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The
PRODIGAL
& SON
OR
The Sinners
Return to
God





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THE PRODIGAL SON;

OR,

THE SINNER'S RETURN TO GOD.

BY

MICHAEL MÜLLER,

Priest of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

WITH THE APPROBATION OF HIS EMINENCE THE CARDINAL-ARCH-
BISHOP OF NEW YORK.

SIXTH EDITION.

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AUG 13 1957

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1875.

TO THE
SACRED AND EVER-IMMACULATE
Heart of Mary,
THE MOTHER OF MERCY AND REFUGE OF SINNERS,
THIS BOOK
IS HUMBLY DEDICATED
IN
THANKSGIVING AND LOVE.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
Introductory.—Good Reading,	9
CHAPTER II.	
The Prodigal Son,	20
CHAPTER III.	
God, the Father of Mankind,	27
CHAPTER IV.	
The Prodigal's Choice—End of Man,	46
CHAPTER V.	
The Prodigal's Departure—Mortal Sin,	62
CHAPTER VI.	
The Prodigal's Companions—Impurity,	83
CHAPTER VII.	
The Prodigal a Monster—Drunkenness,	114

	PAGE
CHAPTER VIII.	
The Far Country—Infidelity,	135
CHAPTER IX.	
Portrait of the Infidel,	154
CHAPTER X.	
The Prodigal's Repentance—Death,	173
CHAPTER XI.	
The Prodigal Judged—Particular Judgment,	190
CHAPTER XII.	
The Prodigal and his Companions Judged—General Judgment,	209
CHAPTER XIII.	
The Prodigal's Companions Punished—Hell of the Body,	228
CHAPTER XIV.	
The Prodigal's Companions Punished—Hell of the Soul,	254
CHAPTER XV.	
The Father of the Prodigal—God's Mercy,	269
CHAPTER XVI.	
The Prodigal's Prayer—Prayer the Key to God's Mercy,	306

CHAPTER XVII.

PAGE

Misapprehension of God's Mercy—Delay of Conversion, . . . 318

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Road Homeward—Institution of Confession, . . . 341

CHAPTER XIX.

The Prodigal's Confession—Necessity of Confession, . . . 355

CHAPTER XX.

Quality of the Prodigal's Confession—Its Integrity, . . . 374

CHAPTER XXI.

The Prodigal's Sorrow—Contrition, 395

CHAPTER XXII.

The Prodigal's Resolution—Proximate Occasion of Sin, . . . 414

CHAPTER XXIII.

Bad Books, 423

CHAPTER XXIV.

What Increased the Prodigal's Sorrow—General Confession, 436

CHAPTER XXV.

The Great Banquet—Holy Communion, 451

	PAGE
CHAPTER XXVI.	
Necessity of Prayer,	482
CHAPTER XXVII.	
The Power and Mercy of the Blessed Virgin Mary, . . .	505
CHAPTER XXVIII.	
The Prodigal's Brother—Happiness of the Just, . . .	539
CHAPTER XXIX.	
The Father's House—Heaven,	559

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.—GOOD READING.

A TRAVELLER once found himself alone on a dreary moor. The ground was covered with snow. The bleak winter wind moaned and blew in fitful gusts. All nature seemed dead around him, and scarcely a star-light gleamed on the dreary tomb. The poor lonely traveller had lost his way. He had been wandering long amid the snow-drifts. He was benumbed with cold, dispirited and weary. Must he lie down upon this bleak moor and die? Must the ice be his bed and the snow his winding-sheet? He thinks of home, but the thought fills his soul with bitterness. Never again shall he feel his fond wife's embrace, never again shall his children welcome him with the merry laugh and the warm, tender kiss. The poor traveller sinks upon the ground in weakness and despair. A distant sound strikes upon his ear, rouses him from his stupor, and fills him with hope. It is the sound of the convent bell ringing the matin chime. The lost traveller shakes off the sleep of death. He sees in the distance a glimmering light. He urges on his weary steps. He reaches the convent door, and is safe.

The state of this unhappy traveller is but a faint image of the unhappy condition of a soul that has strayed from God—from the true faith; that is wandering about in darkness and doubt, and has sunk into blank despair. At last this unhappy soul reads a pious book. The light of truth

flashes upon his mind. He hastens to the church. He enters her portals, and there finds a peace and contentment of heart that surpass all understanding. He is saved.

A good book is indeed a faithful friend, that will give us counsel without cowardice or flattery, on the one hand, and without any personal bitterness, on the other. It is also one of the best missionaries of the Church. It can enter places where priests cannot penetrate. A stern hater of the Catholic Church, who on no consideration would hold intercourse with a Catholic priest, will often take a volume of Catholic truth and read it by his fireside.

La Harpe was an infidel and a great friend of Voltaire. He wrote several works against religion. When the French Revolution broke out he was seized and cast into prison. In the silence and solitude of his cell he found time to examine the truths of religion, which he had hitherto neglected. He tells us how sad and lonely he was in his cell. To while away his time he read a few pious books that had been given him. Gradually the light of faith began to dawn in his heart; but the heavenly light filled him with terror. All the sins of his life came up before him. He knew that death was at hand; for in those days there was but one step from the prison to the scaffold. For the first time in forty years he turned to God with an humbled, sorrowful heart, and began to pray. There was no priest near to prepare him for death. They were all either dead or banished. After having offered up a fervent prayer, he opened at random a copy of the *Imitation of Christ* and read these consoling words: "See, my son, I have come to thee because thou hast called me." The words filled him with unspeakable consolation. His heart was touched; he fell upon his face and burst into tears. This was the beginning of a new life. La Harpe was afterwards set free; but he remained ever after faithful to the good resolutions he had formed whilst shut up in his dreary prison.

Dr. Palafox, the pious Bishop of Osma, in his preface to the letters of St. Teresa, relates that an eminent Lutheran minister at Bremen, who was famed for several works which he had published against the Catholic Church, purchased the *Life of St. Teresa*, with a view of attempting to confute it. But after reading it over attentively, he was converted to the Catholic faith, and from that time forward led a most edifying life.

A thousand such examples might be offered to show that the reading of pious books is well calculated to lead sinners to a life of grace, and to encourage the just to walk steadily onward on the road to perfection. The tendency of pious reading to induce men of the world to change their ways and enter on the path of a holy life, may be seen from the conversion of St. Augustine. The extreme repugnance which, previous to his conversion, the saint felt in his soul at the thought of parting with the false pleasures of sense and surrendering himself in full to the service of Christ, is well known to readers of his life. What a terrible conflict, what fierce attacks, he experienced within his heart! The story of the conflict, as told by himself, moves us to pity. He tells us that he groaned as he felt his own will, like a heavy chain, holding him fast; and that the enemy of man kept even his power of willing shackled by a kind of cruel necessity. He went through an agony of death in ridding himself of his vicious habits. When just on the point of resolving to renounce them, the old fascinations and false delights dragged him back, and he heard low voices murmur, "Do you mean to forsake us? From this moment forth are we never, never more to be with you?" But what was it that finally, after so fierce a struggle, overcame the heart of the saint? What won that heroic soul to God? The final victory was due to the reading of a pious book. To this is to be attributed, under Almighty God, the glory of gaining to the Church so renowned a doctor and saint. It

happened that whilst Augustine was fighting with the wild thoughts that filled his breast, he heard a voice saying to him, "Take and read." He obeyed the voice ; and taking up a book which lay near him, read a chapter from St. Paul. Shortly after the dark clouds passed away from his mind, the hardness of his heart yielded, and peace and calm took possession of his soul, where before tumultuous passions and despair were striving for the mastery. The chains of his bad habits were broken ; he gave himself up without reserve to God, and became the great saint who is admired by all the world, and revered upon the altars of the Church, and who could write in truth :

" Who neither loves, nor seeks for Jesus' love,
His soul a barren desert shall remain ;
And life will prove
To him, whate'er its joys, but life in vain.

" To live for Thee, O Lord ! alone is life ;
To live without Thee were at once to die.
'Twere but the strife
Of aimless folly swiftly passing by.

" Most Merciful ! to Thee I give anew
The life and understanding which I owe ;
That Thou art true,
And wilt that life restore, by faith I know.

" Believing, I will love Thee and adore,
With whom I hope for ever to remain ;
Or, could I more,
In endless rest and blessedness to reign.

" What soul, unloving, seeks not after Thee ?
The slave of sin and earthly love impure,
His lot shall be
The helpless thrall which guilty men endure.

- “Oh! may this bondage never, Lord, be mine;
But let my pilgrimage securely end
 Along the line
Of aspirations pure, which heavenward tend.
- “My soul, in this her exile, longs for rest;
Be that to her, O Lord! for which she longs—
 Softly expressed
In contemplation sweet, or grateful songs.
- “In sorrow or in joy, when tumults swell,
Grant her the shelter of Thy guardian wing;
 Do Thou compel
A calm, from whencesoe'er the tempests spring.
- “O richest Master of the noblest feast,
And bountiful Dispenser unto all,
 Even the least,
On whom the mercies of Thy goodness fall!
- “Do Thou to weary souls sweet food afford;
Thy scattered children safely gather in;
 O loving Lord!
Set free the bound, restore the lost in sin!
- “Lo! at the door a wretched wanderer stands
And knocks. O brightest day-spring from on high!
 Brightening the lands
Of death and sin, in mercy hear his cry!
- “Open! and let this craving suppliant in,
That freely he may find his way to Thee,
 And rest from sin,
And with Thy heavenly food refreshèd be.
- “For Thou of life the bread and water art,
Of light eternal the eternal Fount,
 The living heart
Of righteous men who climb the heavenly Mount.”

So great is the power of pious reading to triumph over the hardest hearts, to wean them from earth, make them spiritual and holy, and convert the sons of darkness into children of light.

The example of St. Ignatius of Loyola, who, by reading a pious book, for the sake of driving away the tedium of a distressing illness, was converted from being a soldier of an earthly king into a soldier of the King of heaven and earth, might be cited. Or that of St. John Colombino, who, by the perusal of a pious book, felt so thorough a change of heart that he turned his back upon the world, surrendered himself entirely to God's service, and became the leader of a great troop of religious men, who enrolled themselves under the banner of the Crucified.

In the book in which St. Augustine relates the story of his own conversion, he also gives an account of the conversion of two gentlemen attached to the court of the Emperor Theodosius. These two gentlemen, weary of the noise and bustle of the court, strolled out into the country to breathe a calmer atmosphere. As they sauntered on they came to a house where some good monks were living, and passing the entrance-gate, they walked slowly forward, feeling a sort of fascination as they marked the poverty, simplicity, silence, and peace that reigned in the holy abode, and the unaffected look of happiness that shone in the faces of the religious. One of the courtiers, entering a monk's cell, found there a copy of the life of St. Anthony, which, out of curiosity, he began to read. As he read on, by little and little he felt his admiration aroused by the deeds of that holy hermit, and his own heart inflamed with the desire to follow the holy example. He resolved to engage himself in the like course of life, and to leave the world for the sake of giving himself up unreservedly to the service of God. Carried away by the ardent zeal of these holy emotions, the courtier fixed his eyes on the face of his friend, and exclaimed:

“What is it that we hope to win by the labors in which we are spending our lives? Can we hope to do more than secure the friendship of Cæsar? And even in this how doubtful is our success! How many risks do we run! But if I wish to become God’s friend, in the act of forming my wish I at once gain it! Ah!

“ ‘What is human life below?
 Passing show,
 Vapor, smoke, and fleeting shade.
 Man, when few short years have flown,
 Is cut down,
 As by scythe the springing blade.

“ ‘Man is like the fragile glass,
 Fading grass;
 Flower whose petals soon are strewn—
 Ah! how quickly reft of strength,
 When at length
 Death’s cold wind has o’er him blown.

“ ‘Youth, to which we may compare
 Roses fair,
 Pales, and must its charms forego.
 All that men of pomp or state
 Highest rate,
 Soon shall be by Death laid low.

“ ‘Man’s the mark at which take aim,
 Like some game,
 Darts which Death unerring plies;
 Though like cedar fair outspread
 Soars his head,
 Felled by Death he lifeless lies.’”

Thinking thus, he fell to reading again, and as he read he felt himself deeply moved and his soul changed. He became conscious that the love of earth and earthly things was departing from his heart. At length, heaving a long

and deep-drawn sigh, he cried : “ O my friend ! I have now broken the chain which bound me to the imperial court. From this moment I make up my mind to serve God alone ; and that you may believe how earnest I am about it, this very hour, on this hallowed spot, I shall begin to put my resolve into execution. If, however, you do not like to follow my example, I beg you not to interfere with my design.” On hearing this the other felt his own heart respond to the holy emotions which his friend had experienced, and readily offered to follow him ; and the two that very day, without any interval of preparation, consecrated themselves to God in that sacred cloister. These young courtiers, moreover, were affianced to two noble ladies, and though they loved them with sincere affection, their love had no power to shake their generous resolve ; nay, their example made such an impression on the hearts of their intended brides, that it led them also to consecrate themselves to God by a vow of perpetual virginity. So many souls did the reading of **one** pious book withdraw from a worldly life to enter on the pathway of sanctity.

Devout persons never want a spur to assiduous reading or meditation. They are insatiable in this exercise, and, according to the golden motto of Thomas à Kempis, they find their chief delight “ in a closet with a good book.”

St. Gregory relates, in his “ Dialogues ” (lib. iv. cap. 14), that a poor beggar in Rome, named Servulus, used to lie in the porch at the entrance of the Church of St. Clement. He was so completely paralyzed that he was not only unable to stand upright, but was even deprived of all power of turning himself from side to side, or of raising his hand to his mouth to take the necessary food. Of the alms he received, he spent part upon his own support, and part he laid aside for providing food and shelter for the poor pilgrims whom he lodged in his own miserable dwelling-place. He was most eager always to acquire spiritual books. He

had purchased many by the outlay of money given him in alms ; for he took from the food that supports the body to supply his soul with the nourishment of pious reading. And as the poor man could not read himself, he made his lodgers read to him. By means of these pious readings, he acquired an extensive knowledge of spiritual things, and a familiar acquaintance with Holy Scripture, on which he used to discourse with great judgment, to the astonishment of all who heard him. But, better far than this, he had acquired an invincible patience, and in the midst of his severe sufferings was always thanking the Lord, and singing hymns of the desire of God :

“ I know not what I could desire
Wert Thou, dear Lord, only mine ;
Wert Thou to crown my soul with gladness,
And still be near and call me Thine.

“ Lift Thou me up, Thou gentle Saviour !
Thou art my all, my life is Thine ;
Though naught of earthly hope were left me,
I know my recompense divine.”

Feeling that the end of his life was drawing near, he sent for some of his friends and begged them to recite some psalms with him. Whilst the psalms were being recited, he suddenly made a sign to them to stop, and said, “ Hark ! Do you not hear how all heaven is ringing with music and song ? ” And with these words he gently breathed his last. After his death, that lowly dwelling-place was filled with a fragrance so heavenly that visitors were at a loss to describe its sweetness. St. Gregory ends his narrative by saying that a monk of his monastery had been present at the death of this saintly man, and that he could not help shedding tears in relating what he had seen.

The great eagerness which this holy sufferer had for spiritual reading is worthy of remark ; as also the excellent

fruits of sanctity which he derived from it, and the blessed death which by its practice crowned his life. But it is hardly necessary to spur on devout Christians to assiduous reading of good books. It is the worldly-minded and lukewarm Christians that stand in particular need of this powerful aid to virtue.

The world is a whirlpool of business, pleasure, falsehood, and sin. Within its vortex the hearts of men are drawn, to be buried for ever in its depths unless frequent pious reading and meditation on holy things oppose a strong bulwark to its waves. "Hence it is impossible," says St. John Chrysostom, "that a man should be saved who neglects assiduous pious reading or consideration. Handicraftsmen will rather suffer hunger and all other hardships than lose the instruments of their trade, which they know to be the means of their subsistence." The more deeply, then, a person is immersed in the tumultuous cares of the world, so much the greater ought to be his solicitude to find leisure to breathe, after the fatigues and dissipation of business and company; to plunge his heart, by secret prayer, into the ocean of the divine immensity, and, by pious reading, to afford his soul some spiritual refection, as the wearied husbandman, returning from his labor, recruits his spent vigor and exhausted strength by allowing his body necessary refreshment and repose.

I have published several books. Their perusal has been a spiritual refection to many a soul. But none of them is so well calculated to nourish and strengthen the soul as the present one. All persons like to read the lives of great men. But they probably like still better to read their own lives. The well-known story of the Prodigal Son is more or less the life of all of us. That story is illustrated in this volume, and as its illustrations are but chapters in our own lives, it is hoped that their perusal will prove as pleasant as it may be profitable to those prodigal children most deeply

concerned in the narrative, who have abandoned their Father's household, taken up their abode in a strange and far-off land, squandered their heavenly inheritance, and instead of the Bread of Life find their only sustenance in the husks of swine.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

IN a far country there lived, many years ago, a certain father who was very rich and liberal. He had sheep and oxen and lands in abundance. He was a good man, and had two sons, whom he loved most tenderly. The elder of the two was a sensible and obedient young man; but the younger son was wild, disobedient, and reckless. He associated with bad companions, stayed out late at night, and spent his time in gambling, drinking, and debauchery. The good father was very much grieved at the conduct of this son. Again and again he warned him, he entreated him to forsake his wicked companions, he even had recourse to harsh words and chastisement; but all was of no avail, the young man was incorrigible. His companions often said to him: "How foolish are you to allow your father to treat you thus! Take your inheritance and leave him. You will then be your own master, to go wherever and do whatever you please." The foolish youth was base enough to follow this infamous advice. He went to his father and said: "I cannot remain here any longer; I do not want to be always treated as if I were a child. Give me my portion of the inheritance; I am now old enough to take care of myself." "My child," cried the father, in heart-broken accents, "what have I done to you that you treat me thus? Why do you abandon me? Is this the reward of my love?" But the son, insensible to his father's sorrow, only said: "Give me my inheritance; I will not remain here longer."

The good man, seeing the blind obstinacy of his son, gave him his portion of the inheritance, and said : “ My dear son, since you will not listen to the voice of your father—since you will not stay with me any longer—take, then, your inheritance ; I desire not to make you unhappy. You think that those wicked companions love you. As soon as they have squandered all your money, they will turn their backs upon you and abandon you. While as yet you were a helpless babe in the cradle, I laid aside this inheritance for you. Then you slept in my arms and called me by the sweet name of ‘ father.’ Then you were pure and innocent. Woe is me ! that I have lived to see this day when the child of my heart forsakes me for a set of libertines. Can you soon forget a father’s love ? What more could I do for you than I have done ? Will you leave this happy home where you were born ? The very walls that have so often heard my sighs and prayers for you will tell you how much I love you ! Stay with me but a little, till my eyes are closed in death, and then depart in peace ! ”

The good father talked to a heart of stone. His son had become a slave to the vice of impurity, and impurity destroys every noble feeling and makes the heart more cruel and pitiless than a tiger’s. The unnatural son took the money and hastened away.

“ Proud, carnal, vain, devotionless,
 Of God above or hell below
 He took no thought ; but, undismayed,
 Pursued his course of wickedness.
 His heart was rock ; he never prayed
 To be forgiven for all his treasons ;
 He only said at certain seasons,
 ‘ O Father, Lord of mercy ! ’ ”

After he had quitted his father’s house, he went far away to a strange country. He wished to go as far as possible from his father, in order that he might gratify the wicked

desires of his heart without any fear of reproach. He cast himself headlong into the most shameful excesses. Day after day, night after night, he spent in drinking, gambling, and debauchery. He passed his time and squandered his money in the company of those lost creatures—the disgrace of their sex, whose life is dishonor, and whose end is eternal torment.

“ Years rolled, and found him still the same—
Still draining pleasure’s poison-bowl;
Yet felt he now and then some shame;
The torment of the undying worm
At whiles woke in his trembling soul;
And then, though powerless to reform,
Would he, in hope to appease that sternest
Avenger, cry, and more in earnest,
‘ O Father, Lord of mercy ! ’ ”

At last the spendthrift had squandered all his wealth, and was himself reduced to the most abject poverty. He called upon his former friends to help him. He thought that those who had been his faithful companions during the days of his prosperity would not abandon him in his sore distress. He visited them one after the other, but was everywhere received with coldness and contempt. No one assisted him, no one pitied him. At last he tried to find some employment; but as he was not accustomed to labor, and as his licentious character was well known, no one was willing to hire him. Besides, a great many were out of employment at the time. The poor were dying of hunger. There was a great famine in the country, and this unhappy young man was often faint with hunger. At last, as he could get nothing else to do, he hired himself to a rich farmer, and was appointed to herd the swine.

What a shameful degradation! He was the beloved of his father. He who had been clothed in purple and fine linen, who had had numerous servants to wait on him, who

had lived in abundance, whose every wish had been gratified, was now become a degraded slave, a wretched swineherd ! He was barefoot and bareheaded, dressed in tattered garments ; and to satisfy the cravings of hunger he had to eat of the husks of swine. “ Ah ! ” he cries in his sore distress, “ even the very servants in my father’s house have food in abundance, and here am I, his son, dying of hunger ! ”

“ At last youth’s riotous time was gone,
And loathing great came after sin.
With locks yet brown, he felt as one
Grown gray at heart ; and oft with tears
He tried, but all in vain, to win
From the dark desert of his years
One flower of hope ; yet morn and evening
He still cried, but with deeper meaning,
‘ O Father, Lord of mercy ! ’ ”

As the unhappy young man sat there alone, abandoned and despised by every one, and dying of hunger, he entered into himself at last. He began to think of the past, and how happy he had been in his father’s house. The thought of his home, of his kind father, filled him with remorse. “ Fool that I was ! ” he cried ; “ had I taken my father’s advice, I would now be happy. Here I am treated as the vilest slave ; I am dying of hunger. The very dogs at my father’s table fare better than his son does here. I will leave this wretched place ; I will arise and go back to my father. Perhaps he will forgive me. I know that I have pained his heart. I know that I do not deserve his forgiveness. I know that I have not behaved like a good son ; yet, in spite of all, my father’s love for me is not dead. His heart will plead for me far more powerfully than I can plead for myself. As soon as I call him by the endearing name of father, he will be moved with compassion. I will go without fear and say to him : “ Father, I have sinned

against heaven and before thee. I am not worthy to be called thy child ; but forgive me, and receive me at least as one of thy servants."

He rose up to return to his father. But the tempter stood beside him and said : " What are you doing ? You cannot go back to your father in that plight. You are all in rags. Your father will be ashamed of you ; he will not own you. Besides, the distance is too great. You will lose your way. You will be attacked by robbers and wild beasts. Moreover, you are now too weak and sickly ; you will faint and die on the way. Wait yet a few days longer. This famine will not last always. You will have better times by and by. If you go back to your father, you will be scolded and treated even more harshly than before. If you go back now, every one will say that you are a coward."

In spite of all these devilish suggestions, the young man made up his mind to return to his father, no matter what it would cost. He was sorry for what he had done, and was determined to make reparation to the best of his power.

" A happier mind, a holier mood
 A purer spirit, ruled him now ;
 No more in thrall to flesh and blood,
 He took a pilgrim-staff in hand,
 Though under no religious vow,
 Travailed his way to fatherland,
 To live as if in an humble cloister,
 Exclaiming, while his eyes grew moister,
 ' O Father, Lord of mercy ! ' "

His loving father was anxiously awaiting his return. Day after day this good man went out and looked about in every direction to see if his son was coming. Day after day he wept and prayed for his lost son. Whilst sorrowing and praying thus, he noticed some one in the distance coming towards the house. The stranger was evidently poor and weary. He came on slowly with tottering steps. The

quick eye of the father instantly recognized in that tattered form, in the pale and haggard face, his long-lost son. With a wild cry of joy, he rushed forward to meet him. The repentant son fell on his knees, and with heart-broken accents cried out, "O father! I have sinned against heaven and before thee; forgive—" But the father would not suffer him to continue. He had already forgiven everything. He threw his arms around the neck of the prodigal; he kissed him again and again, whilst tears of joy streamed down his aged cheeks. In an instant the glad tidings had spread everywhere that the lost son had returned at last. "Go," cried the glad father to the servants—"go, bring the most costly robes, and put a precious ring upon his finger, and let us rejoice and make merry, and prepare a great feast; for my son that was dead is living again, and my child that was lost so long is found at last!"

The rich, liberal, and most kind-hearted father in this story represents God the Father, our Lord and Creator.

The prodigal represents all those who, in the blind pursuit of the riches, pleasures, and honors of this world, have lost sight of the noble end for which God created them, and have forfeited the grace and friendship of Almighty God by mortal sin. The unhappy condition of the prodigal, deprived of all human aid and comfort, represents vividly to our mind the unhappy condition of those who live in the state of mortal sin. The untiring efforts of the prodigal to return to his father's house serve as a model to all those who have abandoned God, and sincerely wish to be received again into the friendship of their Heavenly Father. The manner in which the prodigal was received by his father represents the manner in which God, in His infinite mercy, receives every repentant sinner. The prodigal's companions represent all those who live in sin, delay their conversion until too late, and at last die impenitent. The good brother of the prodigal represents all those who to the end

of their lives overcome the temptations of this world, the devil and the flesh, and bear the crosses and afflictions of this life with patience, in the firm hope that God will reward them in heaven for their faithfulness in **His** service.

CHAPTER III.

GOD, THE FATHER OF MANKIND.

ST. AUGUSTINE, the great Bishop of Hippo, while walking on the sea-shore one day, was thinking about the greatness of the riches of Almighty God. As he went along, he saw a little child sitting by the sea. The child had a small spoon in its hand, which it was dipping into the sea. St. Augustine, observing the action of the child, said: "Why do you dip that spoon into the water?" The child answered: "I want to empty all the water out of the sea." "But," said St. Augustine, "it is useless for you to try to empty the great sea with that little spoon. If you were to work for ever, you could not do it." The child then said: "I am an angel from heaven, and God has sent me to tell you that it would be easier for me to empty the sea with this little spoon than for you to understand all about the greatness of the riches of Almighty God."

To say that God is greater than the heavens, than all kings, all saints, all angels, is indeed to form no measure of His greatness, but to fall infinitely below it. God is greatness itself, and the sum of our conception of His greatness is but an atom compared to the reality.

"What know I when I know thee, O my God?
Not corporal beauty, nor the limb of snow,
Nor of loved light the white and pleasant flow,
Nor manna showers, nor strains that stream abroad,
Nor flowers of heaven, nor small stars of the sod—
Not these, my God, I know, who know Thee so.
Yet know I something sweeter than I know:
A certain Light on a more golden road,

A Something not of manna nor the hive,
 A Beauty not of summer or the spring,
 A Scent, a Music, and a Blossoming,
 Eternal, timeless, placeless, without gyve,
 Fair, fadeless, undiminished, never dim—
 This, this is what I know in knowing Him."

David, contemplating the divine greatness, and seeing that he could not and never would be able to comprehend it, could only exclaim, "O Lord! who is like unto Thee?"* O Lord! what greatness shall ever be found like to thine? And how, in truth, could David understand it, since his understanding was finite and the greatness of God is infinite? "Great is the Lord, and of His greatness there is no end."† To form some idea of God's greatness, let us remember that although this world of ours is only one of a vast system of planets, yet it is twenty-seven thousand miles in circumference, and it would take two years and a half to traverse it completely at the rate of thirty miles a day.

The sun, being nearly three millions of miles in circumference, could not be traversed at the same rate of speed in less than two hundred and seventy-four years; yet this sun, so immeasurably greater than our universe, is supposed to be immeasurably less than certain of the fixed stars. Let us reflect, again, that the sun is distant from us at least ninety-five millions of miles. It is impossible to conceive in the mind so vast a space. Yet there are planets twenty times further removed from us than the sun; and even their distance is nothing, humanly speaking, in comparison with that of the fixed stars. The light of some of those stars, according to the opinion of astronomers, has not yet reached us, although it has been travelling towards us at the rate of twelve millions of miles a minute since the creation of the world. And each of those stars is the centre of a planetary system vastly greater than our own.

* Ps. xxxiv. 10.

† Ps. cxliv. 3.

Now, what are those millions of worlds that bewilder calculation or even conception when compared to God, their wonderful Maker? "Do I not fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?"* Thus all of us, according to our mode of understanding, are nothing but so many miserable atoms existing in this immense ocean of the essence of the Godhead.

"In Him we live, move, and be." †

All men, all the monarchs of the earth, and even all the saints and angels of heaven, confronted with the infinite greatness of God, are like or even smaller than a grain of sand in comparison with the earth. "Behold," says the Prophet Isaias, "the Gentiles are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the smallest grain of a balance; behold, the islands are as little dust. All nations are before Him as if they had no being at all." ‡

It is an utter impossibility for any human or angelic understanding to conceive an adequate idea of the greatness of God.

