour of Thy name, have as much love and affection for Thee as any creature ever had! O most gracious Jesus, I earnestly beseech Thee, that I may at all times rise to Thee with my whole will and eager desire, according to Thy good pleasure. I seek and desire with my whole heart to please Thee perfectly in all virtue and holiness, by Thy merciful will."

3. Mortification.

Thou must not be pusillanimous, nor imagine thyself to be remote from God, because, perchance, thou canst not practise great austerity of life, or because thou dost not feel thyself inwardly impelled and attracted towards it. For it is not in this that true perfection and true holiness consist; they consist in the mortification of self-will and of evil inclinations, and in true humility and charity. We do not read that the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, led so hard a life as did the holy widow Judith; and yet she was by far more perfect than Judith. All the elect walk not outwardly in the same path; but all must surely follow inwardly the same path, namely, the path of humility, and true charity or holy love. For St. John Baptist followed one mode of life, and St. John the Evangelist another; and yet, because both were truly humble, and truly loved God and their neighbour, both were very pleasing to God.

Rejoice and praise God, that many, being assisted by His grace, lead and have led austere lives; for thus, by pious congratulation and sincere love, thou wilt make their merits in a manner thine own, and

thou wilt receive from God reward and glory for the virtues which thou purely lovest in others.

Moreover, thou mayest offer to God the Father, in stead of the austerity in which thou art wanting, the fasts, the vigils, the tribulations, and the most bitter Passion of Christ. And if, with the help of God, thou shalt embrace a somewhat more austere manner of life, do it simply for the glory of God, and make not much account of this austerity, nor put trust in thy merits, but rather rest all thy hopes on the Passion of Christ, and on His satisfaction, expiation, and merits.

Although the imperfect must never lay aside the holy fear of God, they have not much reason to fear, providing they are always striving to be better; they have not, I say, reason to be inordinately fearful. For Christ loves, in His mystical body, not only the eyes, that is to say, the perfect; He loves also the hands and the feet, He loves the lowest of His members, He loves the minute vessels of mercy which He purchased with His Blood and Precious Death. The great sons of God quickly walk and run; but the little ones learn to walk slowly and with difficulty.

Happy wilt thou be if thou be found in the number even of the little children; for they also shall all be heirs of the heavenly kingdom. He who created the great ones created also the little ones; and Christ is the Saviour of both. He shed His Blood for all. He willed to redeem all by His Death; and no one is excluded from so great a benefit, unless he unhappily deprive himself of it by his own fault.

§ 4. Union of our Works with Christ.

Believe me, he who is truly humble and of good will, possesses in Christ--because of the devout and sincere desire of his heart--whatever may be wanting in himself; he possesses in Him all holiness and

perfection. For, without doubt, it was for this that Christ came into the world, for this he became incarnate and suffered, that He might save sinners who humble themselves, raising them to eternal bliss; that He might satisfy for them, making good and supplying for their deficiencies, and enriching them with His merits. Like a faithful parent, He laid up treasure for His children, whom he loved from all eternity.

Beseech Him, therefore, that He will fully answer, satisfy, and supply for thee; pray Him to adorn thy needy soul with His merits and virtues. And while thou thus prayest, hope and believe with certainty that He will of His immense goodness grant what thou humbly askest. If thou remainest doubtful and fearful, thou art like one who having taken off mean and dirty clothing, and suddenly put on royal apparel, knows not how to carry himself composedly as befits those royal garments, but behaves foolishly and rudely, with the roughness of manner to which he is accustomed. Offer to God the Father His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, in full satisfaction for thy sins, and in supply of the merits which are lacking to thee; offer all that He did and suffered for thee; offer the Incarnation, the Life, the labours, the Passion and Agony, the Blood and Death of thy Redeemer. The dignity of this oblation and its profitableness to man are utterly beyond our comprehension. No crimes can be so grave and so enormous that they may not be effaced in a man of good will by the merits of Christ and His Precious Blood. Thou mayest also say to God the Father: "O most merciful Father, I beseech thee by Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, to have pity on me, and to grant me such or such a thing to the eternal praise of thy Name." For whensoever we ask for anything piously and holily in the Name of the Son, or through the Son, that petition is well pleasing to God the Father, since nothing is more dear to Him than His Son. [5]

Commend thy good works and exercises to the most sacred and sweet Heart of Jesus Christ, to be amended and perfected; for this is what the same most loving Heart greatly desires, and it is ever ready excellently to complete thy imperfect works. Rejoice and exult, because how poor soever thou mayest be in thyself, thou art exceedingly rich in thy Redeemer, who has willed thee to be partaker of His merits, who for thee was made man, for thee fasted, laboured, endured torments, shed His Blood and laid down His life. In Him is laid up for thee a truly immense treasure, if thou art really humble and of good will.

[5] St. Matth. vii. 7. and xxi. 22; St. Mark, xi. 24; St. John, xiv.

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CHAPTER VIII: THE SCHOOL OF HUMILITY AND PATIENCE.

THE SCHOOL OF HUMILITY AND PATIENCE.

§ 1. The praise of humility.

§ 2. The chief acts of it.

§ 3. The virtue of patience.

§ 1. The Praise of Humility.

OH, how worthy of praise is the virtue of holy humility! I admonish thee, again and again, most especially to cultivate this virtue; for it was this in particular that Christ wished us to learn from Him. He saith: "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart " (St. Matth. xi. 29). This He ever taught, both by word and by example. Wherefore He again speaks thus: "Unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven " (St. Matth. xviii. 3). This He most lovingly regarded in His Virgin Mother, as she herself bears witness, saying: "He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid " (St. Luke i. 48). It is chiefly by this that all the Saints have been and are men after God's heart. In short, the whole discipline of Christian wisdom is contained in this virtue. If thou dost not desire nor strive to be humble, in vain thou persuadest thyself that thou hast charity, and that a pleasing dwelling may be found in thee for the Holy Spirit, who resteth on none but the humble. Charity is ever joined to humility, and humility to charity; and it is impossible that any one should have charity who is not humble. For, as St. Paul saith: "Charity is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, but is meek and patient." Without humility and charity thy works and thy exercises, how great

soever they may seem to be, will be rotten and empty. But true humility is to be sought for within the heart. If interior humility be wanting, that which is external is nothing but hypocrisy.

§ 2. The Acts which are Special to Humility.

Let thy heart be humble and submissive. Acknowledge thy nothingness, thy infirmity and powerlessness, confess thy ingratitude towards God, thy malice and thy vileness. Of thyself, thou art indeed nothing, and without the help of God's grace thou canst have no good desire, do no good action, nor even conceive one pious thought. Of thyself, thou art ever prone to evil; and if God did not keep thee, there is no crime so horrible that thou wouldst not commit it. Wherefore thou shouldst not esteem thyself above any man, however wicked. If thou hast not been guilty of grave sins, then, because of the goodness of God, which has not permitted thee to fall into them, and has granted thee the power of leading a good life, thou hast still more reason to humble thyself than he who, after the perpetration of many crimes, has obtained pardon and has been received into the favour of God.

Since thou hast nothing of thy own but sin, do thou attribute every good thing that thou hast or doest to the mercy and loving-kindness of God, seeking the praise and glory of God, not thine own. Take not to thyself so much as an atom of the gifts of God; even if thou alone hadst done all the good works of all men, thou shouldst remain as naked and destitute (as regards thy opinion of thyself, and the undue esteem of thy works,) as if thou hadst done no good thing. If thou usurpest and ascribest to thyself any of the gifts of God, and if thou desirest to be held in honour of men on account of any interior or exterior grace, there lurketh in thee great pride. Hold that most pernicious pest in abhorrence; and if, perchance, it conies into thy mind, consent

not to it. Say to God: "O Lord, I would rather die than consent; I renounce all impurity." Not only ascribe no good to thyself, but cast back upon thyself the blame of all the evil that is done in the world. Confess thyself to be utterly unworthy of the benefits and gifts which thou receivest from God, and be grateful to Him; acknowledge that thou art not worthy that the earth should bear thee.

Doubtless, since thou hast by thy sins grievously offended the Lord of supreme majesty and holiness, it would be but just that God Himself and all creatures should torment thee horribly. Wherefore thou shouldst not be astonished, nor disturbed in mind, when thou feelest thyself interiorly dry, barren, unsettled, in darkness, and as if abandoned by God; or when thou art oppressed by daily and heavy crosses, difficulties or temptations, and when others despise and persecute, or even strike thee, and insult and speak evil of thee. Thou thinkest then, perhaps, that God is angry with thee; but that anger is fatherly, and proceeds from love. Be not discontented with so loving a Father, when He tries thee, or allows thee to be tried by adversity. Be meek, patient, and resigned, and give thanks.

Thou must, however, have a reasonable fear, knowing that God sees many faults in thee, while thou, perhaps, perceivest only one, or none at all; fear, I say, and impute to thy sins what thou hast to suffer, acknowledging that thou hast deserved worse things; but by no means imagine thyself, on account of these punishments, not to be dear to God. On the contrary, they should make thee very confident that thou art dear to Him: "For the Lord scourgeth every son whom He receiveth " (Heb. xii. 6). Chant in thy heart these words of the Prophet: "I will look towards the Lord, I will wait for God my Saviour. I will bear the wrath of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He judge my cause. He will bring me forth into the light, I shall behold His

justice" (Mich. vii. 7, 9). Beseech the Lord Jesus that He will satisfy for thy sins; but bear patiently for the love of Him what thou dost suffer.

Pardon speedily from thy heart all the offences of those who hurt and annoy thee, and show thyself benignant towards them, returning good for evil, and bearing quietly and with equanimity their sharp words and threatening gestures, and cruel deeds, and what ever wrong they may have inflicted on thee or on thy friends. And lest this should seem to thee too difficult in practice, place before the eyes of thy mind what thy Lord Jesus Christ endured for thee, and the example that He gave thee, who, when He suffered, murmured not, was not angry nor sought for revenge, but most mercifully prayed for His enemies. [6] Wouldst thou not think thou hadst obtained an immense good, if thou couldst in anything resemble thy King?

It sometimes happens by the permission of God, that a good man, who seeks God alone, falls into some grievous trouble and affliction, either from natural temperament and indisposition, or from the influence and changes of the weather, or by the operation of the evil spirit, or from other causes; this man, thinking he is displeasing to God, then usually loses his peace of mind, and is subject to sadness and disturbance. If such distress come upon thee, do not thou wish to shake it off violently, nor seek out divers ways of ridding thyself of it, but receive the annoyance humbly from the Hand of God, as something most salutary for thee, and endure it with a tranquil and resigned mind, even if it should last many years, or for thy whole life; for thus will God and the Angels dwell with thee, taking delight in thy humility and patience.

[6] 1 Pet. ii. 23; St. Luke, xxiii. 34

§ 3. The Virtue of Patience.

Tribulations in this life are most precious gifts of God, and there is no more certain sign of divine election than to bear adversity with humility and resignation for the sake of God. By means of cold, heat, sickness, and every other exterior and interior trial, God purifies, sanctifies, and wonderfully adorns the souls of His elect. And when He sees that they are unable to bear collars of gold, He adorns them at least with garlands of flowers, that is to say, with lighter tribulations. He would never permit even the least breath of wind to disturb His elect, unless He knew that it was expedient for their salvation. It is of more profit to a man to endure even a moderate trial patiently, for the honour and love of God, than to accomplish great works. Humble patience and resignation in adversity, sound sweetly in the ears of God, and bring Him quickly to the aid of the afflicted. Hence the Prophet saith: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart " (Ps. xxxiii. 19).

Whatever thou now sufferest, God foresaw from eternity that thou wouldst suffer it in this manner; He foresaw the day and the hour when this suffering was to befall thee. But thou hast no reason to be fearful; for the merciful Lord will lay upon thee nothing that will exceed thy strength, which is clearly known to Him. He will most carefully interpose His Hand between thee and the lire of tribulation, lest thou shouldst be too much tormented, as doth an indulgent mother, when she undresses her little child before a material fire. Offer devoutly to God, to His eternal praise, these same tribulations and all thy pains, small as well as great, joined and united to the Passion or the sufferings of Christ; thus will they be of inestimable merit, and most phasing to God.

Learn, I pray thee, to receive solely from the Hand of God, all things that happen to thee, whether in soul or body, or in what belongs to thee; for whatsoever happens, happens by His wise disposal, nor can any misfortune touch thee except by the permission of God. Even did all the demons at once desire to rush upon thee, they could not come nigh thee, unless God permitted it; wherefore thou shouldest not fear them, but God. As I have said, learn to receive from the Hand of the Lord of goodness all things as being best for thee, though perchance such, a calamity and affliction may fall upon thee as may seem to be adverse to thy salvation. For it is impossible that what thou receivest simply from the Hand of the Lord should not be the best and most profitable to thee, since God gives to those of good-will nothing but what is best and most conducive to their salvation; and this is as certain as that God exists. If He were to give to Satan the power to vex thee for all the remainder of thy life with horrible bodily sufferings, thou mightest perhaps consider it an intolerable misfortune, and a terrible judgment of God upon thee; and yet it would not only be no hindrance to thy salvation, but would greatly further it, if thou didst receive it from the Hand of God, and endure it humbly for the honour and love of God.

Thou must also receive from the Hand of the most merciful God those afflictions and crosses of which thou art thyself the cause, or which happen from thy own fault. Yet thou must ever lament the evil thou hast done, and by no means lay the blame of it on God, who can never be the author of sin; nor on the devil, who had not the power of forcing thee to sin; but impute it solely to thyself, who didst consent to sin.

Whenever any vexation or hardship is inflicted on thee by creatures, turn straightway the eyes of thy heart to thy Heavenly Creator and Father, who, out of love, permits this for thy good. Let thy mind dwell

rather on Him, than on the creatures which bring the tribulation, for these are as it were the instruments, the tools which the Supreme Artificer uses as He wills, and as He knows to be profitable to His elect. If thou art disturbed and lovest patience as often as men speak evil of thee or thine, or inflict any injury upon thee, thy tranquillity of mind rests not on God, but is placed in men, and depends on men. And if this were so, then verily wouldst thou be most unhappy and miserable.

CHAPTER IX: THE DOCTRINE AND VARIOUS PRACTICES OF RESIGNATION.

THE DOCTRINE AND VARIOUS PRACTICES OF RESIGNATION.

RESIGN thyself wholly to God, submitting and conforming thy will in all things to His blessed will and disposal, for thus and no otherwise wilt thou at length obtain true and abiding peace of mind; thus will it be evident that thou truly lovest God. Therefore, whether God gives thee prosperity or adversity, whether He wills thee to be in light or in darkness, remain content, bearing all changes according to thy strength with a calm and steadfast mind, praising God and giving Him thanks.

When thou seemest to thyself to be pining in great darkness and aridity, and art oppressed by grievous perplexities, if thou dost then conform thyself to the Divine Will, and for God's sake endure that misery and affliction with sweet tranquillity, thou art much more pleasing to God than if thou wert illuminated with divine light, and all were joyful within.

In trouble and affliction man cannot so easily seek himself as in sensible sweetness and consolation, for in the latter there is mostly some mingling of nature, and if the soul is incautious, it readily contracts a stain through immoderate delight. Assuredly it cannot be that any one can endure anything with resignation for the glory of God, without perceiving in some degree the divine sweetness. If, however, it should happen that he does not perceive it, that is, sensibly taste it, (because God hides Himself at the moment), yet even so what he suffers is acceptable to him, because he knows that he wishes to bear it to the eternal glory of God.

If the Will of God is sweet to thee, when He wills that thou shouldst

be, in health and live, but is bitter to thee when He wills that thou shouldest be ill and die, thou art not yet fully resigned, thy heart is not yet right. If thou desirest to have it right, submit it in all things to the Divine Will, which is ever right. Suffer God to do with thee what He may will, and as He may will, in life and in death, in time and in eternity. Let God with thy consent do whatsoever pleaseth Him with thy soul and body, with thy friends and thy possessions, and with all thy concerns. Desire only that His Will be always done, and let that Divine Will be thy greatest consolation. Say to God: "O Lord, as Thou hast willed from eternity, so be it, and not as I will: let Thy most gracious Will be done in me and concerning me, and in all men and in all things, now and for ever."

Thou canst ask for nothing better, nor canst thou pour forth in the presence of God any more excellent prayer than that thou desirest His Will to be done.

Even if thou hast not long since begun to lead a better life, and thou art about to die, nevertheless be thou resigned, and seek not to know or to enquire whether God will .send thee after thy death to purgatory, or receive thee at once into heaven. Take thou pleasure in the beauty of His justice, as well as in the sweetness of His mercy. These are the words of one who is truly resigned: "O Lord, my God, if it would tend to Thy praise that after my death I should be tormented for fifty years in the flames of purgatory, I would forthwith cast myself at Thy feet, and most readily accept those pains for Thy honour." The holy Fathers affirm that he who to the eternal glory of God loves and embraces the justice of the Lord in his regard equally with His mercy, obtains the full remission of all his sins, and of the punishment due to them, as easily as a drop of water is consumed in a burning furnace.

If thou art a man of good-will, God desires to benefit thee; He wills

that thou shouldst enjoy eternal bliss with Him. He wills this, because He is supremely good and merciful. The Creator abounds in all things, and is in no want of thy good things; but He seeks a heart turned towards Him, humble, resigned, and full of firm confidence in Him, such for example as He found in that thief, to whom He said, hanging on the cross, "This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise" (St. Luke xxiii. 43). If thy heart be of this sort, thou canst in no wise be separated from God, for He will with more than fatherly affection be with thee in life and death, and will protect and console thee. He will assuredly do what He hath promised by His Prophet, saying, "As one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice " (Isaias lxvi. 13, 14).

Therefore, both living and dying, commit thyself and all things securely to the providence of God, casting all thy cares upon Him, yet always reasonably doing what it belongs to thee to do. Lean firmly on His benignity and goodness, and trust fully in Him, whatever may happen, for in truth He takes greater care of thee than thou canst take of thyself. The Lord greatly loves thee and thy salvation, who of His gratuitous mercy made thee to His own image and likeness, and for most pure and ardent love of thee willed to be incarnate, to suffer, and to die. He is possessed by as great a longing for all who piously worship Him and sincerely love Him, as if His whole being and happiness depended on them. If the love that all parents ever had, have, or will have for their children be compared with the charity with which God loves thee, it will be as a little drop of water compared with a vast ocean.

Nor must thou be doubtful of His surpassing love for thee, because perchance all, or nearly all, thy life has been ill-spent or wicked.

Although the crimes by which thou hast offended Him be innumerable and most heinous, nevertheless since thou hast sincerely confessed them, and turning away from them, and sincerely humbling thyself, hast been converted to God, and dost desire and strive from thy heart to please Him, thou art verily dear to thy Lord, and to all the court of heaven.

God, who has given thee true contrition, will doubtless also give thee pardon; nor doth He regard what thou wast formerly, but what thou now art or desirest to be. It is assuredly to the great honour of God that He deigns so mercifully and benignantly to receive a most unworthy sinner returning to Him. And therefore do the heavenly citizens break forth in sweetest melodies of divine praise, when they see the Supreme Majesty with such goodness condescend to a sinful soul. Believe without any hesitation that God embraces thee with immense love; believe also that He who so loves thee, both willeth and is able to dispose all things well for the salvation of thy soul. He seeks nothing more from thee than humble resignation of thyself in all things, renunciation of thy own will, and full confidence in Him.

If thou art not able to resign thyself as freely and entirely as thou wouldst wish, if thou art fearful and faint-hearted at the approach of adversity or of death, be not troubled; for God regards and approves of thy will and desire. And in order to console thy weakness, Christ Himself willed to be seized with fear and sorrow when His Passion and Death drew nigh (St. Matth. xxvi. 38). Therefore cast all thy fears into the abyss of His mercy and goodness; and say to him, if not with a most ready heart, at least piously with thy lips; "O Lord, I offer, resign, and commit myself to Thee; Thy will be done." It often happens, that a man of unresigned will, receives adversity with more courage and confidence, and bears them outwardly more bravely, than he whose will is resigned.

Repel indignantly from thy mind all inordinate sadness, and, as has been said above, lean firmly on the benignity of God, saying with the blessed Job: "Although He should kill me, I will trust in Him" (Job xiii. 15). To this also the Prophet Isaias exhorts thee when he saith, "He that hath walked in darkness and hath no light, let him hope in the name of the Lord, and lean upon his God" (Isaias I. 10). It can never be, that the Lord will desert a man of up right will and true faith whose hope is in Him. Wherefore He saith, "Because he hoped in Me, I will deliver him" (Ps. xc. 14).

CHAPTER X: SEVEN INTERIOR EXERCISES WITH THEIR SEVERAL OBJECTS.

SEVEN INTERIOR EXERCISES WITH THEIR SEVERAL OBJECTS.

- § 1. The Presence of God.
 - § 2. The Diesel Trimly.
 - § 3. The Attributes or Perfections of God.
 - § 4. Continual prayer.
 - § 5. Spiritual reading.
 - § 6. Variety of exercises.
 - § 7. The Sacred Humanity of Christ.
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§ 1. The Presence of God.

RECALL and turn thy mind frequently to the Lord thy God, and walk reverently before Him, who is everywhere by the presence of His majesty and the greatness of His power. For He Himself saith by His Prophet, "I fill heaven and earth" (Jerem. xxiii. 24). He is everywhere present; but no place contains Him, no place encloses Him. He is everywhere whole and undivided; yet He is uncontaminated by any uncleanness. Sensible defilement is not attributed to objects of sense as they are conceived by the mind, but as they are perceived by the senses. Nothing is unclean to God except sin, by which He cannot be defiled, as the sun's rays are not corrupted by shining in filthy places.

If thou enquirest, where was God before He created the world? 1 answer, that He was with Himself, He was in Himself, and now, after the creation of the world, He is in Himself. God, therefore, who is everywhere, penetrates all creatures, and by His simple and occult Essence is nearer to them than they are to themselves. From Him it

comes that all things are, since all created things depend upon Him, and with out Him all things are nothing, and speedily relapse into nothingness unless they are preserved by Him. All things are in God, who sustains and rules them by His power. Wherefore St. Paul saith in the Acts of the Apostles, that "in God we live, and move, and be" (Acts xvii. 28). Moreover, all things are in God ideally; for the ideas, or intelligible forms of all things, were from eternity in the mind and knowledge of God, and therein they abide, fixed and unchangeable; and, being one with God, are life in Him, whose being is life; and God Himself, or the Divine Essence, is the one idea and one pattern of all things, intellectually representing all things. Hence, when St. John the Evangelist had said that all things were made by the Eternal Word of God, and without Him nothing was made, he added: "that which was made was life in Him" (St. John i. 3, 4). [7]

As we have said, God is in all things. He is in a most noble manner in rational creatures, stamped with His image, although He be far removed from the perception of the impious. For every wicked man is removed from God by dissimilitude, as every pious man approaches Him by likeness. Therefore God is present to the good by the saving bestowal of His grace; to the citizens of heaven He is present by the bright manifestation of His glory; to the lost by the congruous execution of His justice. Happy is that soul which, sincerely loving God, in this exile knows how to contemplate His presence (with the help of His grace) by the free, bright, serene, and simple perception of the mind!