"First and Last of faith's receiving,
 Source and Sea of man's believing;
 God, whose might is all potential,
 God, whose truth is Truth's essential,
 Good supreme in Thy subsisting,
 Good in all Thy seen existing;
 Over all things, all things under,
 Touching all, from all asunder;
 Centre Thou, but not intruded,
 Compassing, and yet included;
 Over all, and not ascending,
 Under all, but not depending;
 Over all, the world ordaining,
 Under all, the world sustaining;
 All without, in all surrounding,
 All within, in grace abounding;

* Jerem. xxiii. 24.

† Acts xvii. 28.

‡ Isaias xl. 15, 17.

Inmost, yet not comprehended,
 Outer still, and not extended ;
 Over, yet on nothing founded,
 Under, but by space unbounded ;
 Omnipresent, yet indwelling,
 Self-impelled, the world impelling
 Force nor fate's predestination
 Sways Thee to one alteration ;
 Ours to-day, Thyself for ever,
 Still commencing, ending never ;
 Past with Thee is time's beginning,
 Present all its future winning ;
 With Thy counsel's first ordaining
 Comes Thy counsel's last attaining ;
 One the light's first radiance darting
 And the elements' departing."

But God is not only infinite in greatness, he is also infinite in liberality. To understand this in some measure, we must remember that the First Person of the Holy Trinity is called God the Father. Now, what do we principally consider and admire in a father? It is his great yearning to communicate himself and all his goods, as far as possible, to his children. This yearning of communicating himself and all his goods in our Heavenly *Father* is infinite—it is essential to His nature. This yearning culminates in the reproduction, or in the generating, of its own image. Hence, God, as Father, eternally generates another self, who is His Son, His most perfect image. He, together with His Son, sends forth a third self, proceeding from both, who is their reciprocal Love—the Holy Ghost—so that the one and the same divine Essence is quite the same in each of the three divine Persons.

“Of the Highest generated,
 And not by His Sire created,
 From before all time the Word

One God with the Father reigned,
By the right to Him pertained,
And by gift of none conferred.
Father One in Gospel-story,
One the First-Begotten's glory,
One the Holy Ghost's procession—
Three, but one to faith's confession,
Each Himself is God alone,
Yet not three, but one God only.
In this oneness, worshipped truly,
Three in one I worship duly ;
In their persons ever Three,
In their substance Unity ;
None of whom is less than other,
None is greater than another ;
In each one no variation,
Into each no transmutation ;
Each is God, and yet no blending,
Everlasting, without ending."

But as God the Father cannot multiply His infinitely simple divine essence, the infinite love which He bears to Himself prompted Him to the creation of things, which exist by Him and in Him, and yet are not Himself. He made them that He might lavish upon them His perfections to a certain degree. To some of these creatures He gave a rational spirit—to angels and men. Upon them He lavished His perfections in a more special manner. He created man according to His own image and likeness.

God the Father having begotten from all eternity His only Son, a perfect image of His own substance, and equal to Himself in all things, He wished also to form another image and likeness of Himself—a likeness as perfect as created nature could permit ; and wishing this, he created the human soul.

God created the heavens. He adorned the firmament with sun and moon and planets ; yet, to bring into being all

this wondrous work of wisdom and power, but one word was needed : God said, “ *Fiat* ”—“ Be it done ”—and all was done.

God created the earth ; He clothed it with herbs and trees and flowers ; and for all this work of wisdom and beauty but one act of the divine will was needed. God willed that it should be done, and it was done.

But when God created the immortal soul—that most stupendous of His works—He employed far different language. He no longer said, “ Be it done.” The three divine Persons of the ever-adorable Trinity seem to unite in council. They say : “ Let us make man in our own image and likeness.”

We should remember this : that our soul is the work of the power, the wisdom, and the love of the three adorable Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Our soul has come forth from the unutterable love of God’s heart. God is present entire in the whole world, and in every part of the world ; and the soul of man is present entire in his whole body, and in every part of his body. The soul is a spirit like God, it is one like God, it is indivisible like God, it is immortal like God.

The soul is not like those things which can be seen by the eye. No rational being ever said, “ I saw my soul,” because the soul is a spirit, which is not visible to the eyes of the body. The soul does not wear away like things in this world. It does not fade like a flower or like the colors of the rainbow. Hence we say the soul is immortal. That means it will never die as the body dies. The soul will not be nailed down in a coffin or buried in a grave. When the body dies, the soul will go out of this world to God, who made it.

We are created to live for ever. It is true we must die ; but it is only our body that is doomed to the grave, and that only for a time. Death does not destroy us ; it sepa-

rates only the soul from the body for a certain number of years. Hence a Christian poet exclaimed :

“ Cease, ye tearful mourners !
Thus your hearts to rend ;
Death is life’s beginning,
Rather than its end.

“ All the grave’s adornments
What do they declare,
Save that the departed
Are but sleeping there ?

‘ What though now to darkness
We this body give ?
Soon shall all its senses
Reawake and live.

“ Earth, to thy fond bosom
We this pledge entrust ;
Oh ! we pray be careful
Of the precious dust.

“ Here Eternal Wisdom
Lately made His home,
And again will claim it
For the days to come,

“ When thou must this body
Bone for bone restore,
Every single feature
Perfect as before.”

Ah ! yes, after awhile Almighty God will raise us again to life, that we may hear our eternal fate. This is the infallible doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ. “ Wonder not at this,” He says, “ for the hour cometh wherein all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they that have done good things, shall come forth unto the

resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."* This resurrection of the body will take place, as St. Paul assures us, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise again incorruptible." †

Our life, therefore, is not finished at the grave. We shall be for ever either in heaven or in hell. The infidel or great sinner may ridicule and deny this doctrine. But what will the denial of this truth avail him? It avails him just as little as, nay, even less than, it would avail a robber or a murderer to say, "I do not believe either in the existence of a policeman who can take me prisoner, or of a judge who can sentence me to death."

The man who denies his eternal existence is a liar. His lies will not change the decrees of the Almighty; they will not restrain the power of God; they will not prevent our Lord from carrying out his threats. Let the infidel say, "I do not believe in hell, in the immortality of the soul"; his disbelief will not save him from the eternal flames of hell, diminish the intensity of that fire, nor shorten its duration.

"What," exclaims St. Paul, "if some of them have not believed? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid. But God is true and every man is a liar." ‡ Will the sun shine less brilliantly because a man shuts his eyes, in order that he may not see its light? And will God and all the truths he has revealed be less true because an infidel, a great sinner, denies his truths?

Reason acknowledges the immortality of the soul; revelation speaks of it explicitly, and of the resurrection of the body, of the immortality and eternity of our whole being. "I believe the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." "And these shall go into everlasting punishment

* John v. 28, 29.

† 1 Cor. xv. 52.

‡ Rom. iii. 3.

but the just, into life everlasting.”* This is the unchangeable decree of the Almighty. “My counsel,” says He, “shall stand.” †

“Oh! say not that we die!
 Say not that we, whose heaven-born souls inherit
 Their life from Life, can ever pass away;
 That we, whose source is the Eternal Spirit,
 Can yield what is from God to slow decay.”

After a time, in which everything passes away, man shall enter upon an eternity in which nothing passes away. The heavens and the earth will pass, but God and the soul shall remain for ever. It has been decreed by God that eternity should be closely united to man’s being, as it is to His own. God and man shall live for ever.

When Jesus was alive on the earth, there was a certain man called Jairus. He had an only daughter, a girl twelve years old. This girl was dying. Jairus went to Jesus. He fell down on his knees before Him, and asked Him to come and cure his daughter. While Jairus was there, somebody came to him and told him that his daughter was dead! Jesus heard this, and He said to Jairus: “Do not be afraid; only believe, and your daughter shall be safe.” So Jesus went with Jairus to his house. They found people crying round the dead girl. Jesus told all the people to go out of the room except the father and mother of the girl, and His apostles. Then Jesus, who is almighty, took hold of the hand of the dead child, and said, “Girl, I say to thee, arise!” As soon as Jesus had said these words, her soul came back, and she rose up and walked! † You see how it was. The body died. But the Scripture says the soul *came back* from the other world; so the soul did not die with the body.

We have, then, a soul which is like God, which can sum

* Matt. xxv. 46.

† Isai. xlvi. 10

‡ Luke viii.

mon before it, in its thoughts, the past, the present, and the future ; which can think and reason ; which can will and choose whether it will do good or evil. " Before man is life and death, good and evil ; that which he shall choose shall be given him." *

Boleslaus IV., King of Poland, used to wear around his neck a golden medal that bore the image of his father stamped on it. Whenever he was about to do anything of importance, he took the medal in his hand, gazed at it with tearful eyes, and said, " O dearly-beloved father ! may I never do anything unworthy of thy royal name." Men glory in the nobility of their ancestry. They point with pride to the portraits of their forefathers who were renowned for their bravery, their wisdom, and their virtues. Men are honored because of the nobility of their origin. But if nobility of origin be esteemed an honor, what shall be said of the soul, whose origin is the noblest and most exalted that can be conceived ? Even the proudest on earth is born of man ; but the soul is born of God. St. Paul says, " We are his offspring." † The soul came forth as an ardent sigh of love from the intensely loving heart of God. It was God Himself, the King of kings, the God of infinite majesty and glory, who breathed into the face of Adam the breath of life, the living soul. Your soul and the soul of the meanest beggar are the image and likeness of God, the living expression of a divine idea treasured up in the mind of God from an eternity that knows no beginning.

The divine love for man was extreme, as it had been from all eternity. But it was only when the Son of God showed Himself a little one in a stable, on a bundle of straw, that the love of God truly appeared. From the beginning of the world men had seen the power of God in the creation and His wisdom in the government of the world ; but only in the Incarnation of the Word was it seen how great was

* Ecclus. xv

† Acts xvii. 28.

His love for man. Before God was seen made man upon earth, men could not form an idea of the divine goodness; therefore did He take mortal flesh, that, appearing as man, He might make plain to men the greatness of His benignity.

Alexander the Great, after he had conquered Darius and subdued Persia, wished to gain the affections of that people, and accordingly went about dressed in the Persian costume. In like manner would our dear Lord appear to act; in order to draw towards Him the affections of men, He clothed himself completely after the human fashion, and appeared made man. By this means He wished to make known to man the depth of the love which He bore him. Man does not love me, would God seem to say, because he does not see me; I wish to make myself seen by him, and to converse with him, and so make myself loved.

It was not enough for the divine love to have made us to His own image in creating the first man, Adam; He must also Himself be made to our image in redeeming us. Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, beguiled by the serpent, which suggested to Eve that if she ate of that fruit she should become like to God, acquiring the knowledge of good and evil; therefore the Lord then said: "Behold, Adam is become like one of us."* God said this ironically and to upbraid Adam for his rash presumption. But after the Incarnation of the Word of God we can truly say, Behold, God is become like one of us. "Look, then, O man!" exclaims St. Augustine, "thy God is made thy brother." He might have assumed the nature of an angel; but no, He would take on Himself thy very flesh, that thus He might give satisfaction to God with the very flesh (though sinless) of Adam the sinner. And He even gloried in this, oftentimes styling Himself the Son of Man; hence we have every right to call Him our brother.

It was an immeasurably greater humiliation for God to

* Gen. iii. 22.

become man than if all the princes of the earth, than if all the angels and saints of heaven, with the divine Mother herself, had been turned into a blade of grass or into a handful of clay. Yes, for grass, clay, princes, angels, saints, are all creatures ; but between the creature and God there is an infinite difference.

But the more God has humbled Himself for us in becoming man, so much the more has He made His goodness known to us. As the sportsman keeps in reserve the best arrow for the last shot, in order to secure his prey, so did God, among all his gifts, keep Jesus Christ in reserve till the fulness of time should come, and then He sent Him as a last dart to wound with His love the hearts of men.

“ In wisdom, God the Lord,
 Who by His potent Word
 The universe controls,
 Beheld us as we lay
 To guilt and grief a prey,
 And pitied our lost souls.

“ From His high throne above
 The Father sent in love
 His messenger to earth,
 That all things might be done
 As promised to the Son
 Before His wondrous birth.

“ Soon as the angel spoke
 The Virgin’s joy awoke.
 Hail ! favored one, for thou
 (Said he) shalt bear a Son,
 Both God and man in one,
 To whom shall all things bow .

“ Nor was it long delayed
 Before that Mother-maid
 Embraced her holy Child,

The sight of faithful men
Cheering the world again
With virtue undefiled."

"The Eternal Son of God was born
A man, on that illustrious morn ;
He whom the boundless heavens obey
Then in the lowly manger lay,
And then awoke the exultant hymn
From raptured choirs of cherubim.
No proud ones saw the glorious light
That burst upon the shepherd's sight ;
But, Jesse's Rod in bloom, behold
With myrrh and frankincense and gold,
Fit gifts, the Magi come from far,
Led on by Bethlehem's herald-star !"

It was in the life of Jesus Christ that God the Father made the effects of His goodness, love, and liberality for man appear in the most striking and most wonderful manner. We see these effects in the preaching of Christ, in His miracles, in His Passion and Death ; we see them in the mission of the Holy Ghost ; we see these effects in the holy Sacraments, especially in that of the holy Eucharist, in which God may be said to have exhausted His omnipotence, His wisdom, and His love for man ; finally, we see them in His most wonderful care for his Church in general and for each faithful soul in particular.

Again, in the act of justification, by which God frees the soul from sin and sanctifies her, He communicates Himself not only spiritually to the soul by grace and charity and other virtues, but He also communicates Himself really in giving the Holy Ghost. So that as Jesus Christ is the Son of God by nature, we, by grace, are made children of God, our sonship bearing the greatest resemblance to the divine Sonship. Behold the great things which divine love effects !

We are the sons of God ; as the Holy Scripture says : “ Ye are the sons of the living God.” *

This communication and overflow of God’s liberality is most wonderful for five reasons :

First. On account of the greatness and majesty of the Lover and Giver ; for who can be greater and more exalted than the Lord of heaven and earth ?

Second. On account of the condition of those to whom He communicates himself with all His gifts. By nature they are but men, the lowest of rational beings ; they are proud, ungrateful, carnal sinners, incapable of doing any good, and prone to every evil ; they are mortal, corrupt creatures, doomed to become one day the food of worms. “ What is man,” exclaims the Psalmist, “ that Thou art mindful of him ? or the son of man, that Thou visitest him ? ” †

Third. This liberality of God is wonderful on account of the manifold and extraordinary gifts which He partly confers on men and partly offers to them. These are a rational soul, created according to God’s own image and likeness ; divine grace ; the promise of glory ; the protection of His angels ; the whole visible world ; and, finally, His own well-beloved Son. “ For God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son ; that whoever believeth in Him might not perish, but might have life everlasting.” ‡

Fourth. This liberality of God is wonderful on account of the end for which He confers all these benefits—that is, for the happiness of man, and not for His own happiness ; for God does not expect to receive any gain or advantage from man.

Fifth. This liberality of God is wonderful on account of the *manner* in which He communicates Himself to men.

1. It is peculiar to God’s infinite love to lower Himself to what is vile and despicable, to heal what is ^{is} ~~said~~, to seek

* Osee i. 10.

† Ps. viii. 5.

‡ John iii. 16.



what is rejected, to exalt what is humble, and to pour out His riches where they are most needed.

2. He often communicates Himself even before He is asked, as He does in what are called preventing graces, by which He moves the soul to pray for subsequent ones.

3. When asked, He always gives more than is asked. The thief on the cross asked of Jesus Christ no more than to remember him in His kingdom; but Jesus Christ answered his prayer with the words: "Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise."

4. God often lavishes His gifts on those who, as he foresees, will be ungrateful for them; nay, He lavishes them even upon the impious, upon infidels, heretics, atheists, blasphemers, and reprobates, according to what our Lord says in the Gospel: "Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you . . . that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh His sun to rise upon the good and the bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust."*

Who can, after these reflections, refrain from exclaiming. "Truly, the liberality of God is most wonderful! Who can comprehend its width, its height, its depth? It is fathomless, like the Divinity itself!"

Yes, the greatness and liberality of God are fathomless. The Eternal Father has made the heavens to give us light and rain; the fire to give us warmth; the air to preserve our life; the earth to produce for us various kinds of fruit; the sea to yield us fish; the animals for our food and clothing. God the Son has given Himself to us upon the Cross, and daily gives Himself to us at every Mass and at every holy Communion. The Holy Ghost gives himself to us in baptism, in confirmation, and whenever we receive any other sacrament worthily. So prodigal has God become of Himself, because He is the greatest, the kindest, and most liberal of Fathers!

* Matt. v. 45.

O man ! whoever thou art, thou hast witnessed the love which God has borne thee in becoming man, in suffering and dying for thee, and in giving Himself as food to thee. How long will it be before God shall know by experience and by deeds the love thou bearest Him ? Truly, indeed, every man at the sight of God clothed in flesh, and choosing to lead a life of such duration, to suffer a death of such ignominy, to dwell a loving prisoner in our churches, ought to be enkindled with love towards one so loving. " Oh ! that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, and wouldst come down : the mountains would melt away at Thy Presence, the waters would burn with fire."* Oh ! that Thou wouldst deign, my God ! (thus cried out the prophet, before the arrival of the divine Word upon earth) to leave the heavens, and to descend here to become man amongst us ! On beholding Thee like one of themselves, the mountains would melt away ; that is, men would surmount all obstacles, all difficulties, in observing Thy laws and Thy counsels ; the waters would burn with fire ! Surely, Thou wouldst enkindle such a furnace in the human heart that even the most frozen souls would catch the flame of Thy blessed love ! And, in truth, after the Incarnation of the Son of God, how brilliantly has the fire of divine love shone to many living souls ! It may be asserted even, without fear of contradiction, that God was more beloved in one century after the coming of Jesus Christ than in the entire forty centuries preceding. How many youths, how many of the nobly born, how many monarchs, have abandoned wealth, honor, and their very kingdoms, to seek the desert or the cloister, that there, in poverty and obscure seclusion, they might the more unreservedly give themselves up to the love of this their Saviour ! How many martyrs have gone rejoicing and making merry on their way to torments and to death ! How many tender virgins have refused the

* *Isaias* lxiv. 1, 2

proffered hands of the great ones of this world, in order to go and die for Jesus Christ, and so repay, in some measure, the affection of a God who stooped down to become incarnate, die for love of them, and stay with them as their perpetual Victim on our altars, even to become the food and drink of their souls. The constant remembrance of what God had done for them made them generously repel the most insidious temptations of the flesh, the world, and the devil. The flesh was answered when it spoke :

“ ‘ Sweet, thou art pale.’ ‘ More pale to see
Christ hung upon the cruel tree,
And bore His Father’s wrath for me.’

“ ‘ Sweet, thou art sad.’ ‘ Beneath a rod
More heavy Christ, for my sake, trod
The wine-press of the wrath of God.’

“ ‘ Sweet, thou art weary.’ ‘ Not so Christ,
Whose mighty love of me sufficed
For strength, salvation, Eucharist.’

“ ‘ Sweet, thou art footsore.’ ‘ If I bleed,
His feet have bled ; yea, in my need
His heart once bled for mine indeed.’ ”

The world was answered when it spoke :

“ ‘ Sweet, thou art young.’ ‘ So He was young
Who for my sake in silence hung
Upon the cross, with passion wrung.’

“ ‘ Look, thou art fair.’ ‘ He was more fair
Than men who deigned for me to wear
A visage marred beyond compare.’

“ ‘ And thou hast riches.’ ‘ Daily bread ;
All else is His who, living, dead,
For me lacked where to lay His head.’

“ ‘And life is sweet.’ ‘It was not so
To Him whose cup did overflow
With mine unutterable woe.’ ”

And the devil was answered when he spoke :

“ ‘Thou drinkest deep.’ ‘When Christ would sup,
He drained the dregs from out my cup ;
So how should I be lifted up ?

“ ‘Thou shalt win glory.’ ‘In the skies :
Lord Jesus, cover up mine eyes,
Lest they should look on vanities.’

“ ‘Thou shalt have knowledge.’ ‘Helpless dust !
In Thee, O Lord ! I put my trust ;
Answer Thou for me, Wise and Just !’

“ ‘And might.’ ‘Get thee behind me ! Lord,
Who hast redeemed and not abhorred
My soul, oh ! keep it by Thy word.’

Yes, all this is most true ; but now comes a tale for tears. Has this been the case with all men ? Have all sought thus to correspond with this immense love of their God and Father ? Alas ! the greater part have combined to repay Him with nothing but ingratitude ! Hence His just complaint about so many of His children : “ Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth. I have brought up children, and exalted them : but they have despised me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib ; but Israel hath not known me, and my people hath not understood. Woe to the sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a wicked seed, ungracious children : they have forsaken the Lord.” * Alas ! that this complaint of the Lord applies to so many souls. Alas ! that the heart of God is an abyss of fathomless goodness and liberality, and the heart of man an abyss of sin and iniquity.

* *Isaias* i. 2-4.

St. Paul exclaimed: "If any man does not love our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema"—let him be accursed. Let him be accursed by God the Father, accursed by God the Son, accursed by God the Holy Ghost. Let him be accursed by angels and by men. Let him be accursed by the very demons in hell. Let him be accursed by *all creatures* for refusing to love our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ.

Such is the language that the great Apostle St. Paul, the ardent lover of the Lord, uses towards all who refuse to turn upon their God the force of that ever-active principle of love within them, which will never suffer them to rest, which was implanted in them by their Creator, and which they are their own greatest enemies if they do not direct to **Him**.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRODIGAL'S CHOICE—END OF MAN.

IT is told of the Japanese that when the Gospel was announced to them, while they were being instructed on the sublimity, the beauty, and the infinite amiability of God, the great mysteries of religion, all that God had done for man—God born in poverty, God suffering, God dying for love of them and for their salvation—they exclaimed in a transport of joy and admiration: “Oh! how great, how good and amiable, is the God of the Christians!” When they heard that there was an express command to love God, and a threatened punishment for not loving Him, they were surprised. “What!” said they, “a command given to reasonable men to love the God who has loved us so much? Why, is it not the greatest happiness to love Him, and the greatest of misfortunes not to love Him? What! are not the Christians always at the foot of the altars of their God, penetrated with a deep sense of His goodness, and inflamed with His holy love?” And when they were given to understand that there were Christians who not only did not love God, but even offended and outraged Him, “O unworthy people! O ungrateful hearts!” exclaimed they in their indignation. “Is it possible? In what accursed land dwell those men devoid of hearts and feelings?”

We wonder at these sentiments of the Japanese Christians. But does not our own heart condemn ingratitude? Does it not condemn the conduct of the prodigal son? He was unwilling to live in his father's house, in the society of a

good and wise brother, in the midst of domestic occupations. He thought it happier to be independent of all restraint, to follow the desires of his heart without let or hindrance. We condemn him for all this—for his monstrous ingratitude. But let us look first into our own hearts. Does this unnatural son stand alone? Has he no imitators? Are there not many who, like him, seek their happiness in the blind pursuit of the riches, pleasures, and honors of this world, and lose sight of God, their Heavenly Father? And why do they do this? Because, like the prodigal, they never reflect seriously on the noble end for which they were created. They never say :

“ And let us ask whence we have come,
And what and where we are, and why
We live, and where will be our home,
And seek a practical reply.”

Let us go into the streets of any large city and look around us. There are stately buildings, and gay equipages, and brilliant shops; but even these are nothing to the concourse of human beings, the crowd of immortal souls, passing to and fro, daily working out an immortal destiny of good or evil. There is an old man tottering along the street; there is a child on the way to school; there is a young lady going abroad to display her finery; there is the unhappy victim of want and sorrow; there is, too, the hardy laborer going to his daily toil. Now, each one in the hurrying throng has a soul, and that soul will live for ever. The tide of human beings flows on, day after day, from morning till night. New faces continually appear; they come and go. We know not their history; we know not their destiny; but we know that each one has a spiritual nature, an immortal soul, created in God's own image. Many of these persons we shall never meet again in this world; but the day will come when we shall meet them all

again—not one shall be missing. New generations shall come in the place of those who now inhabit the world. All these grand buildings, these brilliant shops, shall be reduced to ashes—nay, the world itself shall pass away; but every soul now living in this city shall live for ever, even when all else shall be changed or destroyed. They shall live for ever because their souls are immortal.

Now, very few people ever think about their future destiny. Of the greater part of men it is true what a poet said:

“ I loved the beauty of the earth,
 The brightness of the skies;
 Life wooed me with its careless mirth,
 My birthright and my prize.

“ I loved in smooth, self-chosen ways
 To guide my wayward feet;
 I courted men's unmeaning praise:
 Their smile was all too sweet.

“ The light of heaven shone pale and dim
 Upon my earth-bound sight;
 The echo of the seraph's hymn
 For me had no delight.

“ My life and treasure they were here,
 My throbbing pulse beat high,
 My step was free, my glance was clear
 With youth's gay buoyancy.”

Only those who are wise often ask themselves the great question, Why am I in this world

Hear what the monks do. At mid-day they go into the church, and, kneeling down, they ask themselves the great question, Why did God create me? Have I this morning been doing what God created me for? The night comes, and again on their knees in the church they ask themselves the great question, Why did God create me? Did I this

afternoon do what God created me for? Once a month there is an entire day devoted to nothing else than to put to themselves the great question, "Why did God create me?" Have I this month been doing what God created me for? Once every year there are ten days of silence. During that time they do not preach, they hear no confession, they do not speak to any human being. They spend the entire ten days in asking themselves the great question, "Why did God create me?" Have I this year been doing what God created me for? This question, "Why did God create me?" is a question which men of true wisdom often put to themselves. So if they read, if they eat, if they walk, through the works of the day, through the silence of the night, the great thought comes before them, "Why did God create me?"

"Therefore, when this clause thou readest,
See that thou the lesson heedest :
Man, thy life is figured clear ;
In what state thou camest hither,
What to-day thou art, and whither
Tend thy steps, examine here."

Did God create us simply that we might make money and become rich? I go into a great town—New York, or Philadelphia, or St. Louis, or Chicago. I see many people walking about everywhere. There is something in their faces which shows that they are not idle; that they have some great business, some great thing to do. There seems to be something which takes up their thoughts and fills their whole soul.

I stop one of these people and speak to him. "My good man," I say to him, "tell me what is it—what is the great business, the great affair, which fills all your thoughts and takes up all your time?" "My great affair," he answers, "the great affair I have to do, is *to get money, to be rich.*" I go on further. I see a little boy running along

the street. I say to him, "Stop a moment, my boy; what is the matter? What are you running for?" "I am running on an errand," the boy answers. "And why do you run on an errand?" The boy answers: "*I want to get money.*" I pass on and walk into a shop. I see there a man, very busy from morning till night. His whole time is filled up; he has scarcely a moment to get anything to eat. I say to him: "Why do you work so hard all the days of your life? What is it for? What is to be the end of it? What do you want?" He answers: "*I want to get money and to be rich.*" So the will, and the memory, and the understanding, and the thoughts, and the desires of men are always turning on money, as the earth is always turning on its axis. So it is with all, young and old, rich and poor, everywhere, in every place, from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof. I stop, then, for a moment, and again I ask myself the great question: "*Why did God create us?* What is the great thing we have to do on this earth?" And when I see all men spending all their time, and breath, and strength, and health, and life in trying to get money, I say to myself: "Perhaps this is what God created us for—the great thing we have to do is—to get money, to be rich." Is it so? Let us see.

Our divine Saviour tells us that there lived once, in a certain city, a very rich man. He was so rich that he himself hardly knew what he possessed. He had gold and silver, lands and possessions, without end. He lived in a splendid house, which was furnished with everything that was rich and magnificent. There were carpets from Persia, and curtains of rich velvet; ornaments of snow-white ivory, and precious stones and sparkling gems. Every day this man feasted sumptuously. The richest wines, the most delicate meats, were on his table. Every one called this rich man happy, and when the people passed his house they stopped to look at it, saying with a sigh, "How happy must this man

be ! I wish I were as rich." But see what became of him. One day the rich man fell sick. Sickness, you know, comes to the rich as well as to the poor. The doctor was sent for in haste. He came ; and when he saw the sick man, he said : "Oh ! it is nothing ; I will give you some medicine, and you will be well again in a few days." The rich man was very happy when he heard this ; for he did not wish to die. He took the medicine. A few days passed by ; the rich man was a corpse. He died ; and, as our divine Saviour Himself assures us, he was buried in hell. The body of this rich man was laid out on a fine bed, but yet it was just as stiff and cold as the corpse of any poor man ; for in death all men are equal. His body was laid out on a fine bed, and his soul was laid on a bed of fire. There was mourning in that grand house because the rich man was gone. The people walked about the rooms in mournful silence, and if they spoke it was only in a low whisper, as if they feared to awaken the dead man. There was no waking for him any more. He slept the sleep that knows no waking. He had slept the sleep of death, and awoke—in hell ! But the upper end of the chamber is bright with lights. There you can see a splendid coffin. It is made of the richest wood, and covered with folds of rich velvet, all glittering with silver and gold. The inside of that coffin is lined with satin and silk and fringe of gold. How happy must the rich man have been to have such a coffin ! Yes, this splendid coffin is for his body ; but his soul is enclosed in a coffin of burning fire—the ever-burning fire of hell. His friends and relatives are standing round his coffin, and they say : "What a beautiful coffin !" But the demons of hell are standing round the soul of this rich man, and they shout amid shrieks and blasphemies : "What a splendid coffin ! A hot, burning coffin for the soul of this rich man !" It is a terrible fate to be for ever burning in hell—for ever tormented by the demons. But why was the rich man con-

demned to hell? Because he made a great mistake. He thought, like so many others, that he was placed here on earth merely to grow rich and enjoy himself. What will riches avail us at the last hour? When we come to lie on our death-bed, can we say to ourselves, "I have labored hard in my lifetime, and worked much, and am rich; I am going to die; and because I am rich, I die happy"? Here is the answer to the question: "The rich man died, and was buried in hell!" It is very hard for the rich to enter heaven. Jesus Christ has declared that "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go into heaven."* Therefore, to get money and be rich is not the great thing in this world. It was not for this that God created us. Is it possible to think that God created man for that which often ruins him?

God, then, did not create us to get money and to be rich. Therefore those people are mistaken who live in this world as if the one great object of life was to get money. Death will come, and their money will pass away into other hands. In one moment they will go down into hell. When they are buried in hell, they will find out the mistake of their lives. "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world if he lose his own soul?" †

"See how the world before our eyes
Is speeding to decay!
See how its painted vanities
Are withering fast away!
How into dark and darker shades
Its evanescent glory fades!"

Many people think that the great object of life is to eat and drink and enjoy themselves. "Their god is their belly; their end is destruction." † There was once a man who spoke thus to himself: "My soul, we have much goods laid

* Luke xviii.

† Matt. xvi.

‡ Phil. iii.

up for many years ; let us eat and drink and enjoy ourselves.”* When it was night, Almighty God came to that man and said to him : You fool, you fool, because you thought that you were made to eat and drink and enjoy yourself—you fool, because you did not know what you were created for—“you fool, this night you will die ; and those goods which you have laid up for many years, whose shall they be ?” † “The number of fools is infinite.” ‡

Then why are we in this world ? Why did God create us ? Was it to acquire praise and honor ? There is a man whose heart thirsts for praise and honor. He labors through sleepless nights and weary days. Year after year he watches and toils, till at last he obtains what his heart has craved so long. Praises and honors are showered upon him. His name is on every lip. But is he happy ? Is his weary heart at rest ? Ah ! no. Every new honor brings new cares. Envy and jealousy pursue him. His heart ever thirsts for more honors. He yearns to climb still higher and higher.

King Solomon, in the search after happiness, devoted his mind to the gratification of every desire of his heart. “I said in my heart: I will go, and abound with delights and enjoy good things. I made me great works, I built me houses, and planted vineyards. I made gardens, and orchards, and set them with trees of all kinds, and I made me ponds of water, to water therewith the wood of the young trees. I got me men-servants, and maid-servants, and had a great family : and herds of oxen, and great flocks of sheep, above all that were before me in Jerusalem : I heaped together for myself silver and gold, and the wealth of kings, and provinces: I made me singing men, and singing women, and the delights of the sons of men: cups and vessels to serve to pour out wine: and I surpassed in riches all that were before me in Jerusalem : my wisdom also remained with me. And whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them

* Luke xii.

† Luke xii.

‡ Eccles. i.

not: and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure, and delighting itself in the things which I had prepared: and esteemed this my portion, to make use of my own labor.”

After such ample enjoyment of all earthly pleasures, might we not think that Solomon was happy indeed? Nevertheless, he tells us that his heart was not satisfied, and that he felt himself more miserable than before. “And when I turned myself,” he says, “to all the works which my hands had wrought, and to the labors wherein I had labored in vain, I saw in all things *vanity*, and vexation of mind, and that nothing was lasting under the sun.” *

What happened to Solomon happens still, in one shape or form, to every man. Hence a Christian poet writes :

“ Oh ! what is all earth's round,
 Brief scene of man's proud strife and vain endeavor,
 Weighed with that deep profound, that tideless ocean river.
 That onward bears time's fleeting forms for ever ? ”

Give to the man whose dream, whose waking thought, day and night, is to grow rich ; to live in splendor and luxury ; whose life is spent in planning, and thinking, and toiling—give all the kingdoms of the earth, all the gold of the mountains, all the pearls of the ocean. Give him the desire of his heart. Will he be happy? Will his heart be at rest! Ah! no. He will find that riches are like thorns; that they only wound and burn. They seem sweet when beheld at a distance; but indulge in them, and at once you taste their bitterness. All the goods and pleasures of this world are like a fisher's hook. The fish is glad while it swallows the bait and spies not the hook; but no sooner has the fisherman drawn up his line than it is tormented within, and soon after comes to destruction from the very bait in which it so much rejoiced. So it is with all those who esteem

themselves happy in their temporal possessions. In their comforts and honors they have swallowed a hook. But a time will come when they shall experience the greatness of the torment which they have swallowed in their greediness.

Now, why is it that the riches and pleasures of this world cannot make us happy? It is because the soul was not created by and for them, but by God, for Himself. Therefore it is the enjoyment of God alone that can make the soul happy.

A thing is made better only by that which is better than the thing itself. Inferior beings can never make superior beings better. The soul, being immortal, is superior to all earthly things. Earthly things, then, cannot make the soul better. Hence it is that here on earth we are never satisfied. We always crave for something more, something higher, something better. Whence comes this continual restlessness that haunts us through life and pursues us even to the grave? It is the home-sickness of the soul; its craving after a Good that is better and more excellent than the soul herself is. God alone is this Good, He being Supreme Goodness itself. He who possesses God may be said to possess the goodness of all other things; for whatever goodness they possess they have from God.

“In spring the green leaves shoot,
 In spring the blossoms fall,
 With summer falls the fruit,
 The leaves in autumn fall;
 Contented from the bough
 They drop; leaves, blossoms now,
 And ripened fruit—the warm earth takes them all.

“Thus all things ask for rest—
 A home above, a home beneath the sod:
 The sun will seek the west,
 The bird will seek its nest,
 The heart another breast
 Whereon to lean; the spirit seeks its God.”

Where, then, are we to seek true nappiness? In God alone. No doubt God has reserved to Himself far more than He has bestowed upon creatures. This truth admitted, it necessarily follows that he who enjoys God possesses, in Him, all other things; and consequently the very same delight which he would have taken in other things, had he enjoyed them separately, he enjoys in God, in a far greater measure and in a more elevated manner. For this reason, St. Francis of Assisium used to exclaim, "My God and my All"—a saying to which he was so accustomed that he could scarcely think of anything else, and often spent whole nights in meditating on this truth. So also St. Teresa would exclaim, "God alone is sufficient!"

Certainly, true contentment is that which is found in the Creator, and not that which is found in the creature—a contentment which no man can take from the soul, and in comparison with which all other joy is sadness, all pleasure sorrow, all sweetness bitter, all beauty ugliness, all delight affliction. It is most certain that "when face to face, we shall see God as He is"; we shall have perfect joy and happiness. The more closely, then, we are united with God in this life, the more contentment of mind and the greater happiness of soul shall we enjoy; and this contentment and joy is of the self-same nature as that which we shall have in heaven. The only difference consists in this: that here our joy and happiness is in an incipient state, whilst there it will be brought to perfection. Therefore the idea, the very essence, of all happiness is to be united with God as closely as possible. Hence it is that St. Augustine, who had tasted all pleasures, exclaimed: "Thou hast made me, O God! for Thyself; and my heart was uneasy within me until it found its rest in Thee!"

Now, when is it that we possess God, are closely united with Him, and find our rest in Him? It is only when we really do His holy will.

This God gave us to understand in express terms when He said to Adam: "And of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death."*

By this commandment man was clearly given to understand that the continuation of his happiness, for time and eternity, depended upon his obedience to the will of God. To be free from irregular affections and disorderly passions, and to transmit his happiness to his posterity, was entirely in his power. If he made a right use of his liberty by always following the law of God; if he preserved unsullied the image and likeness of his Creator and Heavenly Father; if, in fine, he made a proper use of the creatures confided to his care, he would receive the crown of life everlasting in reward for his fidelity. But if he swerved even for a moment from this loving will of God, he would subject himself to the law of God's justice, which would not fail to execute the threatened punishment.

But did God, perhaps, afterwards, in consideration of the Redemption, lay down other and easier conditions for man's happiness and salvation? No. He did not change these conditions in the least. Man's happiness still depended on his obedience to the divine will. "Now if thou wilt hear the voice of the Lord thy God, to do and keep all His commandments, the Lord thy God will make thee higher than all the nations of the earth, and all these blessings shall come unto thee and overtake thee: yet so if thou hear His precepts."† And our divine Saviour says: "You are my friends, if you do the things that I command you."‡ And again: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven."§ He Himself gave the example, having been obedient even unto the death of the cross,

* Gen. ii. 17. † Deut. xxviii. 1, 2. ‡ John xv. 15. § Matt. vii. 21.

thereby teaching all men that their happiness and salvation depend on their constant obedience to the will of their Heavenly Father. All men without exception were made by God to be happy with Him for ever in heaven, on this one condition: "He that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter the kingdom of heaven." The answer, then, to the great question, "Why did God create me?" is to know God, to love Him, and serve Him according to His holy will.

Man, when leading a life contrary to God's will, is altogether out of his place. A tool which no longer corresponds to the end for which it was made is cast away; a wheel which prevents others from working is taken out and replaced by another; a limb in the body which becomes burdensome, and endangers the functions and life of the others, is cut off and thrown away; a servant who no longer does his master's will is discharged; a rebellious citizen, violating the laws of the state, is put into prison; a child in unreasonable opposition to his parents is disinherited. Thus men naturally hate and reject what is unreasonable or useless, or opposed to, and destructive of, good order, whether natural or moral. What more natural, then, than that the Lord of heaven and earth, the author of good sense and of good order, should bear an implacable hatred to disobedience to His holy will?

The man in opposition to the will of God suffers as many pangs as a limb which has been dislocated; he is continually tormented by evil spirits, who have power over a soul that is out of its proper sphere of action; he is no longer under the protection of God, since he has withdrawn from His will, the rule for man's guidance, and has voluntarily left His watchful Providence. God sent Jonas, the prophet, to Ninive, and he wished to go to Tarsus. He was buffeted by the tempest, cast into the sea, and swallowed by a monster of the deep! Behold what shall come on those who

abandon God's will to follow their own passions and inclinations. They shall be tossed, like Jonas, by continual tempests; they will remain like one in a lethargy, in the hold of their vessels, unconscious of sickness or danger, until they perish in the stormy sea, and are swallowed up in hell! "Know thou, and see that it is a bitter and fearful thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God, when He desired to lead thee in the way of salvation, and that my fear is not with thee, saith the Lord God of hosts."

God grants to the devil great power over the disobedient. As the Lord permitted a lion to kill a prophet in Juda in punishment for his disobedience to the voice of the Lord, so He permits the infernal lion to assail the proud and the disobedient everywhere with the most filthy temptations, which they feel themselves too weak to resist, and thus fall a prey to his rage. Unless they repent soon, like Jonas, of their sin of idolatry, as it were, they will not be saved, as was the prophet, but will perish in the waves of temptations and sink into the fathomless abyss of hell.

Disobedience to God's will turned the rebellious angels out of heaven; it turned our first parents out of Paradise; it made Cain a vagabond and a fugitive on earth; it drowned the human race in the waters of the deluge; it brought destruction upon the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrhah. Disobedience to the will of God led the Jews often into captivity; it drowned Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea; it turned Nabuchodonosor into a wild beast; it laid the city of Jerusalem in ashes; it has ruined, and will still ruin, whole nations, empires, and kingdoms; it will finally put an end to the world, when all those who always rebelled against the will of God will, in an instant, be hurled into the everlasting flames of hell by these irresistible words of the Almighty: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the

devil and his angels," there to obey the laws of God's justice for ever.

It was, on the contrary, for his obedience to the will of God that Abel obtained from the Lord the testimony that he was just; that Henoah was translated by God in order that he should not see death. On account of his obedience to the will of God, Noe and his family were saved from the Deluge; Abraham became the father of many nations; Joseph was raised to the highest dignity at the court of the King of Egypt. For the same reason Moses became the great servant, prophet, and lawgiver of the land, and the great worker of miracles with the people of God. Obedience to the will of God was, for the Jews, at all times, an impregnable rampart against all their enemies; it turned a Saul, a persecutor of the Church, into a Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles; it turned the early Christians into martyrs—for martyrdom does not consist in suffering and dying for the faith; it consists, rather, in the conformity of the martyr's will to the divine will, which requires such a kind of death, and not another. Nay, Jesus Christ has declared that it is by obedience to the will of His Heavenly Father that every one becomes His brother, His sister, and even His mother. "Whosoever," he says, "shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother."*

To serve God according to His will is the principal end of life. To regulate all the affairs of the universe, to be always successful in all our desires, to heap up all the riches of the world, obtain royal dignities, extend our possessions beyond bounds, without having rendered our Creator the service which is due Him, is, in the judgment of heaven, to have done nothing, to have lived on the earth in vain. On the other hand, to have done nothing for the world, to have always languished on a sick-bed, to have been despised by

* Matt. xii. 50.

all our fellow-men, to have lived in some obscure abode, but to have served God throughout, would be enough, because we should have conducted to its last end the only thing for which this present life was given us.

The remembrance of this truth has more than once rendered the wisdom of children superior to that of old men. In a tender age St. Teresa retired into a solitary place, and spoke to herself thus : “ Teresa, you will be either eternally happy or eternally unhappy ! Choose which you please.” Young Stanislas de Kostka gave all to God and nothing to the world. Being asked why he acted so strangely, “ I am not made for this world,” he replied, “ but for the world to come.” Let the world cry out against this truth ; let the flesh revolt against it ; let all the demons deny and oppose it—it is and remains an immortal truth that we were created by God to serve Him in this world according to His will, and in reward for this service to possess Him for ever in the next, or to be punished in hell for ever for having refused to obey the Lord. Who but an atheist would dare deny this truth ?

CHAPTER V.

THE PRODIGAL'S DEPARTURE—MORTAL SIN.

AFTER the prodigal son had received his portion of the inheritance, he left the father by whom he was so much loved. He turned his back upon the home where he had everything in abundance. He went into a far country, which was strange to him. In a short time, he had spent the whole of his inheritance; he soon was poor and naked; he suffered great want, and was dying of hunger. Abandoned by those on whom and in whose company he had dissipated all his wealth, he entered into service with one of the inhabitants of the country. Here he was cruelly treated, and sent into the field to tend the swine. He had at last become a vile slave—a wretched swineherd—barefoot, bare-headed, and dressed in tattered garments. To satisfy the cravings of hunger, he was willing to eat the husks of swine, but they were refused him. What a shameful degradation! Yet what a terrible and truthful picture of the state of every one who has strayed away from God, to lead a life of sin!

God made us to His own image and likeness. He bestowed upon us an intelligence and a will, a heart and a conscience, so that we are intelligent and moral beings. The malice of sin consists in this: that an intelligent creature, having the power of will, deliberately and consciously opposes the will of its Maker, and thus becomes, like Lucifer, a rebel spirit against God.

To understand, then, what sin is, it would be necessary for us to understand the greatness of God Himself. Evil

must be considered to be so much the greater, the greater the good is to which it is opposed ; its sickness is the more dangerous, the more it is calculated to destroy life. Now, God is the Supreme Good. The only evil opposed to Him is sin, especially mortal sin. Mortal sin, therefore, is, as it were, as incomprehensible as God, the Supreme Good, to whom it is opposed. Thus we shall never be able to comprehend the great evil and malice of sin, because we shall never be able to understand what God is. But though it be true that we shall never be able thoroughly to understand the malice of mortal sin, we may obtain some idea of it by considering mortal sin in its effects. Sin is called mortal or deadly, because it kills the soul. When God forbade Adam to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He said : " On what day soever thou shalt eat of the fruit of this tree, thou shalt die." Those same words God addresses to every one of us : " On what day soever thou shalt eat of the fruit of sin, on what day soever thou shalt break one of my commandments, thou shalt die." If, for instance, we stay away from Mass, through our own fault, on a Sunday or holyday of obligation, if we wilfully eat meat on Friday or fast-day, if we take wilful pleasure in an immodest thought, though it be but for a moment, the sentence is passed against us, " Thou shalt die." The moment we have committed a mortal sin, we are morally dead.

But the sinner may ask : " How can I be dead ? My face is not pale, no coffin is brought, no grave is dug for me. I can eat, laugh, talk, and walk about just as well as I did before the mortal sin was committed. How, then, can I be dead ?" Ah ! there is a death far more terrible than the death of the body. It is the death of the soul. And as truly as the God of Heaven has said it, the man who has fallen into mortal sin is dead, for " the soul that sinneth, shall die." *

* *Ezech. xviii.*

The soul has a twofold life : the one natural, the other supernatural. The natural life of the soul cannot be lost—cannot be lost even in hell. The supernatural life of the soul, which is called the life of grace, is the life received in baptism, and this life is destroyed by mortal sin. God Himself is this life. The very instant a mortal sin is committed, God leaves the soul, and it is struck dead. The time of temptation came. It was a fearful time for the poor soul. The devils were near to tempt. But God and His angels were there also to assist. A single prayer, a single good desire, would have saved the soul. But no ! the sinner closed his eyes to the light, stifled the voice of conscience, turned away from God and His angels, consented to sin ; and the immortal soul, the noblest of God's works, created to the image and likeness of the Most High God, redeemed by the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, was crushed and ruined. And who benefited by its ruin ? The devil. The wailings of the angels were not heard from Heaven ; nor did the blasphemies of the demons of hell fall upon the ear. Yet a far more terrible ruin had been wrought than would result from the collapse of the entire universe. After that mortal sin had been committed, did not the stones cry out from the walls against the dead soul ? Did not the beasts of the field shun the sinner ? Did not the people in the street shriek as it passed, and flee, horror-stricken, from the dead soul ? No ; all went on as usual, as though a mortal offence had not been committed against God. But there is One in Heaven who sees the leprosy of that soul, and hates the sin with an infinite hatred, as He punishes it with an everlasting punishment.

If a member of our family dies, we weep and put on mourning. If a friend or acquaintance dies, we are grieved ; nay, if a senseless beast sinks in the field and dies, for the dead beast there is sorrow. But if a member of our family kills his soul by mortal sin ; if his immortal soul, created to

the image and likeness of God, dies, not a tear is shed, not a moan is uttered, not a word of sorrow is spoken. Father or brother, husband or child, has lost Mass through his own fault on Sunday; he has drunk to excess, or he has consented to a wicked thought, or he has committed a sinful action, and he goes to his home with a dead soul—a soul killed by mortal sin. When he opens the door, and brings a dead soul into the midst of us—and a soul in which, instead of purity, there is impurity; instead of justice, there is injustice; instead of truth, there is falsehood; instead of mercy, there is cruelty; instead of meekness, there is anger; instead of the perfections of God, there is the direct contrary of those perfections—do we cry out in lamentation? Do we fly in terror from the murderer of his own soul? Not so. But were God to open our eyes, and show us the hideousness of a dead soul, we should die of terror. Had we light to discover the real deformity of sin, we could not behold it and live. “One sin,” says St. John Chrysostom, “has rendered the demons so horrible, that if God should cause them to appear visibly before us, the sight of them would strike us dead.” St. Frances of Rome says she would willingly have cast herself into a burning furnace to avoid the sight of a demon that had appeared to her. St. Catherine of Sienna assures us that she would rather walk through flames than behold for the shortest space one of those hideous forms. God showed one day, to St. Francis of Assisium, a soul in the state of mortal sin. The great saint was so frightened at it that he took flight, and hid himself in a dark corner.

Many centuries ago there was a certain man condemned to suffer an extraordinary punishment. A dead body, black as if it had died of the black cholera, was taken out of the grave and fastened in such a manner to the body of the unhappy man that it was impossible for him to free himself from it. The poor wretch shrieked and shook with horror

when he saw the terrible burden that he was condemned to bear. But when he felt its cold weight pressing upon him, the shudder of death froze the very blood in his veins. In the light of the day, he saw the frightful load of black death; in the darkness of the night that dead body was his only companion. It soon began to rot, and the stench of it became intolerable. The worms came out of the corpse and crawled over the body of the unhappy man. They crept into his ears and eyes; they crept into his mouth and nostrils. Never was there so shocking a sight. The people who saw this man at a distance shrieked with terror and ran away. The very beasts fled from him when he passed. At last the unfortunate man lost his senses, and finally death came mercifully and relieved him of his horrible load.

Those who are in a state of mortal sin carry about with them day and night a load far more loathsome than a dead body. They carry a dead soul, that is rotten and corrupting in mortal sin. The better a thing is in itself, the more detestable it becomes when it is corrupted; and as there is nothing under heaven so precious as a human soul, there is nothing, consequently, so thoroughly detestable and hideous as a soul destroyed by mortal sin. To form some idea of a soul in the state of mortal sin, go to the graveyard; gaze at the corpses as they rot in their graves.

In the neighborhood of a certain city there is a large burial-ground, having a number of deep vaults, each large enough to hold hundreds of coffinless bodies. It is the custom in this city to throw the dead bodies into the vaults. One day a corpse was brought out to be buried. The large stone that covered the mouth of the vaults was taken away, and one of the bystanders looked down into the vaults. He beheld a horrible sight. There in the vaults lay hundreds of corpses, some with faces upturned, others with faces prone to the earth. Some were leaning against the wall; and some with white skeleton hands stretched out, as if pointing

in solemn warning to the end of all earthly beauty and greatness. Here were the yellow, shapeless skulls, grinning in horrible mockery; there the eyes dropping out of their sockets, the ears falling off, the long hair scattered about, the bones piercing through the livid skin. This immense mass was of every color, from pale to black. In some the flesh was hard, in others it was dissolved like water. There were thousands and thousands of reptiles feeding on the bodies. The stench that rose up from the vault was so repulsive that the man who looked down had to turn away quickly or he would have dropped dead.

But what is even this mass of corruption compared to the shocking corruption of a soul in a state of mortal sin? Here is how our Divine Saviour Jesus Christ speaks of those who are outwardly fair and lovely, but whose souls are dead: "O ye whitewashed sepulchres, without ye are fair and beautiful, but within ye are full of filth and rottenness and dead men's bones." *

Those in the state of mortal sin are like a grave filled with corruption; not the corruption of flesh and blood, but the corruption of the soul, of thoughts and desires, of words and actions. The soul, while in that state, is as yet a sealed grave; no one on earth can see the rottenness within. Outwardly, perhaps, all is fair and beautiful. The tomb is yet wreathed with flowers. But the day shall come when the clangor of the dread trumpet shall ring throughout the universe, and then the sealed grave shall burst asunder, and all the black and hideous corruption of the soul within it shall be revealed and made manifest to all men.

See that young man. His air, his bearing, show you that he knows something of the world, that life has no longer any secrets for him. He has tasted the poisoned cup of pleasure. It was sweet as honey to his lips, but bitter as gall to his heart. And yet, there was a time when that

* Matt. xxiii.

young man was pure and innocent. He was once a good Catholic. His soul glistened with the brightness of baptismal grace and was beautiful as an angel of God. But a day came when he was tempted. He neglected to pray, he closed his eyes to the light, he choked up the warning voice of conscience, and, turning away from God and His angels, he yielded to the temptation and fell. From that moment forward he became an altered being. He had committed his first mortal sin. Could he have heard the wailings of the angels of Heaven, and the blasphemies, the wild shrieks of the demons, as they rang out from the depths of hell! But he sees nothing, he hears nothing. His brain is on fire, his heart is consumed with passion. The pleasures of the world open before him, and he is perverted. He no longer likes the Sacraments, holy Mass, or prayer. He finds his delight only in visiting the haunts of sin and shame, in drinking and debauchery, and, falling from one sin into another, he becomes at last utterly miserable. Perhaps he goes to confession occasionally, but he continues to fall back into the old sins, and finally gives up altogether. Then he begins to curse God's holy things, to wander farther and farther away from God, the most tender and liberal Father, the centre of all happiness and glory, the source of all peace and contentment. He begins to place himself in a state the most remote from heaven, and to live, as it were, in a strange country, in a dark land covered with the shades of death and filled with misery. He serves a most cruel master, who ill-treats him, refuses him even the husks of swine, and suffers him to go about naked and poor and dying with hunger. Outwardly, all may be fair and beautiful with him; he is perhaps the life and ornament of society, praised and admired by all; but within, his heart is full of corruption.

A gallant ship was sailing over the ocean homeward-bound, laden with costly ware, with silver and gold and precious stones. The sky was bright, the wind was fair, and

the ship sped on swiftly as a sea-bird. All on board were happy, for they were nearing the port—their long and perilous voyage was almost at an end. But suddenly the heavens grew dark, a fierce storm arose, the winds howled madly around the vessel, which was hurried on until it was dashed against a rock. The wild surging waves rushed over it, and it sank with all its costly treasures—sank, with all on board, far down into the depths of the sea. Next day the storm died away, the heavens were bright, and the sea became smooth again, but the ship appeared no more; only a few broken planks were to be seen floating here and there on the surface of the water. Such is the story of a wrecked soul. There was a time when it was rich beyond measure. It was then a child of God. During happy years and weeks and days, God kept an account of all the thoughts, words, and actions of that soul, of everything that it had done for His sake, and for everything there was treasured up for it a reward in Heaven—a reward such as no eye has seen, no ear heard, and which never entered into man's heart to conceive. But the storm of temptation came, the soul was shipwrecked by mortal sin, and all the fair treasures were lost. For all the good works there shall be no reward. The moment we commit mortal sin, even if it be but a sin of thought, even if it be but a sin of a moment, that very instant we lose the merit of all the good works we have ever performed, even including those of the days of childhood. And though we should have lived for a hundred years in the practice of the most rigorous penance, and have acquired the virtues and merits of the greatest saints in heaven, we lose all the moment we commit a mortal sin. This is no exaggeration. God himself declares it to us in the plainest terms: "If the just man forsake the path of justice and commit sin, I shall no longer remember his good works, saith the Lord." *

* Ezech. xviii. 2.

What an incomparable loss ! All the merits acquired during so many years, acquired with so much pain and so many tears—merits which would have gained for us in heaven so many new degrees of never-ending glory—all are lost ; and if we die in the state of mortal sin, they are lost for ever.

How great is our pain if we lose all our property and find ourselves suddenly reduced to beggary ! How great is our grief when we are forced to leave our native land ! How bitter is our sorrow when we have to part from a beloved friend or relative, from a kind father or loving mother ! How deeply we mourn the loss of her who watched over us in childhood ! And for what have we lost all these treasures ?

For what have we lost our God ? For the merest trifle ; for a desire ; for a revenge ; for a beastly, a momentary pleasure ; for a paltry gain. If a man breaks in pieces the chairs and tables and all the articles of furniture in his house ; if he sets his house on fire, and burns it to the ground ; if he throws all his money and all his valuable treasures into the river, people instantly cry out that he has lost his senses. They seize him, bind him, and carry him away to the mad-house. Why ? Because he wilfully destroyed his own property. But the moment we commit a mortal sin we wilfully destroy all our treasures—treasures, too, of infinite value. We cast away heaven, our soul, our God. We have acted indeed like madmen, and unless we strive earnestly to recover those treasures, we shall assuredly be shut up in that frightful mad-house, in that dismal prison, where all those demented ones shall be confined for ever, who, like us, have foolishly cast away their souls and their God.

By mortal sin we have lost everything, and as long as we remain in sin our arm is withered ; we cannot earn even a single merit for heaven. By our good works we may indeed

obtain the grace of conversion, but we shall receive no reward for them in the other life. We may perform as many good works as the greatest saints that ever lived; yet, as long as we remain in mortal sin, we shall receive no reward for them in heaven, for they are not written in the book of life.