[7] Many of the early Fathers followed the reading given above, and they explained the words of the Evangelist, as follows. All created things, before they came into being, existed, not in themselves, but in God; just as a house, before it is built, exists in the mind of the

architect who has designed it. And since, by reason of God's simplicity, whatever is in God is God and is life, therefore all created things, as they exist ideally in God, are life.

2. The Blessed Trinity.

When the thought of the adorable Trinity enters thy mind, make not to thyself three gods, after the manner of the heathen; but believe, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are One God, who is the illimitable fulness of being, life, power, holiness, wisdom, goodness, sweetness, beauty, wealth, nobility, bliss, glory, and every perfection. Believe, I say, that the Three Uncreated Persons are One Godhead, One Substance or Being, infinitely transcending all creatures, immense, dependent on none, needing no one, subsisting by Itself, sufficing to Itself, supremely glorious, beautiful, and joyful, supremely tranquil, worthy of love, and perfect, superessential and most simple, which no bodily eye can see, and no human intellect can comprehend. Venerate the Unity of substance in the Trinity of Persons, and the Trinity of Persons in the Unity of substance. The One and Undivided Essence is Three Persons, and the Three Persons are the One and Undivided Essence. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are wholly One as regards the substance, while yet there is great distinction between the Persons. There is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Ghost; but there is not one Essence of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Ghost: for there is one substance, one nature, one Divinity, one majesty, of the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost. As we confess that the Unbegotten Father is perfect and immutable God, or that the whole and true Divinity is in the Father; so we ought to confess that the Son, begotten of the Father, is perfect and immutable God; and that the Holy

Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, who is the Love of the Father and the Son, is perfect and immutable God. But yet the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are not three gods, but one perfect and immutable God, one Lord, one eternal, one al mighty, one Beginning of all created things. Whatsoever one Person is as to substance, such is also each of the other Persons. Assuredly whatever is in one Person, that is entirely in each of the others; nor has any one less than the three together, nor have the three together more than each one alone.

The Father is from Himself. He is His own eternal Essence, and He receives nothing from any other; the Son is not from Himself, but from the Father alone, and whatever He hath, He hath from the Father; moreover, the Holy Ghost is not from Himself, but from the Father and the Son, and whatsoever He hath, He hath from the Father and the Son.

The Father communicates Himself wholly to the Son; for He gives Him His whole Divine Essence or the fulness of His whole Divinity, and, with the Son, as one principle, He gives to the Holy Ghost the same fulness of the i Divinity. Yet there is no before or after in the glorious Trinity, no greater or loss; but the three Divine Persons, whose substance is one and the same, are co-eternal and supremely equal, and supremely alike, and abide mutually each one in each other. In the Father is the whole Son and the whole Holy Ghost; in the Son is the whole Father and the whole Holy Ghost; in the Holy Ghost is the whole Father and the whole Son. Although to the Father be attributed power, and to the Son wisdom, and to the Holy Ghost goodness; yet the power, and the wisdom, and the goodness of the three Persons is one and the same. The Person of the Son assumed a human nature, but not the Person of the Father, nor the Person of the Holy Ghost; yet the Incarnation of the Son was the work of the whole Trinity. For as the Essence of the three Persons is one, so their operation is one, and their will one and

the same.

The image of the Holy Trinity shines forth beautifully in the soul of man. For, like the angelic spirits, the rational soul has three very excellent natural powers, namely, memory, intellect, and will; which God bestowed upon it, that it might with the memory remember Him, with the intellect know Him, and with the will choose and love Him, and enjoy Him. Now, as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are One God, or One Divine Substance; so those three superior and spiritual powers of the soul are one mind, or one essence of the soul. The three eternal and inseparable Persons of the Divinity operate inseparably; and the aforesaid three powers of the soul being also inseparable operate inseparably. The memory does not recall or reflect upon anything without the intellect and the will; nor does the intellect know anything without the memory and the will; nor can the will choose or love anything without the memory and the intellect. These three powers of the soul are the spiritual senses; for sight is attributed to the faculty of intellect, hearing to that of memory; smelling, taste, and touch to that of the affections or of love, that is to say, the will.

But as the spirit is more excellent than the body, so those senses are more perfect and more worthy than the bodily senses. Moreover when a soul, being raised above its natural powers, has deserved to find God in its simple essence and most secret depths, and to be united to Him without any medium, it sees, hears, tastes, and touches what no words can express.

Thou must not discourse otherwise than cautiously of the mystery of the Most High Trinity; for it is as impossible to explain it as it is for a man standing on the earth to reach heaven with his hand. For who can say or even understand, that the Father most clearly contemplating His eternal Essence, and perfectly knowing Himself, utters His Word, or

begets His Son consubstantial, co-eternal, and co-equal with Himself?

For that knowledge of Himself is in eternity the generation of His Son.

Or who can comprehend, that the Holy Spirit proceeds and emanates from the Father and the Son, with whom also He is consubstantial, co-eternal and co-equal? These things surpass all human understanding.

In order, however, that a sensible similitude may strengthen in thee the faith by which thou must believe the Son to be eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal, as the Father, from whom they proceed and derive their origin, is eternal consider that light and heat also proceed from fire or name, and yet are not posterior in time to the fire. For from the very moment that fire exists, it gives both light and heat; nor could fire ever exist without light and heat, so that if fire were eternal its light would also be eternal and its heat eternal. In like manner the light and heat proceeding from the sun are coeval with the sun.

As that incomprehensible Generation and Procession in the Most Holy Trinity never had a beginning, neither will they ever have an end, for if they had ever had a beginning, or if they should ever come to an end, there would have been, or there would be some change in the Divinity, which is absolutely impossible, for the Divine Nature and Substance are unchangeable. Since each Divine Person is infinitely perfect, and each one most clearly beholds and fully comprehends the other, these same three Persons delight in each other with a most joyful, ardent, and utterly infinite love. But it is better to have some experience within of so great a mystery, than with the mouth to speak of it in many words. In these things which thy reason and intellect cannot comprehend, do thou give thyself to humility alone, keeping the entire faith, and simply believing what the Catholic Church believes.

§ 3. The Attributes of God.

Contemplate with all the devotion of thy mind the goodness, the sweetness, the beauty, the loving-kindness, the mercy, the charity, the faithfulness of the Lord thy God, and His other perfections, which are utterly immense and incomprehensible. If thou wishest to aspire to Jesus by loving ejaculations, thou mayest with thy lips or in thy heart say these or the like words: "O good Jesus, would that I were pure and innocent before Thee! O that I might please Thee by true humility and perfect resignation of myself! O my most beloved, and most dear! O sweetness of my heart, the life of my soul! O my pure joy, and my chaste delight! O Lord, my God, what do I desire beside Thee? Thou sufficest me; Thou art my only and most joyful good! I desire to embrace Thee in the arms of my soul! O do Thou enkindle in me the fire of Thy love, and let it consume me. Grant that I may love Thee with my whole heart, with all my soul, and all my strength, according to Thy gracious will," &c.

Be not, however, more vehement in these things than is fitting, but keep carefully within the bounds of discretion, lest thou shouldst injure thy head, and over-burden and destroy thy body. But when it happens to thee to feel some pain from thy spiritual exercises, offer it to God to His eternal praise, and be patient. If any one, without taking into account his strength, strives with violent and unseasonable efforts incessantly to concentrate his thoughts on interior objects, and to raise his mind to God, he does not suffer God to repose within him. Evil thoughts should indeed be repelled by salutary ones, and the eyes of the heart ought to be lovingly, calmly, and simply turned to God everywhere present. As one who is parched with thirst cannot easily forget his thirst, so one who exceedingly loves God, must of necessity

be often mindful of Him, if he is not impeded by other thoughts. For where that is which we love and care for, thither turn of themselves the eyes and the thoughts. Each one should prudently consider the measure of grace he has received from God, since the Holy Spirit variously distributes His gifts.

4. Prayer.

By these words of the Gospel "We ought always to pray, and not to faint" (St. Luke xviii. 1), and by those of St. Paul, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. v. 17), we are not commanded to continue the exercise of prayer without any cessation, for this is not within the power of human frailty; but we are admonished not to abandon prayer so far as to fail to give certain hours to it diligently every day. And assuredly, a man of good-will, who always acts rightly, and refers all his works to the honour of God, is ever praying.

5. Spiritual reading.

When thou attendest as is meet to spiritual reading, or doest anything else rightly to the praise of God, thou dost often reap not less, yea even more, fruit from it than if thou hadst prayed. For not only prayer, but also any salutary words read or listened to for the glory of God, and any other pious actions and thoughts, wonderfully adorn the soul. The mind of a good man receives indeed many and great benefits from spiritual teaching; for it is thereby kept pure, and lays aside its ignorance, and is made tranquil, and is illuminated, nourished, excited, and strengthened, and receives exceeding adornment. Be thou therefore ready and willing to read, or to hear the Word of God and all wholesome doctrine, by whomsoever it may be uttered, and however simply it may be spoken or written; but execrate the corrupt and pestilent

doctrine of heretics. Even though any one may not be able exactly to understand, nor to keep in his memory the pious things which he reads or hears to the praise of God; nevertheless such things are of great profit to his soul. It is certain that while he reads or hears good things, a man loses not his time; but he, no doubt, does lose his time if he has not a pure and right intention while he reads even the best things.

§ 6. Variety of exercises.

We should not persist too long in any one exercise, lest it should cause weariness, and engender sloth; but we should meetly vary our exercises. If exterior tears are wanting to thee in thy prayers or meditations and holy exercises, let it not disturb thee; for one who desires to please God is not destitute of interior tears; and though, his eyes may not weep, yet his heart weeps. For the tears which thou last not, offer to God the Father the tears of Christ. There are some who would do well generally to avoid great sensible compunction, lest it should derange the health of the body and disturb the serenity of the mind.

Give thyself to God and to divine and spiritual things, with a cheerful, free and simple heart, and without inordinate anxiety and too great stretch and application of the intellect. Seek the honour of God in thy pious exercises, rather than thy own good or thy own pleasure. Abandon utterly all faulty self-will; and be ever ready to interrupt or to leave thy private exercises, when thou art aware that God so wills it, or that any just reason requires it. Some are to be found who have taken upon themselves to read certain prayers every day; and if they are obliged to relinquish them by business and pressing necessity, or by holy obedience, they entirely lose their peace and tranquillity; but

this sort of self-will is to be avoided. The Fathers also say that in prayer we ought not to make use of singular and remarkable gestures in the presence of others, such as striking the breast hard and frequently, sighing aloud, lifting up the hands, &c. Some are apt to pray more fervently sitting than kneeling; others say their prayers better standing or walking; do them follow the practice that thou findest to suit thee best, but so as in all things to observe discretion, and to be careful lest thou scandalise any one. Vocal as well as mental prayer rightly offered is very pleasing to God.

§ 7. The Sacred Humanity of Christ.

Remember, I pray thee, what thy sweet Jesus (who is thy God, thy Lord, thy Father, and thy Brother) has done for thee, and devoutly give Him thanks. He was made man for thee. He was always and everywhere mindful of thee, and had thee before the eyes of His mind, doing and suffering all things willingly for thy salvation. Behold, and in thy measure imitate, His humility, resignation, patience, charity, gentleness, modesty, continence, sobriety, and the other holy virtues which shine forth most perfectly in Him. The Life of Christ is a most excellent book, common to the learned and unlearned, to the perfect and to the imperfect who desire to please God. He who studies this book well, becomes extremely wise, and easily obtains the forgiveness of sins, the mortification of evil passions, enlightenment of mind, peace and tranquillity of conscience, and firm confidence in God with sincere love of Him. Even if all the writings that are in the whole world were to perish, the Life and Passion of Christ would abundantly suffice to teach all virtue and truth to every Christian Consider and receive each thing that Jesus did and endured, as if He had done and endured it for thee alone. Nor are these things of less advantage to thee than if thou

alone hadst been redeemed by Christ. And if thou alone hadst been to be redeemed, t would for thee alone most readily have been incarnate have suffered and died; so greatly does He thirst for thy salvation, and so ardently does He love thee.

Keep His worshipful Passion hidden like a precious pearl in the casket of thy heart, and reflect upon it with a grateful mind. Behold, thy Lord out of His excessive charity willed to undergo unworthy and cruel things, that He might satisfy for thy sins and redeem thee. Fill thy mind with sweet images of His Passion, and plant in the midst of thy heart the flowering tree of our Lord's Cross. Choose for the most dear Spouse of thy soul the same Lord Jesus crucified and pierced with wounds, and lovingly contemplate and embrace Him. For out of His roseate and life-giving Wounds now mellifluous streams of graces. He who is able to apply the lips of his soul to His open Side and to dwell there, and who has reached the depths of His Heart, he assuredly tastes the wine of eternal life, and perceives how sweet a paradise Jesus is. It can neither be written, nor comprehended in thought, how much fruit a humble man of good-will gains from pious meditation on the Passion of our Lord. Although he may with but moderate affection read or meditate on any point of the Life and Passion of Christ, he cannot but derive great benefit from it; as he who handles flour must of necessity have his fingers sprinkled with it. But he who contemplates the same Passion of our Lord with many tears, but yet neglects true humility, patience, resignation, and charity, will certainly reap little or no fruit from his meditation.

Be not cast down if God does not in this life raise thee to high degrees of contemplation; but beseech Him earnestly to give thee a good, humble, and resigned will, and to keep it in thee to the end; ask of Him that thou mayest ever live according to His gracious good

pleasure. And since thou hast not strength wherewith to take a lofty flight, do thou remain under the wings of the most loving eternal Wisdom incarnate for thee, as a little, chicken remains under the wings of the hen. Hide thyself and repose in the sacred Humanity of Christ. This will be indeed to thee, as it were, a secure vessel in the stormy ocean of the present life, in which thou mayest reach the haven of salvation, even though thou mayest not attain to the fuller knowledge of the Divinity here, where doubtless "the body is a load upon the soul, and the earthly habitation presseth down the mind that museth upon many things" (Wisdom ix. 15). But thou wouldst have a clearer perception of the Divinity, if the most High God were to irradiate thy mind with frequent Hashes of light and to transform thee into the divine; brightness.

Thou shouldst however, (as we have elsewhere admonished thee), look upon Christ with the eyes of thy mind not as Man only, but as true God and true Man; look upon Him as the noble gem of divine excellence, and the surpassing flower of human dignity. Albeit thou art unable more perfectly to behold the brilliant rays of the Divinity; thou canst nevertheless believe that the same glorious Divinity dwells in the Humanity and Body of Christ as in a worshipful temple. If thou believest this, and thus considerest the Humanity of Christ, thou wilt not wander far from His Divinity, but wilt sufficiently and profitably remember it.

When for the salvation of the world the only-begotten Son of God was conceived by the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, He assumed what He was not and remained what He was. For He assumed a body and a reasonable soul; He assumed, I say, complete manhood and remained God. The Divine nature and the human nature (which are very different) were marvellously united. The God head was not changed into flesh (for

the Divine nature is unchangeable), but the manhood was assumed into God. Each nature remained whole and unimpaired, with its own properties. Then, therefore, the Eternal Word, the rational soul, and human flesh were united in one Person; so that those three are one Person, one Christ. Because of this admirable union the Most Holy Soul of Christ from the first moment of its creation ever clearly contemplated the glorious Trinity.

Wherefore during the Passion and while Christ hung upon the Cross, He, in the higher portion of His Soul, enjoyed the Beatific vision of the Godhead, as He now enjoys it in heaven; yet at the same time in His Body, and in the lower and sensitive powers of His Soul, He was afflicted with the direst torments. And that His Passion might be more cruel, He permitted not any consolation to overflow from the superior portion of His Soul into the inferior and sensitive portion. Hence seeing Himself on the Cross so afflicted and destitute of consolation, He as man exclaimed:--"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (St. Matth. xxvii. 46). He the Son of the Living God, the Word and Wisdom of the Father, the true and uncreated Light, is everywhere present according to His Divine nature, and is equal to the Father and the Holy Ghost; but, according to his human nature, He is less than the Father and the Holy Ghost, and even than Himself; for that which is created cannot be equal to the Creator. And, indeed, the Manhood of the Lord Jesus is the very gate by which we can enter into His Godhead. Perchance thou wishest to hear more expressly, when God the Trinity created the Body and Soul of Christ; listen therefore. The instant that the Blessed Virgin Mary, by her humble resignation, gave her consent, saying to the Angel who announced to her the Incarnation of the Son of God, "Behold the hand maid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word" (St. Luke i. 38): the Holy Ghost descended upon her, and in a

moment He with the Father and the Son formed, out of the most pure Mood of the same Holy Virgin, a little human Body, perfect and complete in all its members; He created at the same moment a rational soul which at the same instant of time He united to that little Body. The bodies of other infants have their members formed, not at once, but by degrees; and when they are perfected in their mother's womb, God in a moment creates a soul, and in creating it places it in the body.

As we have said, the Humanity of Christ is the way and the gate, by which we reach the Godhead; nor can any one safely aspire to the repose of sublime contemplation and divine union, unless he strives diligently to imitate the most holy virtues of Christ, and by devout meditation to impress upon his mind the beloved image of His Humanity.

CHAPTER XL: WE MUST EVER ASPIRE TO MYSTICAL UNION WITH GOD.

WE MUST EVER ASPIRE TO MYSTICAL UNION WITH GOD.

§ 1. Mystical union with God.

§ 2. There is a false union, which some embrace as if it were the true union with God.

§ 3. Revelations and visions.

§ 1. Mystical union with God.

IT is a great thing, an exceeding great thing, in the time of this exile, to be joined to God in the divine light by a mystical and denuded union. This takes place when a pure, humble, and resigned soul, burning with ardent charity, is carried above itself by the grace of God, and through the brilliancy of the divine light .shining on the mind, it loses all consideration and distinction of things and lays aside all, even the most excellent images; and all liquefied by love, and, as it were, reduced to nothing, it melts away into God. It is then united to God without any medium, and be comes one spirit with Him, and is transformed and changed into Him, as iron placed in the fire is changed into fire, without ceasing to be iron. It becomes one with God, yet not so as to be of the same substance and nature as God. Here the soul reposes, and ceases from its own action; and sweetly experiencing the operation of God, it abounds with ineffable peace and joy. Here it tastes such delight, that heaven and earth and all that is in them seem by the greatness of the consolation to melt away, and to be reduced to nothing. For, being raised above the operation of its natural powers, it reaches its silent and tranquil essence; where is simplicity and

unity, and where God inhabits; and having found the Eternal Truth, it possesses inexhaustible riches. That soul is verily happy, which being lifted above all created things, and above its own action, is stripped in the faculty of memory of all images and feels its own simplicity: in the faculty of intellect it perceives the surpassing illumination of the Sun of justice, and learns divine truth; and in the faculty of love it feels a certain glow of quiet love, or contact of the Holy Spirit, like a living fountain, flowing with streams of eternal sweetness; and thus it is introduced into sublime union with God.

The soul, therefore, having entered the vast solitude of the Godhead, happily loses itself; and enlightened by the brightness of most lucid darkness, becomes through knowledge as if without knowledge, and dwells in a sort of wise ignorance. And although it knows not what God is, to whom it is united by pure charity, although it sees not God as He is in His glory; it yet learns by experience that He infinitely transcends all sensible things, and all that can be written, spoken, or apprehended by the human intellect concerning Him. It feels that to pass out into God without images, is far different from beholding God in noble or divine images and similitudes. It knows God by this intimate embrace and contact better than the eyes of the body know the visible sun. This soul well knows what true contemplation is: for its sight being directed to the region of ineffable light, and there fixed, it happily discerns how small and insignificant, and almost nothing, is every creature, compared with the most High and boundless God. But all servants of God are not in this world rapt above themselves, all do not thus reach the hidden, simple, naked, God-like depths of the soul; all are not admitted to that mystical and surpassing union with God, to which no one can attain by his own labour and endeavours, unless he be assisted by the special grace of God. But those who are

admitted to it, ought to resume their own action, and holy images, and good works and exercises, as soon as that glorious operation of God in them ceases; they must remain humble, and persevere in their desire of progress, and so conduct themselves as if they were now first beginning to lead a good life. For during this life no one penetrates so far and deep into God, as that he may not at any moment penetrate farther and deeper; and something will always remain in him which is not yet sufficiently mortified. Supposing that he is no longer moved by the sight of mortal creatures; still it is necessary to be vigilant and to watch over himself diligently until death. King David was assuredly a man after God's heart, who in his youth feeding the flocks of sheep had received the grace of sublime contemplation, yet after wonderful and prophetic illuminations (for God had made manifest- to him the uncertain and hidden things of His wisdom) (Psal. l. 8), after frequently tasting the divine sweetness, after mystical transformations, and loving and ardent and ecstatic unions with God, he fell in his old age into most grievous sins, namely, adultery and murder.

§ 2. The Danger of false union.

There are some, who foolishly imagine perfection to consist in this, that they being quiet and free, can dismiss images from their intellect, and with mere idle sensuality can retire into themselves; neglecting meanwhile the love of God, and all pious works and exercises. They indeed are miserable slaves of the devil, following after false quiet, while they from impure motives seek themselves, and delight in themselves rather than in God. But legitimate cultivators of contemplation and supernatural quiet, so seek after a denuded mind, and holy inactivity, that yet they do not abandon good works and exercises.

For they give themselves to virtue according to their strength, and praise God, and reflect upon the Passion of our Lord, and give thanks, and pray frequently, if they have time, and cleave to God by sincere charity; they also regard and seek the honour of God rather than their own pleasure. God works in them His most noble work; for they, being filled with divine love, present themselves before Him in the nudity and simplicity of interior silence, forming in their minds no thought and no consideration. In this manner being by the grace of God freed from all images, they are rapt and fly up to the rays of the divine darkness, and are without medium united to God. Most pious men, although they do not attain to this height in the time of this exile, yet feel in themselves a certain simplicity of thought, when, excluding tumult from their minds, they dwell in silence, humbly, calmly, and lovingly upon the joyful presence of God, giving little or no attention to anything else.

Furthermore, as it would be absurd if one to whom a King had assigned the office of standing at his table and waiting upon him, were impudently to sit down unbidden to the banquet of the King, so he would he equally blameworthy who should wish to give himself up to the quiet of contemplation when he is evidently not called to it by God. Do thou therefore more and more desire and strive to please God, and nevertheless be always content with that grace which God deigns to bestow upon thee. If He should will to work in thee something singular, impede Him not; but dutifully follow His will, keeping thyself ever in holy humility and self-abasement.

§ 3. Revelations.

Desire not inordinately visions and revelations, (which are sometimes granted even to the wicked). Those who foolishly seek after them, and

thoughtlessly lend faith to them, are easily deceived by Satan, who transformeth himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. xi. 14), and in order to mislead, mostly mingles truth with falsehood. He gives out sometimes true things and sometimes false; but the Holy Spirit never reveals, foretells, or announces anything except the truth.

When the good Spirit visits the soul, it is usually at first, seized with fear, but soon receives joy and consolation; and it retains its activity, its interior pence, and eager desire for virtue. But when the devil presents himself, the first fear remains, and even increases in the soul; and though the soul may be exhilarated in the beginning, when the demon transforms himself into an angel of light, yet it is afterwards confused, and filled with darkness and trouble. If thou art in doubt after having seen a vision, till thou canst satisfy thyself, thou dost not offend God, even if the vision be holy and divine. It is right to examine diligently and discreetly whether these visions and revelations are free from all falsehood, fiction, and absurdity, whether they agree with the Catholic faith and the Holy Scriptures, and the writings of the orthodox Fathers; for if they do not agree with them, they must be instantly rejected. A diabolical illusion makes a man proud, unresigned, and obstinate in his own judgment; but a divine revelation renders him humble, resigned, and docile. There are some servants of God who even while they are awake and in good health, are rapt by the operation of God out of their bodily senses, that these being suspended, they may more perfectly attend to divine visions and revelations.