Indeed, when living in the state of mortal sin, our soul is perishing with hunger. The Holy Ghost no longer inspires us with good thoughts and pious knowledge. He will enlighten the mind, but at long intervals, with a pale and feeble light, like that of a winter's sun. In proportion as the will weakens the imagination grows strong, and fixes itself without restraint on foolish and dangerous objects, until at length the beautiful soul, created by God for Himself and to His own likeness, finds it difficult to look up to its divine Creator and say even a single "Our Father." Turning aside from its Creator, it attaches itself to creatures, and grows careless about the great business of salvation. It finds the exercises of piety, interior and exterior mortification, obedience, and other religious duties, tedious and insupportable. Like the lost prodigal who has wandered from his father's house, the heart craves only after the husks of swine—sinful pleasures. And as we have abandoned our Heavenly Father, He allows us to go our way, withdraws His special and sustaining grace from us, and contents Himself with ordinary solicitude, so that the soul is in great danger of being wounded to death. God does not lead the soul to the execution of any good designs, since it has none, or, if it has some, they are ineffectual, and consequently come to nothing. He leaves the soul to do as it pleases in spiritual things; to dash against rocks—that is, to lavish its affections on creatures who may become its utter ruin.

He permits the devil to have more power over it, to inflame the passions, to darken the intellect. Then the devil,

having full sway, drives the soul whithersoever he wills. He tells it to stay away from confession ; to enter a secret society ; to go to the bar-room, to the gambling-saloon, to the house of ill-fame ; he tells it to commit those secret and shameful sins ; and it does the devil's bidding in all things. And thus the soul, created for Heaven, becomes the slave of the devil. He is ever at its side. He holds the soul bound fast with an iron chain. Day and night he is accusing it, and begging God to suffer him to take it with him to hell. Many have been found dead in the morning strangled by the devil, like the seven husbands of Sara.

Behold what happens to the soul when God withdraws His succor from it ! He does not fail, it is true, to excite, protect, and direct it in the ways of salvation ; but, as the understanding is so preoccupied, the will so taken up with frivolous things, this urging, this protection, this direction of God will not save one in such dispositions, because His graces are too weak and too few. In order to be saved, a certain number of graces are necessary for the understanding and the will. If God gives them to us, we shall certainly be saved. If He withdraws them, even partially, from us, we shall infallibly be lost ; because, when occasions of sin present themselves, we fall, and, though we may rise again, we shall soon relapse, and after a series of relapses we fall at length so low that we shall never be able to rise again.

The salvation of a man often depends on a small thing, as great rivers sometimes have insignificant sources. The torrent of our misfortune may originate in a very trifling matter. A leak can destroy a ship ; a bad lock may give entrance to thieves, who will carry off the accumulated treasures of years. To kill a man, the sword, fire, or pestilence is not always necessary. A crumb of bread, an insect, may do it, if God did not prevent it. A man, quietly returning to his house, encounters his enemy : a quarrel ensues ; swords are drawn, and in a few moments he is a corpse.

A traveller sees two roads ; he takes what seems to him the better one ; but it leads to a wood in which robbers are concealed, who rush out upon him, and take away his life. Had he taken the other road, he would have remained unharmed. Similar accidents are of daily occurrence, which would not happen if God gave an inspiration. That He does not give, because men rejected Him when they committed mortal sin, and thus rendered themselves unworthy of such an inspiration.

By mortal sin we outrage the Most High God ; we lose His grace ; we lose the merits of all our good works ; we lose Paradise. By sin, the mind becomes darkened, the heart grows hardened in crime, and, finally, the sinner dies impenitent, and is condemned to the never-ending torments of hell. If we were to see a good and holy man, renowned for his wisdom, for his justice, who loved his children with the most tender affection, cast some of his beloved children into a fiery furnace, into a prison of frightful torments, and then suffer them to linger on in the most excruciating torments, in the agony of despair, and never to take pity on them, relieve them, to deliver them from their place of suffering, what should we think or say ? How enormous must be the crime which could deserve such a punishment ! But this just, wise, and loving Father is God. He loved the angels with unspeakable love, and yet, for one mortal sin, He cast them into hell, to burn there for all eternity. And it is God who does this, whose justice cannot inflict greater punishments than are deserved, whose mercy always punishes less than is deserved, whose wisdom can do nothing inconsiderately and without reason, and whose sanctity cannot admit of either passion or imperfection. And yet it is this God, so just, so wise, so holy, and so good, who punishes those heavenly spirits with so much severity as soon as they commit a mortal sin—those princes of Heaven, masterpieces of the divine Omnipotence, adorned

with all the gifts of nature and of grace, whose number surpasses the imagination, who would have loved God had they been able to repent, with an eternal and unbounded love—they are all, without a single exception, cast into the eternal flames of hell for one single sin! the *first* sin ever committed—committed in an *instant*, and in *thought alone*. Alas! they suffer for this single sin a chastisement most frightful in its intensity, eternal in its duration, and the most dreadful as to the pain of loss which an Almighty God can inflict in His vengeance. O sin! what a dreadful evil thou art, since God punished thee with such merciless rigor.

Even in this life God punishes sin with frightful rigor. When He created man, He placed him in a paradise of delights. If man had not sinned, he would have continued to live there, in the enjoyment of every happiness; and then, without dying, he would have passed into heaven. But man sinned, and by sin every good was turned to poison, every blessing into malediction, all his happiness was changed into woe, and this earth became a vale of tears, a prison of death. It was sin that caused men and beasts to be swept away by a universal deluge. It was sin that brought down fire and brimstone from Heaven upon the impious cities of Sodom and Gomorrha. It was sin that scourged Egypt with such fearful plagues. It is sin that has brought on all the evils that now afflict mankind. This is an article of faith. “Sin brings misery upon the nations of the earth.” *

Look around on all the evils that now afflict mankind. Call to mind all the evils that afflicted the world in past ages. Imagine all the evils that shall befall mankind until the end of the world. Unite together all diseases and poverty, all the tears and sadness, all the passions and ignorance, all the quarrels and hatred, all the famine and pestilence,

* Psalms xiv. 34.

the wars and earthquakes. Heap together in one vast mound all the bones that are now mouldering in their graves, collect together the scattered dust of all the dead that have mouldered in ages long past, and then say to yourself: All this misery, all this ruin, is the just punishment of sin. Sin brings on sickness, shortens man's life, and leads to an unhappy death. The Holy Ghost assures us that sinners shall die before their time.* Nor is this strange, for sin is the sting of death; its wound is always deadly. Sin often exterminates entire families, so that, after a few generations, not a vestige of them remains on the earth.† What destroyed the Chanaanites and Amorrhites in Palestine? Their crimes. The measure of their iniquities was full. What tore the sceptre from Saul and his race? The sin of disobedience to God's commands. What robbed Roboam of ten of his provinces? The sin of idolatry of his father Solomon. What took the great Nabuchodonosor from his throne, despoiled him of his purple, and reduced him for seven years to the condition of a beast? The sin of pride, with which he was inflated beyond measure. Intemperance, vanity, and, above all, the sacrilege committed by the profanation of the sacred vessels of the temple, deprived Baltassar, the son of Nabuchodonosor, of his kingdom and of his crown.

Where, to-day, are the powerful and wealthy empires of the Assyrians, Medes, Greeks, and Romans? Where the great Republic of Carthage, which so long disputed the sway of Rome? What has become of the famous cities, the superb republics, the great Troy, the wise Athens, the stern Sparta, the rich Thebes, the gay Corinth? They are no more. There remains of them only what is found in history. If the question be asked: "Why were those mighty cities destroyed—the powerful republics and flourishing empires overthrown?" it may be answered, that time, which destroys

* Psalms x. 27.

† Psalms iii. 33.

all things, that fire, war, and enemies, have brought about these misfortunes. But it may be said, with more truth, that their sins have been the time that destroyed, the fires which devastated, the wars which exterminated, the enemies that depopulated them. For, as the wise man says, "Virtue elevates a nation and sin renders the people miserable."* "Kingdoms pass from one people to another," empires change masters, "because of injustice." †

Clovis, who was the first king of the Franks to embrace Christianity, asked St. Remigius how long his kingdom would last. "As long, sire, as religion and justice flourish in it," replied the holy bishop. When Charles VII., by the special assistance of Heaven, had delivered France from the dominion of the English, a Frenchman thus rallied an Englishman: "When will you come back to France and reconquer it?" "When your sins shall be greater than ours," was the reply.

What is true of kingdoms and republics is true also of private houses and families. How often do rich and noble families fall suddenly or perish insensibly, and sometimes by unknown and secret ways! What is the cause of their fall? Without doubt, it is sin. The foundation of these houses is worth nothing; they are built on injustice, ambition, and other crimes. They cannot last long; they must necessarily fall. "If the Lord build not the house," says Holy Writ, "they labor in vain that build it." †

Nicephorus Phocas, Emperor of Constantinople, after having employed all the resources of art to render his palace impregnable, heard, one night, a voice from the sea-shore saying: "Emperor, thou buildest high walls; but though thou shouldst raise them to the heavens, it will always be easy to take thy city, because sin is within it." And, in fact, the very day the fortifications were completed, the very day they brought him the keys, this unfortunate prince

* Prov. iv.

† Ecclus. x. 8.

‡ Psalms cxxvi. 1.

was assassinated. His sins drew upon him the terrible effects of God's vengeance ; he was suddenly deprived of his honors, his riches, his empire, and his life.

Life is the last temporal blessing which is ruined by sin ; for is not sin the author of death ? " God has not made death," says Holy Scripture. Death proceeds not from the soul, for the soul is immortal. Death comes not from the body, for though the body be composed of elements which war continually to destroy it, yet, by a special privilege God gave it at the moment of creation, it is incorruptible and immortal. " God made man never to die," says Holy Writ. Sin, then, is necessarily the only cause of death. To punish sin, God deprived man of the great gift of immortality which he had given him, and subjected him to death, that it might do to him what it could, in the way of nature, indeed, but still in the form of a chastisement. This it was which caused St. Paul to say : " By one man sin entered the world, and by sin, death." *

If the sin of Adam caused the death of all men, it is not surprising that the sins which men themselves commit hasten their own end, as we see by many examples. God often punishes sins by depriving us of a fond parent or a beloved child. " Behold the days come," said God to the high-priest Heli, " and I will cut off thy arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thy house!" † " The fear of the Lord lengthens days," says the wise man, " but the years of the impious shall be shortened." " Sinners," says holy Job, " have been taken from the world before their time was come." Their sins sapped the principles of life, as a river undermines the foundation of a wall.

Whithersoever we turn our eyes, we behold the sad effects of sin, and the infinite hatred God bears to sin. If we look up to heaven, we shall see that its brightest angels have been cast out for one single mortal sin. If we look into Par-

* Rom. v. 12.

† 1 Kings ii. 31.

adise, we shall see how our first parents were banished from that abode of happiness for one single mortal sin. If we look upon the earth, we shall see it consumed by fire from heaven, and all on account of mortal sin. If we look into the abyss of hell, we shall see torments there, and hear howling and gnashing of teeth for ever and ever, and all on account of mortal sin. But neither in heaven, nor on earth, nor in hell, nowhere in the wide universe, is the dread effect of sin so fearfully displayed as on Mount Calvary. So great is the enormity of one mortal sin that it has brought on the earth all the misery and woe that men have suffered since the beginning of the world and that they will suffer till the day of doom. So great is the malice of one mortal sin, that it kept Heaven closed against us for four thousand years, and it has opened wide the mouth of hell, which never ceases to swallow up its countless victims. Yea, so great is the enormity of one mortal sin, that God Himself had to become man, God Himself had to suffer and to die, in order to atone for its effects. All the labors, all the sufferings, and all the virtues of the saints would not have sufficed to cancel one single mortal sin. Had millions of the holiest souls endured, with incredible patience and constancy, torments more acute than the fire of hell, in order to blot out one mortal sin, they would not have been able to expiate it. Nay, had the whole universe been drowned in the blood of human victims, no sin would thereby have been blotted out and forgiven. God could not be appeased except by the shedding of the Blood divine, by the death of His only-begotten Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“ In vain the lambs poured forth their blood,
 In vain the smoking altars stood,
 All unatoned was sin ;
 Must greater be the sacrifice
 Before the gate of Paradise
 Can let the fallen in.

“The Lord of life His life must give
That man an endless life may live,
And death's dark doom reverse.
The Cross is made the mystic tree
The Blood that flowed on Calvary,
Hath washed away the curse.”

It is of faith that Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, suffered and died, in order to atone for the sins of the world. Jesus was most innocent and holy; Jesus was the only Son of God, and God loved Him with an infinite love; and yet, because Jesus charged Himself with all our sins, because He took upon Himself the semblance of a sinner, God punished Him with merciless rigor. On the night of His bitter Passion, when our Blessed Redeemer knelt in the garden of Olives, His soul was sad unto death; His face deadly pale; He trembled in every limb, and in His agony His heart's blood oozed out through every pore of His body. He struggled and prayed; He wept and implored His Heavenly Father to deliver Him from the shame, from the torments that awaited Him. “O my Father! if it be possible, take away this chalice from me.” But no; God's outraged justice must be satisfied. Jesus has taken upon Himself all our sins; He must also endure all our punishment. God treats His own beloved Son with justice, without mercy, in order that He might treat us with unbounded mercy. For our sakes, God delivered up His own beloved Son to the fury of His enemies; to all the malice of the demons; to the most infamous outrages; to the most atrocious punishments. For our sakes He made His only-begotten Son to become an object of horror and malediction; for it is written in the Word of God, “Accursed is he who hangs on the cross.”* And Jesus, the God of all glory, hung on the cross, and died thereon because we sinned.

Alas! every one condemns the conduct of the prodigal;

* Deut. 21-23.

every one detests his black ingratitude. But, after these considerations, what conduct more blameworthy, more damnable, what ingratitude more detestable and abominable than that of a Christian who commits mortal sin? Let us turn to ourselves and see what we have done. God has given us a being far superior to all that we can see in nature. He has given us a soul that can never die. He has made us like Himself, free, intelligent, immortal. He preserves and nourishes us from day to day, every hour, every moment of our existence. He watches over us as the apple of His eye. But, more than all this, He has made us His children; He has made us Christians; He has chosen us to be of His royal race of priests—that holy nation, that chosen people, whom He Himself has purchased, not with silver and gold, but with His own precious blood. Thousands and thousands lie buried in the darkness of heresy and idolatry, and God has chosen us, in preference to them all, to be children of His own true Church. He has given us His angels to be our guides. He has given us His own dear Mother to be our loving Mother. He has fed us with His own divine flesh, and nourished us with His own loving heart's blood. He has prepared for us a heaven, where we shall reign with Him as kings in never-ending happiness, in the brightness of eternal glory. He has promised even to give Himself to us as our exceeding great reward. And what return have we made for all these favors? God has given us food and drink, and we have abused these gifts by eating meat on forbidden days, by gluttony, by drunkenness. God has given us reason and a free will, and we have made them the slaves of the most foolish superstition, the most degrading passions. We have defiled our memory and our imagination by the most shameful thoughts and images. God has given us eyes to gaze on the beautiful works of His creation, and afterwards to see Him face to face in heaven; and we have dimmed those eyes by gazing on immodest

books and pictures and sinful objects. God has given us our ears, that we might listen with pleasure to His word, and hereafter drink in with joy the sweet harmonies of the blessed ; and we have made those ears deaf to Him by listening to slander, to uncharitable discourses, and immodest conversation. God has given us a tongue, that we might pray to Him, praise Him, and bless Him ; and how often have we polluted that tongue by curses and blasphemies, by false oaths, by slander, by immodest songs and discourses ! God has given us hands, that we might help the poor, that we might lift them up in holy prayer ; and we have soiled those hands by fraud and injustice and secret abominations. God has given us our feet to bear us to the house of God, and we have used them to hasten to the theatre, the ball-room, and to those low haunts of sin and shame which are the very hot-beds of vice. God has given us a heart, that we might love Him in this life and the next ; and we have loved some weak, sinful creature even more than God. God has given us a body, to be the living temple of the Holy Ghost ; and see how we have corrupted that body by the most shameful excesses. Let us look back upon our past life. See how often God has preserved us from death and hell. God has made us His children in baptism, and in return we have crucified Him by our sins. God has given us the sacrament of penance, and the precious body and blood of His only-begotten Son to wash away our sins ; and by our bad confessions, by our unworthy communions, we have trampled on the body and blood of Jesus Christ. God has given us the sacrament of marriage, to preserve us from sin and to sanctify us ; and we have dishonored that sacrament by marrying a heretic, by marrying out of the Church, by being married in a state of sin, without even going to confession ; we have degraded this sacrament by many abominable sins committed under the veil of marriage. Ah ! is this the return we make to God for all His favors ? Listen to the sad complaint of God, our

Heavenly Father : “ Ah ! ” He says, “ had my enemy done this, had pagans and heretics dishonored and reviled me thus, I might have borne with it ; but you, my friend—my bosom friend—you, whom I have adopted as my child in baptism ; you, whom I have chosen to be my living temple, my dwelling-place ; you, whom I have sanctified with my graces, whom I have nourished with my own heart’s blood ; you, for whom I had prepared a crown and a throne in heaven—that you should dishonor me, should crucify me by your sins ! This indeed is the blackest ingratitude.” No wonder, then, that St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi said, on her death-bed, that she could never understand how a man could dare commit a mortal sin. Indeed, what breast so savage as not to detest mortal sin—as not to be afraid of that soul-killing monster ? If, after these reflections, we can still yield to our passions and commit sin, we are hopeless, we are beyond redemption, and must prepare for that hell which the devil, for whom it was first created, had merited by such obdurate malignity. Let our eyes weep bitter tears for having gazed immodestly on forbidden objects. Let our face grow pale with grief, which blushed with sinful passion. Let our lips now move in prayer, which were moved so often with unchaste words. Let our heart, which glowed so long with sinful desires, be now crushed and broken with unbounded sorrow.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRODIGAL'S COMPANIONS—IMPURITY.

ON arriving in the strange country the prodigal plunged immediately into bad company. He passed his time and squandered his money among those lost creatures—the disgrace of their sex—whose life is dishonor and whose end is eternal torments. “This thy son hath devoured his substance with harlots.” * Alas! the prodigal has many followers. Every one who likes to associate with the impure will soon be infected with their impurities.

“Evil communications corrupt good manners.” Why is it that the association with the wicked corrupts our manners and our morals? We meet a wicked man; we hold intercourse with him, and are never after what we were before. We feel that something has gone forth from him and entered into our life, so that we are not, and can never be again, the man we were before we met him. What is the explanation of this fact? How happens it that we are benefited by intercourse with the good, and injured by intercourse with the bad? How is it that one man is able to influence another, whether for good or for evil? What is the meaning of influence itself? Influence—inflowing, flowing in. What is this but the fact that man is a being whose life is dependent on an exterior object? God alone can live in, from, and by Himself, uninfluenced and unaffected by anything distinguishable from His own being. But man is not God. He is a dependent being, yet free to choose good

* Luke xv. 30.

or evil ; to side with God or with the devil ; to follow truth or falsehood, light or darkness ; to embrace virtue or vice. In consequence of the fall of Adam, he feels more inclined for evil than for good. Baptism, indeed, cancels original sin in our soul, but it does not destroy our natural inclination to evil, which we have inherited from our first parents. The great Apostle St. Paul bears witness to this when he says : “ I do not that good which I will, but the evil which I hate, that I do.”* That is to say, I do not wish to do evil ; I even try to avoid it ; but I experience within myself a continual inclination to evil ; I endeavor to do good, but I feel within myself a great reluctance thereto, and I must do violence to myself in order to act aright. Every one has from his childhood experienced this evil inclination. We naturally feel more inclined to anger than to meekness, to disobedience than to submission ; we are more prone to hatred than to love ; more inclined to gratify the evil desires of our heart than to practise the holy virtue of purity ; we prefer our own ease to visiting Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, or receiving Him in the Holy Communion. We are naturally indifferent toward God and His religion ; we lack fervor in His divine service ; we often feel more inclined to join a forbidden society than to enter a pious confraternity ; we often find more pleasure in reading a bad or useless book than one that is good and edifying ; we are more apt to listen to uncharitable and unbecoming conversation than to the word of God ; we feel naturally more inclined to vain-glory, pride, and levity, than to humility, self-control, and the spirit of mortification.

Now, when we place ourselves wilfully under circumstances in which this natural inclination to evil is nourished, so strong does the inclination become that it is morally impossible to resist it. Charles, King of Navarre, was once affected with great weakness of the nerves. By order of the

* Rom vii. 15.

physician he was sewed up in cloths moistened with brandy, in order that by this strengthening stimulant his cool nerves might be heated and his drooping spirits raised. But the attendant who sewed the cloths unfortunately burned off the thread with a candle, and the linen took fire with such fury that there was no means of saving the poor prince. In a few moments he was but a cinder. We must bear in mind that our soul is wrapped up in weak flesh, as in a cloth, not moistened with brandy, but with something a thousand times more inflammable—with the passion of lust. If we bring our soul too near the fire of sinful occasions, it will immediately take fire. The very presence, the very sight, of that person for whom passion is felt, has a fascinating power. A moment's conversation, a single word, a look, a gesture, casts a spark of impure fire into the innocent soul; and that fire is soon fanned into a fierce flame that may never be extinguished. There are some who say that the sin of impurity is but a small evil, a human weakness. But who are those who say so? Ah! it is only the impure, the unchaste.

The law of nature, written in every man's heart—the voice of conscience—tells him that it is a sin to defile his soul and body by the shameful vice of impurity. Every one is born with a natural sense of modesty. A certain feeling of shame restrains the heart, as yet unsullied, from every thought, word, and action. The honest blood rushes from the pure heart and mantles the flushing cheek whenever anything immodest is spoken of or hinted at. The voice of conscience warns every one before he commits the shameful deed. And when at last, after long and fearful struggles, a pure man has unhappily consented to sin, his feelings of shame, of agony, and remorse torture and crucify him.

Where is the man who does not feel and know for certain that the vice of impurity defiles and dishonors him? Where

is the man who, after having committed the foul deed, does not feel degraded in his own eyes—whose conscience does not torture and reproach him? Where is the man who, after having gratified his vile passion, does not feel how empty and drear his heart is—how poor and wretched this sin has made him?

The libertine seeks the most secret nook, the darkest night, to cover and conceal his infamy. He strives to hide the blush of shame beneath the fall of darkness and secrecy. He whispers into the ear of his unhappy victim, “No one sees us;” but he forgets that there is an Eye that sees all, that there is One before whom the darkest night is as the broad light of day. Why does he act thus? It is because his own conscience condemns his foul actions.

Among the old heathen tribes in Germany and Gaul, if a young girl lost her innocence, her father had the power to put her to death, and thus wash away the stain of dishonor from his family. St. Boniface tells us, in his letter to King Ethelbald of Mercia, that it was a custom and law among the Saxons that if a girl dishonored her family or a woman proved faithless to her husband, the unhappy wretch was forced to take a rope and hang herself. Her infamous body was then cut down and burned. The villain that had ruined the unhappy creature was then dragged to the spot and hanged like a dog over the smoking ashes of her whom he had ruined. In other places, whenever a woman fell into sin, all the women of the place gathered around the guilty one, drove her from place to place, and scourged her till at last she fell bleeding and exhausted to the ground.

Another ancient law decrees that “if a woman prove faithless to her husband, both she and her seducer shall be dragged to the place of execution. There a grave is dug seven feet long and seven feet deep, and filled with sharp thorns. The guilty pair are tied together and hurled into the grave. A long, sharp stake is then driven through their

yet living bodies, the earth is then heaped over them, and they are left there to perish.”

Why is it that we find even among the heathens such severe punishments inflicted upon the impure? It is because they knew by the light of reason how heinous and shameful a crime the sin of impurity was.

What is it that gives the young man, and especially the young woman, their freshness, their beauty, their loveliness? Is it not innocence, purity of heart, stainless virginity? This heavenly virtue casts around them a halo of glory that nothing else can give.

But if this lustre is once lost, if the lily of purity once withers and dies, what can replace it? That young woman, with all her beauty, with all her finery, is but an ornamented corpse, a gilded tomb wreathed with flowers; without all fair, but within full of mould and stench and rottenness. Of what avail are all her ornaments, her silks and satins, her gold and precious stones, if she has lost the greatest ornament of all—her virtue? All these are but the symbols, the fit ornaments, of a chaste and noble heart. On those who have lost their innocence they are but a glaring mockery, the sad remembrance of what their wearer once was and might have been. Away, then, with costly trappings—the price, perhaps, of lost honor; they are but the flimsy tinsel that covers a vile and degraded heart.

“Your bodies,” says St. Paul, “are the living temples of the Holy Ghost.” What a crime it is to profane the church, to dishonor the sacred chalice or ciborium! But how much more enormous is the sin of a Christian who dishonors his soul and body by the sin of impurity! If it be a sacrilege to profane the material temple of God, the lifeless vases consecrated to his service, how much greater is the crime of him who profanes the living temple of God; how much greater is the crime of him who defiles his soul

and body, which are consecrated to God by the most intimate union with Him!

Let us be mindful of our dignity. Our soul was made the image of God in creation and to the likeness of God in baptism. The vice of impurity especially defiles and dishonors the soul and degrades it to the likeness of the brute.

“Your bodies,” says St. Paul, “are members of the body of Christ.”* Your body has become intimately united with Jesus Christ in baptism, but more especially in Holy Communion. You can say with truth, especially after having received Holy Communion, that the blood of a God flows in your veins. What an unspeakable honor! Men boast of their ancestry. They are proud of royal blood and the blood of heroes. How great, then, is the honor of a Christian in whose veins flows the blood of the King of kings—the blood of God! What a burning shame, then, what a horrible sacrilege, is it for a Christian to defile his body and soul by the foul vice of impurity! By committing that sin he dishonors Jesus Christ. He causes Jesus, the God of purity, to serve him in his sins. He takes the members of the body of Jesus Christ, as the Apostle assures us, and makes of them the members of a harlot.* This crime, as St. Paul the Apostle assures us, is so great that it should not be even named among Christians. Now, if it be forbidden even to name this sin, what must it be to commit it? “Do not err,” says St. Paul: “neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate shall possess the kingdom of God.”† “Whatever sin you name,” says St. Isidore, “you shall find nothing equal to this crime.”‡ Indeed, “There is nothing more vile or degrading,” says St. Jerome, “than to allow one’s self to be conquered by the flesh.” In the lives of the ancient Fathers it is related § that a certain hermit, being once favored with the company of an angel, met on his way the fetid carcass of a dog. The angel gave no sign of

* 1 Cor. vi. 15. † 1 Cor. vi. 9. ‡ Tom. Orat. xxi. § Part ii. c. viii.

displeasure at the smell which it exhaled. They afterwards met a young man elegantly dressed and highly perfumed. The angel stopped his nostrils. Being asked by the hermit why he did so, he answered that the young man, on account of the vice of impurity in which he indulged, sent forth a far more intolerable stench than the putrid dog which they had passed.

“In no sin,” says St. Thomas, “does the devil delight so much as in sins against chastity” (i. ii. q. 73, a. 3). The reason why the devil takes so much delight in this vice is because it is difficult for a person who is addicted to it to be delivered from it. And why? Because this sin so blinds the sinner that he commits it oftener than any other sin. A blasphemer only blasphemes when he is drunk or provoked to anger. The assassin, whose trade is to murder others, does not, at the most, commit more than eight or ten homicides. But the unchaste are guilty of an unceasing torrent of sins, by thoughts, by words, by looks, by complacencies, and by touches, so that when they go to confession they find it impossible to tell the number of sins they have committed against chastity. Even in their sleep the devil represents to them obscene objects, that on awakening they may take delight in them; and, being the slaves of the devil, they obey him, and give consent to his evil suggestions. “There is,” says St. Thomas, “no sinner so ready to offend God as the votary of lust is” on every occasion that occurs to him. To other sins, such as blasphemy, murder, and slander, men are not prone; but to this vice of impurity nature inclines them, and therefore it is so easy to contract the habit. How many foundlings, abortions, infanticides, may one count every day in our large cities! How few young couples come with pure hearts to the altar! How many lost creatures earn a livelihood by a life of infamy! How many houses of shame! How many so-called fashionable houses of assignation in every city—houses of

infamy not only for hoary sinners, but even for young and thoughtless children!

What forms the favorite topic of conversation in company, in the cars, on the boats, in the tavern, in the streets, in the market-place, in the ball-room, in the theatre? Is it not the shameful vice of impurity?

What constitutes the interest of the great majority of the novels, magazines, weeklies, that fill our libraries, that are to be found in the hands of every one from the young school miss to the venerable old maid? Is it not sensual love? Is it not impurity?

Which dances are the most popular? Are not the obscene, impure round dances? How many a young girl will tell you that she will not give up these forbidden dances, even if she had to burn in hell for it!

Which are the most popular plays in the theatre? What plays are those that always draw crowded houses, while the churches are often empty? Are they not the most immodest plays that hell itself could invent—plays wherein lost creatures sell their modesty to make a paltry living?

What class of pictures is to be found in those weekly papers? What kind of photographs and statues in the windows of so many stores? Are they not usually the most indecent?

Another reason why the devil delights so much in seeing men commit the sin of impurity is that it is the fruitful source of so many other sins. The impure man is, to a certain degree, guilty of idolatry—of giving to some creature the love and honor which are due to God alone.

Is not that impure man guilty of idolatry who loves the frail, erring creature of his passion to such a degree that for her sake he willingly sacrifices his health, his honor, his hope of heaven, and God Himself? Does he not love that creature more than God? And is not that idolatry?

The impure man is guilty of perjury. Impurity leads to

perjury. Is not the young woman who protests solemnly to her parents that she keeps no dangerous company ; is not that vain woman who protests again and again to her husband that she receives no dangerous visits, guilty of perjury when they call God to bear witness to their innocence, though they know in their inmost hearts that they are not innocent ? How many false oaths has not that young man taken ; how often has he solemnly sworn to the unhappy victim of his passion that he would never abandon her ; and how quickly has that solemn promise been broken as soon as his brutal passions were gratified !

Impurity leads to sacrilege. Who are those that make bad confessions ? Who are those that conceal their sins in confession, and make so many sacrilegious communions ? They are, in every case almost, those who have been guilty of the crime of impurity. They are ashamed to confess their secret crimes. They will not reveal to their confessor the dangerous company they keep, the sinful liberties they permit, the shameful thoughts and desires that they nourish in their hearts. They never mention to the confessor the wicked books that they read, the immodest conversation in which they indulge. And even if they do mention any sin of this kind, they never tell the whole truth ; they cover and lessen the sin ; so that their confession is worthless, and they leave the confessional with the curse of God and the sin of sacrilege on their soul. Oh ! how many of these souls are lost for ever. How many are now burning in hell who were led astray by the demon of impurity, and who afterwards had not the courage to open their hearts sincerely, to tell everything honestly to their confessor !

Impurity leads to theft. A young man filches from his employer ; he keeps back part of his wages, that he may have the means to spend the night in those haunts of sin and shame which are the very hot-beds of hell. The young woman steals from her parents in order to buy some finery

which she thinks will make her more captivating in the eyes of others. A husband and a father squanders his means and ruins his family in order to gratify the vanity of some infamous woman who has gained those affections which alone belong to his lawful wife. To gratify his passion he is even cruel to his family.

A certain man kept a mistress in the house. His wife knew it, but bore the insult patiently, in order to prevent greater evils. One day, the servant came to this good lady with tears in her eyes. "What is the matter? Why do you weep?" asked the good woman. "Ah!" answered the servant, "your husband has sent me to take the keys of the house from you. He says that henceforth this young woman in the house is to be my mistress." The lady grew pale, her heart pierced by this last crowning insult, went to the "mistress," and ordered her to quit the house instantly. The husband heard of the difficulty. He told his wife if she did not beg pardon on her knees of the mistress, he would send her and her child a thousand miles away, where she would never see him again. And the poor mother had to obey.

Impurity leads to cruelty and hardness of heart. There lived some years ago in the city of Vienna a young widow. She had an only child—a little girl of about six years of age, named Lena. Soon after the death of her husband, this young widow began to receive the visits of a young man of the neighborhood. By and by the visits became more frequent, their friendship ripened into intimacy, and wicked tongues were not wanting to whisper suspicions that this innocent friendship would end in shame. The young widow felt the shame of her unhappy position very keenly; but she was blinded by her passions, and would not give up the young man's company. She urged him frequently to save her from shame by an honorable marriage; but he steadily refused. "I cannot marry a woman with a fam-

ly," he said ; " it would only bring trouble." At last the woman, who had now given herself up entirely to the devil, formed the horrible resolution to do away with her child, and thus set aside every obstacle to the wished-for union. In the house in which she lived there was a deep, dark cellar. One day the unhappy woman took her little daughter by the hand, led her down into this damp, gloomy dungeon, and said, in a harsh tone : " Here, Lena, remain here until I come back for you." The poor innocent child began to cry, but the unnatural mother hurried away, and closed the heavy door behind her. Two days passed. The mother hoped now that her little child was dead. In the darkness of the night she stole down to the cellar, slowly opened the door, and called out : " Lena, are you there ? " The sad, plaintive voice of the little child was heard : " Ah ! mamma, mamma, give me a piece of bread." But the mother turned away and closed the heavy door once more. Another day passed by. The mother spent it in the company of her wicked companion, gratifying her sinful passions ; and the poor helpless child remained pinning away with hunger in her gloomy prison. Once more the wretched woman went down to the cellar. This time she expected for certain that the child would be dead. She opened the door and called again, " Lena, are you there ? " Again the sad, moaning voice of her child was heard, crying in feeble tones : " O mamma, mamma ! a piece of bread." The unnatural mother turned away ; her heart trembled not with compassion—the impure heart has no compassion—but with fear lest she should be found out. She trembled with rage that her child was not yet dead. She now waited several days, and when she went to the cellar once more, the child was dead ! She took the poor dead child to her room and dressed it for burial. Early the next morning the neighbors were aroused by loud wailing and lamenting in the house of the young widow. They hastened to her room ;

they found her crying and shrieking and acting as if she were beside herself with grief. There lay the dead child, pale and cold. It was dressed in white ; a wreath of flowers was placed upon its breast. No one suspected anything of the foul, unnatural murder. Next day the child was buried. All the little playmates of Lena formed a procession and accompanied the body to the grave. The body of the dead child was now lowered into the grave ; the first handful of earth was thrown upon the coffin ; the priest then knelt down with all those present, and recited the customary prayers. Every heart was touched—every eye filled with tears. There was one heart, however, that remained cold and unmoved ; it was the heart of the mother. She was now free. She could now gratify her sinful passions without restraint ; there was no longer any fear of detection. The secret deed was locked up securely in her heart. But oh ! terrible justice of God ! when the priest recited the “ Our Father,” and came to the words, “ Give us this day our daily bread,” the sad, plaintive cry of her dying child rang in the ears of the mother ; a wild feeling of terror and remorse seized her, and she fell senseless to the ground. She came to herself again, but she had lost her reason and become a raving maniac. And now, with a wild, unearthly laugh, she related to the horror-stricken bystanders the full particulars of the murder of her child.

Impurity leads to jealousy, murder, and suicide. George Bauman, one of the principals of the Public Schools of Williamsburg, N. Y., and Annie McNamara, both Catholics, met frequently for nine months in a house of assignation in Elizabeth Street, in New York. Bauman at last shot her, and then shot himself, in that infamous house. Their bodies were taken to the Morgue near Bellevue Hospital, where they were laid out in coffins side by side. The face of the unhappy murderer looked as if he had died in the most terrible agony.

About four years ago, Catherine Lenan, a virtuous and handsome young girl, left her home in the County Cork and came to this country, where she soon obtained employment as a domestic servant; her last place being in Longwood, near Brookline, Mass. She was a careful and industrious girl, and those who employed her became attached to her. There were few or none of those near her whom she had known in Ireland; she had only one relative in this country, who lived at a distance from her. Thrown upon herself, she naturally wanted to form new acquaintances and make new friends; and we soon find her, in company with another girl, walking from her employer's house on every evening she could spare, and visiting a saloon or drinking-house, kept by Irish people, where she had become acquainted with several young men. In taking this walk on the night of Tuesday, Oct. 24, poor Kate Lenan was waylaid on the road by some miscreant yet unknown, and brutally outraged and murdered!

The third reason why the devil takes peculiar delight in the vice of impurity is because this sin involves the malice of scandal. Other sins, such as blasphemy, perjury, and murder, excite horror in those who witness them; but this sin easily excites and draws others to commit it, or at least to commit it with less horror. Ignorance of evil is a part of innocence, and the best rampart of virtue. Those who have never seen evil done think not of seeing it. They will entertain a horror of it unless they see it committed and excused by others. One is ashamed to practise virtue among the wicked, and to be innocent among the guilty. How many have received their first lessons in immorality or crime from the hostler, or the cook, or the nurse; while a single night with a strange bedfellow may initiate a boy in mysteries to which he had else remained a stranger. This last danger is greatly increased if the casual room-mate be by a few years his senior; for the power of mischief pos-

sessed by the older boy is increased in proportion to his size and his experience. An impure boy or girl is sure to corrupt the smaller ones whenever a safe opportunity presents itself, and thus children of six and twelve fall victims to those who are older than themselves.

The fourth reason why the devil rejoices so much in seeing one commit the sin of impurity, is because it blinds the sinner to such an extent as not to allow him to see the injury which he offers to God, nor the miserable state in which he lives and sleeps. Like "the sow wallowing in the mire," the impure are immersed in their own filth, so that they are not sensible of the malice of their actions, and therefore they neither feel nor abhor the stench of their impurities, which excite disgust and horror in all others. By this sin they lose the light of God, which shines in the hearts of all his children, so that they may not stray from the narrow path that leads to heaven. But suddenly this light of the soul is extinguished by the sin of impurity, and the impure are left in utter darkness. Their sins degrade and dim their understanding more than does any other vice. They have eyes and see not, they have ears and hear not, they have reason and understand not. If the unchaste are deprived of light, and no longer see the evil which they do, how can they detest it and amend their lives? The prophet says that, being blinded by their own mire, they do not even think of returning to God. Their impurities take away from them all knowledge of God. "They will not set their thoughts to return to their God, for the spirit of fornication is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord."* Yes, this sin, if often repeated, will become a habit, and this habit will become so strengthened and deeply rooted in the soul by repeated falls till it finally attains to a degree of malice that is truly devilish.

Whoever has arrived at this degree of sin is possessed by

* Osee v. 4.

a hardened, unyielding determination to commit sin—a determination which neither warnings nor threats, neither punishments nor favors, can change. Shrouded in impenetrable darkness, in insolent defiance of God and man, the rays of divine light cannot penetrate this heart. The unhappy man is separated from God. The wounds of his conscience have become encrusted so that he can no longer feel any remorse, and at last he reaches such a depth of wickedness that it is almost impossible for him to become either better or worse.

By lust the devil triumphs over the entire man—over his body and over his soul—over his memory, by filling it with unchaste thoughts and making him take pleasure in them; over his intellect, by making him desire occasions of committing sin; over his will, by making it love its impurities as his last end, and as if there were no God. Hell governs him, hell dwells in him; he is already, one may say, a victim doomed to the flames, an agent and slave of the devil. What Jesus said of Judas may be said of him: “One of you is a devil. There is one among you, and it were better for him that he had never been born.”

A certain person was so much addicted to the vice of impurity as to commit the most atrocious crimes no longer through weakness, but out of sheer hatred of God. Her accomplice died suddenly in the very act of a most abominable sin of impurity, and afterwards appeared to her enveloped in fire and flames. From that time forward she felt within her, as it were, a burning so intense that she imagined herself in hell, and kept uttering the most horrible cries of despair. This happened in 1858 in a city of Pennsylvania.

There stood once in the middle of Jerusalem a beautiful temple. It was adorned with silver, and gold, and precious stones. It was the work of many kings, and the wonder of ages. In an unhappy hour a torch was cast by a soldier's hand into this beautiful temple. It caught fire, the flames

gained apace, and soon the glorious temple was a heap of smoldering ruins. Jews and Romans, the friends and the stranger, made every effort to save the temple, but their efforts were of no avail.

What a sad image this temple is of the soul that has been ruined by the vice of impurity ! A single spark of impure fire is cast into the pure soul which is the temple of the living God. The spark is soon fanned into a flame—the hellish flame increases and gains full mastery over the soul—the friends and relations of the deluded creature may speak to her—the priest of God may warn her—heaven and earth may strive to save her ; but in vain. The impure fire, the flame of impure love, burns on—it burns to the very verge of the grave, to the very brink of hell, where the worm never dieth and the fire never quenches.

This vice when habitual clings so firmly to nature that the desire for carnal pleasures becomes insatiable, and will cease only when the unhappy man who indulges in it is cast into the fire of hell. “O hellish fire !—lust, whose fuel is gluttony, whose sparks are brief conversations, whose end is hell.” The unchaste become like the vulture that waits to be killed by the fowler, rather than abandon the rottenness of the dead bodies on which it feeds.

Some years ago a gentleman of rank and education forgot himself so far as to keep in his house a young woman of loose character. His friends, his relatives, and even the priest of God, advised and begged him again and again to give up that wicked girl. But it was all in vain. His only answer was: I cannot, I cannot. At last he fell sick, and his illness became so dangerous that he was at the point of death. The good priest now came to see him. He saluted the dying man, and spoke kindly to him, in order to win his confidence. “My dear friend,” said the priest, “your illness is dangerous, it is true, but you are young yet, you have a strong constitution, and we hope that you will recover.

But, at all events, it would do you no harm to make your peace with God like a good Christian." "Ah! father," said the dying man, "I know that I am in great danger. It is true, I have led a very wicked life, but I now wish to amend. I wish to die a good death. Tell me, then, what I must do." The priest was overjoyed to see him in such a good disposition. "Well," said the priest, "since you desire to die a good death, you must prepare yourself by a good confession." "Oh! most willingly," was the reply. "Are there any debts that you have not paid?" asked the priest before he commenced to hear his confession. "I have paid them all," answered the sick man. "Have you never defrauded your neighbor or injured him in his good name or property?" "Yes, but I have made restitution." "Have you no ill-will against any of your neighbors?" "I had, but I have forgiven them all." "Are you willing to ask pardon of all those whom you may have offended?" "Yes, I humbly ask pardon." "Do you wish, then, to receive the last sacraments?" "I desire it with all my heart." "Well, then," said the priest, "since you desire to receive the last sacraments, you know you must put away every obstacle to the grace of God—you must send away this wicked girl from your house; she is a constant occasion of sin to you still. You must send her away." "O father!" said the dying man, "what do you mean? Send away that girl! Oh! I cannot do that." "What is that?" said the priest, amazed. "You cannot. Why can you not? Do you not know that you must do so if you wish to save your soul?" "Father, I cannot, I cannot." "But you are at the point of death. In a few moments more you will be forced to leave her. Why not send her away now of your own free will?" "I cannot do it, indeed I cannot." "Oh!" cried the priest, drawing forth his crucifix, "look at this crucifix. Our Redeemer, your Lord, suffered and died for you. He shed His heart's blood for you. Will you not

make this slight sacrifice to please Him? Oh! look upon His wounds; see His blessed head crowned with thorns—can you refuse him? For the love of Jesus, have pity on your poor soul. Will you not send away that wicked woman, at least for the love of Jesus Christ?” “Father, I have told you already that I cannot do it.” “But if you do not send her away, I cannot give you the sacraments.” “No matter, I cannot do it.” “You will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven.” “Well, I cannot help it.” “You will die excommunicated; you cannot be buried in consecrated ground, you will be thrown aside like a dog, or an abortion!” “I cannot help it.” “But you will be condemned to the everlasting flames of hell.” “Well, I cannot help it.” “In the name of God, be reasonable. Is it not better to send away this wicked woman than to lose soul and body, heaven, and God Himself?” “I cannot send her away.” The dying man then beckoned to the wretched woman, who was standing at some distance from him, and wept. As soon as she drew near, he threw his arms around her neck, and, in a voice which trembled with weakness and passion, he cried: “Ah! you have been my joy during life, you shall be my joy in death and throughout all eternity.” These were his last words. In that same instant he breathed forth his soul, and died in the very act of sin.

Oh! how difficult it is for a person who has contracted the habit of this vice to amend his life and return sincerely to God! How difficult it is for him not to put an end to this habit in hell, like the unfortunate man of whom I have just spoken.

During the late war, a young man, a soldier in the hospital at New Berne, was reduced to a skeleton from the excess of impurity. He was lying in his agony for three days, and yet all the time he was seen committing self-abuse. Two other young soldiers in New Berne killed themselves by the excess of this accursed vice. The impure labor un-

der another illusion. They say that God has compassion on this sin. Has he? God has chastised no vice so severely as the vice of impurity. Read the Scriptures, and you will find that in punishment of this sin God sent fire from heaven, and in an instant burnt five cities, with all their inhabitants, nay, even the very stones of these cities. "And the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrha brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he destroyed these cities, and all things that spring from the earth."* In punishment of the sin of impurity, God sent on the earth the universal deluge, in which the whole human race perished with the exception of eight persons. We also read in the Scriptures that the Hebrews, having entered Settim, a city of the Moabites, fell into sin with the women of the place. In punishment for their sins, God ordered Moses to put twenty-four thousand of the Hebrews to the sword.†

At the present day, we see more severe temporal punishments inflicted on this than on any other sin. Go into the hospitals, and listen to the shrieks of so many young persons of both sexes. Ask them why they are obliged to submit to the severest treatment and to the most painful operations, and they will tell you that it is on account of the sins of impurity. At the first glance, the impure man presents an aspect of languor, weakness, and thinness. His countenance is pale, sunken, flabby, often leaden, or more or less livid, with a dark circle around the sunken eyes, which are dull, and lowered or averted. His physiognomy is sad and spiritless; his voice feeble and hoarse. There are dry cough, oppression, panting and fatigue on the least exertion; palpitations, dimness of sight, dizziness, trembling, painful cramps, convulsive movements like epilepsy; pains in the limbs or at the back of the head, in the spine, breast, or stomach; great weakness in the back; sometimes lethargy; at other times slow, consumptive

* Gen. xix. 24.

† Num. xxv. 1, 9.

fever, digestive derangements, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, or progressive emaciation. Sometimes the body is bent, and often there are all the appearances of pulmonary consumption, or the characteristics of decrepitude joined to the habits and pretensions of youth. What a wretched and degraded being such a man becomes! He bends under the weight of his crime and infamy, dragging in darkness a remnant of material and animal life. Unhappy man! He has sinned against God, against nature, against himself. He has violated the laws of the Creator. He has disfigured the image of God in his own person, and has changed it into that of the beast. He has sunk lower than the brute, and, like the brute, looks only upon the ground. His dull and stupid glance can no longer raise itself toward heaven. He no longer dares to lift his brow, already stamped with the seal of reprobation. He descends little by little into death, and a last convulsive crisis comes at length, violently to close this strange and horrible drama. (Dr. Debreyne.)

But while the physical symptoms are so grave, the moral degradation goes even further. The impure man, the desecrator of his own body, gradually loses his moral faculties; he becomes dull, silly, listless, embarrassed, sad, effeminate, in his exterior; he becomes indolent, averse to and incapable of all intellectual exertion; he is destitute of all presence of mind; he is discountenanced, troubled, inquiet, whenever he finds himself in company; he is taken by surprise and even alarmed if required simply to reply to a child's question; his feeble soul succumbs to the lightest task; his memory daily losing more and more, he is unable to comprehend the most common things, or to connect the simplest ideas. The greatest means and the brightest talents are soon exhausted; knowledge previously acquired is forgotten; the most exquisite intelligence becomes naught, and no longer bears fruit; all the vivacity, all the pride,

all the qualities of the spirit disappear; the power of the imagination is at an end for them; pleasure no longer fawns upon them; but, in revenge, all that is trouble and misfortune in the world seems the portion of the impure fellow. Inquietude, dismay, fear, which are his only affections, banish every agreeable sensation from his mind. The last crisis of melancholy and the most frightful suggestions of despair commonly end in hastening the death of the unfortunate man, or else he falls into complete apathy, and sinks below those brutes which have the least instinct, retaining only the figure of his race. It even frequently happens that the most complete folly and frenzy are manifest from the first. (Dr. Gottlieb Wogel.)

One day a young man spoke to me about one of his companions who had lost his mind. I told him that many young men nowadays lose their minds on account of self-abuse. He then avowed that he, too, had lost his mind for some time, and was taken to the mad-house; God permitted him to recover his mind that he might repent. But he soon after relapsed and was again taken to the mad-house. The overseer told one of my friends that two-thirds of the inmates lost their minds through the shameful sin of self-abuse. Such, then, is the physical degradation of the impure man—of the desecrator of his own body. If these evils are not always visible, yet they are all present, and will show themselves in proportion as the vice of impurity is practised.

Not all offenders, it is true, are visited so severely as above described. Perhaps even a small proportion of the whole number die in this manner; yet in this comparatively small minority those who persist in the practice will, sooner or later, surely be included. Let no one delude himself with the false assumption that he can be exempt from this universal law. There can be no possible exemption. Those who persist will surely die the death most horrible of all

deaths ; while the very individuals who seem to escape are those who most surely carry their punishment for the remainder of their lives, never live to attain old age, and frequently fall victims to some chronic disease, the germs of which they owe to this detestable vice. “Thou hast cast me off behind thy back,” says the Lord ; “bear thou also thy wickedness and thy fornications.”*

Doctor Tissot relates that a young man from Montpelier, a student of medicine, died from excess of the crime of impurity. The idea of his crime so agitated his mind that he died in a kind of despair, believing that he saw hell open at his side to receive him.

L. D., a watchmaker, had been virtuous and healthy until the age of seventeen. At that time he delivered himself to the vice of impurity, which he committed three times a day. In less than one year he began to experience great weakness after each criminal act. This warning was not sufficient to drive him from the danger. His soul, already wholly delivered to sin, was no longer capable of other ideas, and the repetition of the crime became every day more frequent, until he found himself in a condition which led him to be apprehensive of death. Wise too late, the evil had made such progress that he could not be cured. He soon suffered from habitual spasms, which often seized him without apparent cause, and in so violent a manner that, during the paroxysm, which sometimes lasted fifteen hours, and never less than eight, he experienced in the back of the neck such violent pains that he commonly raised, not cries merely, but howls, and it was impossible for him, during all this time, to swallow either liquids or solids. His voice became hoarse ; he entirely lost his strength. Obligated to abandon his profession, overwhelmed with misery, he languished almost without relief for several months. A trace of memory, which had nearly vanished, only served to remind him in-

* Ezech. xxiii. 35.

cessantly of the causes of his misfortune and to increase his remorse. He was less a living being than a corpse, groaning upon the straw, emaciated, pale, filthy, exhaling an infectious odor, almost incapable of any movement. Often a pale and watery blood issued from the nose, and a constant slime flowed from the mouth. Like a pig, he wallowed in his own abominable filth. Bleared, troubled, and dull, he had no longer the faculty of motion. His pulse was extremely low and rapid; his breathing very difficult; his emaciation excessive, except at the feet, which commenced to become dropsical. The disorder of his mind was just as frightful. Without memory; incapable of connecting two phrases; without reflection; without inquietude as to his fate; with no other sentiment than that of pain; a being far below the brute; a spectacle of which it is impossible to conceive the horror, one would with difficulty recognize that he had formerly belonged to the human species. He died at the end of some weeks (June 17, 1857), dropsical from head to foot.

Two young Spaniards, Ferdinand and Alonso, lived at Madrid. They were friends, of respectable family, and led very immoral lives. One night Ferdinand had a dream or vision. On a sudden the door of his chamber flew open. Two enormous giants, black and hideous, rushed towards him, seized and carried him with incredible swiftness to the shore of the sea. The night was a fearful one, dark and stormy. The wind howled wildly around him; the foaming waves were lashed into fury and rose to an immense height. His ears were stunned by the deafening peals of thunder, and his eyes blinded by the vivid flashes of lightning, which one moment lit up everything with fearful brilliancy, and then again left everything in utter darkness. By the gleam of the lightning, he noticed a vast multitude of persons standing on the shore. A number of phantom ships were sailing swiftly towards him, and to his horror he saw that

they were swarming with ghostly spectres, who hurried to and fro with wild, unearthly yells. The ships reached the shore. The demons seized and bound with chains every one they could find, and carried them quickly to their vessels. Among the prisoners, Ferdinand noticed his friend Alonso. In a moment, the grim spectres surrounded himself, seized him, and were carrying him away, when, in an agony of terror, he called aloud upon the sweet names of Jesus and Mary, and suddenly the frightful vision vanished. Ferdinand now found himself transported before the judgment-seat of God. Jesus Christ, the Eternal Judge, was seated on His throne, surrounded by myriads of angels. On His right was His Blessed Mother. Ferdinand saw that he was to be condemned for his wicked life. He called upon the Blessed Virgin, implored her assistance, promised to quit the world, and lead a life of religious penance. His prayer was heard. He awoke, and his cheeks were wet with tears. He remembered the warning, and promised God on oath to enter a religious order.

Next morning Alonso came, and, seeing Ferdinand look sad and troubled, began to banter him, and tried to amuse him by telling him of the gay parties to which they were to go. Ferdinand told him of his dream, and the vow he had made to change his life and enter a convent. Alonso laughed, and said, mockingly: "What! go into a convent? Will you not take me with you? Now, seriously, Ferdinand, you are not such an old woman as to believe in such nonsense? Do you not think that I wish to save my soul too? Indeed I do; but you see I am in no hurry. Plenty of time when I get old. Don't you know the old saying: 'All's well that ends well'?" Just at this moment a servant came up-stairs and told Alonso that there were two gentlemen at the door who wished to see him on very urgent business. Alonso told Ferdinand to banish his melancholy fancies and to prepare for the pleasant party they

were to attend that evening. He then hurried down-stairs. At the door, he met two young men with whom he had had a quarrel the day before on account of some love-affair. As soon as they saw him, they rushed upon him, stabbed him to the heart, and fled, leaving him weltering in his gore. Ferdinand, hearing the scuffle and the wild, agonizing shriek, rushed down-stairs. To his horror, he found that Alonso was dead. At the sight of this bloody corpse, he was vividly reminded of his dream. He hastened to the nearest church, cast himself at the feet of a priest, related the terrible tragedy, his dream, his vow, made a good confession, and renewed his vow. He was now restored to the grace of God, full of fervor and happiness. He sold his property in order to give the price to the poor. But alas ! after some time his impure passions began to revive, and he did not resist them. Instead of giving his wealth to the poor, he spent it in gambling, drinking, feasting, and debauchery. He cast himself headlong into the whirlpool of impurity. His excesses brought on a sickness. God, in mercy, now gave him another warning: he saw the fathomless abyss of hell open beneath him. He saw in its fiery dungeons thousands of souls horribly tormented by the devils. He saw before him once more his Eternal Judge. In a moment, a swarm of demons rose out of hell to seize his soul and drag him into the fiery gulf.

Again in his agony the unfortunate man called upon Mary, and again he obtained a respite; but something in his heart told him it was to be the last time. He was now changed. He did penance, and was restored to health. But with returning health the accursed habit of sin returned also. His passions grew strong again; he sought the occasions of sin; he fell, and became worse than ever. Reduced to poverty, he sailed to South America. On arriving at Lima he spent whatever he earned in gratifying his passions, the consequence of which was that he fell sick once

more, and went to the city hospital. Again he began to enter into himself. He sent for a holy missionary, who was celebrated for his zeal, and made his confession with a flood of tears. He told the missionary of his vow. The good priest promised to assist him to enter the convent as soon as he should recover, and promised to come and see him again. The young man soon recovered; but no sooner was he well than all his good resolutions were forgotten. In order to avoid the missionary, he left the hospital as soon as possible, and travelled through the country, everywhere giving himself up to the most shameful disorders. Some years afterwards this holy missionary was led by his zeal into one of the wildest and least frequented parts of Peru. There, in a little town surrounded by lofty mountains and pathless forests, he spent some time in instructing the inhabitants and in visiting the hospital. One day, as he was going about from bed to bed, instructing and comforting the sick, he heard a low moaning sound proceeding from a corner of the room. He went thither, and his eyes fell on an object that filled him with horror. There, upon a heap of rotten straw, lay a man, or rather a living, rotting skeleton, for there was nothing left of him but skin and bone. His hollow cheeks, his sunken, lustreless eyes, the intolerable stench that proceeded from his body, which was barely covered with rags, all told too plainly that he was an unhappy victim of that degrading passion which should not be even named amongst Christians. The priest bent over the dying man. The unhappy victim of his own guilty passions slowly opened his languishing eyes, and saw the priest. "Ah, just God!" he cried, in a hollow voice, "are you here? You who alone know all the crimes of my whole life, must you now witness my death?" At these words he began to howl and moan like a wild beast. The priest tried to encourage him, but in vain. "No, no!" he cried, "there is no hope for me. It is too late, too late!" And

with a look of wild despair he died, and his guilty soul went forth—no longer in a vision, but in dread reality—to appear before the judgment-seat of God. Ah! how true are the words of the Holy Ghost: “The bones of the impure shall be filled with the vices of his youth, and his impurity shall descend with him to the grave.”