Those are assuredly least liable to be seduced by the malignant spirit who are inundated in revelations with the exceeding sweetness of divine love, and the pure influence of intellectual and supernatural light.

And the Lord graciously preserves and protects from being caught in the

snares of the devil all who are endowed with sincere humility, and who piously seek and invoke Him, lest they perish. For they who are proud, and who conceal within themselves any duplicity and dissimulation, miserably mislead themselves, and fall of their own accord into the nets of the devil. Since God is a most faithful Father, to His humble children asking for bread, an egg, or a fish, He gives not a stone for bread, nor a scorpion for an egg, nor a serpent for a fish: but He gives them His good Spirit (St. Luke xi. 11, 12, 13). He gives that which conduces to their salvation. It is in no wise possible that He should abandon those who humbly have recourse to Him, and truly trust in Him. Therefore the humble always escape the snares of Satan, and there is doubtless no more certain sign and proof of true holiness, than true humility and perfect resignation.

CHAPTER XII: REVERENCE FOR THE HOLY EUCHARIST.-- WORSHIP OF THE MOTHER OF GOD, AND OF THE

REVERENCE FOR THE HOLY EUCHARIST.-- WORSHIP OF THE MOTHER OF GOD, AND OF THE

SAINTS IN HEAVEN.

§ 1. The Holy Eucharist.

§ 2. The worship of the Virgin Mother of God ought to be most acceptable to a. spiritual soul.

§ 3. The veneration and invocation of the Saints.

§ 4. It is lawful, pious, and profitable, to pay religious honour to their images.

§ 1. The Holy Eucharist.

WHEN thou art about to be admitted to that heavenly banquet in which Christ is received, reflect with piety on the benefits of God, and chiefly on the Passion of our Lord, in which the unspeakable love of Christ towards us especially shines forth. He Himself saith, speaking of this banquet, "This do for the commemoration of me " (1 Cor. xi. 24). Therefore if thou hast leisure, think over or meditate on what the Lord Jesus did and suffered for thee, and at the same time beseech Him to prepare in thee a grateful and pleasing habitation for Himself. Ask of Him, that all thy sins being blotted out, He would adorn thy destitute soul with His merits and virtues.

Receive the holy Eucharist with humble reverence, believing with firm faith that under the appearance of a little bread thou receivest the true and immortal Body of Christ. For by the divine power, operating through the words of consecration which the priest pronounces, the

substance of bread and wine is supernaturally converted and transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. If this same Eucharist be given even to many thousands of men, each one of them receives the Body of the Lord, and Christ undivided; also if one consecrated Host be divided into many parts, Christ is entire in each fragment. And nevertheless the Body of the Lord remains whole, Christ remains entire at the Right Hand of the Father in heaven. This great mystery, this incomprehensible transubstantiation (as it is called), is accomplished by the operation of God, to whom nothing is impossible. Verily Christ in the Eucharist gives thee His whole Self; that is, He gives His supreme Divinity, His perfect Body with His Blood, and His Holy Soul.

If thou worthily and fittingly receivest this venerable and adorable Sacrament, thou art greatly confirmed and strengthened in well-doing, and receivest an especial remedy against sin; thou art also more closely joined to God, and more intimately united with Him; lastly, thou art made more excellently a partaker of all the merits of Christ, and of all the virtues which He exercised in His Life and Passion, and art enriched with unspeakable grace. No tongue can indeed express, no heart can understand, what immense gifts accrue to men from the pious reception of this Sacrament. Glorify thy God, who out of His most abundant goodness has left and given to His Church in this miserable exile, so great a treasure.

When thou dost not receive Christ sacramentally, neglect not to receive Him spiritually, preparing thyself, and desiring that He should come into thy soul. No one surely can prevent thee from making a spiritual communion every day, if thou wilt. As often as thou art present at the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, devoutly offer the Host consecrated in it by the priest to God the Father, in full expiation and satisfaction for thy sins; offer it to Him in the odour of sweetness and to His

eternal praise, for thy own salvation, and that of others.

§ 2. The worship of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Love purely, and sedulously venerate and invoke the most sweet Mother of Christ, the Virgin Mary, who is the most benign consoler and advocate not only of the perfect but also of the imperfect; for she repels no one, but is ready to listen to all. She gently receives, cherishes, and protects sinners who piously and humbly have recourse to her, and with motherly confidence reconciles them to her Son. Sooner would heaven and earth perish, than would she deprive of her help any one earnestly imploring her aid. Give thanks to the Lord, who has given her to thee for a Mother and a helper.

§ 3. The invocation of the Saints.

Venerate also the other citizens of heaven, as illustrious princes, and glorious kings and queens. Listen not to the unhappy heretics of these times, who with stupid temerity assert that the Saints in heaven can not hear our prayers, nor help us, and therefore should not be invoked. For the Catholic and Apostolic Church, which "is the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. iii. 15), holds an utterly different opinion. Assuredly the beatitude of the Saints in the heavenly kingdom admits not of the ignorance and powerlessness under which heretics say they labour; for there all things are perfect. The Saints in heaven clearly contemplate God, they doubtless see Him as He is: for if they did not thus discern and know Him, they would not be blessed. Christ saith to the Father in the Gospel: "This is eternal life; that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (St. John xvii. 3). Therefore the Saints seeing God face to face, are in a most excellent manner united to God. And since they are one with Him

who knows all things, and can do all things, they also in Him are able to know and to do all things which concern their glory; doubtless they can know and do whatsoever they will. Wherefore they perceive not only the words of our prayers, but also our holy desires and thoughts, by which we speak to them and honour them, and they succour with great fidelity all who devoutly invoke them. Since they are the intimate friends and most dear children of God, and are gloriously reigning with Him, it is highly pleasing to God that they should be held in great veneration by all Christians.

§ 4. The images of the Saints.

Venerate them, therefore (as we have said), and piously honour their images. Utterly senseless are the heretics of our age, who reject the images of the Saints, because God saith in His Scripture; "Thou shalt not have strange gods in My sight" (Deut. v. 7). And, "Thou shalt not make any graven thing, to adore it" (Levit. xxvi. 1). Heretics either will not or cannot distinguish between idols, and images of the Saints. Assuredly Christians, sons of the Catholic Church, do not, after the manner of the heathen, adore graven images as gods (which God certainly forbids), but they piously honour the Saints in their images. For this practice is derived from Apostolical tradition, and has hitherto been faithfully observed by the Church the Spouse of Christ, which is taught and ruled by the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER XIII: AN ANTIDOTE TO ARIDITY AND DESOLATION.

AN ANTIDOTE TO ARIDITY AND DESOLATION.

SPEND all thy time to the praise and glory of God. While thou art in health, be ever occupied in some good work; but when thou art sick, be always gentle and patient. And think not that thy pious works are less pleasing to God or less profitable to thyself, when thou performest them with little pleasure or alacrity, or even when thou feelest thyself chilled by interior coldness and encompassed by darkness. True devotion consists in real submission, resignation, mortification, and contempt of self, rather than in sensible sweetness. To many persons it is certainly more profitable to feel aridity and bitterness of heart, than sweetness and loving desires. He is very pleasing to God, who, filled with faith and divine love, is able, in the midst of his interior dryness and poverty, to say humbly; "O Lord, although I am unclean, and unworthy of all consolation (which most good men experience), yet I will not abandon Thee, but will willingly remain in desolation according to Thy good pleasure and permission." He is most unfaithful to God, who is willing to serve God while God consoles him, but when he is deprived of spiritual solace, immediately withdraws from God, and seeks after impure and unlawful consolations. If God refuses thee divine consolation when thou longest for it, and thou bearest the refusal with resignation for His glory, thou hast it no doubt more truly, and gainest for thyself a hundredfold more merit before God, than if thou hadst received sensible consolation. Such sweetness is not an undoubted sign of holiness, but God manifests His goodness by bestowing it; for He sometimes gives it to those who lead bad lives; and a person should hold this kind of sweetness in suspicion, unless

while he perceives it he retains his alacrity of mind, and desire of virtue, and above all the love of holy humility and obedience, and of divine charity.

Those who have been newly converted to God, are frequently so stirred by the abundance of grace in the lower powers of their souls, that being as it were inebriated by it, they are forced to manifest the greatness of their interior delights by unaccustomed words and gestures, or even fall into a certain stupor, and sleep, or ecstasy of the mind. Thus the recent servants and friends of God, through the divine embrace, are joined to Him by a sensible union, and receive from Him most sweet caresses. That sensible union is indeed good which, using a medium, is still within the nature of man; provided that those to whom this kind of grace is given, strive to advance more and more in true humility, patience, and self-abnegation; but that mystical and truest union is incomparably more excellent, which some perfect men, carried above their natural powers, and absorbed in the abyss of divine love, experience without any medium in the highest and most noble portion of themselves, (that is, in the mind, or inner spirit and naked depths of the soul).

Be thou prepared to endure dryness and perplexity of heart, and interior darkness during thy whole life, if it be the will of God. If, however, the merciful Lord should sometimes bestow on thee, all unworthy as thou art, spiritual consolation and sweetness, reject it not: but receive it with humility and gratitude and keep thyself ever in the holy fear of God. Be ware of vain-glory and self-complacency on account of this sort of consolation: beware of resting in it or trusting to it, or making use of it for thy own pleasure; for we should repose not in the gifts of God, but in God Himself.

Nature is always prone to self-seeking, and for the most part secretly

and under the pretext of a good reason and of a greater good; but we must carefully watch and diligently correct and mortify this its evil propensity. For this impure self-seeking, combined with divine consolations, is like filthy dung mixed with precious balsam. The gifts of God should be wholly given back to God; so that a man should endeavour to keep himself as untouched by them as if he had never received them. Therefore the more benignantly God visits and consoles thee, the more shouldst thou be humble and steadfast in thy self-contempt; and faint not when the consolation is with drawn, but persevere in pious works and exercises under interior dearth and sadness, as well as in abundance and joy. For the barrenness and dryness of thy heart, offer to thy Heavenly Father the fervent desires and burning love of the Heart of Jesus Christ; offer the holy devotion and charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of all the elect of God.

CHAPTER XIV: THOUGHTS ON THE LAST THINGS.

THOUGHTS ON THE LAST THINGS.

§ 1. On death.

§ 2. On heaven.

§ 3. On the miseries of hell.

§ 1. The thought of death.

REMAIN united to God in perfect peace whatever may befall thee. For by this means thou wilt lead a life pleasing to God here, and at length pass hence by a holy death. Thou wilt die in the grace and friendship of God; and thy death will be the entrance into true life, according to the promise of the Lord Jesus, who saith, "He that believeth in Me, although he be dead, shall live: and every one that liveth and believeth in Me, shall not die for ever" (St. John xi. 25, 26). Christ also will gently whisper these or the like words to thy soul as it issues forth from the prison-house of the body; "I am thy salvation. I thy Creator, thy Redeemer, and thy Lover, have sought thee and found thee through the agonies of death; thou shalt be ever with me, fear not." In this manner will the Lord thy God then console thee if thou art a man of good and resigned will.

Wherefore let not the remembrance of death immoderately sadden thee, but let it rather bring thee joy, as it rejoiced a certain holy virgin, [8] who said to God; Lord, when will my body (destroyed by Thee) at length return to dust and my soul be reunited to Thee its source! She certainly desired death and had patience with life. Think not anxiously by what manner of death thou wilt pass hence; but commit thyself entirely and securely to the disposal and will of God.

And if death be not perhaps desirable to thee, let it be at least endurable. Say to the Lord, "Thy will be done." Jesus thy King by dying prepared the way for thee and made it easy; follow humbly where He has gone before. Even if thou art fearful and terrified, persevere still in holy hope and trust in thy good Lord, who willeth to act towards thee not as a severe Judge, but as a merciful Father; and who Himself (as we have said above,) chose to be fearful and sorrowful before His Death, that He might console thee in thy fear and sadness. Offer to Him, to His eternal praise, thy sadness united to His; and commend thy death to Him in union with His Death. If thou lovest and fearest God, death will bring thee innumerable benefits. When thou shalt have passed through this life, thou wilt assuredly be no more stained by sin, no more wilt thou offend God, nor will this corruptible body be any longer an impediment in thy way.

[8] St. Gertrude.

§ 2. The thought of paradise.

After thy purgatory (if thou wert yet in need of being purified,) thou wilt arrive in thy heavenly home, a home of eternal glory, a home ever most sweet and joyful; where there is no infirmity, no corruption, no fear, no anxiety, no grief, no poverty, no affliction, no sorrow or misery (Apoc. xxi. 4). There wilt thou most happily enjoy that supreme and unchangeable Good, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of mortal man (1 Cor. ii. 9). For thou shalt clearly see the glorious Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the One supremely desirable God. Thou wilt be in God and God will be in thee in a most excellent manner. Being thus united to God, thou wilt perfectly taste the sweetness of His goodness, and wilt

be utterly inebriated with the torrent of divine delights (Psal. xxxv. 9). Thou wilt then most fully know and feel, with what immense love He has loved thee from all eternity. Filled with unspeakable and incomprehensible joy, thou wilt behold the Human Face of thy Beloved Jesus, which is verily all gracious, glorious, and sweet; for His beauty and fairness far surpass all that can in this life be wished for or desired. Thou wilt also behold, with ineffable joy, the most benign, fair and sweet Mother of Christ the Virgin Mary, and all the blessed Spirits and all the Saints; and dwelling most happily with them, thou wilt love and praise God without end, without labour and without impediment. O blessed home, and truly the only home! All who are there, are certainly kings and queens, and children of God. There all are adorned with incorruptible beauty, and enjoy an imperturbable peace. There all are ever glorified by the serene light of the Godhead, and obtain full knowledge of the truth. Each one distinctly and perfectly knows every one of the citizens of heaven, and abounds with every sort of riches, delight and joy. Thou needst not fear lest any of those things which please thee here should be absent. For all the beauty, elegance, sweetness, grace, perfection, and excellence that can here be found in all creatures, exist there most exuberantly and superessentially. In short, there is the influx of every good. And the elect who arrive there, receive the glory of eternal bliss most abundantly in their souls before the resurrection; but after the Judgment they will receive it also in their bodies. We shall all rise again at the age at which the Lord Jesus was when He died for us. The old man of a hundred years and the infant of one night old will be of the same stature. And although the good may now be lame, or blind, or deformed; yet they will then rise again sound, whole, fair, beautiful, and free from every blemish. The bodies of the elect will then emit a

most sweet odour, and will be seven times more brilliant than the sun, since the glory of their souls will penetrate them. They will also be impassible, so that they can suffer no injury. And they will be endowed with such agility that wherever the soul may wish to be, thither it will in a moment transport the body. They will moreover be so subtle that they will penetrate solid and thick substances with less difficulty than the light of the sun penetrates glass. Then the heavens and the elements will shine for ever, being changed and adorned with wonderful beauty; and all corruption being removed, the clouds, winds, showers, burning heat, thunder, frost, night and darkness being done away, they will be succeeded by perpetual tranquillity, warmth, and light, and sunshine sevenfold brighter than it now is. The air will contain more light than it now does. The water will be purer than it now is. The earth will be clear as crystal, and perfectly level. And the sensible world thus renovated will offer for ever a most joyful spectacle to all the Saints. Oh! how fresh and pleasant will be that perennial summer! Then, in deed, the Saints, who during the winter of this exile, like trees stripped of all adornment, appeared lowly and were esteemed barren, will be clothed with unspeakable glory and beauty, and will flourish like palm-trees for ever and ever.

§ 3. The miseries of hell.

But all things contrary to the happiness and glory of the righteous will befall the wicked and impious who shall die in their sins. For their souls will be cast before the Judgment into eternal fire and horrible darkness, and will be vexed with intolerable torments. They will, indeed, resume their bodies at the last day; but these will be black, deformed, fetid, and heavier than lead. After the Judgment, hell will receive within itself all these, and whatever foulness and filth

there is in the world; and from thence neither man nor demon will ever again issue forth. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and everlasting lamentation. There will misery, pain, envy, anger, hatred, and despair never have an end. There will the lost, amid incomprehensible torments, ever see, hear and feel, all that is horrible and abominable.

Do thou, O beloved friend, weighing within thyself both the happiness of the good, and the misery of the wicked who end their days in their sins; abhor the one, and aspire to the other with all the love and desire of which thou art capable. It is only with the eye of faith that thou canst now discern God and thy heavenly country; but do thou believe in what thou seest not plainly, so that when what thou believest in shall have been made manifest, thou mayest perfectly rejoice, the clear vision of it being shown thee.

Look frequently into the spiritual mirror, which I, being already fifty years old, have written for myself and for thee. Contemplate thyself diligently in it, that thou mayest easily discover thy defects, and having discovered them, correct them with all thy strength. It is clearly expedient that he who desires to make spiritual progress, should have some certain written precepts and advice by which he may carefully regulate his whole life. Although for many it is abundantly sufficient to contemplate attentively the Life of Jesus Christ, who is the most glorious Mirror of all Christians. To Him be glory for ever and ever, Amen.

A STRING OF SPIRITUAL JEWELS.

PREFACE.

THE reader must be warned not to follow the perverse judgment of some men, who condemn divine revelations and visions, as though they were vain dreams, and thereby show themselves to be unspiritual, and wanting in humility. For we should not esteem of little account the revelations that have been divinely manifested, by which the Church of God is wonderfully enlightened. It is certain that the holy Prophets (into whom the Spirit of God descended like a most sweet torrent), learnt the truth without error by revelation. And the Blessed Paul commending to the Galatians the Gospel which he preached, asserts that he received it, "not of man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galat. i. 12). Lastly, the Holy Scriptures are full of divine revelations, and the Lord ever was and ever will be able to work whatsoever He willeth in the pure souls of His elect. Let, therefore, the pious reader receive with a humble and grateful mind the holy revelations here related, for thus will he derive from them immense fruit and consolation.

CHAPTER I: THE IMMENSE MERCY OF GOD, AND THE BENIGNITY OF THE MOTHER OF GOD TOWARDS

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SINNERS DEMONSTRATED BY VARIOUS REVELATIONS.

THE divine Dionysius the Areopagite, in the Epistle which he wrote to Demophilus, pointing out how great is the goodness and clemency of God towards sinners, and how much our good Lord desires their salvation, relates a beautiful vision shown to St. Carpus, a Bishop to whom many things were divinely revealed, which was narrated to him by Carpus himself. A certain infidel having led away a Christian from the faith of the Church, Carpus, who ought to have had compassion on them both, and to have most pitifully prayed for them, conceived an inordinate anger and bitterness against both of them. Wherefore he prayed to God to end their lives at once; not being able to endure that impious men who perverted the right ways of the Lord, should be allowed to live. And, behold, looking up, he saw the heavens opened, and Jesus sitting on a throne, with innumerable Angels standing round Him. But, when he turned his eyes downwards, he beheld a deep abyss, in which were a multitude of serpents. At the mouth of this abyss, as it were on the slippery edge, stood the two men, on whom he had wished to bring evil, trembling and exceedingly miserable. And, when he was angry that they were not instantly swallowed up, looking up again to heaven, he saw the most merciful Jesus, moved with pity, arise from His heavenly seat, and descending, stretch forth to them His most benignant Hand, the Angels at the same time assisting them. Then the Lord Jesus, turning to Carpus, said, "I am ready, Carpus, to suffer again for the salvation of

these men; and it would be pleasing to Me, provided other men would not therefrom take occasion to sin. Do thou consider whether it would be well for thee to prefer that dwelling full of serpents to the company of God. and his good and merciful Angels."

The blessed Dionysius adds these words; "These are the things which I heard, and I believe them to be true."

Gertrude, or Trutha, a holy virgin most dear to God, was once divinely taught that one who is considering in his heart the image of the Crucified, ought to think he hears Jesus Christ Himself saying to him, with a gentle; voice, "Behold, thou seest how for love of thee I hung upon the cross, naked, despised, My whole Body wounded, and every limb stretched. And My Heart is still full of such sweetness of love towards thee, that, if it were expedient for thy salvation, and thou couldst not otherwise attain to eternal bliss, I would suffer for thee alone all that I suffered for the whole world."

St. Bridget in spirit heard Christ speak thus: "I am perfect love, for all things which I have done from eternity, I did out of love; and, whatsoever I do or shall do in future, likewise proceeds and will proceed from my love. My love for man is now as great and incomprehensible as it was at the time of my Passion, when, out of exceeding love, I delivered all the elect by my Death. And, if it were possible for me to die as many times as there are souls in hell, I would with most prompt will and most perfect charity give up my Body, and would endure for each soul the same Passion and Death that I endured for all."

Thus spoke Christ. Behold how tenderly and ardently God loves the rational soul, and how vehemently He desires that every man should attain to heavenly bliss. But the Lord created man noble, to His own image and likeness, giving him reason and liberty of choice, and

freedom of will, so that, if he chose to obey and serve God, he might receive an eternal reward in heaven; but, if he would not, he should undergo never-ending punishment in hell. And this is justice. If, however, any one who has contemned and disobeyed God by sin, should, out of love, return to God by true repentance, he shall be accepted by God, and shall not perish, however many and grievous may have been his sins, provided he perseveres in well-doing. And this is mercy.

Once, when the holy virgin Gertrude was considering within herself, which of those things that she had learnt from the Lord, it would be most useful to make known to men, the Lord thus answered her thoughts; "It would be most useful that men should know and ever bear in mind, that I, the Son of the Virgin, stand before God the Father, for their salvation; and, whenever they sin in their hearts through human frailty, I offer My immaculate Heart to God the Father to make amends for them; and, when they offend by deeds, I show Him my pierced Hands; and thus, in whatsoever way they sin, I pacify the Father by my innocence, in such wise, that being penitent, they may ever obtain a ready pardon of their sins.

The holy virgin Mechtildis was praying for a certain man, and, being indignant because he remained incorrigible, the Lord said to her, "Condole with Me, O My chosen one, and pray for the miserable sinners, whom I bought at so great a price, and for whom I wait so patiently, desiring earnestly that they should be converted to Me. Behold, as I once offered Myself a sacrifice on the altar of the cross, so do I now, with the same love, stand before God the Father, on behalf of sinners; because it is My greatest desire that the sinner should turn to Me by true repentance, and live."

Again, the Lord said to the same holy virgin Mechtildis, concerning another pious person: "When he has committed any fault from human

infirmity, if he presently returns to Me by penance, trusting in My mercy, I am ready, for one sigh, to remit his every fault."

St. Gertrude once understood from the Lord, that if any one, quickly repenting of all his sins of omission and commission, gives himself with his whole heart to obey the precepts of God, he is as truly sanctified and cleansed before God, as was that leper who said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," and to whom the Lord answered, "I will. Be thou cleansed" (St. Luke, v. 12, 13).