What has already been said regards the temporal punishment inflicted in this life on sins against chastity. But what shall the punishment be in the next? You say that God has pity on this sin. But St. Remigius says that few Christian adults are saved, and that the rest are damned for sins of impurity. And Father Segneri says that three-fourths of the reprobate are damned for this vice. The hatred which God bears to sins against purity is great beyond measure. If a lady finds her plate soiled, she is disgusted and cannot eat. Now, with what disgust and indignation must God, who is purity itself, behold the impurities by which his law is violated! He loves purity with an infinite love, and consequently he has an infinite hatred for the sensuality which the lewd, voluptuous man calls a small evil. We may rest assured that, as pride has filled hell with fallen angels, so impurity fills it with the souls of men.

A young student, a model of piety, and who frequented the sacraments, was one morning going to Mass. He met two of his schoolmates, who invited and forced him to breakfast with them in a saloon. He refused; but he was in a manner forced to consent. He took some wine with them; very little at first, but soon liked it, and took more. It began to rise to his head. At this moment his eyes fell on one of the waiting girls. He yielded to the temptation, and was stabbed in the very act of sin. His two companions, terrified, quitted the world, and led lives of rigor and penance in a monastery.

About six years ago, a young man came to one of the

Redemptorist Fathers in New York, and said: "Father, be kind enough to hear my confession without delay. I have been so unfortunate as to scandalize a young lady. She died in the very act of sin. A while ago she appeared to me all on fire, and said that she was damned, and that I was the cause of her damnation, of her everlasting torments. I tremble all over, and fear I may die in the same manner." The same father was one day called to assist a dying man in a house of ill-fame. But he went in vain. The impure man was dead and judged. He died in the very act of sin. The same punishment was inflicted about two years ago on some young people in one of the New England States. They were found dead in the corn-field in the act of sin.

One day, the Fathers of the Mission of St. Vincent gave a retreat in their house at Florence to a gentleman who had lived in criminal intercourse with a lady, who died before making her peace with God. While this gentleman, in the bitterness of his repentance, was imploring the Divine mercy for the companion of his guilt, she appeared to him, and said: "Do not pray for me, for I am damned"; after which, to convince him of the reality of her apparition, she placed her hand on the table before which he was kneeling in prayer, and the part which she touched received the burnt impress of her hand. This table is still preserved in Naples.*

St. Alphonsus relates that one day a young girl was going to church. On the way she met a young man of her acquaintance. He saluted her, and asked her whither she was going. "I am going to church," she replied. "This is a beautiful day," said the young man. "The sun shines so brightly. You have plenty of time to go to church; come and let us take a short walk." The girl hesitated at first, but she forgot to pray, and at last she consented. They both went out into the fields, and the devil went with

* *Life of St. Alphonsus.*

them. The young girl forgot all about Mass. She did not think of the terrible danger to which she exposed herself, and at last when she returned home she was no longer innocent. The young man went away, and she never saw him any more. The girl went home, but she did not tell her parents what had happened, and they suspected nothing. Evening came, and the girl felt unwell. Morning came, and the girl was much worse. A neighboring woman came in, and when she saw the girl she grew pale and whispered to the mother: "For God's sake, send quick for the priest; your daughter is dying." The girl's brother ran in haste for the priest, but he was not at home. He had gone far away on a sick call. The girl's mother went to the window and looked out anxiously, to see if the priest was coming. Suddenly the young girl uttered a fearful scream. The mother ran to the bedside. The daughter was sitting up, her face was deadly pale, her eyes were staring wildly. "My poor child," said the mother, "what is the matter? Why did you scream?" The girl pointed with her finger to a corner of the room and said: "O mother, mother! look, look! Do you not see them?" "No, my child," said the mother, "I can see nothing." "O mother!" screamed the girl in an agony of terror. "See them, those horrible black people. See, they are coming near me." "Do not mind those black people, my darling," said the mother soothingly. "The priest will soon be here, and he will drive them away." And the mother gently laid back the girl's head on the pillow. "Now sleep, my dear child," said she; "the priest will soon be here, and all will be well." She then went once more to the window, and looked out anxiously to see if the priest was coming. Again the girl uttered a wild shriek. The mother hastened to her side. The girl was sitting up as before—her eyes glared wildly, looking like two balls of fire. The mother laid her hand gently on her daughter's forehead, and she

could feel the blood throbbing against her temple. The girl looked fixedly at a corner of the room. She neither stirred nor spoke, but seemed transfixed with terror. Suddenly she shuddered convulsively, and, turning to her mother, screamed: "O mother, mother, look! The black people are coming to me. O mother! they tell me they are devils; that they are going to carry my soul to hell." And then she began to shriek wildly, and to curse the young man that was the cause of her ruin. She grew black as if she were choking, fell into convulsions, and at last gasped and died. Yes, she died without the priest, died in her sins, and her soul was carried by the devils to hell.

Ah, what a horrible death! God created this girl for heaven. All that she had to do, to gain heaven, was to avoid bad example and bad company. The moment of temptation came for her; she did not pray, she did not resist. She broke the commandment of God. She committed a mortal sin, and died without confession or repentance. Had she at least made a good act of contrition, she might yet have been saved; but no, she died in despair, and the devils carried her soul to hell. The impure may say that the sin of impurity is but a small evil. But at the hour of death they will not say so. Every sin of impurity shall then show itself such as it really is—a monster of hell. Much less will they say so before the judgment-seat of Jesus Christ, who will tell them what His apostle has already told them: "No fornicator or unclean hath inheritance in the kingdom of God."* The man who has lived like a brute cannot sit among the angels. Common-sense, the voice of conscience, Holy Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, all the Saints, even all the devils, tell him so.

All that has been said on this subject has been said, not that any one who has been addicted to the vice of impurity may be driven to despair, but that he may be cured. Let

* *Eph.* v. 5.

him pray to God, let him pray to the Mother of God, in order to obtain, through her powerful intercession, light to see the great danger of damnation which his soul incurs, and courage and strength to deliver himself from this danger by a sincere confession and firm purpose of amendment of life—by avoiding the occasions of this sin, and by having immediate recourse to prayer as soon as he is assailed by temptations against the holy virtue of chastity.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRODIGAL A MONSTER—DRUNKENNESS.

ST. JOHN the Evangelist was once taken in spirit to the bank of a sea. And behold, as he stood there, a hideous beast came out of the deep sea. It had seven heads and ten horns, and upon its horns were ten diadems, and upon its heads were written names of blasphemy. And the beast was like a leopard, and its feet were as the feet of a bear, and its mouth was as the mouth of a lion. And this monster opened its mouth in blasphemies against God, against His holy name, against His tabernacle, the holy Church, and against the Saints in Heaven. And the dragon of hell gave this beast his own power and great strength, and the beast waged war against the Saints, the children of God.* How great would be our horror were this monster to appear to us! We should die of fright. And yet, there are many who have been for years carrying in their hearts a far more hideous monster—a monster so horrible that, could we but see it in its true shape, the sight of it would kill us. They have carried this monster in their hearts day and night, waking and sleeping; they have carried it for days and weeks, and for years. And the name of it is drunkenness. The spirit of intemperance every day changes human beings into savage beasts—into the hideous monsters of the Apocalypse with seven heads. These seven heads are the seven deadly sins, which are all found in the drunkard. The drunkard is proud, envious, gluttonous, full of lust, etc. There are, of course, degrees of intemperance, and many

* Apoc. xiii. 1.

persons are only at times guilty of this sin. There are many who say that drunkenness is no sin. It is not considered by those outside the Church as a sin, but as a weakness : men speak of it as a misfortune ; physicians class it as a simple mania, to be pitied rather than condemned. Instead of giving to it, as a moral disease, a moral remedy, they encourage it by taking away its enormity. But what says the Word of God ? It tells us that drunkenness is a mortal sin. St. Paul says : “ The drunkard shall not possess the kingdom of God.”* And why shall not the drunkard possess the kingdom of God ? Because the sin of drunkenness of which he becomes guilty is a grievous sin against nature, against religion, against himself, against the family, and therefore against God, the Author of nature, the Spirit of religion, and the Founder of the family. It goes against nature, because it ruins the body, corrupts the soul, and changes the image of God in man into the likeness of a brute.

It is a singular fact that the devil may tempt a man in a thousand ways. He may get him to violate the law of God in a thousand ways, but he cannot rob him of the divine image that the law of God set upon him in reason, in love and freedom. The demon of pride may assail us, but the proudest man retains these three great faculties in which his manhood consists ; for man is the image of God. The image of God is in him ; his intelligence, love, and freedom are the quintessence of his human nature that the devil must respect. Just as of old the Lord said to the demon : “ You may strike my servant Job ; you may afflict him ; you may cover him with ulcers ; you may destroy his house and his children ; but respect his life ; you must not touch his life.” So Almighty God seems to say to the very devils of hell : “ You may lead man, by temptations, into whatsoever sins ; but you must respect his manhood ; he must still remain a man.” To all except one ! There is one devil

* 1 Cor vi. 9.

alone who is able not only to rob us of that divine grace by which we are children of God, but to rob us of every essential feature of humanity, in taking away from us the intelligence by which we know, the affection by which we love, the freedom by which we act, as human beings, as we are. What demon is this who is the enemy not only of God but of human nature? It is the terrible demon of intemperance. Every other demon that tempts man to sin may exult in the ruin of the soul; he may deride and insult Almighty God for the moment, and riot in his triumph; insult Him as the author of that grace which the soul has lost. The demon of drunkenness alone can say to Almighty God: "Thou alone, O Lord, art the fountain, the source, the Creator of nature and of grace. What vestige of grace is here? I defy you, I defy the world to tell me that here is a vestige even of humanity!" Behold the drunkard. Behold the image of God as he comes forth from the drinking-saloon, where he has pandered to the meanest, vilest, and most degrading of the senses—the sense of taste. He has laid down his soul upon the altar of the poorest devil of them all—the devil of gluttony. Upon that altar he has left his reason, his affections, and his freedom. Behold him now, as he reels forth, senseless and debauched, from that drinking-house! Where is his humanity? Where is the image of God? He is unable to conceive a thought. He is unable to express an idea with his babbling tongue, which pours forth feebly, like a child, some impotent, outrageous blasphemy against Heaven! Where are his affections? He is incapable of love; no generous emotion can pass through him. No high and holy love can move that degraded, surfeited heart. The most that can come to him is the horrible demon of impurity, to shake him with emotions of which, even in that hour, he is incapable! Finally, where is his freedom? Why, he is not able to walk, not able to stand, he is not able to guide himself! If a child

came along and pushed him, it would throw him down. He has no freedom left—no will. If, then, the image of the Lord in man be intelligence—in the heart and in the will—I say this man is no man. He is a standing reproach to humanity. He has cast aside his manhood and adopted the habits of a brute. He roars like a lion, he capers like a donkey, he wallows in the mire like a swine. What sort of an animal is he? He is a swine, and worse than a swine; for what animal is there more filthy and impure than a drunkard, whose very thought, word, and deed reek of impurity! When did a drunken man or a drunken woman commit the most abominable, the most unnatural crimes? When did they degrade themselves below the brute beast? Was it not when their reason was besotted by the accursed vice of drunkenness? Look upon the wretched drunkard as he staggers along the street! The street seems too narrow for him; his feet are unable to carry their monstrous load. He reels; he falls; he wallows in the mire till he is all besmeared with filth. The very dogs come and look at him, smell him, wag their tails, and walk off. They can walk, but he cannot; they find their way home, but he cannot.

And this is the image of God? No; he is no longer the image of God, because he has lost his intelligence. What says the Holy Ghost? The man blinded, when he has no honor—when he has lost his intelligence—He compares to a senseless beast; like unto it he is no longer the image of God, but only a brute beast. And if such be the sin that the drunkard commits against humanity, what shall be said of the sin that he commits against religion?

The drunkard seldom or never goes to Mass. He never goes to confession. Or, if he does, it is only to lie to the Holy Ghost, for he promises to abstain from drink, and he breaks his promises as soon as he has made them. He is a disgrace to religion, the enemy of the priest, the stumbling-block to

hundreds in the way of conversion, a mockery of our holy faith, a wretch who drags his faith in the mire and pollutes the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Go through the streets of any of our large cities, and see a drunkard staggering along and serving as a laughing-stock for the whole neighborhood. Go ask who it is, and to your shame some scoffing infidel will tell you, sneeringly, "Oh! it is only a drunken Catholic!" A drunken Catholic! My God! is it then for this that thou hast come into the world? Sweet Jesus! is this the fruit of thy bitter passion! Is it for this that thou didst bleed and die, to found a pure and holy religion? And is it for this that the priests of God have left father and mother, home and friends, and all that was near and dear to them on earth? Is it for this that they have studied and labored so long—that they have renounced all the pleasures and honors of life? Have they sacrificed all only to become the priests of a people who trample all the dictates of religion and reason under foot, who are the disgrace of their faith, their country, and their God?

When God upbraided the Israelites by the mouth of his prophet, he named all their wicked crimes one by one. "There is," saith the Lord, "no truth, there is no mercy, there is no knowledge of God among these people. Cursing, lying and murder, and robbery and adultery have overflowed the land; one bloody deed surpasses the other." And then, as if to sum up all these grievous crimes in one most grievous crime, God says: "These people are become like unto those that contradict the priests." This terrible truth is the last degree of wickedness to which sinners can come; for he who contradicts the priests of God contradicts God Himself. Our Saviour says to the apostles: "He who despises you despises me." He saddens the Holy Ghost; and Jesus assures us that he who sins against the Holy Ghost shall not obtain forgiveness, neither in this life nor in the

life to come. Now, call together the sinners of every class, seek especially those who by every word and action contradict the priest of God, and foremost among them you will find the drunkard. Yes, the drunkards are those who contradict the priest. The priests tell them that drunkenness is a grievous sin, and they answer that it is only a weakness of nature, more to be pitied than blamed. The priests tell them that they dishonor their faith, that they make themselves a laughing-stock for the enemies of our holy Church, and these unworthy Catholics choose the most solemn festivals, the most sacred days, as the most fitting occasion when to satisfy their accursed passion. The priests denounce the detestable crime of drunkenness. From the altar they protest against it, in the name of God. And these men who have heard them leave the church to go straight to the low haunts of sin and intemperance. They have been implored for the love of God, for the love that they bear to their immortal souls, to give up drunkenness and to lead sober and upright lives. And those very Catholics who have heard such pleadings and prayers in the morning, one blushes to meet in the evening staggering home in their drunken defilement; and perhaps, ere another day has passed, the priest is sent for to prepare them for an untimely death. What wonder at the fearful vengeance that so often falls upon the drunkard! Listen to the dread sentence of the Holy Ghost: "The drunkard shall not enter the kingdom of Heaven." Listen to the terrible threat which God has pronounced against them by the mouth of His prophet: "I shall make them drunk till they fall asleep, and sleep that eternal sleep, that knows no waking."* "They shall die as they have lived, they shall die in their sins."

In the year 1872, there was in the poor-house of Crown Point, Lake County, Indiana, a native of Grosslosheim in

* *Isaias* li. 39.

the diocese of Treves, Germany. He had been a rich man, but through his intemperance he was soon reduced to beggary. He came over to this country to try and repair his fortune. Here he grew worse and worse; he fell away from his religion; he renounced his God, and became a bitter enemy of everything sacred. He ridiculed God, he ridiculed religion, he ridiculed the priest, the church, the sacraments, the pious, the saints. Well, death came to him at last. He was missed from the poor-house for some days. No one knew anything of his whereabouts until on the 27th of October, 1872, his bones and clothes were found scattered about—not in the grave-yard, not in the field, not in the streets, but in the pig-sty. Having led the life of a swine, he was eaten up by the swine.

The drunkard sins not only against nature and against religion, but he also sins grievously against himself.

Look at a young man of eighteen or nineteen whose father, mother, or himself have never touched intoxicating drink: he is full of strength and energy, mentally and physically ready for any emergency. Let him begin to drink liquor: he does not become a drunkard suddenly; he sinks by the regular stages; his liking for drink grows on him slowly but surely, until at last he becomes a regular drunkard. At twenty-seven or twenty-eight he has become a wreck, with tottering feet, trembling hands, glassy eyes: drink has ruined his constitution. The man has been poisoned.

It is known that out of every ten gallons of drink sold nowadays—especially in the low grog-shops—nine gallons are poison. This enters into the system, destroys the coating of the stomach, is absorbed in the blood, and ruins the entire health. The strongest proof of the effects of drink is to be found in the cities, where the terrible epidemics of cholera, typhus, or yellow fever have paid their visits—the first men who fall are the drunkards. Read the statistics

of New Orleans, Liverpool, London, and New York, and you will find this to be the fact.

Ah ! yes, the drunkard loses health, loses reputation, loses his friends, loses his wife and family, loses domestic happiness, loses everything. And in addition to this is the slavery that no power on earth, and scarcely—be it said with reverence—any power in Heaven, can seem to be able to assuage. All this is the injury that man inflicts upon himself by this terrible sin.

Finally, consider the evil that the drunkard does to his family. St. Paul says that he “who neglects his family is worse than a heathen, and has already denied his faith.” We are bound to love our neighbor. Our neighbor may be a Turk, a Mormon, or an infidel, but we must love him. For instance, we are bound to regret any evil that happens to him, because we are bound to have a certain amount of love for all men. Well, in that charity which binds us to our neighbor there is a greater and a less. A man must love with Christian charity all men. But there are certain individuals that have a special claim on his love that he is bound, for instance, not only to love, but to honor, to worship, to maintain. And who are they? The father and the mother that bore us; the wife that gave us her young heart and her young beauty; the children that Almighty God gave us. These gifts of God—the family, the wife, the children, have the first claim upon us; and they have the most stringent demand upon that charity concentrated, which, as Christians, we must diffuse to all men. And this is precisely the point wherein the drunkard shows himself more hard-hearted than the wild beast. The woman that in her youth, and modesty, and purity, and beauty put her maiden hand into his before the altar of God, and swore away to him her young heart and her young love; the woman who had the trust in him to take him for ever and for aye; the woman who, if you will, had the confiding

folly to bind up with him all the dreams that ever she had of happiness, or peace, or joy in this world; the woman that said to him, "Next to God, and after God, I will let thee into my heart, and love thee and thee alone," and then before the altar of God received the seal of sacramental grace upon that pure love—this is the woman, and her children and his children, towards whom the drunkard cannot fulfil his duties of a husband and a father.

How is it possible for him to do so?

The drunkard is a husband. Why, his wife is starving and in rags; he treats her as if she was the vilest slave. The drunkard is a father. Look at his children: they are shivering with cold and crying for bread, while he is spending his last dollar in the bar-room. Whose boy is just arrested for robbery? He is the drunkard's son. Poor boy! his unnatural father spent in liquor the little money that might have supported him honestly, and the wretched boy was forced to steal in order to satisfy the cravings of hunger. There is that son, that daughter, taught to drink from their very childhood, brought up in ignorance of their religion, and utterly demoralized by bad example. In early youth, they found the way to the saloon and to the low haunts of sin and shame. They have been taught by their own parents to drink and to curse, and now they curse those very parents, and they raise their guilty hands to strike those who bore them, and thus bring down upon their own heads the terrible curse of God. What slatternly, dirty creature is that with a black eye and a bloated face? It is the drunken wife. Her husband is, perhaps, far away, working for her support. He sends her the pay which he has earned at the price of hard toil. And little does he dream that these hard-earned wages only help to ruin his family and to make his wife a drunkard.

Rev. Father T. Burke, O.P., relates the following: "I was," says he, "on a mission some years ago in a manufac-

turing town in England. I was preaching there every evening, and a man came to me one night after a sermon on this very subject of drunkenness. He came in—a fine man: a strapping, healthy, intellectual-looking man. But the eye was almost burned in his head, and was glassy. The forehead was furrowed with premature wrinkles; the hair was steel-gray, though the man was evidently comparatively young. He was dressed shabbily; scarce a shoe to his feet, though it was a wet night. He came into me excitedly after the sermon, but the excitement had something of drink in it. He told me his history. ‘I don’t know,’ he said, ‘that there is any hope for me; but still, as I was listening to the sermon, I must speak to you. If I don’t speak to some one, this heart will break to-night.’ What was his story? Five years before he had amassed in trade twenty thousand pounds, or one hundred thousand dollars. He had married an Irish girl—one of his own race and creed, young, beautiful, and accomplished. He had two sons and a daughter—a woman. He told me for a certain time everything went on well. ‘At last,’ he said, ‘I had the misfortune to begin to drink—neglected my business, and then my business began to neglect me. The woman saw poverty coming, and began to fret, and lost her health. At last, when we were paupers, she sickened and died. I was drunk,’ he said, ‘the day that she died. I sat by her bedside. I was drunk when she was dying.’ ‘The sons—what became of them?’ ‘Well,’ he said, ‘they were mere children. The eldest of them is no more than eighteen; and they are both transported as robbers to Australia.’ ‘The girl?’ ‘Well,’ he said, ‘I sent the girl to a school where she was well educated. She came home to me when she was sixteen years of age, a beautiful young woman. She was the one consolation I had; but I was drunk all the time.’ ‘Well, what became of her?’ He looked at me. ‘Do you ask me

about that girl,' he said, 'what became of her?' And as if the man was shot, down he went, with his head on the floor—'God of Heaven! God of Heaven! She is on the streets to-night—a prostitute!' The moment he said that word he ran out. I went after him. 'Oh, no! oh, no!' he said; 'there is no mercy in Heaven for me. I left my child on the streets!' He went away cursing God to meet a drunkard's death. He had sent a broken-hearted mother to the grave; he sent his two sons to perdition; he sent his only daughter to be a living hell. And then he died blaspheming God!"

Again, look at the drunkard. There is stupidity in his face, fire in his brain, and the demon of hatred and anger in his soul. Hear the broken curses, the blasphemies, that flow from his lips. He imagines that every one he meets is his enemy; he fights and quarrels even with his best friends. What sort of an animal is *he*? He is a tiger, and worse than a tiger. Ah! God help his poor wife when he comes home. She once married a kind, good-natured man; but now that he has turned to drink he has become a tiger. See how he storms about the house, cursing and swearing! He breaks the furniture, he smashes the doors and windows, and alarms the whole neighborhood. Look at his poor children. God help them now! See how they cower and hide themselves away from their own father. Father, indeed! They tremble in deadly fear at the sight of him whom they should love and honor. To them the dear name of "father" is not a name of love. Ah, no! it is a name of hate and terror. They whisper to one another: "Father's drunk again; let us go away." The poor wife tries to calm him, perhaps, with kind words, and what is her return? O shame! O ye men, born of woman, nourished at her breast, hang your heads in shame at such a deed! And you, angels of God, veil your faces lest you witness the heavy blow and the brutal kick. Poor, unhappy wife! God pity her! Was

it, then, for this that she sacrificed all that was near and dear to her in the world? Was it for this that she tore herself away from her fond parents, from her loving brothers and sisters, in order to follow him and to love him? Ah! better were it for her, on the day she gave him her hand and heart, had her bridal garment been changed into a shroud. Better were it for her had she lain stiff and cold in her coffin, than to have stood with him as his bride before the altar. On the day he wedded her, he promised before the altar of God, in presence of the holy angels, in presence of the Almighty God, that he would love, honor, and cherish her. And see how he has kept his promise! He has lost his reason; he has degraded his manhood; his once noble nature is now turned into the nature of a wild, ferocious beast. He stamps about the room, swearing by the holy name of God that he will not be dictated to by any living being—man or woman. His glaring eye at last falls upon the prostrate form of his once-loved wife. She is lying on the floor, pale and lifeless. What does he see? What is it that makes him thus start back, horror-stricken? It is blood! Yes, there is blood on the pale face of his lifeless wife; there is blood upon the clothes; there is blood upon the floor; and, before he can collect his scattered thoughts, there is a noise outside: the officers of justice enter. The drunkard—the murderer—is seized and handcuffed; he is hurried to prison; he is tried and found guilty—guilty of murder; and then—his body to the hangman, and his soul—to hell. “The drunkard shall not possess the kingdom of God.”

There is nothing more pleasing to God than to be merciful and to spare. Therefore the greatest injury that any man can offer to God is to tie up His hands and to oblige Him to refuse the exercise of His mercy—to tell the Almighty God that He must not, nay, that He cannot, be merciful. There is only one sin and one sinner alone that

can do it. That one sin is drunkenness ; that one sinner is the drunkard : the only man that has the omnipotence of sin, the infernal power to tie up the hands of God, to oblige that God to refuse him mercy. No matter what sin a man commits, if, in the very act of committing it, the Almighty God strikes him, one moment is enough to make an act of contrition, to shed one tear of sorrow, and to save the soul. The murderer, even though expiring, his hands reddened with the blood of his victim, can send forth one cry for mercy, and in that cry be saved. The robber, stricken down in the very midst of his misdeeds, can cry for mercy on his soul. The impure man, even while he is revelling in his impurity, if he feel the chilly hand of death laid upon him, and cry out, “God be merciful to me a sinner !” in that cry may be saved. The drunkard alone—alone amongst all sinners—lies there dying in his drunkenness. If all the priests and all the bishops in the Church of God were there, they could not give that man pardon or absolution of his sins, because he is incapable of it—because he is not a man ! Sacraments are for men, let them be ever so sinful—provided that they be men. One might as well absolve the four-footed beast as lift a priestly hand over the drunkard. If the Pope of Rome were with him, what could he do for him while in such a state ? The one sin that puts a man outside the pale of God’s mercy is drunkenness. Long as that arm of God is, it is not long enough to touch with a merciful hand the sinner who is in the act of drunkenness.

What greater injury can a man offer to God than to say to Him : “ Lord, you may be just. I don’t know that you don’t wish to exercise your justice, but you may. You may be omnipotent ; you may have every attribute. But there is one that you must not have, and must not exercise in my regard ; I put it out of your power ; and that is the attribute that you love the most of all—the attribute

of mercy"; for the Father in Heaven sees in the drunkard his worst and most terrible enemy.

There lived not many years ago, in an obscure part of a certain city, a poor family. They were poor, for their father was a drunkard. He was a good workman, and had once been a kind father and a good husband. But he became acquainted with bad companions, who led him to the bar-room. From that time forth he became an altered man. He no longer frequented Mass or Confession. His chief place of resort was the public-house. He was often out of employment by reason of his drunkenness, and when he was in want of money he sold the furniture, sold even the very clothes of his wife and children, in order to buy liquor. His poor children were in rags, and they would have starved had not the eldest boy, named Willie, managed to work for them. Many and many a time the poor wife, on her knees, begged her unhappy husband to give up the public-house. But the only answer she got was a bitter curse or a hard blow. Once, when this unhappy man came home drunk as usual, he was in a violent passion, and stabbed his son Willie. The boy recovered, but he had to work very hard in an iron foundry, and within a year after his drunken father had stabbed him he sickened and died. The wretched man still continued to drink, and to ruin himself and his family. God often warned him. God waited and waited, expecting that he would do penance; but the unhappy drunkard heeded neither the voice of man nor the voice of God. His punishment came at last. He lived a drunkard's life, he must die a drunkard's death. In a miserable garret, on the third story, in one of the poorest parts of the city, his poor wife was kneeling and praying for her husband. It was just midnight, and well he needed her prayers. Midnight passed, and he came home drunk again. His head was bleeding, and his face was swollen. He had been fighting with his wicked companions. When

he came into the room and saw that his wife had been waiting for him, he said roughly to her: "Why are you sitting up and wasting the candle? I suppose you want to tell the neighbors about me. If you do not go to bed instantly, I'll kill you." The poor wife was terrified, but she took courage, and said kindly: "You are hurt, my dear. I will get some vinegar and bathe your face with it." The drunkard grew furious, and, swearing a terrible oath, said: "If you don't get out of my sight, I will murder you." The poor woman was faint and weary from hunger and long watching, and overcome by weakness and terror, fell back fainting on the floor. The drunken man stood over her, and his face glared like the face of a demon. He howled like a wild beast, and sprang upon his wife, kicked her with his heavy shoes, and stamped upon her. The neighbors heard the noise, but they feared to enter, for they knew what sort of a drunkard he was. They then heard him go down-stairs, open the door, and walk away. On entering the room they found the poor woman lying on the floor senseless. Blood was flowing profusely from her mouth and nostrils. The priest was sent for in haste, and when he came he found her dying. She had lived a good life, had gone regularly to the sacraments; she had borne patiently, for the love of Jesus, all the cruel treatment of her husband, and now that she was dying of that ill-treatment no complaint passed her lips. She forgave her husband; she prayed for him with her dying breath. She received the sacraments, and then died in peace. The following night a good woman was sitting up, watching by the dead body, and praying for the departed soul. It was already late in the night—about eleven o'clock. Suddenly she heard the tramp of footsteps coming up-stairs. She listened; the footsteps came on—on, stopped a little way from the door, then came close to the door, and stopped again. At last the latch was lifted, the door was opened a little, and a horrible face appeared.