Jesus Christ said to St. Bridget, "Be them steadfast and humble. Be not elated in thy own mind, when I make known to thee the dangers of others, and divulge not their names, unless thou be commanded to do so. For I do this not to their confusion, but that they may be converted, and acknowledge the justice and mercy of God. Nor shouldst thou fly from them, as if they were already judged and condemned; because, if he who is now most wicked, should call upon Me with contrition, and with the will to amend, I am ready at once to pardon him. And, on account of his true contrition, I call him to-day most dear, whom yesterday I called most wicked; and, if his contrition be perfect and steadfast, I remit not only the sin, but also the punishment due to it."

Our Lord said to St. Mechtildis, "There is no sinner so wicked, but that, if he truly repents, I will instantly grant him full remission of all his sins, and rest My Heart upon him with as much clemency and sweetness as if he had never sinned." O unspeakable goodness of God! Wherefore (as one of the Saints writes), if any one should deny that God is ready to remit the sins of the truly penitent, even as often as there are moments in time, he would set about despoiling God of great glory.

Again, our Lord said to the same virgin Mechtildis; "Although the stars, that is, the souls of My elect, may sometimes be greatly

darkened by the clouds of sin, and the night of ignorance, yet they cannot be obscured in their firmament, that is, in My divine light. Though My elect, I say, may often be involved in great sins, yet I always regard them with the same love by which I chose them, and I wait for them in that glory to which they will at length attain. It is, therefore, good for man to reflect often with what gratuitous goodness I have chosen him, and how I have thought mercifully of him, and lovingly regarded him, even while he lay in his sins; and, also, how benignantly I have rendered him good for evil." Oh, the depth of the inscrutable wisdom and mercy of God, who endeavours in so many and such marvellous ways to recall and attract to himself the heart of the sinner, leaving him no ground for despair!

When the holy virgin Gertrude had heard in a sermon that no one could be saved who had not at least so much true charity as to repent and abstain from sin for the love of God; she reflected within herself that many pass out of this life who seem to repent rather from fear of hell than from love of God. "While she was turning over these things in her mind, our Lord answered her thus: "When I see those in their agony, who have ever remembered Me with affection, or have done any meritorious work, I manifest Myself to them with so sweet and gentle an aspect, that they grieve from their inmost hearts for having ever offended Me; and being by this repentance rendered capable of obtaining salvation, they cannot perish."

The blessed Mechtildis was once considering how immense was the loving-kindness of God, when our Lord said to her: "Come, and contemplate the least of all the blessed who are in heaven; for in him thou wilt be able to understand My loving kindness." And while Mechtildis was considering attentively, and longing to know who it was of whom the Lord was speaking; behold there appeared to her a man of

royal aspect and dignity, in the flower of his age, with a beautiful, resplendent, and most amiable countenance; to whom she said, "Who art thou? and how didst thou attain to so great happiness and glory?" He answered, "On the earth I was a robber and a malefactor; but, because my evil deeds were done rather from ignorance and the habits in which I was trained by my parents, than out of wickedness, I at last through repentance obtained mercy. But I remained a hundred years in the place of punishment, and endured many torments, that I might be purified; and now, by the sole gratuitous goodness of God, I have been brought hither into rest." In this manner St. Mechtildis learnt the loving-kindness of God towards him who was the least of all the blessed. And if our most merciful Lord granted so much to one who had led so bad a life, what will He give to those who live in justice and holiness?

God spoke thus to the holy virgin, St. Catherine of Siena: "Those sinners who, in the extremity of death, despair of My mercy, offend Me more deeply, and displease Me more by that one sin, than by all the iniquities that they have ever committed. For he who despairs, openly despises My mercy, and perversely imagines his wickedness to be greater than My mercy and goodness. Whence, being held captive by this sin, he grieves not for his offence against Me, but for his own irremediable damnation. But if he truly grieved for having offended and contemned Me, and faithfully hoped in My mercy, he would most certainly find it; since My mercy is infinitely greater than all the sins which ever were or ever can be committed by any creature."

It is not, however, sufficient to grieve for sins; it is also necessary to confess them sacramentally before a priest, unless this confession be really impossible. Hence, the Lord Jesus said to St. Bridget: "No one is so great a sinner that I would refuse him mercy, if he sought it with a humble and perfect heart. Therefore, let sinners who wish to

be reconciled to Me, and to obtain My grace and friendship, first, grieve with their whole hearts that they have offended Me, their Creator and Redeemer; then, let them purify themselves before the priest by a sincere and humble confession, and amend their lives, and perform satisfaction according to the advice and discretion of the priest, If they have done this, I will draw near to them, and the devil will be kept at a distance from them. Afterwards, it will be fitting that they should receive My Body with devotion and true love, resolving never more to fall into their former sins, and purposing to persevere to the end in well-doing. These I will run to meet as a mother runs to meet her erring children, and will most gladly receive them. I will be in them, and they shall be in Me, and shall live and rejoice with Me to all eternity."

When St. Bridget out of compassion was praying for a certain powerful nobleman of renown in the world, who was dangerously ill, and yet would not confess his sins to a priest after the manner of the faithful; Jesus Christ, appearing to her, said, "Tell thy confessor to visit that sick person, and to hear his confession." The priest, being sent by St. Bridget, visited the sick man; but he answered that he had often made his confession, and that it was not now necessary. The following day, by the command of Christ, the priest was again sent to him, and received the same answer as before. But the third day, returning to the sick man, he declared to him the things which would hinder his being saved, which our Lord had revealed to St. Bridget. Then he, dissolved in tears, said to the priest, "And how can I possibly obtain pardon, who am laden with so many crimes?" The priest replied, "Even if thou hadst perpetrated many more and worse crimes, thou mightest yet be saved by true contrition and confession; this I faithfully promise thee." And he answered: "I despaired of the salvation of my soul,

because I had utterly submitted and given myself up to the dominion of the devil, who has also frequently spoken to me. I am now sixty years old, and I have never made a sacramental confession, nor received the Body of Christ; but I now feel that I shed such tears as I never shed before." On that day, therefore, he confessed four times to the priest, and on the morrow after his confession he received the Holy Eucharist, and on the sixth day he died. Concerning him the Lord said afterwards to St. Bridget: "He went not down into hell, but reached purgatory, on account of his contrition and confession. He has obtained salvation through My goodness, whereby I wait even unto the last moment for the conversion of a sinner, and through the merits of My Mother, whose dolours he used to compassionate while he lived in the flesh, and he will be saved."

God the Father said to the virgin St. Catherine: "My goodness has granted to the glorious Mother of My only begotten Son, out of reverence for the Incarnate Word, that whoever has recourse to her with devout veneration, even though he be a sinner, shall in no wise become the prey of the infernal enemy. For she has been chosen and prepared by Me, and placed as a most sweet allurements to captivate men, and especially the souls of sinners."

The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, herself said to St. Bridget, "However much a man may have sinned, if from the bottom of his heart he seeks me with true amendment and love, I am instantly ready to receive him. Nor do I consider how much he has sinned, but with what will and intention he returns to me. For I disdain not to touch, to anoint, and to heal the wounds of any sinner, let him be ever so vile and filthy; because I am called, and I truly am, the Mother of mercy."

Saint Gertrude once saw as it were little animals of various kinds running under the mantle of Mary, the most sweet Mother of God, by

which were signified those sinners who have a special devotion to her.

The Mother of mercy received them all benignantly, and, as it were, protecting them under her mantle, she patted and stroked each one, with her delicate hand, and kindly caressed them, as one caresses a favourite animal.

And she thus plainly insinuated how mercifully she receives all who call upon her, and with what maternal kindness she defends all who hope in her, even those who are still entangled in sin, until she reconciles them, as true penitents, with her Son.

The devil once wishing to deceive the holy virgin St. Catherine, and to lead her into faintheartedness or despair, endeavoured to persuade her that her life was false, useless, and perverse. She, therefore, taught by the goodness of God, who never denies Himself to those who truly seek Him, humbly raised her mind to the divine mercy, saying: "I openly confess to my Creator, that I have daily been in darkness, and done evil; but yet I will confidently hide myself in the Wounds of my Lord Jesus Christ, and I will wash away the stains of all my iniquities in His Precious Blood, and will evermore rejoice with holy desire in Him my Creator and Redeemer." After these words, the devil immediately took to flight.

Christ said to St. Gertrude, "Any one may attain to the hope of pardon, how much soever he may feel himself oppressed by the heavy weight of his sins, by offering to God the Father My most innocent Passion and Death. Let the sinner, therefore, believe that by this he obtains the saving fruit of indulgence; because there is on earth no remedy against sin so efficacious as the devout remembrance of My Passion, with right faith and true repentance."

Cut we should, in prudence, consider not only the mercy, but also the justice of God; concerning which Christ frequently spoke very terrible

words to St. Bridget. She once (by the will of God) heard the devils bearing witness to the truth, and saying to the Lord, "If that creature whom Thou most lovest, namely, the Virgin who bore Thee, and who never offended Thee, had committed mortal sin, and had died without divine contrition, she would never have reached heaven, but would be tormented with us in hell; so greatly dost Thou love justice."

Let no sinner, therefore, say to himself, I will now follow freely my own will and my pleasures, I will enjoy the delights and joys of this world, and afterwards I will amend at the end of my life; for the mercy of God is great and boundless; whenever I shall repent of my sins, the merciful Lord will receive me, and I shall be saved; meanwhile, I will do whatever pleases me. Let not the sinner speak thus, let him not act thus, let him not cast himself into danger; but let him without delay strive to amend his evil life, and if it be possible, confess his sins to a priest, and that sincerely and completely. For although God promises mercy to the penitent sinner, yet He promises not true repentance, nor a long life, to one who perseveres in sin. And it is certain that if a sinner who has offended God by his wickedness and crimes, should not repent and have true contrition before his soul is separated from the body, he will eternally perish, for the satisfaction of divine justice. O how many, seduced by the persuasions of the devil, perish and die in their iniquities! Wherefore it is sometimes said, in the Revelations of St. Bridget, that souls fall into hell, as snow falls upon the earth.

CHAPTER II: ON DISCRETION AND PURITY OF INTENTION.

ON DISCRETION AND PURITY OF INTENTION.

THE illustrious virgin and martyr Agnes, appearing to St. Bridget, said to her, "My daughter, be steady; and neither draw back, nor advance beyond what is fitting. Thou shouldst not afflict thyself beyond thy strength, nor imitate others in good works above thy nature; for God has decreed from all eternity to open heaven to sinners by works of humility and love, and He wills that measure and discretion be observed in all things. But the devil in his envy often persuades an imperfect man to fast beyond his strength, or to take up exercises that he cannot bear, or to aim at what is too high for him. The crafty enemy does this in order that the man, continuing only through shame what he foolishly undertook, may the more quickly fail through weakness. Thou shouldst measure thyself in this matter according to thy strength or thy weakness; because some are by nature stronger, and others weaker, some are more fervent by the grace of God, others more diligent by habit.

"Rule thyself, and order thy life, according to the advice of those who fear God, and desire not to seem what thou art not, nor seek anxiously what is above thy strength. There are some who believe they will obtain heaven entirely by their own merits; and some who think they can by their own works adequately satisfy for the sins they have committed. But these are damnable errors; for if a man were to give up his body to death a hundred times, he could not answer to God for one in a thousand." Thus spoke the blessed Agnes.

Christ said several times to St. Bridget, that satisfaction should be made by all our members, as they have all assented to sin. Let a man, therefore, with all diligence and humility correct himself, and neglect

not to make all possible satisfaction to God (who, for a moderate penance rightly performed with good-will here, remits grievous punishments in the next world), restraining, for the love of God, his eyes from beholding evil and vanity, his ears from hearing hurtful and foolish things, his tongue from evil and idle words, his heart from pernicious and foolish thoughts and wicked desires, and his whole body from all that contaminates the mind. Let him abstain not only from unlawful things, but also with prudence from some things that are lawful. Let him studiously mortify in himself his own will and his vices; let him patiently bear all adversity, and devote himself to good works, to virtue and holy exercises. Let him, how ever, always trust rather in the satisfaction and merits of Jesus Christ than in his own works and merits; for one little drop of the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus is of more value than all human merits.

Christ spoke thus to the blessed Bridget: "Abstinence and continence, however slight, discreetly undertaken, and observed for My love and honour, will deserve from Me a great reward." And, assuredly, he who for the love of God prudently restrains himself, so that he sees, hears, smells, tastes, speaks, and touches nothing that is not necessary or useful, and who discreetly strives to overcome his own will and sensuality even in the least things, does what is more pleasing to God, than if he recalled many dead persons to life. Hence the Fathers say as follows: "If two men, passing the same way, find a beautiful flower, and one of them wishes, indeed, to gather it, but, thinking better of it, leaves it for God's sake; and the other, without reflection, gathers the flower; the latter by gathering it in simplicity sins not, but the former by leaving the same flower for God's sake gains as much merit over him who gathers it as there is distance between heaven and earth. If, however, he who gathers the

flower gathers it purely to the, praise of God, he also acquires great merit." In the same way. he who fittingly abstains from food for God's sake is greatly pleasing to God, and he who fittingly eats to the honour of God, is also pleasing to God.

The blessed Gertrude heard from our Lord that she showed her exceeding love of Him when she offered in His praise all her thoughts, words, looks, and actions. She understood, also, that, as often as anyone looks with devout intention on the image of Christ crucified, so often is he lovingly regarded by the most gracious mercy of God; and hence his soul, like a clear mirror, receives in itself from the divine love a most joyful image, which causes rejoicing in the whole court of heaven. And this will be to his eternal glory. She understood, also, that, if a person even lifts a straw from the ground, or takes one step for the honour and love of God, it is pleasing to God, and worthy of reward.

When the same virgin, St. Gertrude, once complained that she could not feel as much desire of God as she ought, she was divinely taught that it was amply sufficient in the sight of God, if a man wished to have a great desire, though he might feel little or no desire within himself; because he has before God as great a desire as he wishes to have, and God dwells in the heart containing such a desire (that is to say, the will to have the desire) more gladly than a man could dwell amid fresh and pleasant flowers.

Our Lord very often revealed to His most dear spouses, Gertrude, Bridget, Mechtildis, and Catherine, how acceptable it is to Him, and how profitable to man, to contemplate the Passion of Christ with pious, humble, and sincere attention and devotion, which they themselves were always most diligent in doing. For they engraved so deeply on their inmost hearts the Passion of the Lord Jesus, (which, though it was most

bitter and cruel, is yet all full of the sweetness of love), and were accustomed to meditate upon it with such ardent and sweet affection, that it was to them honey to the taste, harmony to the ear, and joy to the heart.

The holy virgin Elizabeth of Spalbeeck also was accustomed daily to contemplate the Passion of our Lord with immense devotion. Whence the stigmata of His five Wounds were truly imprinted by Christ on her hands and feet, and her side, so that blood often copiously flowed from them, as if from recent wounds, more especially on Fridays. And this most pure virgin was seven times a day so rapt in God that no feeling, movement, or breath were perceptible in her: for her whole body became stiff, and no part of it could be moved without moving the whole. Let us, in imitation of these virgins, engrave on our hearts the Passion of the Lord Jesus, and sedulously give thanks for it.

Our Lord once instructed the blessed Gertrude by this simile: "Even as a powerful Emperor not only is pleased to have in his palace gentle and accomplished maidens, but also appoints and ordains princes, generals, and soldiers, and other ministers fitted for various labours, who may be always ready to attend to his affairs; so I also not only delight in the interior joys of those who, following My guidance, seek the quiet of divine contemplation, but I am, moreover, attracted to remain with the sons of men, when they undertake any useful work for My love and honour."

Therefore, pure and frequent prayer does, indeed, greatly adorn the soul of him who has leisure to pray continually, and who has the grace of prayer: (for what is more honourable than to converse assiduously with the Heavenly King?) but, nevertheless, exterior works, rightly performed for God's sake, also confer great grace on the faithful soul.

CHAPTER III: ON PRAYER AND THE DIVINE OFFICE.

ON PRAYER AND THE DIVINE OFFICE.

OUR Lord said to the virgin Catherine . "The holy desire of the soul, that is to say, good-will, is a continual prayer, because it has the power of prayer. And, whatsoever man does for the love of God and of his neighbour, may be called prayer, since love is accounted as prayer. Good-will and pious affections should, however, at certain seasons and hours, be raised to Me by actual devotion. Know, O daughter, that the soul that perseveres in humble and faithful prayer, attains to all virtue. Wherefore, on no account, is the duty of prayer to be neglected or omitted because of any difficulties, whether they proceed from the illusions of Satan, or from human frailty, or from unclean thoughts, or from inordinate carnal motions of the flesh. For the devil often strives more during the time of prayer than at other times to infest the soul with various images and phantoms. And he then cunningly suggests to him who prays, that such a prayer avails him nothing, since he ought to have no thoughts but of his prayer. The malignant enemy strives to persuade him of this, in order that he may incur weariness and confusion of mind, and so be led to omit the exercise of prayer, which is the strongest defence against all enemies. Oh! how useful to the soul, and how pleasing to Me is that prayer which man makes with love, in the thought of his own vileness and of My goodness."

Again, our Lord said to St. Catherine: "A man sometimes resolves to recite a certain number of Psalms, or other prayers, to which he is not obliged by duty or obedience; if, in the mean time, I should benignantly visit his soul, he abandons the grace of My visitation, that he may fulfil the number of prayers which he had intended in his

own mind to say. But he ought not to do thus, nor to believe the devil who wishes to deceive him. Let him, therefore, when he feels himself specially visited by Me, immediately follow My grace, and not impede it by the prayers which he had proposed to recite. He may, however, read them afterwards, if he has leisure; but if he cannot conveniently do this, let him not be in any way distressed, nor allow his mind to be disturbed. He obtains little fruit from prayer who looks only to the utterance of many words."

It was once shown in spirit to St. Gertrude, that the words of prayer recited with attention of mind and holy devotion, are, as it were, brilliant jewels or most lovely flowers; but that the words of prayers said negligently, and, from habit, without earnest devotion, are like dull gems and faded flowers. And when the same virgin Gertrude had read a certain verse two hundred and twenty-five times, saluting Jesus, she understood that each salutation was presented to the Lord in the likeness of the melodious sound of a musical instrument; but those salutations which she had read with devout attention gave out most sweet harmony, while those which she had read less accurately yielded lower and less joyful sounds.

Let him who prays take care lest his mind be distracted, voluntarily and by his own fault, through negligence; let him also beware of giving up prayer, because he may perhaps feel no consolation in it. As distractions which occur against the will of him who prays take not away the fruit and utility of the prayer, so neither does aridity of heart, while a good intention remains. Hence our Lord once said to St. Gertrude: "I wish my elect to be convinced that their good works and exercises are very pleasing to Me, when they serve Me at their own cost. And those do Me service at their own cost, who, although they taste not the sweetness of devotion, yet faithfully go through their

prayers and other pious exercises, trusting in My compassion, that I shall willingly and gladly receive them. There are many whose merit would be greatly diminished if sweetness and interior consolation were granted them, nor would it avail for their salvation."

Man sometimes labours under such inconstancy of mind, that when he wishes to elevate his heart to God in prayer or meditation, or to fix it on any pious thought, he is presently driven away from it. This is treated of by St. Augustine, saying: "Prayer is often impeded by vain thoughts, so that hardly has the heart fixed itself on God, desiring to remain so fixed, than it flies off as it were from itself, and can not find a secure place in which to enclose itself, nor bars to restrain its Might and its wanderings. There is scarcely one persevering prayer among many. And God bears with the hearts of those who pray and admit various thoughts, not to say thoughts that are sometimes evil, perverse, and hostile to God. Wherefore, because His mercy is great, let us say to Him: "Rejoice the heart of Thy servant, because I have lifted up my heart unto Thee, Lord. And how have I lifted it up? As I was able, as Thou hast given me strength." Thus speaketh St. Augustine. Let not, therefore, him who is of good will be disquieted without measure, because of the unsteadiness of his thoughts; but let him peacefully do what is in his power, so long as he humbly and patiently perseveres in prayer; for thus will he be most acceptable to God. Hence, the Lord taught the blessed Gertrude that when any one in prayer, meditation, or contemplation, fixes his mind and his thoughts holily on God, he then presents to God a throne of glory, as it were a mirror of marvellous splendour, in which the Lord, the Giver of all good, beholds with delight His own image. And when man, from impediments and the instability of his heart, finds difficulty in doing this, the more earnestly and patiently he labours, the more fair and

resplendent does that mirror appear in the sight of the adorable Trinity and of all the Saints. But too great vehemence must be guarded against, lest the head should be injured, and the spirit disturbed.

When St. Bridget was harassed by temptations in prayer, Mary the Mother of God said to her: "The devil with malicious watchfulness seeks to hinder the good from praying. But do thou, daughter, what ever temptation may assail thee in prayer, persist in thy desire or good will, and in thy holy endeavours, as best thou canst; because thy pious desires and endeavours will be reputed as effectual prayer. Even if thou art not able to cast out the base and evil thoughts that come into thy mind, yet for those endeavours thou shalt receive a crown in heaven; thus these troubles will profit thee, provided thou consentest not to the temptation, but art displeased with whatever is unbecoming."

It was revealed by our Lord to St. Gertrude, that when any one commends himself to the prayers of another, trusting that by his merits he will obtain divine grace, the merciful Lord, without doubt, blesses him according to his faith and desire, even if he to whom he had commended himself should neglect to pray devoutly for him,

A certain very simple man, who scarcely knew how to read the Lord's prayer, asked holy counsel of St. Bridget, and as St. Bridget was praying for him Christ said to her: The simplicity of this man is more pleasing to me than the wisdom of the proud. Therefore, thou shalt instruct him to continue his work and his praiseworthy habits; and I will reward him. His good-will is very acceptable to Me. He has learnt from My Spirit the true wisdom, that is to say, the love of God, through which he keeps the law, and all the divine commandments. I say to thee, daughter, whosoever with faith and a perfect will says these words,--Jesus have mercy on me,--is more acceptable to Me than one who reads a thousand verses without attention." The Lord likewise said to

St. Gertrude: "Although the souls in purgatory derive great profit from what is done for their relief by reciting the Office or Vespers of the Dead, and other prayers; yet a prayer uttered in very few words, with burning love, sometimes avails them more and obtains for them greater relief." But no one should, on account of these words of our Lord, omit the long prayers which he is under obligation to say, unless he is forced to do so by real necessity. For it is right always to prefer to other exercises those prayers to which we are bound by duty and obedience, and which can well be said.

Once also, when St. Gertrude was confined to her bed by illness, and was unable to say her Office, or even, according to her desire, to say the whole angelical salutation in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she yet endeavoured often to repeat at least these words, "Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee," (St. Luke i. 28). Whereupon, the Virgin Mother of God appeared to her, clothed in a mantle marvellously adorned with golden flowers, which represented the salutations recited by her with difficulty; and, in them shone forth brilliantly the pious affection with which she had desired to salute the glorious Virgin. There shone forth also the holy discretion with which she had recited those words only, when she felt herself unable to do more; and the entire confidence with which she trusted that the Mother of our Lord would graciously accept this her little service.