It was the face of the murderer. The woman was so terrified, she could neither speak nor scream. The eyes of the murderer rolled about and wandered over the room, as if in search of something. At last he looked in a friendly manner at the woman. "Woman," cried he hoarsely, "tell me, where is my wife?" As he said these words, he strode into the room, and his heavy footsteps resounded on the wooden floor. The woman's fright passed away; she arose, and, pointing sternly to the dead body of his wife lying on the bed, said: "There, drunkard, there lies the corpse of your murdered wife." The drunkard went to the bedside, and bent for a moment over the dead body. Then in a wild agony he threw up his hands and cried aloud: "My God! she is dead! she is dead! What have I done?" He screamed aloud, and those who heard that scream will not forget it to their dying day. He clinched his hands, his lips parted so that all his teeth could be seen, a deadly paleness overspread his face, and he fell heavily on the floor. The woman screamed for help. The neighbors rushed in; they lifted up the wretched man, but he had lost his reason, and raved like a madman.

The priest was sent for, and when he came he found the drunkard stretched on a bed from which the dead body of his wife had been removed. Six strong men were holding him down, hanging with their whole weight on his limbs. From time to time he started up and shook off these strong men as if they had been so many children. The large iron door-key was put betwixt his teeth, that he might not bite off his tongue; and it was horrible to hear the grating sound of his teeth grinding the iron key. The priest had to leave, as he could do nothing for the unhappy man. Next day the priest came again. The drunkard was terribly changed. His flesh was dried up, and his skin parched by a burning fever. His arms were pinioned; for it was dangerous to let him loose. His lips were withered and cover-

ed with a brown crust. There was a dark ring around each of his eyes, and his eye-balls were red and blood-shot. All those who saw him trembled at the sight; for he was in despair. He had indeed recovered his senses, but it was only to realize the horror of his unhappy state. The priest approached the bedside and spoke kindly and gently to the unhappy man. "My man," he said, "you are now dying. You will soon appear before the judgment-seat of Jesus Christ. Repent of your sins while you have yet time." The drunkard glared at the priest with fiery eyes. "What!" cried he, "repent? Is it to me you talk of repentance? No, no, no; there is no repentance for me! I am damned! I am damned for ever!" The priest encouraged him and told him to hope in the mercy of God. "No, no," cried the unhappy drunkard, "there is no hope, no mercy, for me. All last night I saw my murdered wife and boy standing by this bed and threatening me. Sometimes they pointed with their shadowy fingers to the corner of the room, and there I saw the damned spirits of hell mocking me. And then these hellish spirits would crowd around my bed and bend their horrid faces over me; I was tied, and could not get away from them. Then they would grin and laugh at me, and tell me how they would meet me to-night—to-night!—in hell. No, no, there is no mercy for me; it is too late, too late." The good priest tried once more to encourage the unhappy man. He told him how the blessed Jesus had died to save him. He told him how good and kind a mother Mary is; how she obtains pardon even for the most abandoned sinner. But he spoke to a heart of stone; the drunkard heeded not his words. The dying man made no confession. He said that he could not, that he would not, repent. His blasphemies were too horrible to be told. It seemed as if the very devil himself was speaking by his tongue. Sometimes he would call on those present to hide him from his wife and boy, whose ghosts, he said, were haunting him. Then he would sing a

few snatches of an immodest song, and talk as if he was again in the midst of his bad companions. Then again he would roar out in a fearful agony, as only a sinner dying in despair can shout. "Oh!" he would cry wildly, "do you not see the devils coming around my bed? Ah! they want to take my soul to hell. See! see! the blue flames of hell are rising up around me."

It was just midnight. The hour of retribution had come. The drunkard was never more to see the dawn of morning. The window was open, and the heavy bell could be heard through the still night-air; it struck the hour of twelve. Then the wretched man gave a long and terrible howl, and died. He died and passed from the darkness of midnight to the never-ending darkness of hell. Thus dies the drunkard, and thus will every drunkard die who perseveres in his sin; for the Holy Ghost has said: "The drunkard shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."*

Go now, and drink; call it a friendly glass. Yes, you will gain a friend and lose your God. Go now, and drink; say that you drink only because of your weak health, because of your hard work. Go and buy your drink; bring on disease and an untimely death. Ask the doctors, the chemists, and they will tell you how much deadly poison you continually drink in with your liquor. Drink and say that you meant no harm; you only wished to be a little merry; that you wished to drown your grief and trouble. Drink now of the intoxicating cup, and hereafter you shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God; you shall drink of fire and brimstone; you shall drink of the poison of serpents and the gall of dragons.

Go now, and call your friends around the innocent babe that has just been baptized; go and call your neighbors round the corpse of your dead relative, and drink—yes, drink your fill; but with your liquor drink in the priest's

* 1 Cor. vi. 10.

tears, drink in the widow's and the orphan's curse, drink in the wrath of your offended God. Go, season and soak your bodies with liquor, and be assured that they will burn all the more fiercely for it in the eternal flames of hell.

And you who sell liquor to drunkards—you whose saloon is the vestibule of hell—you who are in it the devil's recruiting sergeant—you who encourage and fatten upon this accursed crime, stand up now in the presence of your Eternal Judge, and say, if you dare, "Their blood be upon us and upon our children." Go home now, and count all your blood-money you have received for your liquor; count it well, for it is the price of immortal souls, purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. Count it all; for it is moistened by the tears of the heart-broken wife and her half-starved children. Hoard it with care; for every cent of it will surely bring upon you and your family the widow's and the orphan's curse—the curse of the avenging God.

And you who are yet free from this accursed vice, thank God, and beware lest you be led into it by degrees. It is far easier for you to avoid falling into this vice than it is to abandon it after having once contracted it. If you have just begun to contract the sinful habit of drunkenness—if you are already its slave—stop now, and pause where you are. Listen to the voice of your poor wife, whom you have so often ill-treated. Listen to the cries of your poor children, whom you have reduced to beggary and shame. Listen to the voice of the priest of God, who conjures you, for the love of God, for the love of your immortal soul, to give up drinking. Listen to the warning voice of the Holy Ghost, who tells you that the drunkard shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Listen to the pleading voice of your Saviour, Jesus Christ. Do not ruin that soul for which Jesus Christ has died. Three-and-thirty years did Jesus fast and labor in order to gain your soul. He suffered hunger and thirst; He bore patiently the burning thirst,

that tormented Him on the cross ; He tasted the vinegar and gall, in order to atone for your intemperance. Will you, then, ruin that soul for which Jesus suffered so much ? Will you trample on the precious blood of Jesus ? Will you render all his sufferings useless ? Ah ! save yourself, while you have yet time, from temporal as well as eternal misery. You have sinned, and you must do penance. Give up drinking, and God will accept that as a penance. You have sinned grievously. You have merited the never-ending torments of hell. Give up drink, then. It may indeed be hard and painful ; but remember the miseries of drunkenness—the never-ending torments of hell are far more painful. The longer you abstain from drink, the easier will it be for you to abandon it altogether ; and the peace of conscience you will enjoy, the blessings of God, the prayers of your family, will give you strength enough to resist the unhealthy craving for liquor. Pray often . approach the Sacraments frequently. Choose a good confessor, and follow his advice, and God may yet preserve you from the unutterable torments reserved for the drunkard.

How glorious is the mission of the temperance society ! The members of this society have raised the standard in defiance to this demon that is destroying the whole world. They have declared that their very names shall be enrolled as a monument against the vice of drunkenness. They have thereby asserted the glory of God in His image—man. The glory of humanity is restored by the angel of sobriety and temperance ; the glory of Christ restored from the dishonor which is put upon Him by the drunkard amongst all other sinners ; the glory of the Christian woman retrieved and honored, as every year adds a new, mellowing grace to the declining beauty which passes away with youth ; the glory of the family, in which the rue Christian son is the reflection of the virtues of his true and Christian father :

finally, the glory of souls, and the assurance of a holy life and a happy death—all this is involved in the profession which they make to be the apostles and the silent but eloquent propagators of this holy virtue—**temperance.**

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FAR COUNTRY—INFIDELITY.

OUR future and true home is heaven. Oh! how full of joy and sweetness is that one word heaven, paradise! To the ear of the exile there is nothing sweeter than the name of home. What wonder, then, that the name of heaven should be so full of sweetness, since it is our true home, our home for ever? When Blessed Egidio heard any one speak of heaven, he was so overcome with joy that he was lifted up into the air in an ecstasy of delight.

The first step towards heaven is the knowledge of God. "For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and is a rewarder of those that seek Him."* "And this is life everlasting," says our dear Saviour, "that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." † "Without this faith it is impossible to please God." ‡ But as without this faith man cannot please God and be saved, his Creator has made faith easy for him.

Man is born a believing creature, and cannot, if he would, destroy altogether this noble attribute of his nature. If he is not taught, and will not accept, a belief in the living and uncreated God, he will create and worship some other god in His stead. He cannot rest on *pure negation*. There never has been a real, absolute unbeliever. All the so-called unbelievers are either knaves or idiots. All the Gentile nations of the past have been religious people; all the pagan powers of the present are also believers. There never has been a nation without faith, without an altar, without

* Heb. xi. 6.

† John xvii. 3.

‡ Heb. xi. 6.

a sacrifice. Man can never, even for a single instant, escape the all-seeing eye of God or avoid the obligations of duty imposed on him by his Creator. The pantheists of ancient as well as of modern times recognize this fact, although they do not discharge their religious obligations conformably to the divine will, but make to themselves other gods instead. The belief in the existence of God among men in some sensible form seems to be a want of the human heart. To satisfy this craving after the Real Presence of God, men made use of unholy means. Blinded by their passions, they fell into idolatry, and, instead of raising themselves to the true and pure God, they foolishly worshipped what they deemed the divine Presence in stones, plants, and animals. It was God Himself who planted in the human heart the desire for the Real Presence, and God Himself also found means to satisfy this desire. He first revealed Himself to man by creation, which is a continual revelation of His Presence, although He is hidden therein. The good and pure indeed behold God in creation. They see His power in the storm, in the cataract, in the earthquake. They see His wisdom in the laws that govern the boundless universe, His beauty in the flower, in the sunbeam, and in the many-tinted rainbow. But the wicked and impure use this very creation only to outrage and blaspheme the Creator.

God, then, made use of a more perfect means to reveal to man His divine Presence. This was His Word. If a friend visits us at night, and finds us sitting in the dark, he speaks, he makes use of words to show that he is really present. In like manner God, wishing to reveal His Real Presence to man, sitting in the darkness of this life, has addressed him in words. This is the very first article of faith. God spoke to our first parents in the garden of Paradise. He spoke to the patriarchs, to the prophets, and finally, as St. Paul assures us, He has spoken for the last time by His only-begotten Son.

But merely to hear the voice of a friend is not enough ; the heart longs for something more ; the eyes yearn to look upon Him. God knows this want of the human heart, and He has satisfied it also. The prophets have besought Him again and again to show Himself. "Show us Thy face, O Lord! and we shall be saved." This, too, was the ardent prayer of Moses: "O Lord! show me thy glory."*

In the Old Law God satisfied this desire by manifesting His Real Presence to the Israelites under the form of a cloud and a pillar of fire. He next commanded an ark or tabernacle to be made, and there He manifested His Real Presence by a peculiar, supernatural light, called the Shekinah. But all this did not satisfy either man's heart or God's unbounded love. If we love a person dearly, it will not satisfy us to hear his voice or to see him in disguise; we wish to behold him face to face. God gratified even this desire. He had commanded a tabernacle of wood to be made by the hand of man, and that tabernacle he chose for his dwelling-place. But now with His own divine hands He made a living tabernacle, holy and spotless—the Immaculate Virgin Mary; and in that tabernacle He took up His abode. There He formed for Himself a human body and soul. Thence He came forth to live among men and to be as one of them.

In becoming man God revealed His Real Presence to all our senses. Men saw God, heard God, even touched God. He had already revealed His Real Presence to man's reason in the creation, but man had forgotten Him. He had revealed His Real Presence by His word, and man refused to listen to Him. He had shown himself face to face to man, and man crucified Him. There was now but one means left for God to reveal His Real Presence, and that was by faith. He reveals His Presence in a far more perfect manner. He shows himself to the eyes of faith—to the believing soul.

* *Exod. xxxiii. 18.*

God has done all that He could to make men believe in Him and in his Son Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, whom He sent to teach us the way of salvation. If man be born a believing creature, how does it happen that we see this faith in God, in Jesus Christ, in everlasting rewards and punishments, disappear every day more and more? How many millions of men live in America who profess no religion at all! Infidelity and indifference to all religion are the characteristic traits of our age. Men boast of the progress, of the inventions, of the discoveries of our age; but all this vaunted progress is only material. In religion, in all that is high and noble and holy, they have made no progress; they are even far behind their forefathers. They have established lines of communication with the most distant nations of the earth, but they have lost the blessed communion with heaven. They boast that they have almost annihilated time and space, but they have not succeeded in annihilating sin and crime in their midst. Their schools and academies, their colleges and universities, impart the most thorough instruction in every branch of human knowledge; but the only true knowledge—the knowledge of God and of His holy law—they utterly ignore. How are we to account for this universal unbelief? What are the causes of infidelity?

The causes that lead to infidelity are various. They are corruption of the heart, neglect of prayer, ignorance of the mind, private judgment in matters of faith, and godless education. Before the prodigal son left his father's house our Lord said that "he asked for the portion of goods which should come to him." We are thus informed of the desire which was in the prodigal's mind before he quitted his father's roof; his aim was to spend those goods without restraint or remonstrance. For the same purpose, also, he took these goods "into a far country," where he would no longer be under his father's eye. Thus it is with every sinner. When his passions begin to gain a sway over him, he

invents maxims and principles of conduct, in order that he may rid himself of the reproaches of the law of God—"putting for the commandments of God the traditions of men"—and by giving a less offensive name to his sin he stills the voice of conscience within him. The next step is to "go into a far country"—into the farthest possible. He says that there is no God. Corruption of the heart or slavery of the passions is the very first cause, the prolific mother, of infidelity.

You will find men who deny the immortality of the soul, who deny the eternity of hell, who deny the infallibility of the Pope. You will find men who deny the divine origin of confession; but why? It is because these wholesome truths put a check to their passions. They cannot believe in these truths and at the same time gratify their criminal desires. "It is only the *fool*, the impious man, that says in his heart there is no God."* An honest, virtuous man would never think of doubting or contradicting these sacred truths.

In spite of its innate pride, the mind is the slave of the heart. If the heart soars to heaven on the wings of divine love, the mind, too, rises with it. But if the heart is buried in the mire of filthy passions, it soon exhales dark, fetid vapors, which obscure the intellect. The infidel's reason is the dupe of his heart.

There is a man who was once a good Catholic, who used formerly to go regularly to Mass and to confession. He is now an infidel; goes no longer to confession. But why? Has he become more enlightened? Has he received some new knowledge? The only new knowledge he has received is the sad knowledge of sin. He believed as long as he was virtuous. He began to doubt only when he began to be immoral; he became an infidel only when he became a libertine. The history of his life is soon told. Wishing to gratify his pas-

* Ps. xlii. 1.

sions without restraint and without remorse, he tried to rid himself of a religion which would have troubled him in the midst of his unlawful pleasures.

His face tells the story. The sacred nobility of the free man is there no longer. He has become a member of a secret society. The dark, oath-bound seal of hell is on his lips. His hands are defiled by injustice. He has grown rich, but his riches are accursed. His heart is a slave to the most shameful passions. He wishes to gratify his wicked desires without shame, without remorse. In order to do this he tries to get rid of religion. The solemn form of religion appears in the midst of his sinful revelry like the hand on the wall, writing in letters of fire the dread sentence of his damnation. His conscience tells him that there is a hell to punish his crimes, and he tries to stifle the voice of his conscience, and says "There is no hell." The voice of his conscience reproaches him and tells him that there is a just God, who will punish him for his sins; and he stifles the voice of his conscience, and says: "There is no God." His conscience says to him: "Ha! there is a strict and terrible judgment that awaits you after death," and he stifles the voice of his conscience, and says: "There is no hereafter; it is all over after death." He tries to prove to himself and to others that man is a brute, because he wishes to live like a brute. He hates religion, he hates the priest, he hates the Church, he hates the Sacraments, he hates everything that reminds him of God, because he knows that by his crimes he has made himself an enemy of God. The unhappy man says, "There is no hell," and whithersoever he goes he carries hell in his heart. In the silence of the night, when others are sleeping around him, he cannot sleep. His conscience tortures him. It asks him: "Were you to die in **this** state this night, what would become of you? It is a terrible thing to fall unprepared into the hands of the living God! Think of eternity! eternity! eternity! Think of the worm

that never dies, and the fire that never quenches !” No wonder that men sometimes commit suicide. They cannot bear the remorse of conscience, and so they try to find rest in death. The hell of the infidel begins even in this world, and it continues throughout all eternity in the next.

There lived in France a certain philosopher, an infidel, named Banguer. When he was lying on his death-bed, he sent for the priest, the Rev. Father La Berthonie, to assist him in his last moments. The priest instructed him at great length in order to rouse his faith. “Hasten to the end, Rev. Father,” said the philosopher ; “for it is my *heart* rather than my mind that wants to be healed ; I was an unbeliever only *because I was bad.*”

One day a Lieutenant-General revealed his doubts on religion to one of his officers in whom he placed great confidence. This officer advised him to confer with Father Neuville and Father Renaud. But notwithstanding the solidity of their arguments, he could not arrive at conviction. Hereupon the officer prevailed on him to visit an ecclesiastic whom he had chosen for his confessor. The Lieutenant-General called upon him in the name of his friend. He told him what had brought him, and the fruitless steps he had already taken to dissipate his doubts. “What could I possibly add, sir,” answered the priest, “to the arguments of men like Fathers Neuville and Renaud ? What force can their arguments receive from my lips ? I have only one recourse ; please try it. Enter into my oratory ; let us pray God to enlighten your understanding, to touch your heart, and then begin by making your confession.” “I, sir, when I scarcely believe in the existence of God ?” “You believe in Him, and in religion too, far more than you think. Kneel down, make the sign of the cross, I am going to call to your mind the *Confiteor*, and to put to you the necessary questions.” After sundry marks of astonishment that seemed but too well founded, after many repetitions of his

doubts, and even of his infidelity, after many objections and difficulties, the Lieutenant-General at length obeyed, and answered honestly the different questions of the priest. The priest went back with him to the time of his first transgressions; he dwelt at some length on the disorders that ensued. By degrees the heart of the penitent opened itself, his voice began to tremble, and tears involuntarily flowed from his eyes. The priest, seeing his agitation, ceased questioning him, and, giving full scope to all the ardor of his zeal, he exhorted him in the most pathetic and touching manner, and thus accomplished what his interrogations and the first avowals made to him had begun. "O father!" exclaimed the penitent, sobbing, "you have followed the only path that could have conducted you to my heart! I am a wretch who has been led astray by his passions alone, who carried his judge in the hidden recesses of his conscience, but who stifled that judge's voice, who dared not avow his crimes to himself, and who preferred to believe nothing rather than be obliged to live well! I will return to-morrow, and I will then make a more lengthy confession." And he did so with sentiments of the most lively compunction; he died some years after, in the practice of the most austere penance and of a truly Christian life.*

The second cause of infidelity is the neglect of prayer. This was pointed out many centuries ago by a great prophet. "The impious," says David—and who is more impious than an infidel?—"the impious are corrupt, and they become abominable in their ways. . . . They are all gone aside; they are become unprofitable together; there is none that does good, no, not one. . . . Destruction and unhappiness are in their ways." "Now the cause of all this wickedness," continues David, "is because they have not called upon the Lord." God is the light of our understanding, the strength of our will, and the life of our

* Debussi, *Nouveau Mois de Marie*, 143.

heart. The more we neglect to pray to God, the more we experience darkness in our understanding, weakness in our will, and deadly coldness in our heart. Our passions, the temptations of the devil, and the allurements of the world, will draw us headlong from one abyss of wickedness to another, until we fall into the deepest of all—into infidelity, and indifference to all religion.

The third cause of infidelity, and indifference to all religion, is the ignorance of the mind. Many are infidels because they never received any instruction in religion. Among these are some who are more guilty than others; namely, those who do not wish to be instructed in their religious duties, in order that they may more easily dispense themselves with the obligations of complying with these duties. Now it is this very class of men that easily gives ear to the principles of infidelity, because these principles are more pleasing to their corrupt nature than those of our holy religion. This class is very numerous and their number is on the increase every day. For, not having any religion themselves, nor wishing to have any, what wonder if their children follow their example? Such as the tree is, will the fruit be. A Catholic lady of New York asked a little child: "How many gods are there, and who made you?" The child could not answer the questions. So the Catholic lady said to the child: "Say, 'There is but one God'; say, 'God made me.'" When the mother of the child heard this she flew into a passion, and said: "My child shall never learn such a thing; God has nothing to do with my child." Behold how infidel mothers bring up their children!

There are others who became infidels because they were never sufficiently instructed in their holy religion. There is a certain class of parents who have their children instructed in everything but their religion. They allow them to grow up in ignorance of everything except of the

means by which they may make money. Now, when the time draws near for these children to make their First Communion, their parents will take them to the priest to prepare them for this holy sacrament in a week or two. What can children learn in a couple of weeks? Certain it is that what they learn in that time very seldom enters their hearts. Their hearts are not prepared for the Word of God; they are light-minded, and in many cases corrupt, and what they learn is learned from constraint. No sooner are they free from constraint than they throw their religion overboard; they become the worst kind of infidels and the worst enemies of our holy religion.

The young man who set fire to St. Augustine's Church, in Philadelphia, Pa., was a Catholic, and he gloried in being able to burn his name out of the baptismal record. Archbishop Spalding, of Baltimore, asserted one day that in one body of Methodist preachers he had observed seven or eight who were the children of Catholic parents, and that they were the smartest preachers among them. Bishop England said that the Catholic Church loses more, in this country, by apostasy than it gains by conversions. "Thus is verified in these children what God has said through the Prophet Isaias: "Therefore is my people led away captive because they had not knowledge." (chap. v 13).

These three causes of infidelity have existed from the beginning of the world. But about three centuries ago Protestantism opened a very wide avenue to the same end. Protestantism introduced the principle that "there is no divinely-appointed authority to teach infallibly. Let every man read the Bible and judge for himself."

Upon this false principle they even boldly denied the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. What more natural than gradually to begin to deny with the same boldness almost all the Gospel truths? Why should the one who does not care for Jesus Christ upon the altar be

expected to care for Jesus Christ in heaven, and for all that He has taught us? Hence it is that what they may call their religion and religious service is in itself neither inviting nor impressive; it has nothing in it to stir up the fountains of feeling; to call forth the music and poetry of the soul; to convey salutary instruction or to awaken lively interest. It possesses no trait of grandeur, of sublimity; it has certainly not one element of poetry or pathos. Generally cold and lifeless, it becomes warm only by a violent effort, and then it runs into the opposite extreme of intemperate excitement and sentimentalism; nay, it is no exaggeration to say that religiousness among the greater part of Protestants in our day and country seems to have well-nigh become extinct. They seem to have lost all spiritual conceptions, and no longer to possess any spiritual aspiration. Lacking as they do the light, the warmth, and the life-giving power of the sun of the Catholic Church—the holy Mass, the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament—they seem to have become, or to be near becoming, what our world would be if there were no sun in the heavens.

For this reason is it that Protestants are so completely absorbed in temporal interests, in the things that fall under their senses, that their whole life is only materialism put in action. Lucre is the sole object on which their eyes are constantly fixed. A burning thirst to realize some profit, great or small, absorbs all their faculties, the whole energy of their being. They never pursue anything with ardor but riches and enjoyments. God, the soul, a future life—they believe in none of them; or rather, they never think about them at all. If they ever take up a moral or a religious book, or go to a meeting-house, it is only by way of amusement—to pass the time away. It is a less serious occupation than smoking a pipe or drinking a cup of tea. If you speak to them about the foundations of faith, of the principles of Christianity, of the importance of salvation, the

certainly of a life beyond the grave—all these truths which so powerfully impress a mind susceptible of religious feeling—they listen with a certain pleasure; for it amuses them and piques their curiosity. In their opinion all this is “true, fine, grand.” They deplore the blindness of men who attach themselves to the perishable goods of this world; perhaps they will even give utterance to some fine sentences on the happiness of knowing the true God, of serving Him, and of meriting by this means the reward of eternal life. They simply never think of religion at all; they like very well to talk about it, but it is as of a thing not made for them—a thing with which, personally, they have nothing to do. This indifference they carry so far—religious sensibility is so entirely withered or dead within them—that they care not a straw whether a doctrine is true or false, good or bad. Religion is to them simply a fashion, which those may follow who have a taste for it. By and by, all in good time, they say; one should never be precipitate; it is not good to be too enthusiastic. No doubt the Catholic religion is beautiful and sublime; its doctrine explains with method and clearness all that is necessary for man to know. Whoever has any sense will see that, and will adopt it in his heart in all sincerity; but after all, one must not think too much of these things, and increase the cares of life. Now, just consider we have a body; how many cares it demands. It must be clothed, fed, and sheltered from the injuries of the weather; its infirmities are great, and its maladies are numerous. It is agreed on all hands that health is our most precious good. This body that we see, that we touch, must be taken care of every day and every moment of the day. Is not this enough without troubling ourselves about a soul that we never see? The life of man is short and full of misery; it is made up of a succession of important concerns that follow one another without interruption. Our hearts and our minds are scarcely sufficient for the solitudes of

the present life; is it wise, then, to torment one's self about the future? Is it not far better to live in blessed ignorance?

Ask them, What would you think of a traveller who, on finding himself at a dilapidated inn, open to all the winds, and deficient in the most absolute necessaries, should spend all his time in trying how he could make himself most comfortable in it; without ever thinking of preparing himself for his departure and his return into the bosom of his family? Would this traveller be acting in a wise and reasonable manner? "No," they will reply; "one must not travel in that way. But man, nevertheless, must confine himself within proper limits. How can he provide for two lives at the same time? I take care of this life, and the care of the other I leave to God." If a traveller ought not regularly to take up his abode at an inn, neither ought he to travel on two roads at the same time. When one wishes to cross a river, it will not do to have two boats, and set a foot in each; such a proceeding would involve the risk of a tumble into the water and drowning one's self. Such is the deep abyss of religious indifferentism into which so many Protestants of our day have fallen, and from which they naturally fall into one deeper still—infidelity.

A body which has lost the principle of its animation becomes dust. Hence it is an axiom that the change or perversion of the principles by which anything was produced is the destruction of that very thing; if you can change or pervert the principles from which anything springs, you destroy it. For instance, one single foreign element introduced into the blood produces death; one false assumption admitted into science destroys its certainty; one false principle admitted into faith and morals, is fatal. The reformers started wrong. They would reform the Church by placing her under human control. Their successors have in each generation found they did not go far enough, and have,

each in turn, struggled to push it further and further, till they find themselves without any church life, without faith, without religion, and beginning to doubt if there be even a God.

It is a well-known fact that, before the Reformation, infidels were scarcely known in the Christian world. Since that event they have come forth in swarms. It is from the writings of Herbert, Hobbes, Bloum, Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke, and Boyle that Voltaire and his party drew the objections and errors which they have brought so generally into fashion in the world. According to Diderot and d'Alambert, the first step that the untractable Catholic takes is to adopt the Protestant principle of private judgment. He establishes himself judge of his religion; leaves and joins the reform. Dissatisfied with the incoherent doctrines he there discovers, he passes over to the Socinians, whose inconsequences soon drive him into Deism. Still pursued by unexpected difficulties, he finds refuge in universal doubt; but still haunted by uneasiness, he at length resolves to take the last step, and proceeds to terminate the long chain of his errors in infidelity. Let us not forget that the first link of this chain is attached to the fundamental maxim of private judgment. They judged of religion as they did of their breakfast and dinner. A religion was good or bad, true or false, just as it suited their tastes, their likings; their religious devotion varied like the weather; they must feel it as they felt the heat and cold.

New fashions of belief sprang up, and changed and disappeared as rapidly as the new fashions of dress. Men judged not only of every revealed doctrine, but they also judged of the Bible itself. Protestantism, having no authority, could not check this headlong tendency to unbelief. Its ministers dare no longer preach or teach any doctrine which is displeasing to the people. Every Protestant preacher who wishes to be heard and to retain his salary

must first feel the pulse of his hearers; he must make himself the slave of their opinions and likings.