It was revealed to St. Mechtildis that he who has to recite the canonical Hours, will do it with great advantage, if he unites his task of the Hours with the prayer of Christ. Therefore, when he is about to begin the Hours which he is obliged to recite, he may pray in this or in like manner, either in his heart or with his lips; "O Lord Jesus, I desire for Thy honour humbly to obey, faithfully to serve Thee, and purely to praise Thee, in union with that most perfect attention with

which Thou didst praise and pray to Thy Father on earth; help me by Thy grace, for I can do nothing without Thee." Thus his exercise will be wonderfully ennobled, and will be highly pleasing to God, for it will be reputed to be one with the prayer of Christ, as a little water mixed with wine is counted to be wine.

When the same virgin, Mechtildis, was praying for a certain person who had complained to her that he often recited the canonical Hours thinking, through human infirmity, of other things; she received from our Lord this answer; "Let him for whom thou prayest, always say these words humbly after the Hours: God be merciful to me a sinner (St. Luke xviii. 13). For, if these words of the Publican availed him so much, that on account of them he was absolved from his sins and justified, why should they not also obtain pardon for any other? Since My mercy and clemency are not less ready to forgive now than they were then." Happy, indeed, is he, who carefully fulfils his task of the Hours both by willing and humble obedience, and by reciting all the sacred words; for he is not voluntarily distracted, though he may suffer distraction of heart.

St. Gertrude was once saying the Divine Office with the other virgins of her monastery, and was striving to pronounce every word attentively, but since she was often distracted through human infirmity, she said mournfully to herself, "And what fruit can be derived from this endeavour, which is combined with so much inconstancy?" The Lord, therefore, wishing to console her, showed to her His Heart, that treasury of all good and of all blessedness, and said, "Behold, I display to the eyes of thy mind My most sweet Heart, to which thou shalt confidently commend all things which, of thyself, thou art unable to accomplish, that they may be fulfilled for thee; for thus will they all appear very perfect in My sight. Assuredly, My divine Heart,

knowing the frailty and inconstancy of man, with desire always expects that thou shouldst, if not in words, at least in thought, commit to it whatever thou canst not of thyself perform, to be supplied, amended, and perfected for thee." Therefore, after finishing the Hours, which must be not only read with the mind, but also pronounced with the lips, any one may pray in this or in like manner; "O good Jesus, be merciful to me a sinner. I commend my tepid and distracted service to Thy most sweet Heart, to be amended and perfected, and I offer it to Thee for the salvation of all men, in union with that most perfect attention wherewith Thou didst on earth praise and pray to Thy Father. Hearken, I beseech Thee, satisfy and supply for me most fully. Amen."

Another time, St. Gertrude, feeling great difficulty in performing a certain work, said to God the Father, "O Lord, I offer Thee this work, to Thine eternal praise, through Thine only Son, in the virtue of the Holy Ghost;" and she understood that as a thing looks green or yellow, seen through a green or yellow glass, so everything which is offered to the Father through the Son, and everything which is humbly asked through the Son, is made magnificent beyond all human estimation, and becomes most acceptable to God the Father."

CHAPTER IV: DAILY DEFECTS, AND THEIR REMEDIES, WITH CONSOLATION UNDER TEMPTATIONS.

DAILY DEFECTS, AND THEIR REMEDIES, WITH CONSOLATION UNDER TEMPTATIONS.

ST. GERTRUDE, severely rebuking and reproofing herself for some slight defect, besought God earnestly that He would enable her thoroughly to amend it, and would remove it from her. To whom the Lord lovingly replied, "And wherefore wishest thou that I should be deprived of much honour, and that thou shouldst miss a great reward? For thou gainest a great reward every time that thou, acknowledging that or a similar defect, resolvest to avoid it for the future; and, whenever anyone for love of me labours to overcome his faults, he offers to me as much honour and fidelity as a soldier would offer to his king who should strenuously oppose his enemies in war, and manfully resist and overthrow them."

When the same holy virgin was praying for the defects of a person who was at the head of the community, our Lord appeared to her, and said, "Out of the abundance of My divine pity, sweetness, and love, by which I have chosen this community, I permit some defects to adhere to those who preside over it, in order that the merit of the community may be increased. For there is much more merit in submitting to one whose faults are known, than to one whose works seem perfect in every respect. I allow Superiors to have some defects, and to be sometimes blemished by the diversity of their cares, that so they may be the more humbled. The merit of subjects is increased as much by the defects as by the perfection of those who govern them; and, in like manner, the merit of those who govern well is as much increased by the progress as by the defects of their subjects." By these words of our Lord, St. Gertrude

understood the super-abounding clemency of the divine wisdom, which so carefully provides for the salvation of the elect, permitting defects in them, in order that He may lead them to greater perfection. It seemed, therefore, to her, that even if the goodness of God shone forth in no other matter more than in this, yet God could not be sufficiently praised by every creature.

St. Gertrude being confined to bed at the approach of the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus, she gave way to impatience, through human frailty. And she sorrowfully revolved in her mind this her defect, thinking herself most unworthy of any of the gifts of God, since because of some little negligence of those who attended her she had fallen into such impatience. While doing this, she was divinely taught that every thought by which man sorrowfully renounces his faults, after fitting penance, prepares and disposes him to receive the grace of God (concerning which God says in Scripture, In whatever hour the sinner shall be converted, and repent, I will no more remember all his sins). Again, St. Gertrude, through inordinate sadness and impatience, once experienced such darkness that she seemed to have lost in great part the joy of the, divine Presence; which darkness was, however, afterwards mitigated by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

"When, therefore, being graciously visited by our Lord, she reflected on this her impatience and her other faults, she was much displeased with herself, and said to our Lord in great dejection of mind: "O Lord, I beseech Thee, put an end to my miseries, for I myself put no end to them. Deliver me, and set me beside Thee, and let any man's hand fight against me" (Job xvii. 3).

And our Lord, having compassion on her desolation, enquired of her whether she would choose any delight in the world rather than Him, and would prefer anything to Him. To which she answered: "Far. far be it

from me that I should ever prefer anything to Thee, the true, supreme, unchanging, and eternal Good." And the Lord said: "Since thou dost prefer nothing to Me, and desirest ever to submit Thy will to Mine, it is clear that thou art in grace and charity; wherefore, then, speakest thou so despondingly on account of thy sins?" For the Scripture is witness that charity cover eth a multitude of sins (1 Pet. iv. 8).

When St. Gertrude again gave way to impatience, and was, nevertheless, most graciously visited by God, she said at length to our Lord: "O most sweet God, how couldst Thou bestow such consoling gifts of Thy grace on me, who am now so unworthy and so unprepared?" The Lord answered, "Love constrained me." And she said, "Where are the stains, contracted by me through the impatience which I felt and showed somewhat in my words?" To which the Lord replied, "The fire of My Divinity hath consumed them." Then she said: "O most merciful God, since Thy grace so often remedies my vileness, I should wish to know whether my soul will require to be purified after death from this impatience and from similar defects." As our Lord in His mercy delayed answering, she added, "Verily, Lord, if the glory of Thy justice required it, I would willingly of my own accord even go down into hell, that so I might make Thee more worthy amends for my faults; but if it is more becoming to the bounty and mercy of Thy nature that, by Thy love, my stains be utterly effaced and reduced to nought, I fearlessly beseech Thee that Thy love may fully cleanse my soul from these stains." The Lord then, with His accustomed mercy, quickly granted her petition and desire. Christ, gently reproving St. Bridget for the anger and impatience which had disturbed her, said, "I, thy Creator and thy Spouse, have endured stripes for thee; but thou wert so impatient that thou couldst not endure even words. Standing before the judge when I was accused, I was silent, and opened not My mouth; but thou didst raise thy voice in

bitter answers and reproaches. Thou oughtest to have borne all things patiently for My sake, who for thee was transfixed with nails; thou oughtest by thy patience to have won to a better mind him who had erred. Henceforth, be thou more cautious, and when thou art provoked by any one to anger, speak not readily, until the anger shall have been removed from thy mind. When the disturbance of thy mind has passed away, and thou hast carefully weighed the cause of that disturbance, thou wilt be able to speak with gentleness. But if thou canst do no good by speaking, and there would be no sin in being spoiled, it will then be better and more meritorious for thee to hold thy peace."

St. Gertrude was given to understand that the Divine Heart feels ineffable sweetness each time that any one reflects with sorrow on his having by distraction of mind, or by the dissipation of useless words and works, fallen away from the Lord his God, who so graciously surrounds him with blessings at every hour and moment. She understood that when a man says within himself these or similar words, with compunction of heart, "Alas! miserable that I am, how have I wasted this time! how little have I fixed my thoughts on God, who loveth me!" and earnestly resolves to avoid such negligences and offences for the future, he becomes truly the tabernacle of God, in which the Majesty of the Most High deigns to dwell, as in His own abode. And thus are our shortcomings supplied by the most holy conversation of the Son of God, and the faithful man is renewed in holiness of life; and hence there is joy in heaven, because the infinite goodness of God deigns to find delight in a truly penitent soul.

The Lord Jesus said to St. Bridget: "Wherefore, daughter, art thou anxious and disquieted?" She answered, "Because I am afflicted with many unprofitable and evil thoughts, which I cannot drive away, and the fear of Thy judgments oppresses me." Then the Lord said, "This is true

justice; that as thou hast formerly taken delight in the vanities of the world against My will, so thou shouldst now be molested by various perverse thoughts against thy own will. Do thou, however, fear my judgments with moderation and discretion, ever firmly trusting in Me thy God. For thou must know, for certain, that evil thoughts, which the mind resists and detests, are the purification and crown of the soul. If thou art unable to avoid them, bear it patiently, and let thy will strive against them. And, although thou consent not to them, fear lest thou take pride in that and fall; for whosoever stands, it is by the power of God alone that he stands."

Again, the Lord said to St. Bridget, "In order that man may understand his own weakness, and the strength he receives from Me, it is necessary that he should sometimes be allowed to be attacked by evil thoughts; and if he consents not to them, they become the purification of his mind, and the safeguard of his virtues. And although they are hard to be borne, they heal the soul, and conduct it to eternal life, which cannot be gained without sufferings. The soul should, therefore, labour diligently, lest it consent to them, or take any pleasure in them."

Some are permitted to be more violently tempted in the beginning of their conversion, others in middle life, and others in old age. Hence the Mother of God said to St. Bridget: "Thou dost wonder why temptations multiply upon thee in thy old age, and why thou feelest now those which thou didst not experience either in thy youth or during thy married life. This comes to pass that thou mayest know that thou art nothing, and canst do nothing, without my Son. For, unless He kept thee, there is no sin so grievous that thou wouldst not commit it."

The holy virgin St. Catherine was, by the permission of God, bitterly tormented for several days by carnal temptations. For the malignant spirits thrust themselves upon her eyes and ears, not only by the

suggestion of obscene thoughts and the illusions of dreams, but also by manifest apparitions. They pictured to her images of men and women embracing each other immodestly in her sight, and by gestures, words, and actions, provoking her to wantonness. Thus was this most chaste virgin forced to see and hear what she most abhorred; and though she shut her eyes, those most filthy and abominable images yet remained before her. At the same time, she was deprived even of spiritual consolations, and felt not her usual fervour of devotion. She did not, however, on account of these troubles, omit her pious exercises, but persevered most diligently in prayer to the utmost of her power, saying to herself: "Thou, a most vile sinner, art unworthy of any consolation. What then, would it not be enough for thee if thou wert not lost, even though thou shouldst have to bear these crosses and this darkness during thy whole life? Surely, thou didst not choose to serve God that thou mightest receive consolations from Him here, but that" thou mightest enjoy Him for ever in heaven. Arise, therefore, and pursue thy accustomed exercises, and remain faithful to thy Lord." Afterwards, when one demon maliciously said to her: "We will not desist but will vex thee till thy death, unless thou consentest to us;" she answered: "I have chosen affliction for my refreshment, nor will it be difficult, but pleasant to me to endure these and other sufferings for the honour of my Lord Jesus Christ, so long as it shall please Him." At these words the whole troop of malignant spirits departed in confusion, and a brilliant light, in which was the Holy Virgin, illumined the place, and the Lord appearing to her said: "While thy heart was assailed by evil thoughts, I was hidden in the midst of it, and prevented thee from consenting to them or taking pleasure in them. I permitted thee to be tempted as much as was for thy good, that, with My help, thou mightest overcome."

The virgin St. Gertrude was once most clearly shown how God sometimes permits a man to be grievously assailed by many vices, in order that he may in the end more happily triumph, and obtain greater glory in heaven. She saw that many were faithful followers of chastity and purity (such were the Apostles of Christ), who indeed avoided all things that were open to suspicion, but admitted, as was reasonable, what was not open to it. And these, if they are assailed by any temptation, striving man fully with the help of God's grace, overcome it: but if, from human frailty, they sometimes give way a little, they labour to efface their fault by worthy fruits of penance. The blessed Augustine thus exhorts combatants of this sort: "Attend, ye Saints who are fighting. I speak to combatants; those who fight understand; whosoever fighteth not understandeth not me. The chaste man wishes that on no account should any desire contrary to chastity arise in his members. He wishes for peace, but he hath it not yet. For if he had attained to this, that no adverse desire should arise, there would be no enemy with whom to strive; nor is a victory expected where the enemy is already conquered and triumphed over. But now is the battle, whilst the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh (Gal. v. 17). We do not the things that we would. Wherefore? Because we would that there were no lusts, but it cannot be. Whether we will or no, we have them (Rom. vii. 15, 16); whether we will or no, they excite, they entice, they provoke, they molest, they will arise, they are repressed, they are not yet extinguished. For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that you do not the things that you would. What do ye desire, O Saints! O good combatants! O valiant soldiers of Christ! what do ye desire? That evil lusts should in nowise exist. But it cannot be. Carry on the war, hope for the triumph. Do what ye are able to do, us saith the same Apostle

in another place: Let not sin reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof (Rom. vi. 12). He saith not, let there be no sin; but, let it not reign. So long as thou livest, there must be sin in thy members; only let the power be taken away from it, let not its commands be obeyed." Thus saith St. Augustine.

CHAPTER V: FREQUENT CONFESSION AND THE DESIRE TO CONFESS.

FREQUENT CONFESSION AND THE DESIRE TO CONFESS.

CHRIST said to St. Bridget: "It is useful to him who desires to acquire and to retain My Spirit and My grace, that he should frequently confess his sins and negligences to a priest, that so he may be cleansed." And when she saw the soul of her husband Ulpho in purgatory, she said: "O happy soul! what was it that most contributed to thy salvation?" He answered, "My confessions, which I was accustomed (when I could have access to a priest) to make every Friday, with a firm purpose of amendment."

A certain virgin in a religious order, who had lived very piously, coming to the hour of her death, had to be cleansed before her departure from this fault, that she had sometimes neglected the grace of sacramental confession. For occasionally, when the other virgins her companions prepared themselves for confession to the priest, as her conscience did not reproach her with any grave fault, she did not care to be absolved by the words of the priest from, the mere dust, as it were, of venial sins, from which no human life can be free; but feigned to be asleep when the priest came to hear their confessions.

When St. Bridget was living in Rome, a certain man came there who wished to make sacramental confession of his sins, but could not obtain a confessor, because none of the priests understood his language. And when St. Bridget consulted our Lord on his behalf, our Lord answered: "He laments because he cannot find any one to hear his confession; but thou shalt tell him to be of good courage. The will is sufficient, when a man is not able to do the good work that he desires to do. For what

brought salvation to the thief on the cross? Was it not his good will? And what constitutes hell, but an evil will and inordinate affections? Therefore, let this poor man remain firm and not draw back. When he has returned to his own country, let him seek from wise and just men those things which are salutary for his soul, and let him listen to them, submitting his will to them, and following their counsel rather than his own inclination or his own judgment. And if he should die on the way thither, it shall be with him as I, hanging upon the cross, said to the thief: Thou shalt be with Me in Paradise " (St. Luke, xxiii. 43).

Without doubt a good will is a great and sweet treasure. He who has this, desires and endeavours to obey and to please God, and to do those things which are acceptable to Him. This is the foundation and the root of all holy virtues. It springs from the Holy Spirit, and is a great grace of God and an infused love. Blessed is he who has received it from God, and who studies to keep it.

St. Gertrude once complained to St. John the Evangelist that she feared lest she should incur some loss because, through forgetfulness, she sometimes omitted to confess to the priest some things (though of lesser importance), since she had not, in the meanwhile, access to a priest, and they escaped her through the weakness of her memory. St. John sweetly consoled her with these words: "Fear not, daughter; for whenever thou preparest thyself with a perfect will to confess all thy sins, and wishing for a priest thou canst not obtain one, those things which thou omittest through forgetfulness to confess, will shine before the merciful Lord like precious jewels in thy soul, and make thee appear wonderfully gracious in the sight of all the citizens of heaven."

When St. Gertrude was once praying for some other virgins of her convent, who by her desire had humbly received the Holy Eucharist,

although because of the absence of the confessor, they had not made a sacramental confession; our Lord seemed to clothe them with a perfectly white garment, that is to say, His own innocence. This garment was ornamented all over with most brilliant jewels, having the form, and also the fragrance of violets; and by these was denoted the humility with which they had received Communion, simply following her instructions, and confiding in the goodness of God. Afterwards there was given to them also a rose-coloured garment, interwoven with golden flowers, figuring our Lord's Passion perfect in love, by which Passion any man obtains the merit of worthy preparation. But a rose-coloured garment alone, interspersed with golden flowers, was given to those sisters who, not by the advice of St. Gertrude, but of their own accord (the grace of God co-operating with them), had communicated, though they had not confessed their sins to a priest. Lastly, those who with humility and sorrow had abstained from Communion, seemed to be present at the heavenly banquet, and to rejoice greatly in the abundance of its delights.

CHAPTER VI: ON FREQUENT COMMUNION.

ON FREQUENT COMMUNION.

AGAIN, when St. Gertrude prayed for a certain virgin, who, moved by zeal for justice, made other pious sisters timid by her words, and deterred them from frequent reception of the Holy Eucharist, our Lord answered her: Since my delights are to be with the children of men, (Prov. viii. 31), and I have, therefore, out of supreme love left this Sacrament to be received by the faithful in commemoration of Me, and also will, through it, to remain with them even to the consummation of the world; whosoever by words or persuasion withdraws from the reception of it those who are free from mortal sin, he impedes and interrupts My delights, which I might have with them. For he is like a severe schoolmaster, who harshly separates the king's son from his poor and ignoble companions (in whose society the king's son himself greatly delights), judging it more becoming that the youth should have royal honours, than that he should play at ball with them in the streets. But if any one proposes to lay aside and avoid such severity, I not only pardon him, but I am as much pleased as would be the king's son if the schoolmaster with a serene and gentle countenance brought back his beloved companions to play with him."

St. Gertrude also understood from our Lord, that they receive not the Holy Eucharist irreverently or unworthily, who receive it piously from a desire for the honour, praise, and glory of God; for in this doth that divine glory most conspicuously shine forth, that His Supreme Majesty disdains not to communicate Himself to men so unworthy. Therefore, all pious priests, and also monks and nuns of good will, who sincerely seek after God and their own salvation, striving to keep

their rule and the holy statutes of their congregation, passing their time usefully, and who, when they are negligent, or transgress in any point, confess sincerely to their priest whatever their conscience shows them to be sinful; these ought to have great confidence in God, and thus to receive through His mercy and goodness the Sacrament of the Eucharist as often as it is given by the rule, or as they have the good custom of receiving it. In like manner, all laymen and women living in any condition allowed by God and the Church, whether married or single, whether they buy or sell, or gain their livelihood in any other lawful way, if with a good will they persevere by the grace of God in well-doing, refraining from grave faults, and wish to direct their lives according to the precepts of God and the decrees of holy Church, and confess their sins with a humble heart to the priest; all these trusting in the mercy of God, may receive the adorable Sacrament of the Eucharist on solemn feasts or on the days appointed by their spiritual Father. For, although they may be variously occupied in external affairs, and often fall into slight faults, they are yet just in all things according to their power, and therefore are pleasing to God. But among those who wear secular attire, some are occasionally found so pure and fervent, or so holy, that they may receive Holy Communion every day.

The soul of a certain deceased person appeared in flames of intense fire to a servant of God, and said that he was suffering such dire torments solely because he had been negligent about the reception of the Lord's Body, adding that he would soon be liberated if that person would but once devoutly receive the Adorable Sacrament for him. When the servant of God had done this, the soul appeared to him on the following day more bright and refulgent than the sun, having been by that one reception of this most worthy Sacrament, delivered from

intolerable pains, and conveyed to eternal bliss in heaven.

Christ Jesus said to St. Gertrude: "When I communicate Myself to thee in the Sacrament of the Altar, I caress thee with embraces and kisses; and this delight is incomparably greater than any one can ever experience from human embraces and kisses. For the delight of human embraces and kisses is vile, and passes away with time; but the sweetness of that union by which thou art united to Me in the Sacrament of the Altar is most noble and pure, nor can it ever fail or diminish, but the oftener it is renewed, the more vigorously doth it flourish to all eternity."

The Lord said to St. Catherine: "The heart of man ought truly to be pierced and melted by considering, among the benefits bestowed by Me, the exceeding benefit of the holy and venerable Eucharist. But this is to be looked upon with the eye of the intellect and of faith, not only with the eye of the body: for the eye of faith discerns, under the insignificant species of bread, the true God and true Man. how great is the excellence and dignity of receiving in a state of grace this admirable and ineffable Sacrament! For It is the Bread of Life and the Food of Angels. He who fitly receives It, abideth in Me, and I in him (St. John vi. 57). My incomprehensible charity provideth for you this salutary food, that in this life, in which you are wayfarers and pilgrims, you may hence derive solace and refreshment, and that the memory may remain with you of the Passion and Precious Blood of My only begotten Son."

Christ said to St. Mechtildis: "When thou art about to receive Holy Communion, do thou desire and wish to the praise of My name, to have all the desire and all the love for Me with which any heart has ever been inflamed, and thus draw near to Me. For I shall regard and accept that love from thee, not as it is in thee, but as thou wishest it to be

in thee."

When St. Gertrude was about to receive the Body of Christ, being grieved that she was ill prepared, she besought the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the Saints, that they would offer for her to our Lord all the worthiness with which any one of them had ever been prepared to receive the grace of God. Wherefore, our Lord said to her: "Thou dost truly now appear to all the citizens of heaven adorned as thou didst desire to be." It is good, therefore, that who soever is about to receive Holy Communion, should also desire and seek to have his soul adorned with the merits and virtues of Jesus Christ and His Saints.

Once, when St. Gertrude was very weak, she wished to receive the divine Eucharist (for which she had diligently prepared herself), yet, by the advice of her spiritual Mother, for the sake of discretion, she did not receive It. And on her offering this to our Lord, to His eternal praise, the Lord, bending towards her, received her into the bosom of His paternal benignity, and, sweetly caressing her, said: "Because thou didst determine to omit receiving Me, purely for My sake, I will cherish thee in My bosom." Then St. Gertrude understood that to intermit Holy Communion, not from negligence, but from discretion, or out of obedience, is not displeasing, but pleasing to God.

It is, therefore, laudable to abstain sometimes from the sacramental reception of the Eucharist through humility and holy fear or reverence; but it is much better to receive it frequently through charity, and desire for the glory of God and the common good, or out of special devotion. Assuredly, since this most excellent Sacrament is the fountain of all grace, and the medicine of the soul, no one ought lightly to absent himself from its reception, because, perchance, he does not feel spiritual sweetness and consolation, or because he is afflicted with grievous and importunate temptations. For he who

communicates piously and humbly reaps great benefit, not only for himself, but also for others, living and dead. But he who, being impeded by hatred of his neighbour, or by any other grievous crime, fears not to receive the Holy Eucharist, incurs eternal damnation (1 Cor. xi. 29). Such a one is inevitably lost, unless he be reconciled to God by penance.

The handmaiden of Christ, Mechtildis, was once confined to her bed, while the other virgins of her convent received the Holy Eucharist. When she, therefore, lamented, sighing deeply to the Lord in poverty of spirit, she saw the Lord arise from His throne, saying: "By reason of the misery of the needy and the groans of the poor, now will I arise" (Psalm xi. 6). And when He arose, all the Saints likewise arose, offering to God for the spiritual consolation of the sick person, and to the eternal praise of God, the homage which they had rendered to God on earth, and those things which they had suffered for His sake. By which Mechtildis understood that whenever a soul in poverty of spirit sends up sighs or groans to God, desiring His grace, all the Saints immediately impetrate grace and obtain pardon for that soul, provided the soul sighs with grief for its sins. And the Lord said: "When thou sighest after Me, thou drawest Me to thyself. Behold, man by his will alone acquires not anything, however vile and worthless; but Me any one may possess by his will, or even by a single sigh."

CHAPTER VII: ON PARTICIPATION IN THE MERITS OF CHRIST, AND THE VALUE OF OBEDIENCE.

ON PARTICIPATION IN THE MERITS OF CHRIST, AND THE VALUE OF OBEDIENCE.

ST. MECHTILDIS praying for a certain person who was grieved that she had shed many tears almost fruitlessly, our Lord answered: "Let her beseech Me through My goodness to accept all the tears she has shed, as if she had shed them out of love for Me, or from devotion or contrition. For if she does this piously, she will, without doubt, succeed according to her faith and hope in My goodness."

marvellous and stupendous condescension of the divine mercy, which relieves the wretched with such consolations! For what has been said of tears, may also be applied to past sadness, and to any tribulation, misery, or pain, which a person thinks he has endured in vain.

When St. Mechtildis, at the request of another, besought our Lord that He would deign to give that person a pure, humble, and spiritual heart, full of desires, she received this answer: "All that he wishes and stands in need of, he will find in Me. Therefore, whatsoever is wanting to him in purity, humility, desire, or love, let him supply, or seek to have it supplied from the good that is in Me, and let him take to himself all My divine conversation." She answered: "sweetest God, if it is so pleasing to Thee that man should take Thy virtues to himself, tell me, I beseech Thee, how he is to do this." And our Lord replied:

"Let him offer to my Heavenly Father or to Me, My purity and innocence for his impurity, My humility for his pride, My pity and charity for his hard-heartedness and tepidity, and lastly, My most holy and perfect conversation for his negligent and imperfect life. Let him offer also his desires, thoughts, words, prayers, tears, griefs, troubles, and

works, in union with My desires, thoughts, words, prayers, tears, griefs, troubles, and works; for thus will they all be most pleasing to God. Every holy prayer will indeed penetrate the heavens, but that which is united to My prayers is by far more excellent and worthy. Let him also study to imitate My virtues according to his measure, and to govern his life and actions after the pattern of My life and conversation."

Christ has often deigned to reveal that every Christian ought to imitate the humble obedience by which He obeyed His Heavenly Father, and men, not only the good, but also the impious. And this most important virtue may be well cultivated and practised, not only by monks and nuns, but by all men. Obedience brings man into subjection to the Church, and to her Sacraments, pastors, superiors, and to all her dogmas, precepts, institutions, and customs. It renders him prompt and accommodating in giving advice, in affording help and service, both temporal and spiritual, with discretion, and according to each one's necessities. The truly obedient man readily abandons his own judgment and opinion, and utterly renounces his own wishes and dislikes; wherefore he need not fear hell. For an evil self-will (which is the foundation of all sins) alone constitutes hell; take that away, and hell will be no more. The truly obedient man gives up his own will, and delays not to execute what ever is required of him; as soon as anything is en joined he is ready,--yea, he often waits not for a command. He submits himself not only to God and his superiors, but even to all men; and the more men are his inferiors, the more he delights in subjection, the more willingly he obeys them; for here he finds more mortification of himself than when he submits to those above him. No one is so barren and destitute of divine grace but that if he wills to obey promptly, for God's sake, he may not grow and flourish and produce abundant

fruit. Doubtless, the safest way to heaven, and that by which the snares of the devil are most easily avoided, is obedience, by which a man of good will submits himself and chooses not to live by his own judgment, but arranges all his works and all his affairs (especially those that are arduous) by the salutary and holy counsel of a spiritual and enlightened confessor. By this resignation of himself all a man's works abound with grace: but it is difficult to discern whether the works which a good man does of his own judgment, are done by nature or by grace. He, however, who has no one whom he can fitly obey in all things, and by whose advice he can regulate his works, should, nevertheless, keep himself in the disposition to obey, if he could meet with such a one.

If any one has attained, by the gift of God, to so high a degree of sanctity that he has God ever visibly present and abiding with him, he should humbly say to God, when he is called by obedience to any work: "O most sweet God, permit me, I beseech Thee, to perform this work for love of Thee." For this abandonment of his own will is much more pleasing to God than if that man had then with all the blessed spirits penetrated heaven, as is shown by the following example. For when the sweet Jesus had appeared in the form of a little child to a certain virgin living in a convent, and praying in her cell, and she was required by obedience to do some work of the community, she immediately left the child Jesus, and with a willing mind and cheerful countenance, performed what she was bidden to do. Then quickly returning to her cell, she saw her beloved Lord, whom she had left a child a little while before, standing in perfect stature, as a most beautiful youth of four-and-twenty years old. And when the virgin enquired how, in so short a time, He had grown so much, He answered; "The deep humility of thy swift and ready obedience made me so tall in so short a time.

Wherefore, O most dear daughter, if thou wishest always to please Me and to cleave to Me, do thou always obey promptly for love of Me." And having said these words, our Lord disappeared. He is wise, therefore, who straight way postpones his meditations and prayers, and any other holy work or exercise, that he may obey for God's sake.

Christ said to St. Bridget: "All true virtues spring from love, as branches from a tree; and among these, virtues obedience holds the first place. Wherefore he is most pleasing to Me who, out of humility, submits himself, and places his will in the hands of others, thus choosing not to follow it. For I also, who am the most perfect of all, and perfection itself, was obedient to My Father, even unto death, that I might show by My example how pleasing it is to God to deny one's own will. But many who attend not to this virtue of obedience, and whose zeal is not discreet, follow the ideas of their own minds, and by their own judgment, but not by the impulse of the Holy Spirit, afflict their flesh so immoderately for a time, that for long after they are useless to themselves, little acceptable to God, and very burthensome to others. The counsels of the wise should be listened to; for I desire the death of sin, not of the flesh. He who, putting aside his own imaginations, submits his mind to others, will receive a double crown, and an increase of spiritual devotion. Obedience, which admits no self-will nor evil inclination, pleases Me more than a great sacrifice" (1 Kings xv. 22).

St. Bridget also heard the Lord Jesus speaking thus: "He who would rather fast than eat, and who yet takes food by obedience, will have the same reward as he who rightly fasts. And he will receive a similar reward, who eats because he is ill, though he would rather fast in honour of Me." The Blessed Virgin, moreover, said to St. Bridget, "Let there be two men, one living under obedience, and the other at liberty;

if he who is free fasts piously, he will have a single reward; if he who lives under obedience fasts not, but even eats meat temperately, according to his Rule, though he would wish to fast if obedience did not stand in the way, he will obtain a double reward, that is to say, one for his obedience, and another for the mortification of his own will and desire. Do thou, daughter, refresh thy body moderately with what is necessary. Make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences (Rom. xiii. 14), but abstain from unlawful indulgence. Fast, and pray, and visit holy places; these are, indeed, good works in themselves; but, unless they are done discreetly, humbly, and out of love, they merit not eternal life."

CHAPTER VIII: OF THE REFRESHMENT OF THE BODY.

OF THE REFRESHMENT OF THE BODY.

ST. BRIDGET was sometimes vehemently tempted to gluttony. While she was praying, there appeared to her in spirit the devil and a good Angel, the one in the form of a hideous negro, the other in that of a beautiful youth. And, when the demon, taunting Bridget whom he was tempting, said to the Angel that she made use of dainty food, and led a life of little severity while she boasted of her abstinence, the Angel answered: "Christ the Lord considers not much what things any one eats, provided they be not forbidden, and be taken with a pure intention, that is, out of true love, with moderation and without inordinate desire, Purple, and line linen, and delicacy of body exclude not from heaven, if humility and charity are also present. The habits of a refined education should sometimes be retained, with giving of thanks, lest the body be grievously weakened."

The Blessed Augustine, speaking to God, saith: "I being exposed to temptations, strive daily against the concupiscence of eating and drinking. And who is there, Lord, who is not, at times, carried beyond the bounds of necessity? Whoever he is, he is great, and let him magnify Thy name: I am not he; for I am a sinful man. But I, also, heavenly Father, magnify Thy name; and may Thy only begotten Son, who overcame the world, intercede with Thee for my sins, numbering me among the weak members of His body."

The virgin St. Gertrude understood by divine inspiration that it is most pleasing to God, and most beneficial to man, if a man says in his heart or with his voice such words as these, before his food, sleep, and other refreshment of the body; "Grant, O Lord, that I may take this

food, or any other relief of the body, purely for the glory of Thy name, in union with that love with which Thou, made man, didst take similar refreshment on earth, to the praise of God the Father, and for the salvation of the whole human race." Again, when the same spouse of Christ, Gertrude, in eating, piously reflected on these words, "May the virtue of Thy divine love, most sweet Jesus, incorporate me wholly into Thee;" and on these in drinking, "O most loving Jesus, pour into me, and preserve within me the energy of the divine love, which reigned supreme in Thy inmost Heart, so that it may penetrate all my substance, and evermore flow through every sense and faculty of my body and soul, to Thine eternal praise;" when, I say, she practised this devotion during her meals, she heard our Lord saying to her, "As often as any one shall think on these things in eating and drinking, so often will I confess that I have eaten and drunk with him, and that I have received from him a most grateful refreshment."

When St. Bridget had made use of baths, by the advice and desire of her spiritual guide, Christ said to her, "The washing of the body is not hurtful to a pure soul, so that it be done with discretion, and without seeking for pleasure in it. Wherefore thou didst please Me better by obeying thy spiritual father against thy will, than if thou hadst followed thine own inclination. Many of My elect have not made use of medicines for the body, and they were acceptable to Me. But others have applied remedies to themselves, having regard to the requirements of place, time, and maladies: and these have not displeased Me, because they did it for My honour, that they might better serve Me."

St. Bridget heard in spirit the Blessed Virgin Mary say thus; "The friends of God may now and then, or at fixed times of the day. receive exterior consolation, uttering edifying words, and taking lawful and moderate recreation to the honour and praise of God. it the fist be

kept always clenched, the nerves contract, and the hand is weakened: and the bow which is too far bent, is more easily broken. Therefore, on account of the weakness of the flesh, moderate rejoicing is pleasing to God."

Christ also, prescribing to St. Bridget and her family. a mode of life somewhat like that of a religious order, allowed that, after the hours appointed for silence, prayer, and other spiritual exercises, they should freely converse among themselves of lawful and harmless things.

CHAPTER IX: ON THE MANNER AND REGULATION OF OUR SLEEP.

ON THE MANNER AND REGULATION OF OUR SLEEP.

THAT necessary sleep should be allowed to the body, has been frequently revealed by Christ to St. Bridget and others, But every one, before he gives himself up to his nightly repose and goes to sleep, ought diligently to examine his conscience, and to reflect in what he may have neglected his duties or offended God during the day; he ought to seek pardon of God for his faults, and resolve to amend his life with the help of God; he ought to commend his soul and body to God, and also to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to his holy guardian Angel, and making the sign of the cross, thus place himself modestly in bed.

Likewise on rising from sleep, he ought to fortify himself with the sign of the cross, and commend himself to God; he ought to desire and pray that what ever he shall that day do, say, or think, may tend to the eternal praise and glory of God.

Our Lord said to St. Mechtildis: "When any one is going to sleep, let him meditate on something concerning Me, or converse with Me. Thus will his mind watch with Me, though his body sleeps; and if when he suffers from any evil dreams, he feels displeasure and annoyance thereat on awaking, it is a sign that he was in no wise separated from Me. Let him who is about to sleep also desire that I may receive every breath he draws that night as a slight tribute of praise to Me; and I who cannot refuse the holy wishes of a pious and loving soul, will in truth fulfil this his desire."

When St. Gertrude had passed nearly a whole night without sleep, and was greatly weakened and exhausted by it, she offered this loss of her strength to God to His eternal praise, for the salvation of all men. To

whom our Lord said: "When any one wearied and worn out with watching beseeches Me to grant him some repose in sleep to My praise and for the renewal of his strength, if I do not then grant his request, and he, taking patience, endures his want with humility; this is most pleasing to My mercy. And it is infinitely more acceptable to Me when one who is sleepless in illness offers to Me humbly and patiently the loss of his strength, than when one watches in prayer during a whole night who, being in good health, is well able to watch."

The same virgin Gertrude was one night visited by our Lord in her sleep so sweetly that by the company and presence of God she seemed to herself to be refreshed with delicate food. And awaking she gave thanks to God, and said: "O Lord my God, what have I, a most vile sinner, deserved above others, who are often so oppressed by dreams that they even terrify others by their cries?" The Lord answered: "When those whom My divine Providence designs to sanctify by afflictions, bestow more care than they ought on the solace of their bodies while they are awake, and thus deprive themselves of occasions of merit, I send them troubles in their dreams out of My divine love, that so they may at least gain some merit. And she replied, "O Lord, can they merit by those things which they suffer without intention, and almost against their will?" Then the Lord said, "My mercy effects this. They indeed are clothed and adorned, although not with gold and jewels, at least with ornaments of bronze."

CHAPTER X: ON THE ADVANTAGE OF TRIBULATIONS.

ON THE ADVANTAGE OF TRIBULATIONS.

AGAIN, the holy Gertrude knew by divine inspiration that our Lord (whose delights are to be with the children of men) (Prov. viii. 31) finding nothing pleasing in man, that would make it fitting that He should deign to consort with him, sends him tribulations and afflictions, both bodily and spiritual, which may give Him the opportunity of remaining with man; for the Scripture of truth saith: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart " (Psal. xxxiii. 19). And again, the Lord Himself saith: "I am with him in tribulation" (Psal. xc. 15).

A certain person, occupied in manual labour, was suddenly grievously hurt, and suffered great pain. St. Gertrude, taking compassion on her, besought our Lord that He would not permit a member of the community to be in danger who was hurt in the course of her righteous labour. Our Lord benignantly answered her: "That member will be nowise in danger; but will receive an incomparable reward for the pain she endures. All the other members also, who exert themselves to serve the injured one, and who alleviate and heal her pains, will in like manner obtain for this an eternal reward. Then she said, "And how can the members thus serving each other merit so much, since they do it, not in order that the injured member may bear her pain more patiently for Thy sake, but that the pain may be diminished or removed?" To which our Lord answered, in words of inestimable consolation, saying, "When a man. after the remedy has been applied, boars patiently, for love of Me, the pain which h" cannot by his own endeavours alleviate, he gains an incomparable reward and merit, since I have most truly sanctified such

sufferings by those words in which I prayed to My Father at the moment of My extreme necessity, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me" (Matth. xxvi. 30). And she replied. "Is it not more acceptable to Thee, Lord my God, that a man should bear with resignation whatever may happen to him, than that he should be patient when he cannot in any way escape from it?" Our Lord answered, "This is hidden in the secrecy of My Divinity, and surpasses all human understanding. But, as far as human judgment can discern, those two are like two colours, of such elegance and beauty that men can hardly decide which of them is to be preferred to the other."

Our Lord said again to St. Gertrude: "When My elect rightly desire any good, My loving-kindness with which I delight in the salvation of men, compels Me to deem that they have desired Me, Wherefore, if those who are weighed down by sickness of body or desolation of mind, piously desire health or deliverance, I account them to have desired Me, that I may be able the more copiously to reward them according to the burning love of My Heart, provided they do not wish for health in order to do evil."

St. Gertrude also divinely learnt that, as a ring is the sign of espousals, so adversity, whether bodily or spiritual, humbly borne for God's sake, is a true sign of the divine election, and, as it were, the espousal of the soul with God, in so far that the afflicted may confidently say these words, "My Lord Jesus Christ hath betrothed me with His ring." For if, in the midst of adversity, he can by the gift of God praise God, and from his heart give thanks to Him, he already obtains, like a beloved spouse, a crown from the Lord; since gratitude in adversity is the most beautiful and precious crown of the soul.

St. Gertrude once heard the Lord Jesus gently saying to her; "Behold, I exhibit to thee the abundance of the sweetness of My divine Heart, that

thou mayest draw from it, and give liberally as much and to whomsoever thou wilt." She, therefore, praying with special affection for a certain person, infused into that person's heart a good measure of sweetness, drawn from the Heart of our Lord, which was immediately changed into bitterness. And, as Gertrude wondered greatly at this, the Lord said to her, "When I give grace to any one, it produces the effect in him which is most conducive to his salvation. For to some it is more useful to be tried in the present life by divers afflictions, than to receive great sweetness and consolation. Therefore in them, My grace is converted into the bitterness of tribulations and sorrows, by which their salvation is more and more promoted, and their souls are adorned according to the good pleasure of My Heart. And, although this be hidden from them in this exile, yet they will the more sweetly experience it in eternity, in proportion as they have more faithfully laboured here, patiently enduring all adversities and troubles for the love of My Name."

The Lord said also to St. Gertrude: "When a man fears to lose, or has lost any beloved friend, if he offers to Me, with his whole will, the grief which he feels, so that even if he could retain that friend he would yet be willing to part with him to My praise, that so My Will rather than his might be done, he is indeed most acceptable to Me. And after the moment when he so bent the wishes of his heart to My Will, My loving-kindness will preserve his offering in the same nobleness and perfection as when he first made it in his heart; and all the thoughts that afterwards from human frailty oppress his heart (as, for example, if he thinks thus: Thou mightest now have this or that consolation or help from thy friend, if he were here), will co-operate for his eternal salvation, and prepare a place in his soul for divine consolation."

When a certain devout and amiable virgin had died in the convent of St.

Gertrude, whose dentil caused no small grief to the community, our Lord, speaking to St. Gertrude, said, of her, "When any one of you, recollecting the sweet manners of the departed, wishes to have her yet present; if she then offers her up to My Will, she presents to Me, by so doing, a lily of most sweet odour, and I will in My goodness repay her for it a hundredfold,

The Lord said to the blessed Mechtildis, "When any one bears any affliction, or even slight pain, with this intention, that he would willingly endure a greater pain for the love and praise of My Name, if it so pleased Me, he in that same moment revives, and becomes capable of receiving My grace, though his heart be ever so dry and covered with the rust of sin. If one who is afflicted offers his grief to Me at once in the beginning, I, partaking of it, render it sweet to him, and wonderfully ennoble it. But if he first drink of it, he pollutes it; and the more he drinks the more bitter it grows to him, so that afterwards it is not fitting for me to drink of, unless it be purified by penance and confession. Therefore, when a man suffers any injury, let him not impatiently complain to men, with many words, but let him instantly lay his grief before Me, that I may pour into him the sweetness of My consolation, and encourage, him to patience. If, however, he has neglected to do this in the beginning, let him not on that account lose confidence, but let him strive to offer it to Me purified by penance, with a humble spirit and a contrite heart."

One of the Fathers says: "If thou be unjustly rebuked, humble thyself, and keep thyself patient; if, indeed, thou be justly reprov'd, then be thou much more humble and patient, and, being ready and willing to correct thyself, remain tranquil." "Why, I ask, art thou disturbed when this or that person accuses thee of many things of which thou hast not even thought, and .speaks evil of thee? Remember thy Lord Jesus Christ,

who most patiently and gently endured evil words heaped upon Him without cause. See that the peace of thy heart depend not on the tongues or the judgment of men.

God, when He wills to purify and adorn one of His elect, often permits that he should be greatly contradicted in what he rightly does, even by those who are esteemed good, and in whose fidelity he most trusted. Whatever may happen, whatever evil may come upon thee, do thou ever flee to the Lord thy God, and hide, thyself in Him, and receive all things from His fatherly Hand. what a joyful life thou wouldst lead, if thy heart were firmly fixed on God!

St. Gertrude, moved by compassion, was praying for a person whom she had heard impatiently complaining that God had sent her trials that were not conducive to her salvation, and, our Lord answered her: "Thou shalt tell her for whom thou prayest, that since no one can obtain the kingdom of heaven without at least some tribulation or suffering, she may choose and point out what trials she thinks would be of use to her, and when these have come upon her, let her have patience." By which words of the Lord Gertrude understood that it is a most dangerous kind of impatience when a man perversely and proudly wishes to choose what he can bear, saying that he cannot endure the afflictions that are sent him by God, and that they are not adapted to his salvation; for each one ought always to be sure that whatever God lays upon him or permits to happen, is most suitable and most useful to him; and if he does not endure it altogether patiently, he ought to humble himself for this.

A certain virgin of most holy life said to one who enquired how she had attained to perfection: "(1) I received all adversity with a tranquil mind from the Hand of the Lord; (2) and if any one inflicted an injury upon me, I took care to return him some special benefits, which I should not have done if I had not been injured by him; (3) I complained

of my trials to no one except God, wherefore I immediately received from Him consolation and strength."

Another virgin of exceeding holiness being asked by what practices she had arrived at perfection, humbly answered: "I was never so overwhelmed with pains and trials but that I sought to endure greater for the love of God, counting myself unworthy of those glorious gifts of God."

Another virgin, visited by the permission of God with an intolerable pain, seemed to herself to suffer the torments of hell; and when she had long been thus afflicted, turning at length with her whole heart to God, she said: "O most sweet God, remember, I beseech Thee, and mercifully consider that I am Thy poor creature, and Thou indeed my Lord and Creator. Behold, I offer myself to Thy most just judgment, and entirely resign myself to Thy most sweet Will, and I am ready to endure these infernal torments so long as it may please Thee; make use of me as Thou wilt in time, and in eternity." When she had made this act of resignation, the Lord straightway united that virgin to Himself, and plunged her in the joyful abyss of His Divinity.

A servant of God had wonderful things revealed to him by an interior light from God; but he besought the Lord that if it pleased Him, He, would withdraw this manner of grace from him. Therefore the Lord, having deprived him of that grace, left him for five years without consolation amid great temptations, difficulties, and calamities; and once when he was weeping bitterly, and two Angels wished to console him, he said that he sought for no consolation, but that it abundantly sufficed him if the most sweet Will of God was accomplished in him, and if he could be interiorly pure before God, and pleasing to Him.

Our Lord said to St. Catherine.: "I will that thou shouldst know that all the pains which afflict men in this world consist in their will; for if the will were regulated and conformed to My Will, the pain would

in a sense disappear. Although he whose will is thus sanctified and regulated, may feel labours and sorrows, yet what he suffers cheerfully for love of Me, is borne by him almost without pain, for he endures it most willingly, considering and knowing it to be My Will that he should suffer. His mind is free in every bodily pain, since his will is in all things conformed and united to My Will. Affliction or pain proceeds from the will, and entirely depends upon it, since man is afflicted by having what he wishes not to have, or by not having what he wishes. Therefore if his self-will be removed, the spirit of man is tranquil, and enjoys peace."

CHAPTER XI: ON CONFIDENCE IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE, AND PERFECT RESIGNATION.

ON CONFIDENCE IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE, AND PERFECT RESIGNATION.

THE virgin St. Catherine, being once in ecstasy, saw and clearly understood that the Lord God, who is supreme Goodness, created man out of His ineffable charity, and that in the same charity and burning love He gives to man, or allows to happen, all things, whether consolations or tribulations, bestowing them both with no other aim than to provide for his salvation. Wherefore those are very blind and foolish who reprehend the works or the judgments of God, and murmur against Him, being scandalized and disturbed by the things which come to pass. But blessed are those who, understanding and believing in the holy Providence of God, humbly receive all things as best from the Hand of God, and give thanks for them, ever firmly hoping and trusting in the Lord.

St. Gertrude heard from our Lord that every pious and faithful soul ought to give up its own will utterly to God, committing itself fully to His good pleasure, and implicitly trusting that of His most gracious mercy, He, wills in all things to bring about its salvation. Hence when Jesus, her beloved Spouse, appeared to her, bearing in His right Hand health, and in His left sickness, and desiring her to choose which she would, she turned away from both the Hands of our Lord, saying: "O Lord, I desire with my whole heart that Thou shouldst not regard my will, but accomplish Thy good pleasure in all things." He who desires to please God must commit himself and all belonging to him to the divine disposal with such perfect confidence, that he should even love to be ignorant of what the Lord wills to do in his regard, that so he

may know the good pleasure of the divine Will to be more entirely accomplished in him.

Our Lord said also to St. Gertrude: "Whosoever wishes Me to come freely to him, must resign to Me the key of his own will. And if it happens to him through human frailty to take back the key he had given up to Me, by doing his own will in anything, let him wipe out the fault by penance, and again give up his will to Me; and the right hand of My mercy will receive him, and bring him forth with inconceivable honour to the kingdom of eternal glory."

The blessed Augustine says: "A man may wish something, while God wills otherwise. This is granted to human frailty and to human weakness. It is difficult for thee to avoid having a wish of thy own. But consider that God is above thee, and thou art under Him; He is the Creator, thou the creature: He the Lord, thou the servant; and correcting thyself, and submitting thy will to His Will, say with Christ, Not as I will, but as Thou wilt, my Father' (Matth. xxvi. 39). For thus shall thy heart be upright, and not perverse." Wherefore St. Gertrude, by divine inspiration, read three hundred and sixty-five times these words of the Gospel, "Not my will, but thine be done, most loving Jesus" (St. Luke xxii. 42). And this she felt to be most pleasing to the Lord.

We read of the same virgin Gertrude, that neither dangers, nor tribulations, nor losses, nor any other difficulties, nor even her own sins or defects, could ever overcloud the constant and secure confidence she felt in the most gracious mercy of God. For she most certainly trusted that all things, adverse as well as prosperous, were turned to her good by the divine Providence. And to this virgin the Lord .spoke thus, "The certain confidence which any one has in Me, believing that I have truly the power, the knowledge, and the will to be faithfully with him in all things, pierces My Heart, and dues such

violence to My loving-kindness, that I can in no wise abandon or fail such a man."

Our Lord said to St. Mechtildis; "It is very pleasing to Me that men should trust in My goodness and rely upon Me. When any one has humbly trusted in Me, and rightly believed in Me, I will be with him in this life, and will reward him beyond all his merits after death. How much soever any one may trust in Me, and piously expect from My goodness, so much and infinitely more shall he obtain; since it is impossible that a man should not receive what he has piously expected and hoped for. Therefore it is good for man to trust rightly in Me, hoping for great things from Me." Also when St. Mechtildis sought to know from our Lord what ought to be believed concerning His ineffable goodness, our Lord answered; "Believe with certain faith that I will receive thee after death, as a father receives his most dear son, and that no father ever divided his inheritance with his only son so faithfully as I shall communicate all My good things and Myself to thee. He shall be blessed who shall firmly and with humble love believe this of My goodness."

CHAPTER XII: ON A HAPPY DEATH.

ON A HAPPY DEATH.

ST. MECHTILDIS was once praying for a certain pious person, saying; "O most loving God, I beseech Thee that in her last moments Thou wilt purify her, and grant unto her certainty and confidence of attaining to Thee." To which our Lord answered, "What prudent man would of his own accord throw into the sea the merchandize and goods which he has brought to the port? Therefore, when I shall have brought into port and to the end of life, her soul which I have guarded amid the various storms of the world, and shall have disposed of it according to My good pleasure, I will also assume it into glory."

Again St. Mechtildis received this answer from our Lord when she prayed God that He would deign to be with another pious person in the last moments of her life, and to give her the assurance of remaining with her; "The wise man throws not away the gold that he has acquired with labour and that is very dear to him. Nor will I abandon for ever her for whom thou prayest, who has been sanctified by My Humanity, and received life through My Spirit in Baptism.

St. Mechtildis in colloquy with our Lord said; "How comes it, most sweet God, that when I think myself about to die, I feel little or no joy in it, while many anticipate that hour with great delight and desire?" The Lord answered; "This comes to pass by My dispensation; because if thou didst desire to die, thou wouldst by thy desire so move and attract My divine Heart, that I could not deny thee what i lion didst seek." Then she said, "How is it that I, though so miserable, am not terrified when I remember that I am to die, while those who are very perfect sometimes fear death?" To which the Lord replied;

Wherefore shouldst thou fear, who hast received My Heart as the pledge of an eternal compact, and for a house of refuge and an everlasting habitation?"

The blessed Gertrude, from the firm confidence she had in the goodness of God, often wished to die; and again she was so united to the Will of God, that she was equally ready to live or to die, according to the good pleasure of God. She was once on a journey, when having ascended a certain mountain, she fell down a slippery place, and rejoicing in spirit, she said to our Lord; "O good Jesus, how well it would have been for me if this accident had been the occasion of my attaining to Thee more speedily!" And as those who were present asked her whether she feared not to die without being fortified by the Sacraments, she answered, "I do indeed desire with all my heart to be fortified by the holy Sacraments before I die; nevertheless I confidently prefer to them the providence and the will of the Lord my God; and whether He wills me to depart hence by a sudden or by a lingering death, His good pleasure will be acceptable to me. For by whatever manner of death I shall pass out of this world, I hope that the mercy of God will never fail me, without which I cannot obtain salvation." And the same St. Gertrude before her death spoke to our Lord in these words; "O my Lord, although it be beyond all delights desirable and joyful to me to be brought out of the prison of the flesh, and united to Thee; yet if Thou wilt that I should remain here, I would rather live in extreme misery even to the day of judgment, to the praise of Thy Name." This resignation of the will the Lord declared to be most pleasing to Him.

Christ said to St. Bridget of some sick person: "Fear not, O daughter, she will not die, for her works are pleasing to Me." And when she was dead, the Son of God again said, "Behold, O most dear one, that is true which I said; for she is not dead but liveth, because her glory is

great. In the just, the separation of the soul from the body is no more than sleep, since they awaken to eternal life. But you may truly call it death, when the soul being separated from the body, lives in everlasting death and punishment." He who loves worldly prosperity and gives not thanks to God, and having lived dissolutely dies in sinful dispositions, dies a bad death, even though his death be tranquil. On the other hand he who loves God with his whole heart, even though he be afflicted in many ways, and oppressed by long illness, and though he leave his body by a horrible, painful, and despised death, lives and dies happily; because in the elect, tribulation and a cruel death diminish or remove the punishment due to sin, and increase their reward. He who lives a good life cannot die a bad death.

Doubtless death is to the just the harbour of repose, as saith St.

Ambrose, To this harbour the holy Simeon looked forward, when holding in his arms the Child Jesus, and desiring to be delivered and brought out of the prison of the body, he said: "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, Lord, in peace" (St. Luke, ii. 29). But someone being at the hour of death may say that he is not just, and neither can nor ought to hope as the just hope. Let him who speaks thus trust in Christ, who justifies the wicked, and let him be humble and of good will; for thus being by faith and love united to God, he will by the grace of God be just. And if a pious man at the approach of death feels sad and fearful through weakness, let him cast upon God this terror and sadness, and resigning himself to it, let him look towards God with confident hope. In order to mitigate the fear of death, let him also recall to mind the words of the only begotten Son of God (who is eternal Truth) saying in the Gospel: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me although he be dead, shall live: and every one that liveth and believeth in Me, shall not die for ever" (St. John, xi. 25, 26). Let

him also meditate on these words of the Apostle St. Paul: "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. xiv. 8). Let him reflect how willing to die were the just of ancient times, when the gates of the heavenly kingdom were not yet opened. For we read at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, that when the people of Israel were already near the promised land, the Lord said to Moses who was leading that people: "Go up into Mount Nebo, and see the land which I will deliver to the children of Israel. Thou shalt see the land, and thou shalt not enter into it, but thou shalt be gathered to thy people, as Aaron thy brother died in Mount Hor, and was gathered to his people; because you trespassed against me in the midst of the children of Israel at the waters of contradiction" (Deut. xxxii. 49, 50). And the Holy Scripture shortly after adds these words: "Then Moses went upon Mount Nebo and died there, by the commandment of the Lord" (Deut. xxxiv. 1, 5). Behold with what resignation of mind to the good pleasure of God, Moses, the friend of the Most High, accepted death. He entered not indeed into that visible land, but he was received into an invisible and better land, that is to say, into the secret bosom of peace, the limbus, where the souls of the just reposed in great tranquillity. If the ancients were thus ready to die, surely we ought not unwillingly to endure death, now that the entrance to the heavenly country has opened to us by Christ.

Let the dying man firmly hold the Catholic faith, and holily receive the Sacraments of the Church, if he can obtain them; and let him rely rather on the merits of Jesus Christ, than on his own. Let him confide much in the prayers and the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other Saints. Let him keep before his eyes the image of Jesus crucified, and reflect upon that ineffable charity with which our Lord

willed to suffer and to die, and thus let him hide himself and repose wholly in His open and bleeding Wounds, beseeching Him that He will deign to wash away all his sins in those sacred Wounds. Let him offer himself to the Lord to bear out of true love, according to His most sweet will, all the bitterness of suffering and death itself, and whatsoever the Lord may be pleased to send him in time and in eternity. If he acts thus, if he resigns himself utterly to the divine Will, humbly, lovingly, and fully trusting in the immense mercy and goodness of God, it cannot be that he should die a bad death. His death will be precious in the sight of the Lord (Psal. cxv. 15), even if he alone had committed all the sins of the whole world. Such a one deservedly rejoices in the presence of death, since his beauteous soul (which is a pure, rational spirit in the likeness of God), is about to be released from this miserable and painful prison, that it may henceforth without impediment enjoy its blessedness. There is no exercise more profitable to a man at the hour of death, than to give himself up freely to the will of God, and turning to Him out of pure love, to confide firmly in His loving-kindness.

A certain friend of God being asked what he would do at the approach of death, if he had lived long in grievous sin, answered: "If I had lived for forty years always in sin, and when the hour of my dissolution was at hand, I had sincerely confessed my sins, and it for the space only of one angelical salutation I had been able with perfect love from the bottom of my heart so to betake myself to God as to be found wholly converted to Him and turned away from all sin, then indeed I should depart out of this life as it pure and innocent. But if I had yielded to only one sin, and I were to depart hence contrite and grieving after a confession rightly made, I should then die as a penitent."

Our Lord has deigned to reveal to some of His friends, that the words

which we are about to give, being spoken in the ears of the dying and recited before them, or being uttered and reflected on by themselves, are of such wonderful virtue that no one holding the Catholic faith can perish, if in his last moments he is able with a true and sincere heart humbly to pronounce these words or to meditate upon them within himself. They are as follows: "O Lord God, I am that miserable one, whom Thou of Thy fatherly goodness hast created, and redeemed from the power of the enemy through the most ignominious Death of Thy only begotten Son; Thou alone hast power and dominion over me, and art able to save me according to Thy boundless mercy, in which I hope and trust."

The Virgin Mary Mother of God said to St. Mechtildis: "I will, as a most loving mother, without fail be present at the death of all those who piously and holily serve me, and will console and protect them." In like manner the other Saints are undoubtedly ready to succour at the hour of death those who venerate and invoke them with devotion.

CHAPTER XIII: ON THE PAINS OF PURGATORY.

ON THE PAINS OF PURGATORY.

ST. BRIDGET heard the Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of God say as follows:

"I am the Mother of God and the Mother of all who are in purgatory; because all the pains which they have to suffer for their sins are at some time, in some way, mitigated through my prayers. I am the Mother of all the just, and also of all sinners who wish to amend, whom I cease not to defend and to save from every danger that threatens their salvation."

The holy Angels also, (as saith the Blessed Mechtildis), afford to the souls detained in purgatory, the light of knowledge, solace, and assistance. St. Bridget saw the soul of a certain king, who had led an evil life, but being urged by the grace of God in the last moments of his life, had thus reflected within himself, "Woe is me that I have most audaciously offended my Creator! that even one little hour might be granted me, in which I might wholly turn to God, and give Him thanks for His benefits! The sins which I have committed against God torment me more than the pain I suffer in my body. Even if I could never attain to heaven, I would yet wish to serve my most gracious Creator and Redeemer." Wherefore Christ the Judge said to the devil and to the guardian Angel of that soul: "Thou, O devil, shalt trouble this soul, but thou, My Angel, shalt console it, until it be brought forth into the light of glory." And to the soul itself He said: "It is permitted to thee to be held by the holy Angel, and to receive consolation from him, and to be a partaker of My Blood, and of the prayers of My Mother and of Holy Church." Therefore the devil said to the soul which he was about to torture: "Because thou hast fallen into my hands full of food

and ill-gotten riches, I will now empty thee in my press." And then placing the king's head between his knees, he pressed it so violently that all the substance of his brains became no thicker than a leaf.

Then he said again to the soul: "Because the place where virtues ought to be is vacant in thee, I will fill it; and inserting, as it were, the pipe of a bellows into the king's mouth, he blew into it so hard that the king's veins and nerves were miserably burst asunder, being filled with a fetid and horrible wind." Again the devil said to the soul:

"Because thou wast merciless to thy subjects, who ought to have been, as it were, thy children, and didst oppress them, my arms shall bind thee round like serpents, and most cruelly rend and tear thee." But when the devil, repeating these punishments, would have increased them, St. Bridget saw the Angel of God stretching forth his hand, and forbidding him to aggravate them as before. In this manner the Angel mitigated the pains at every repetition of the punishment. And the soul after each suffering raised its eyes to the Angel, saying nothing, but by its gestures showing that it had received consolation from him and would soon be liberated.

Some souls in purgatory appeared to St. Gertrude in the form of most hideous toads, burning in horrible flames. There also appeared to her the soul of a certain soldier who had died before the age of fourteen, in the form of a huge beast suspended from a stake over the mouth of hell, and direfully tortured by receiving into itself the pains of hell. St. Gertrude understood that the stake by which the soul was prevented from falling into hell, signified the good will which that soldier had sometimes (though rarely) had during his life.

A certain very pious monk, who had seen in a vision the torments of purgatory, said on returning to himself: "No tongue of man can express, nor imagination conceive, the variety, multiplicity, and severity of

the tortures which I have seen the souls in purgatory endure,, God is my witness that if any man had inflicted on me, and on all those dear to me, all the injuries and pains that can be inflicted in this life, or had even put them to death, and that I saw him given over to the torments I have beheld, I should be ready (if it were possible) to die a thousand times for his deliverance; so far do those pains which I have seen in purgatory exceed in degree and in kind all the pain, distress, bitterness, and misery of this life. Those, however, who are so direfully tormented, pass on by degrees to more tolerable pains." St. Gertrude saw the soul of a certain man of a religious order well known to her, as it were sitting at a table, sad, and with a dejected countenance, as not being yet purified nor worthy to enjoy the blissful contemplation of God. On this table were presented all the Masses, the Office of the Church, the prayers, and other pious works that were offered for that soul, and by these the soul was wonderfully strengthened. The Lord also, moved by his own loving-kindness, and the supplication of intercessors, always added something, in virtue of which that soul rejoiced, being greatly strengthened and relieved. In like manner the Blessed Virgin Mary seemed to place something upon it, that the soul might receive more consolation, which had, while it was in the body, worshipped her with especial devotion. Those also of the Saints whom the soul had more particularly venerated on earth, added to the table in proportion as the soul being in the body had deserved by its greater or less labour and devotion. By all which means the soul, becoming more and more soothed from hour to hour, began more and more to lift its eyes to the most sweet light of the Divinity, which to behold in open vision is in truth to have laid aside the sad memory of all sorrows, and to have found the abundance of all good and of all joy.

When St. Bridget was praying for a certain hermit of especial and tried virtue, whose body had been brought into the church to be buried, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to her, and said: "daughter, the soul of this hermit, my friend, would have gone immediately to heaven, if in death he had had a perfect desire of attaining to the presence and vision of God; because he had it not, it is now detained in the purgatory of desire, where there is no pain except the desire of attaining to God. Know, however, that it will be introduced into the glory of heaven before his body is laid in the earth."

On Easter Day St. Gertrude prayed for the souls detained in purgatory, and immediately many were delivered by her prayers and translated to a place of very grateful refreshment; when she saw that they were not yet brought forth into full beatitude, she prayed again, and they were at once put in possession of everlasting bliss.

The soul of a certain young Count appeared after his death to St. Mechtildis, by whom being questioned whether he suffered any pain, he answered that he felt no pain except that he did not see his most loving God, whom he longed to see with a huge and unspeakable desire. For he said that the soul while yet weighed down by the burden of the corruptible flesh, is greatly impeded by bodily necessities, by eating, sleeping, and conversing with men; but the pious soul that is released from the body, since it then becomes more aware that God is the supreme Good, burns with inconceivable desire of Him. The most learned doctors assert that the vision of God being delayed is an exceeding grief and pain to a soul freed from the body, as the Scripture saith: "Hope that is deferred afflicteth the soul (Prov. xiii. 12). St. Mechtildis also heard the soul of the same Count chanting these words: "I know, Lord, that Thou hast delivered me over to death for my salvation, joy, and consolation." And she asking, "Who taught thee to chant those words?"

The soul answered, "Those things I know which relate to the praise of my Creator."

The same virgin Mechtildis was once carried in spirit into a most delightful garden near to heaven, where there was a great multitude of souls, who endured no other pain than that the worm of conscience was ever reproaching each one that he had not been faithful to his most sweet and gracious God, wherefore he had not deserved to attain to Him without impediment after death. And this worm departs not from the soul till it enters into the joy of its Lord. While St. Mechtildis was praying, these souls took their flight with great exultation to the glory of eternal bliss. And when the Lord afterwards showed to Mechtildis the torments of purgatory, she again prayed, and many souls were translated with joy from those pains into that beautiful garden.

A certain virgin of St. Gertrude's monastery having died after passing all her youth in practising the virtues of holy religion, Gertrude saw her standing by Jesus Christ in brilliant light, and with various adornments; yet she, with eyes cast down like a modest spouse, strove to withdraw, not daring to lift her eyes to the glory of the Divine Majesty. Wherefore Gertrude, incited by compassionate zeal, said to our Lord, "O most benign God, why receivest Thou not this daughter to Thy sweet embraces, but permittest her to stand by Thee like a stranger?"

At which words the Lord seemed with most gentle serenity to stretch forth His right Hand, as though about to embrace the soul. But she with delicate reverence avoided it. Whereat Gertrude greatly wondering, said to the soul: "Why dost thou withdraw from the embraces of so amiable a Spouse?" And she answered: "Because I am not yet purified, and some stains render me unmeet. Even if the entrance to heaven lay open to me, I would (following the dictates of justice) retire of my own will, while I know myself to be still unfit for so glorious a Spouse." Then

Gertrude said: "And yet thou seemest already almost glorified." To which the soul replied: "No soul deserves to receive that glory of blessedness which the Saints for their full reward obtain from the vision and fruition of the Godhead, until, being perfectly purged from every stain, it enters into the joy of its Lord" (Matth. xxv. 21).

When the sister of this virgin died in the monastery of St. Gertrude (having also passed her life piously and religiously), Gertrude beheld in like manner her soul in a place, of resplendent light, and wonderfully adorned; moreover, the Lord Jesus stood near her, and by His five Wounds refreshed her senses with a new sweetness, and gently consoled her. Gertrude therefore said to the Lord, "How comes it that while Thou, the God of all consolation, showest to this one Thy loving serenity, she betrays by her sad countenance an interior affliction?"

The Lord answered: "From this My presence the soul which thou seest receives only the delights of My humanity, by which it cannot be fully consoled; but when it shall have been purified from the negligence of its past life, I will perfectly console it in the presence of My most blissful Divinity." Then she said, "Wherefore, my Lord, should Thy mercy not at once avail to liberate from all the impediments of her negligences this Thy daughter, to whom Thou didst give, from her childhood, a pious heart and a nature full of kindness towards all men?" The Lord answered, "I will most abundantly reward the piety of her heart and her good will; but it is fitting (according to the dictates of My justice) that she should be first purified from every stain." And as it were caressingly touching the chin of the maiden, He added, "In this matter My spouse most willingly consents to what My justice requires, since when she shall be fully purified, she will most happily enter into the glory of My Divinity."

To these words of the Lord she assented with a sweet countenance.

Afterwards, when St. Gertrude offered for her during Mass the life-giving Host, which the priest was elevating, the soul said: "In truth I experience how certain it is that no good action of man, however trifling, is without reward, and that every fault, however small, must be expiated either before or after death. For because I willingly received Holy Communion while I lived on earth, I now obtain great relief from the Sacrament of the Altar being offered for me. And because I had such good will towards all men, the prayers said for me avail me much more quickly. Moreover, I also look for the eternal recompense which I shall receive in heaven." And so the soul seemed to be borne on high, being raised up by the prayers of the Church. For she knew that when she had reached the appointed limit, the Lord would meet her with a crown of glory, and introduce her into eternal bliss. But although one who requires purgatory consents to the justice and will of God, he does not therefore love his pains; but he wishes to have; so lived as that nothing in him should deserve to be punished or purified. Yet he would rather endure the pains of purgatory with the certainty of attaining to God, than be still in this life with the danger of sinning against God.

CHAPTER XIV: ON THE JOYS OF PARADISE — Chapter of: Revelations of St. Gertrude, we find that St. Gertrude saw herself

ON THE JOYS OF PARADISE.

AFTER the death of a certain virgin St. Gertrude saw her soul exulting in celestial glory; and having heard her relate many most wonderful things, she said to her, "How knowest thou all these things? for whilst thou wert in the body, thy capacity was very simple." She answered, "I have learnt them from that Source, of which a certain Saint says, that to have once behold God, is to have learnt all things." In like manner in the Revelations of St. Bridget, the Virgin Mary Mother of God, and other citizens of heaven very frequently declare, that they see and know all things in God. Assuredly the Saints in heaven perfectly know the truth, they know the nature of all things, they see and know whatever belongs to the order and beauty of the whole world. Hence St. Gregory saith, "Since the blessed souls in heaven see within the brightness of God, it is in nowise to be believed, that there is anything without, of which they are ignorant." And in the twenty-eighth Revelations of St. Gertrude, we find that St. Gertrude saw herself presented before God, clothed in a garment on which was distinctly marked everything that she had thought, said or done in religion, whether good or bad, so that not even the smallest point of her good or evil thoughts, intentions, words or works could be hidden, since God and all the dwellers in heaven know them most perfectly in the light of infallible truth. Whence she learnt from God, that the state of every man lies open in like manner to God, and to the Saints throughout endless ages. Therefore every blessed spirit, seeing the Essence of God, sees and knows all things which concern the perfection of his own

glory, sees and knows whatsoever he desires to see and know, but he sees not all things, which exist and shine in God. For if the creature could know all that is in God, he would comprehend God, which is by no means possible, since the creature is finite, and God is infinite.

Wherefore not even the most blessed of all creatures, that is to say the Soul of Christ, comprehends the Divinity, or the infinite Essence of God. The uncreated God alone fully comprehends and knows Himself. He however, who in heaven is highest in merit, and most ardently loved God, beholds Him most clearly, and understands most in Him. There each one in his measure partakes of the glory of God, which is common to all, and each one is filled.

Christ said to St. Bridget, "If when visions are shown to thee, thou wert to see the beauty of the blessed souls or of the holy Angels as it is, thy heart would be broken with excess of joy. If again thou wert to see the devil as he is, thou couldst not endure so horrible a sight and live. But thou discernest spiritual things as if they were corporal, and the souls and Angels appear to thee in the likeness of men; because thy spirit, being as yet impeded by the flesh, cannot otherwise take them in." Wherefore our Lord said to St. Catherine, "Thou well rememberest, that when once I had shown thee in extasy the devil in his own shape as it were at a glance and for a moment, thou being restored to thy bodily senses, didst choose rather to walk with naked feet upon a burning path till the day of judgment than to behold him again. And yet thou knowest not how horrible he really is, whom thou didst see so imperfectly. But so great is the loveliness of even the lowest citizen of heaven, that the sensible beauty of the whole world put together can in nowise be compared to it; its brightness far surpasses the meridian brightness of the visible sun."

In the eleventh Chapter of the fourth Book of the Revelations of St.

Bridget, the Virgin Mary Mother of God tells St. Bridget that the number of the blessed angelic spirits is so great, that if all men were counted from Adam to the last who will be born at the end of the world, ten glorious Angels at least might be assigned to each man. The divine Dionysius the Areopagite also writes, that the number of the holy Angels exceeds all numbers of inferior creations. Several of the Fathers, however, think that there are not more Angels in heaven than there will be souls of men saved at the end of the world; so that the numbers of Angels and Saints will be equal.

O how joyful will it be to behold all that heavenly host, and that ravishing multitude, resplendent in gracious humility, most sweet charity, ineffable beauty and perpetual glory, and most perfectly to know each one of the citizens of heaven!

God said to St. Catherine: "I have provided and arranged much concerning the love of the heavenly citizens, and the angelic spirits in eternal life. For I would not that each should enjoy alone his own good, which he receives from Me, but have ordained that the good of each one be shared by all. I have willed that in most orderly and perfect charity the greater should enjoy the good of the lesser, and the lesser likewise should partake of the joy of the greater. There, both great and small, obtain perfect happiness and perfect consolation, because all are filled according to their measure and degree. O how fraternal and how united to Me is that charity! The Angels with immense gladness communicate with the blessed spirits, and the blessed spirits with the holy Angels. Therefore all, being abundantly imbued with sweetest charity, exult beyond what thou canst understand, and in a wonderful manner rejoice in Me with jubilation. Every citizen of heaven beholding Me the Eternal God, beholds the glory and praise of My Name in My Saints, and in the good angelic spirits, and in all other

creatures, and even in the demons. He clearly perceives the truth, and possesses all things that he can desire. He is ever satiated, and yet he never suffers disgust. Although he discerns the offences of sinners, yet he can in nowise feel grief from this or any other cause, but he feels compassion without pain, loving the sinners themselves, and ever with affectionate charity beseeching Me graciously to show mercy unto the world. The will of the blessed is utterly united and conformed to My Will. Hence though parents should see their children lost in hell, they are yet not moved by any compassion towards them, but are well content, seeing them tormented as My enemies. The blessed desire indeed to be reunited to their bodies, but this desire afflicts them not, since they most certainly know that it will at some time be fulfilled. Nor must thou imagine that after the resurrection the glorification of the body will bring greater happiness to the soul; for if it were so, the bliss of the souls which are in heaven would be imperfect until they had resumed their bodies, which is by no means possible; for no perfection is wanting to them. The body will not augment the bliss of the soul, but rather the soul will out of its abundance confer it on the body. The eye of the intellect sufficeth not to see, nor the ear to hear, nor the tongue to express, nor the thoughts of the heart to understand, how great is the beatitude of My elect (1 Cor. ii. 9.). what and how great is the bliss of beholding Me clearly, of sweetly embracing Me, of for ever enjoying Me, who am the Supreme and Eternal Good!"

A certain virgin who was often admitted to the utmost familiarity with God, used, while her soul was elevated in God, to utter only these words: "O my God and my all!" For in God are all things, and God is all. All things were from eternity in the mind of God; since in Him the ideas and forms of all things immutably existed, and the Divine Essence

Itself is the pattern and idea of all things which have been and are to be created. For whatsoever God creates, whatsoever He has done or will do, has been from all eternity known by Him, and remains for ever in His unchangeable knowledge, and shines forth in Him. Oh, how greatly is God to be loved and desired! He is Himself light, beauty, peace, sweetness, graciousness, and goodness, immense, invariable and eternal. We admire, and with good reason, the splendour of the sun, the brightness of the moon and stars, the adornment of the heavens, the order of the elements, the multiplicity of animals, the variety of colours, the pleasantness of gardens, the elegance of flowers, the verdure of the grass and leaves, the brilliancy of gold, the lustre of gems, the aptitude of bodies, the fairness of the human form and face; but if we were to behold the unspeakable beauty of in visible creatures, namely, of the heavenly spirits and blessed souls, our senses would fail us with wonder and admiration. How much ought we not then to admire and love the incomprehensible beauty of God? For the beauties of created things are nothing else but minute rivulets flowing from that supreme Beauty, as from their original source. We admire also the songs of the little birds, and the sweet sounds of the lyre, the harp, and the organ; we admire the excessive sweetness and fragrance which God has given to honey, to wine, to fruits, stems, flowers, herbs, and spices; but God, from whom all sweetness flows, is incomparably and infinitely more sweet and delightful. Melody, fragrance, savour, are in God in a manner that is indescribable, superessential, most true and most perfect. Whatever sweetness, beauty, excellence, attraction, or perfection we find in a partial and limited measure in creatures, exists collectively, simply, and with infinite plenitude in God. The visible light and brightness of the sun is darkness and obscurity compared to the divine light. Hence the blessed

John says in the Apocalypse, that the heavenly city has no need of the sun, because it is enlightened by the most splendid, most serene, and most blissful glory of God (S. John, Apoc. xxi., 23); and in it there is one everlasting day, to which no night succeeds. All fairness of created things may in deed be called deformity, compared with the uncreated fairness. So also the sweetness of creatures is as it were bitterness, compared with the sweetness of the Creator. In like manner all the riches, nobility, glory, majesty, excellence, dignity, and perfection of this world are nothing in comparison with the riches, nobility, glory, majesty, excellence, dignity, and perfection of God. And all the joys and delights which can be felt in this world, compared to the most pure joys and perennial delights which are derived in heaven from the vision of God and the companion ship of the Saints, are like a little drop of water compared to the whole ocean. Let us therefore desire our God, who alone can fully satisfy us; let us love that supreme and unchangeable Good, in whom is all good; let us sigh after that blissful and eternal life, compared to which the present life should rather be called death than life. And, alas! how imperfectly, how weakly, with what dark and distracted minds do we here praise God! but there is praise perfect and everlasting, where love is ardent, sweet, and constant. The most favoured virgin, St. Gertrude, once understood in spirit, that the light of the Divinity was so great and so incomprehensible, that if each one of the Saints, from Adam to the last man, were to attain as deep and clear a knowledge of it as any one has ever attained, without that knowledge being shared by any other, and even if the multitude of the Saints were a thousand times more numerous, yet that light of the Divinity would infinitely surpass all understanding. The same is true of the beauty, sweetness, and goodness of God, and of His other desirable perfections.

With good reason therefore did this virgin, Gertrude, who, in her union with God, had tasted the delights of the heavenly country, thus exclaim, and commit to writing these words: "O blessed region, making Messed with the affluence of bliss; harvest of delights, whose minutest grain is able amply to satisfy the avidity of all the elect, containing all things desirable, attractive, and sweet that the human heart can conceive! O eternal solstice, fair noontide, secure abode, dwelling filled with every pleasure, joyful paradise, flowing on all sides with rivers of inestimable delights, fascinating by the varied beauty of its flowery gardens, and soothing with most sweet sounds, yea, with the entrancing melody of intellectual music, and inebriating with the overwhelming sweetness of interior joys, and transforming by the marvellous charm of secret embraces! But wherefore should my stammering tongue attempt to speak of it? when even if all the powers of Angels and men were combined in one science, it would never fully suffice to form one single word which could in any measure express, or reach to the height of its excellence." These are the words of St. Gertrude. But if such inexplicable things were shown to that virgin during her exile, what, I ask, is given to the blessed citizens of heaven, who see God not in a dark manner, but face to face (1 Cor. xiii. 12)? May Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God and of the Virgin, who is blessed for evermore, deign to bring us into that heavenly home, Amen.

APPENDIX.

OF THE FOUR HOLY WOMEN FREQUENTLY MENTIONED IN THE FOREGOING BOOK.

1. Of St. Bridget.

THE blessed Bridget was born of noble parents, who descended from the kings of Sweden. Our Lord began to visit her even in her earliest

childhood; and at the age of thirteen, although she especially loved virginity, yet by the command of her parents, and by the will of God, she married a most noble youth, by name Ulpho, and had by him four sons and as many daughters.

Her husband being at length dead, she chose with Mary Magdalen the best part (St. Luke x. 42), and at the command of God left her native country and came to Rome. Afterwards, by the command of the Lord, she went to Jerusalem, and subsequently returned to Rome.

After the death of her husband Christ said to this most holy woman: "I am thy God, who willeth to converse with thee. But I speak to thee not for thyself alone, but for the good of all Christians. Thou shalt be My spouse, and I will make use of thee as a canal; because by thy means I will communicate My grace to others, and will do good to them. Thou shalt see and hear spiritual and heavenly secrets, and My Spirit shall remain with thee till death. Thou becamest Mine by right, when at the death of thy husband thou didst resign thy will into My hands and wast prepared to relinquish all things for Me. Therefore I take thee to Myself to be My spouse, that I may find such delight in thee, as it is fitting that God should find in a chaste soul."

Again the Lord said to her: "Many wonder wherefore I converse with thee rather than with others who are better and more perfect than thee, and have served Me longer than thou hast. But I answer them that I am like the master of a house, having various kinds of wine in his house, who sometimes drinks that which is inferior, because he then prefers it, rejecting the stronger; yet he does not therefore despise or throw away the better wine, but reserves it for his future use. I have indeed many friends, whose lives are sweeter to Me than honey and brighter than the sun; and yet I have chosen thee to be My spouse, that I might reveal to thee My secrets, not because thou art better than them or even couldst

be compared to them, but because I have so willed, who make the foolish to be wise, and sinners to be just. In conferring on thee such grace, I reject not them, but shall make use of them afterwards to My honour. Therefore do thou ever humble thyself."

A certain exceedingly holy monk, by name Gerekinus, once saw St. Bridget raised from the ground into the air, and a river flowing out of her mouth, and heard a voice uttering these words: "This woman, coming from the ends of the earth, shall pour forth wisdom upon innumerable nations. And this shall be a sign to thee, that she, being taught by God, shall foretell the end of thy life; wherefore thou shall exult in her words, and the desire with which thou longest for the vision of God shall quickly be fulfilled."

This widow, so dear to God, speaking of the grace given her, said to the Lord; "When it pleaseth Thee, O Lord, thou dost still my body not indeed with bodily sleep, but with a certain spiritual quiet; but thou dost then rouse my soul as it were out of sleep, and makest it spiritually to see, hear and feel." For when the same St. Bridget was rapt in extasy, all the powers of her body seemed to fail, but her heart exulted and was inflamed with love. She passed happily out of this life in the seventieth year of her age. [9]

[9] A.D. 1373.

2. Of St. Catherine of Siena.

The virgin of Christ Catherine, an Italian by nation and born in the city of Siena, loved God fervently, and served Him zealously from her earliest years. When she was yet a little child, and had been taught the Hail Mary, she was accustomed to salute the Mother of the Lord at each of the steps by which she entered her father's house. She was

devoted to prayer and most familiar with God.

Our Lord also interiorly invited and attracted her to adopt a supernatural austerity of life. For she chastised with the utmost severity her tender virginal body. She sometimes remained without food from Ash Wednesday to the Ascension, satisfied with the reception of the Holy Eucharist alone. For several years she took nothing for the refreshment of her body but a little juice of herbs; and she became seriously and dangerously ill if she was constrained to take anything else. She seldom slept more than two hours, lying on a very hard bed, which she had made for herself of planks of wood.

The Lord however taught her that true holiness consists not in these arduous works of penance and bodily exercises, but in the mortification of self-will and of evil dispositions; and that he would greatly err, who should measure perfection rather by great severity of life than by true humility and love.

Although her manner of life was singular, it is not to be reproved, since she adopted and pursued it by the impulse and by the will and special assistance of the Holy Ghost. Thus we see by what different paths the elect of God are outwardly led. For St. Bridget refreshed her body discreetly and moderately with food and sleep, as nature required. So we think did the most holy virgins Mechtildis and Gertrude; and we do not read of them that they embraced any unusual austerity of life, for they were often prevented by weakness from keeping their rule in its severity. But St. Catherine led a life of unheard-of abstinence and austerity, and she is in this respect rather to be admired, than lightly imitated.

She ever approached with the utmost alacrity the Sacrament of the Altar (which she received almost daily), as if she had been invited to heavenly nuptials. She overcame divers temptations of the malignant

spirits with the shield of patience and the helmet of faith. She suffered frequently from pains in her head, and almost continually from a severe pain in her side.

She abounded with such plenitude of grace and was so firmly united to God, that her mind seemed to be almost incessantly occupied in divine contemplation. She was very often taken out of her bodily senses and fell into extasy by the operation of God, and then her whole body became stiff. In these extasies she often perceived things so sublime, that, returning to her senses, she could in no way find words fitly to explain what she understood by divine enlightenment. Wherefore she repeated again and again, these words only: "I have seen the hidden things of God."

Thirsting for the salvation of souls, she gave precepts of salvation to men in the various places to which she travelled, and by the grace of God worked many miracles. She died in the thirty-third year of her life, and was received into heaven. [10]

[10] A.D. 1380.

3. Of St. Mechtildis.

The holy virgin Mechtildis, the daughter of a certain Count, was born in Germany. Being taken in the seventh year of her age by her mother to a neighbouring monastery of virgins of the Order of St. Benedict, she remained there, and at length made her religious Profession.

She grew rapidly in the love of God, and in true virtue, and became most familiar with the Lord. For she had entirely renounced her own will, humbly preferring all others to herself, and was most prompt in obedience. She was never found idle, but was always either praying or meditating, teaching or reading, or working with her hands, to the

honour of God.

She was often tormented by a painful disease, and other sufferings; but she bore most patiently all the afflictions, that came upon her, receiving them with a joyful heart from the Hand of the Lord. Many days she suffered from so severe a pain in the head, that she was quite unable to sleep, and she was then also deprived of her usual divine sweetness and consolation. But when she complained with tears to our Lord, and humbly called upon Him; the merciful Lord, who is ever present with those in tribulation, at length poured upon her such abundance of grace, that she remained a long time with her eyes closed, as if dead, in the enjoyment of God, perceiving meanwhile many heavenly secrets. She often fell into extasies of this sort, and was wholly rapt in God.

She experienced such sweetness, when she read or heard the words of the Gospel, (for she had learnt, and understood the Latin tongue) that she often became nearly insensible from the overwhelming delight.

On one Wednesday after Easter, when this Introit of the Mass was begun, "Come ye blessed of My Father," she being filled with immense and unusual joy, said to our Lord, "O that I were one of those blessed ones, who shall hear these most sweet words of Thine!" And the Lord replied, "Know for certain, that thou art one of them. And that thou mayest have no doubt of it, behold I give thee My Heart as a pledge of love, and for a house of refuge, that thou mayest always, and chiefly in the hour of thy death, find in it consolation and repose." From that time she began to have a wonderful devotion to the Heart of Jesus Christ, whence she frequently said in her simplicity, "If all the good things were to be written down, which I have received from the most gracious Heart of my Lord, the largest possible volume could not contain them."

In her last illness, when her companion, the blessed Gertrude, enquired of the Lord what He was working in her, the Lord answered, "I repose with her in a sweet embrace, because although she be tortured by various and continual pains, yet trusting in My goodness, she believes that through My Divine Mercy all things are for her eternal salvation, and ever giving thanks to Me, she faithfully commits herself to My fatherly Providence."

One day the same spouse of Christ Mechtildis, being already in the agony of death, said nothing but these words, "O good Jesus, O good Jesus," which she constantly repeated; thus plainly showing, that He was in truth intimately impressed on her heart, whose Name she so sweetly ruminated upon, and so frequently pronounced, amid the bitter pains of death. But the hour being come when she was to pass out of this world, Jesus, the Lord of Supreme Majesty, glorifying her with the light of His Divinity, in a sweet and gentle voice invited her in these words: Come, thou blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for thee, from the foundation of the world (St. Matth. xxv. 34).

Then indeed did the Lord Himself remind her of that most excellent gift, by which some years before, (when the same words were sung in the Mass,) He had given her His Heart as a pledge of love. Therefore that blessed soul, being admitted into the sweetest Heart of Jesus, entered happily into eternal glory and heavenly joys.

4. Of St. Gertrude.

The virgin Gertrude, or Trutha, full of the amiable sweetness of the grace of God, shone with the splendour of all virtues, having been, in the fifth year of her age, planted like a fair lily in the garden of holy religion. She served God in the same monastery as Mechtildis. Gertrude, being gifted with extraordinary talents, in a short time made

great progress in the Latin language; but her chief study was to acquire humility and purity of heart, and to be united to God by ardent love.

She saw herself in the light of truth, to be unworthy of any of the gifts of God; she looked upon herself, I say, only as a sort of canal by which God willed to convey His gifts to His elect. She esteemed above herself all whom she saw; and those to whom she communicated the gifts of God, she believed to merit more by their thoughts, their innocence or blameless conversation, than she could by all her exercises and labours.

Sometimes when she was journeying, she said to our Lord in her deep abjection, "Ah! my Lord! among the great miracles, which Thou workest, I consider this to be one of the chiefest, that Thou permittest the earth to bear so vile a sinner as I am." To which the Lord graciously answered, "Rightly does the earth allow itself to be trodden by thee, since all the dignity of heaven awaits with ineffable desire that most joyful hour, when it may receive and welcome thee."

When garments or any other things were offered to her that she might choose which she liked, she would not choose, but stretching forth her hand with her eyes shut, she received with the utmost gratitude whatever she took hold of (though it might be the most vile), as if the Lord had given it to her with His own Hands.

Her confidence in God was ever firm, her mind active and courageous, leaning steadily on His fatherly Providence, to which she looked in all things.

The Lord sensibly imprinted on her heart the glorious stigmata of His five Wounds, and He prepared for Himself in her so pleasing a dwelling, and so sweetly manifested to her His Heart, that if men did not know the power and goodness of the Lord to be boundless, they could hardly

believe that He had shown as much familiar friendship to His most holy Mother on the earth as He showed to her.

Hence the same Lord Jesus, speaking to a certain holy person of her while she was yet alive, said thus: "Since there is no one now living who is nearer and more united to me by pure intention, good will, and true fidelity than she is, I also incline to no soul dwelling in the flesh with greater favour than to her soul; wherefore thou mayest nowhere more readily find Me than in the Sacrament of the Altar, and next in the heart and soul of this My spouse." Again the Lord said to another person: "I am all hers, and I have united her inseparably to Me by love, as gold and silver are melted by fire into one metal." And again: "She is to all the citizens of heaven a sweet-sounding harmony, which is produced by all the adversities endured by her with so much equanimity." To Mechtildis also, who was praying for her, the Lord said: "Whosoever shall listen to her words, and humbly obey her admonitions, shall not deviate from the way of salvation, but shall at length attain to eternal life." And to Gertrude herself He said: "Since I have mercifully chosen thee, that I may joyfully inhabit in thee, whosoever shall commend himself to thy prayers, with pious confidence, shall by My grace be saved." And again: "No one of those who listen to thy words with humility, and order their lives according to them with a pious intention, can ever perish, but will attain to Me by a way safe from all error."

She had also received from the divine and infallible Truth the promise, that as in the Death of Christ the most exalted power of love separated the Soul of the Lord Jesus Himself from the Body, so in the death of this virgin divine love was to consume all her strength.

She was, moreover, assured by a divine promise that if any one should, either before or after her death, considering and understanding how

graciously and familiarly God had condescended to her, devoutly, faithfully, and lovingly praise God, or give thanks to Him, for the benefits bestowed on her he should not depart out of this world until God had taken delight in some especial familiarity with his soul. Therefore he who chooses may pray in this or like manner: "O sweetest Lord Jesus Christ, I praise Thee and give Thee thanks, with all the devotion of which I am capable, for all the benefits Thou didst bestow on the virgin Gertrude Thy beloved spouse; and by that love with which Thou didst from eternity choose her out for Thy special favour, and in Thy own good time didst sweetly attract her and familiarly invite her to Thyself, and joyfully abide in her soul, and end the course of her life by a blessed death, I pray and beseech Thee that Thou wilt have, mercy on me, and render me pleasing to Thee, and lead me into eternal life. Amen."

5. On the authority of the foregoing Revelations.

The revelations made to the holy women mentioned above were known to the whole world, and have long ago been approved by pious and learned men; for the holy Fathers everywhere quote them in their books and writings. During the lifetime of St. Bridget, distinguished bishops and theologians examined her revelations; and after her death the Council of Basle deputed some who were eminent for piety and doctrine to investigate them again most diligently; and all these constantly affirmed that they came from God. In like manner the revelations of St. Gertrude were, both before and after her death, examined with the utmost diligence by most enlightened men; one of whom, after an accurate study of them, wrote his opinion as follows:-- "In the light of divine truth I am convinced that no one who is illuminated by the Spirit of God can calumniate or attack those things which are contained

in this book, for they are Catholic and holy."

From all which it appears how far from the Spirit of God are those who reject and ridicule these revelations as the dreams of foolish women.

May God forgive them; and may He deign, through the merits and intercession of His most dear spouses (on whom He abundantly poured forth His Spirit, and whom He surpassingly illuminated with the light of truth), to bring us all, after this miserable life, to eternal blessedness in the life to come.

THE END.

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155. file:///ccel/b/blois/spiritual/cache/spiritual.html3?scrBook=Luke&scrCh=23&scrV=43#v.vi-p3.1

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181.

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194.

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