It is, therefore, historically correct that the same principle that created Protestantism three centuries ago has never ceased since that time to spin it out into a thousand different sects, and has concluded by covering Europe and America with that multitude of free-thinkers and infidels who place these countries on the verge of ruin.

The individual reason taking as it does the place of faith, the Protestant, whether he believes it or not, is an infidel in germ, and the infidel is a Protestant in full bloom. In other words, infidelity is nothing but Protestantism in the highest degree. Hence it is that Edgar Quinet, a great herald of Protestantism, is right in styling the Protestant sects *the thousand gates open to get out of Christianity*. No wonder, then, that thousands of Protestants have ended, and continue to end, in framing their own formula of faith thus: "I believe in nothing." And here I ask, what is easier, from this state of irreligion and infidelity, than the passage to idolatry?

This assertion may seem incredible to some at this day, and may be esteemed an absurdity; but idolatry is expressly mentioned in the Apocalypse as existing in the time of Antichrist. And, indeed, our surprise will much abate if we take into consideration the temper and disposition of the present times. When men divest themselves, as they seem to do at present, of all fear of the Supreme Being, of all respect of their Creator and Lord; when they surrender themselves to the gratification of sensuality; when they give full freedom to the human passions and direct their whole study to the pursuits of a corrupt world, with a total forgetfulness of a future state; when they give children a godless education, and have no longer any religion to teach them, may we not say that the transition to idolatry is easy? When all the steps leading up to a certain point are taken, what won-

der if we arrive at that point? Such was the gradual degeneracy of mankind in the early ages of the world that brought on the abominable practices of idol-worship.

Of course it will be said that we have the happiness of living in the most enlightened of all ages; our knowledge is more perfect, our ideas more developed and refined, the human faculties more improved and better cultivated, than they ever were before; in fine, that the present race of mankind may be reckoned a society of philosophers when compared to the generations that have gone before. How is it possible, then, that such stupidity can seize upon the human mind as to sink it into idolatry?

This kind of reasoning is more specious than solid. For, allowing the present times to surpass the past in refinement and knowledge, it must be said that they are proportionately more vicious. Refinement of reason has contributed, as every one knows, to refine upon the means of gratifying the human passions.

Besides, however enlightened the mind may be supposed to be, if the heart is corrupt the excesses into which a man will run are evidenced by daily experience.

Witness our modern spiritism (spiritualism). What else is our modern spiritualism than a revival of the old heathen idol-worship?

Satan is constantly engaged in doing all in his power to entice men away from God, and to have himself worshipped instead of the Creator. The introduction, establishment, persistence and power of the various cruel, revolting superstitions, of the ancient heathen world, or of pagan nations in modern times, are nothing but the work of the devil. They reveal a more than human power. God permitted Satan to operate upon man's morbid nature, as a deserved punishment upon the Gentiles for their hatred of truth and their apostasy from the primitive religion. Men left to themselves, to human nature alone, however low they

might be prone to descend, never could descend so low as to worship wood and stone, four-footed beasts, and creeping things. To do this needs satanic delusion.

Paganism in its old form was doomed. Christianity had silenced the oracles and driven the devils back to hell. How was the devil to re-establish his worship on earth, and carry on his war against the Son of God and the religion which He taught us? Evidently only by changing his tactics and turning the truth into a lie. He found men in all the heresiarchs who, like Eve, gave ear to his suggestions, and believed him more than the Infallible Word of Jesus Christ. Thus he has succeeded in banishing the true religion from whole countries, or in mixing it with false doctrines. He has prevailed upon thousands to believe the doctrines of vain, self-conceited men, rather than the religion taught by Jesus Christ and His Apostles. It is by heresies, revolutions, bad secret societies, and godless state school education, that he has succeeded so far as to bring thousands of men back to a state of heathenism and infidelity. The time has come for him to introduce idolatry, or his own worship. To do this he makes use of spiritualism. Through the spirit-mediums he performs lying wonders. He gives pretended revelations from the spirit-world, in order to destroy or weaken all faith in divine revelation. He thus strives to re-establish in Christian lands that very same devil-worship which has so long existed among heathen nations, and which our Lord Jesus Christ came to destroy. The Holy Scriptures assure us that all the gods of the heathens are devils ("Omnes dii gentium dæmonia."—Ps.) These demons took possession of the idols made of wood or stone, of gold or silver; they had temples erected in their honor; they had their sacrifices, their priests, and their priestesses. They uttered oracles. They were consulted through their mediums in all affairs of importance, and especially in order to find out the future, precisely as they

are consulted by our modern spiritualists at the present day.

In modern spiritualism the devil communicates with men by means of tables, chairs, tablets, or planchette, or by rapping, writing, seeing and speaking mediums. It is all the same to the devil whether he communicates with men and leads them astray by means of idols, or by means of tables, chairs, planchette, and the like.

Assuredly, if the philosopher is not governed by the power of religion, his conduct will be absurd and even despicable to the most ignorant individual of the lowest rank.

A Socrates, a Cicero, a Seneca, are said to have been acquainted with the knowledge of one supreme God; but they had not courage to profess His worship, and in their public conduct basely sacrificed to stocks and stones with the vulgar. When men have banished from their heart the sense of religion, and despise the rights of justice (and is this not the case with numbers?), will many of them scruple to offer incense to a statue, if by so doing they serve their ambition, their interest, or whatever may be their favorite passion? Where is the cause for surprise, then, if infidelity and irreligion be succeeded by idolatry? That pride alone, when inflamed with a constant flow of prosperity, may raise a man to the extravagant presumption of claiming for himself divine honors, we see in the example of Alexander, the celebrated Macedonian conqueror, and of several emperors of Babylon and ancient Rome. From suggestions of that same principle of pride, it will happen that Antichrist, elevated by a continued course of victories and conquests, will set himself up for a god. And as at that time the propagation of infidelity, irreligion, and immorality will have become universal, this defection from faith, disregard for its teachers, licentiousness in opinions, depravity in morals, will so far deaden all influence of religion, and cause such degeneracy in mankind, that many will be base enough even

to espouse idolatry, to yield to the absurd impiety of worshipping Antichrist as their Lord and God; some out of fear for what they may lose, others to gain what they covet.

Then will it be evident to all that infidelity, and even idolatry, existed in the Protestant principle of private judgment, as the oak exists in the acorn, as the consequence is in the premise; or, in other words, that this principle was but the powerful weapon of Satan to carry on his war against Christ; of the sons of Belial to fight the keepers of the law; of false and anti-social liberty to destroy true and rational liberty—to make worshippers of the devil out of the worshippers of God.

CHAPTER IX.

PORTRAIT OF THE INFIDEL.

WE have seen what leads to infidelity. Let us now see what kind of a man is the infidel. In our day and country it has become fashionable for a large number of men to have no religion, and even to boast of having none. To have no religion is a great crime, but to boast of having none is the height of folly. The man without religion is a kind of monster with the intelligence of a man and the cruelty and instincts of a beast. His religion is to disregard good principles; to do away, not only with all revealed religion, but even with the law of nature; to hold iniquity in veneration; to practise fraud, theft, and robbery almost as a common trade; to be regardless of parents and of all divinely-constituted authority; to create confusion, not only in religion, but also in government and in the family circle; to contribute towards the increase of the number of apostates, and make of these apostates members of such secret societies as aim at the overthrow of governments, of all order, and of the Christian religion itself.

The man without religion says: "There is no God." He says so "in his heart," says Holy Writ; he says not so in his head, because he knows better. There are moments when, in spite of himself, he returns to better sentiments. Let him be in imminent danger of death or of a considerable loss of fortune, and how quickly, on such occasions, he lays aside the mask of infidelity! He straightway makes his profession of faith in an Almighty God; he cries out: "Lord! save me; I am perishing; Lord! have mercy on me"

The famous Volney was once on a voyage with some of his friends off the coast of Maryland. All at once a great storm arose, and the little bark, which bore the flower of the unbelievers of both hemispheres, appeared twenty times on the point of being lost. In this imminent danger every one began to pray. M. de Volney himself snatched a rosary from a good woman near him, and began to recite Hail Marys with edifying fervor, nor ceased till the danger was over. When the storm had passed, some one said to him in a tone of good-natured raillery: "My dear sir, it seems to me that you were praying just now. To whom did you address yourself, since you maintain that there is no God?" "Ah! my friend," replied the philosopher, all ashamed, "one can be a sceptic in his study, but not at sea in a storm."—Noel, *Catech. de Rodez*, i. 73.

A certain innkeeper had learned, in bad company, all sorts of impiety. In his wickedness he went even so far as to say that he did not believe in God. One night he was roused by the cry of "Fire! fire!" His house was on fire. No sooner had he perceived the dreadful havoc going on than he cried with clasped hands: "My God! O my God! God Almighty! God of grace and mercy! have pity on me and help me!" Here he was suddenly stopped by one of his neighbors: "How! wretch, you have been denying and blaspheming God all the evening, and you would have him come now to your assistance!"—Schmid and Belet, *Cat. Hist.* i. 43.

Colonel Ethan Allen, the hero of Ticonderoga, was an atheist and unbeliever. On the 12th of November, 1827, his daughter fell dangerously ill. The poor girl appeared to have but a few moments to live. She sent for her father to her bedside, and, taking him by the hand, faintly addressed him in these words: "My dear father, I am going to die very soon; tell me seriously, then, I entreat you, whether I am to believe what you have so often told me—that there is

neither God nor heaven nor hell, or what I learned in the catechism which my mother taught me ?” The father was thunderstruck ; he remained silent for some moments, with his eyes fixed on his expiring daughter. His heart appeared to be torn by some violent struggle. At length he approached the bed, and said in a choking voice : “ My child, my dear child, believe only what your mother taught you !” The astonishment of the unbelievers who heard him may easily be imagined. One of them, who had long before abjured his religion, being asked what he thought, replied that it was more pleasant to live according to his new religion, but it was better to die in the old.—Schmid and Belet, *Cat. Hist.* ii. 47.

From these examples it is evident that the mouth of the infidel belies his own heart.

There is still another proof to show that the infidel does not believe what he says. Why is it that he makes his impious doctrines the subject of conversation on every occasion ? It is, of course, first to communicate his devilish principles to others, and make them as bad as he himself is ; but this is not the only reason. The good Catholic seldom speaks of his religion ; he feels assured, by the grace of God, that his religion is the only true one, and that he will be saved if he lives up to it. Such is not the case with the infidel ; he is constantly tormented in his soul. “ There is no peace, no happiness for the impious,” says Holy Scripture. * He tries to quiet the fears of his soul, the remorse of his conscience ; so he communicates to others, on every occasion, his perverse principles, hoping to meet with some of his fellow-men who may approve of his impious views, that he thus may find some relief for his interior torments. He resembles a timid man who is obliged to travel during a dark night, and who begins to sing and cry in order to keep away fear. The infidel is a sort of night traveller he

* *Isaias* xlvi. 22

travels in the horrible darkness of his impiety. His interior conviction tells him that there is a God, who will certainly punish him in the most frightful manner. This fills him with great fear, and makes him extremely unhappy every moment of his life; he cannot bear the sight of a Catholic church, of a Catholic procession, of an image of our Lord, of a picture of a saint, of a prayer-book, of a good Catholic, of a priest—in a word, he cannot bear anything that reminds him of God, of religion, of his own guilt and impiety; so on every occasion he cries out against faith in God, in all that God has revealed and proposes to us for our belief by the holy Catholic Church. What is the object of his impious cries? It is to deafen, to keep down, in some measure, the clamors of his conscience. Our hand will involuntarily touch that part of the body where we feel pain; in like manner, the tongue of the infidel touches, on all occasions, involuntarily as it were, upon all those truths of our holy religion which inspire him with fear of the judgments of Almighty God. He feels but too keenly that he cannot do away with God and His sacred religion by denying His existence.

The man without religion must necessarily lose the esteem and confidence of his fellow-men. What confidence can be placed in a man who has no religion, and consequently no knowledge of his duties? What confidence can you place in a man who never feels himself bound by any obligation of conscience, who has no higher motive to direct him than his self-love, his own interests? The pagan Roman, though enlightened only by reason, had yet virtue enough to say: "I live not for *myself*, but for the republic"; but the infidel's motto is: "I live only for myself; I care for no one but myself." How can such a man reconcile "poverty and wealth," "labor and ease," "sickness and health," "adversity and prosperity," "rich and poor," "obedience and authority," "liberty and law," etc., etc.? All these are

enigmas to him, or, if he affects to understand them at all, he thinks they arise from bad management or bad government. He will be a tyrant or a slave, a glutton or a miser, a fanatic or a libertine, a thief or a highway robber, as circumstances may influence him. Think you that the common "fall-back" on the principle of self-interest—well or ill understood—will ever restrain such a one from doing any act of impulse or indulgence, provided he thinks it can be safely done? He will look on life as a game of address or force, in which the best man is he who carries off the prize.

He will look upon power as belonging of right to the strongest; the weak, or those who differ from him in opinion, he will treat with contempt and cruelty, and will think that they have no rights which he is bound to respect. In power such a man will be arbitrary and cruel; out of power he will be faithless, hypocritical, and subservient. Trust him with authority, he will abuse it; trust him with money, he will steal it; trust him with your confidence, and he will betray it. Such a man—pagan and unprincipled as he is—may nevertheless affect, when it suits his purpose, great religious zeal and purity. He will talk of *Philanthropy* and the *Humanities*, have great compassion, perhaps, for a dray-horse, and give the cold shoulder to the houseless pauper or orphan.

The heart of such a man is cold, insincere, destitute of every tender chord for a tender vibration, of every particle of right or just feeling or principle that can be touched; on the contrary, it is roused to rage, revenge, and falsehood if interfered with. How is such a heart to be touched or moved, or placed under such influences as could move it? Indeed, it would require a miracle. Nay, even a miracle would fail to make a salutary impression upon such a heart. A French infidel declared that, should he be told that the most remarkable miracle was occurring close by his house, he would not move a step out of his way to see it. Pride

never surrenders ; it prefers rather to take an illogical position than to bow even to the authority of reason. Furious, beside itself, and absurd, it revolts against evidence. To all reasoning, to undeniable evidence, the infidel—the man without religion—opposes his own will : “ Such is my determination.” It is sweet to him to be stronger single-handed than common sense, stronger than miracles, stronger even than God who manifests Himself by them.

Such a man may be called civilized, but he is only an *accomplished barbarian*. His head and hands are instructed, his heart, and low passions, and appetites unbridled and untamed.

Collot d’Herbois played the most execrable part during the French Revolution. Having become a representative of the people under the Reign of Terror, he had the Lyonese massacred in hundreds. The very accomplices of his crimes regarded him as a man so dangerous that they thought it expedient to exclude him from society by banishing him to the deserts of Guiana. Transported to that tropical country, he looked upon himself as the most miserable of men. “ I am punished,” would he sometimes exclaim ; “ the abandonment in which I find myself is a hell.” Being attacked by a malignant fever, he was to be taken to Cayenne. The negroes charged with this commission threw him on the public road with his face turned to the scorching sun. They said in their own language : “ We will not carry that murderer of religion and of men.” “ What is the matter with you ? ” asked the doctor, Guysonf, when he arrived. “ I have a burning fever and perspiration.” “ I believe it ; you are sweating crime.” He called on God and the Blessed Virgin to assist him. A soldier, to whom he had preached irreligion, asked him why he invoked God and the Blessed Virgin—he who mocked them some months before. “ Ah ! my friend,” said he, “ my mouth then belied my heart.” He then cried out : “ O my God, my God !

can I yet hope for pardon? Send me a consoler, send me a priest, to turn mine eyes away from the furnace that consumes me. My God, give me peace!" The spectacle of his last moments was so frightful that no one could remain near him. Whilst they were seeking a priest he expired, on the 7th of June, 1796, his eyes half open, his hands clenched, his mouth full of blood and froth. His burial was so neglected that the negro grave-diggers only half covered him, and his body became the food for swine and birds of prey.—Debussi, *Nouveau Mois de Marie*, 251.

The man without religion is a slave to the most degrading superstition. Instead of worshipping the true, free, living God, who governs all things by His Providence, he bows before the horrid phantom of blind chance or inexorable destiny. He is a man who obstinately refuses to believe the most solidly established facts in favor of religion, and yet, with blind credulity, greedily swallows the most absurd falsehoods uttered against religion. He is a man whose reason has fled, and whose passions speak, object, and decide in the name of reason. He is sunk in the grossest ignorance regarding religion. He blasphemes what he does not understand. He rails at the doctrines of the Church, without knowing really what her doctrines are. He sneers at the doctrines and practices of religion because he cannot refute them. He speaks with the utmost gravity of the fine arts, the fashions, and matters the most trivial, while he turns the most sacred subjects into ridicule. In the midst of his own circle of fops and silly women he utters his shallow conceits with all the pompous assurance of a pedant.

The man without religion is a dishonest plagiarist, who copies from Catholic writers all the objections made against the Church by the infidels of former times or by modern heretics; but he takes good care to omit all the excellent answers and complete refutations which are contained in

those very writings. His object is not to seek the truth, but to propagate falsehood.

The man without religion often pretends to be an infidel, in order to appear fashionable. He is usually conceited, obstinate, puffed up with pride, a great talker, always shallow and fickle, skipping from one subject to another without thoroughly examining any. At one moment he is a deist, at another a materialist, then he is a sceptic, and again an atheist, always changing his views, but always a slave of his passions, always an enemy of Christ.

The man without religion often praises all religions—he is a true knave. He says: “If I were to choose my religion, I would become a Catholic; for it is the most reasonable of all religions.” But in his heart he despises all religion; he scrapes together all the wicked and absurd calumnies he can find against the Church. He falsely accuses her of teaching monstrous doctrines which she has always abhorred and condemned, and he displays his ingenuity by combating those monstrous doctrines which he himself has invented or copied from authors as dishonest as himself. The infidel is a monster without faith, without law, without religion, without God.

There are many who call themselves “free-thinkers”—many who reject all revealed religion—merely out of puerile vanity. They affect singularity in order to attract notice, to make people believe that they are strong-minded, that they are independent. Poor, deluded slaves of human respect! They affect singularity in order to attract notice, and they forget that there is another class of people in the world also noted for singularity; in fact, they are so singular that they have to be shut up for safe-keeping in a mad-house.

What is the difference between an infidel and a madman?

The only difference is that the madness of the infidel is wilful, while the madness of the poor lunatic is entirely in-

voluntary. The one arouses our compassion, while the other excites our contempt and just indignation.

The man without religion is a slave of the most shameful passions. What virtue can that man have who believes that whatever he desires is lawful; who designates the most shameful crimes by the name of innocent pleasures? What virtue can that man have who knows no other law than his passions; who believes that God regards with equal eye truth and falsehood, vice and virtue? He may indeed practise some natural virtues, but these virtues are, in general, only exterior. They are practised merely out of human respect; they do not come from the heart. But the seat of true virtue is in the heart, and not in the exterior; he that acts merely to please man, and not to please God, has no real virtue. What are the poor without religion? They are unable to control their passions or to bear their hard lot. They see wealth around them, and, being without religion, they see no reason why that wealth should not be divided amongst them. Why should they starve, while their neighbors roll in splendor and luxury? They know their power, and, not having the soothing influence of religion to restrain them, they use their power. They have done so in France and elsewhere; and if they do not always succeed in producing revolution and anarchy, it is only the bayonet that prevents them. Is not the man who has said, "There is no God," on the point of also saying, "Property is robbery," and "Lust is lawful"?

What are children without religion to their parents? They are the greatest misfortune and the greatest curse that can come to them.

History informs us that Dion, the philosopher, gave a sharp reproof to Dionysius, the tyrant, on account of his cruelty. Dionysius felt highly offended, and resolved to avenge himself on Dion; so he took the son of Dion prisoner—not, indeed, for the purpose of killing him, but of

giving him up into the hands of a godless teacher. After the young man had been long enough under this teacher to learn from him everything that was bad and impious, Dionysius sent him back to his father. Now, what object had the tyrant in acting thus? He foresaw that this corrupted son, by his impious conduct during his whole lifetime, would cause his father constant grief and sorrow, so much so that he would be for him a lifelong affliction and curse. This, the tyrant thought, was the longest and greatest revenge he could take on Dion for having censured his conduct.

Indeed, there is no father, there is no mother, who is not thoroughly convinced of the truth that a child without religion is the greatest affliction that can befall parents. This truth needs no illustration.

What is the man of learning without religion? He is more destructive than an army of savage soldiers. His science will prove more fatal than the sword in the hands of unprincipled men; it will prove more of a demon than a God. The arsenal of his mind is stored with weapons to sap alike the altar and the throne; to carry on a war of extermination against every holy principle, against the welfare and the very existence of society; to spread among the people the worst of religions—the *no-religion*, the religion which pleases most hardened adulterers and criminals, the religion of irrational animals. The man of learning without religion will do all in his power to preach licentiousness, cruelty, and vice; the substitution of the harlotry of the passions for the calm and elevating influences of reason and religion; to bring about a generation without belief in God and immortality, free from all regard for the invisible—a generation that looks upon this life as their only life, this earth as their only home, and the promotion of their earthly interests and enjoyments as their only end; a generation that looks upon religion, marriage, or family and private property as the greatest enemies to worldly happiness; a

generation that substitutes science of this world for religion, a community of goods for private property, a community of wives for the private family ; in other words, a generation that substitutes the devil for God, hell for heaven, sin and vice for virtue and holiness of life.

Witness the current literature of the day, which is penetrated with the spirit of licentiousness, from the pretentious quarterly to the arrogant and flippant daily newspaper and the weekly and monthly publications, which are mostly heathen or maudlin. They express and inculcate, on the one hand, stoical, cold, and polished pride of mere intellect, or, on the other, empty and wretched sentimentality, irreligious and impious principles. Some employ the skill of the engraver to caricature the institutions and offices of the Christian religion, and others to exhibit the grossest forms of vice and the most distressing scenes of crime and suffering. The illustrated press has become to us what the amphitheatre was to the Romans when men were slain, women were outraged, and Christians given to the lions to please a degenerate populace.

Who were the leaders in the work of destruction and wholesale butchery in the Reign of Terror? The nurslings of lyceums in which the chaotic principles of the "philosophers" were proclaimed as oracles of truth.

Who are those turbulent revolutionists who always long to erect the guillotine? And who are those secret conspirators and their myrmidon partisans who have sworn to unify Italy or lay it in ruins? Men who were taught to scout the idea of a God and rail at religion, to consider Christianity as a thing of the past ; men who revel in wild chimeras by night, and seek to realize their mad dreams by day.

What is the physician without religion? He peoples the graveyards, murders helpless innocents, and makes many of his patients the objects of his brutal lust. What does he care, provided his purse swells and his brutal passion is gratified?

A gentleman of one of the smaller towns of Connecticut writes to the *Independent* as follows:

“I dare not tell you what I know (and the information has been given me unsolicited) in reference to the horrid practice of the crime of infanticide in the land. I do not believe there is a village in the New England States but this crime is practised more or less. There are men who make it their business, with medicine and instruments, to carry on this slaughter. And even physicians in good and regular standing in the Church have practised it. Men are making here, in this highly moral State, three thousand and four thousand dollars a year, in the small towns alone, at this business.”

Trustworthy physicians assure us that there are not less than sixty ghouls in New York City who grow rich by killing infants. The number has been stated at six times sixty. The author of the book *Satan in Society* writes on pages 130, 131 as follows: “A medical writer of some note published, in 1861, a pamphlet, in which he declared himself the hero of three hundred abortions. He admits, in a work of his, that he only found abortion necessary to save the life of the mother in four instances, thus publicly confessing that in an immense number of cases he has performed the operation on other grounds; and yet, in the face of all this self-accusation, this rascal walks unhung.” These infidel and immoral physicians advertise publicly, offering their services to enable people, as they say, “to enjoy the pleasures of marriage without the burden.” They prepare, and even publicly sell everywhere, the drugs and implements for committing such murders of the helpless innocents. But who are the patients of those infidel physicians, the victims of these ghouls? They come from the highly religious and fashionable as well as from the low and vicious circles of society. Many of them, shocking to say, are under the age of fifteen.

“How is all this possible?” exclaims the good Christian. “Is not affection for their offspring a quality possessed even by all animals, with rarely an exception? Few, indeed, of the millions of the animal creation seek to destroy their own offspring after birth, or to so neglect them as to leave them liable to destruction by other bodies or forces. How, then, can a human intelligence, a mother, though she be illegitimate, be cruel enough to adopt the most revolting and barbarous means of committing that most unnatural of crimes, the crime of infanticide?”

Such a crime is indeed most shocking for the truly Christian woman. But since thousands of young ladies nowadays are brought up without religion, and are real infidels, we need not wonder at the fact that they are a kind of monster with the intelligence of a man and the cruelty and instincts of a beast. In 1865 Dr. Morse Stewart, of Detroit, Mich., could not help declaring that “among married persons the practice of destroying the legitimate results of matrimony had become so extensive that people of high repute not only commit this crime, but do not even blush to speak boastfully among their intimates of the deed and the means of accomplishing it.” “Several hundreds of Protestant women,” says Dr. Storer of Boston, “have personally acknowledged to us their guilt, against whom only seven Catholics; and of these we found, upon further enquiry, that all but two were only nominally so, not going to confession. There can be no doubt that Romish ordinance, flanked on the one hand by the confessional, and by denouncement and excommunication on the other, has saved to the world thousands of infant lives.”—*Criminal Abortion*, p. 74.

Ah! if God is despised, His laws will be hated and violated; man will see only his own interests; his neighbor's property will only whet his appetite; his neighbor's life will only be a secondary consideration; he would, according to his creed, be a fool not to shed blood when his in-

terest requires it; his fellow-men become imbued with his principles—anarchy succeeds subordination—vice takes the place of virtue—what was sacred is profaned—what was honorable becomes disgraceful—might becomes right—treaties are waste paper—honor is an empty name—the most sacred obligations dwindle down into mere optional practices—youth despises age—wisdom is folly—subjection to authority is laughed at as a foolish dream—the moral code itself soon becomes little more than the bugbear of the weak-minded—crowns are trampled under foot—thrones are overturned, nations steeped in blood, and republics swept from the face of the earth.

Witness the downfall of so many empires, kingdoms, dynasties, and republics of the past. Witness the great confusion in the governments of the present. Witness the nameless abominations of the Communists, Fourierites, and other such vile and degraded fraternities; the cold-blooded murders and frightful suicides that fill so many domestic hearths with grief and shame; the scarcely-concealed corruption of public and professional men; the adroit peculation and wilful embezzlement of the public money; those monopolizing speculations and voluntary insolvencies so ruinous to the community at large; and, above all, those shocking atrocities so common in our country of unbelief—the legal dissolution of the matrimonial tie, and the wanton tampering of life in its very bud; all these are humiliating facts sufficient to convince any impartial mind that if the devil were presented with a blank sheet of paper, and bade to write on it the most fatal gift to man, he would simply write one word—*no religion*. Yes, it is the infidel, the man without religion, who makes war on God and His Christ, and says, with Lucifer, "*Non serviam*"—I will not serve thee. This daring rebel against God and His law wishes to have the innocent children of the Christian family to teach them his false, devilish maxims; promises them,

as Satan, his master, did the Saviour, riches, and honors, and power, if they will but fall down and worship him. He is blind, and he attempts to lead; he is ignorant, and he offers to teach and direct his fellow-men. He **will** not receive the law, and he claims the right to give it. He arrogates the "higher law," and "would be as God." How incomprehensibly strange it is that there are so many men and women in our day who give ear to this tempter, instead of saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan," and "Thou art a liar and a cheat from the beginning."

Were we given to see a devil and the soul of an infidel at the same time, we should find the sight of the devil more bearable than that of the infidel; for St. James the Apostle tells us that "the devil believes and trembles."*

As no one can attain life everlasting without knowing and living up to the true religion, it is evident that mankind can have no worse enemies than those who endeavor by word and deed to destroy the true knowledge of God and His holy religion. Alas! how numerous are these enemies in this country!

How hateful these enemies of God and of His holy religion are in the sight of the Lord may be seen from the frightful punishments which the Lord is accustomed to inflict upon them.

Let us look at a few instances, taken from the little book *Fate of Infidelity*, by a converted infidel.

"You have undoubtedly heard of Blind Palmer, a professed infidel. After he had tried to lecture against Christ he lost his sight, and died suddenly in Philadelphia, in the forty-second year of his age. You will also have heard of the so-called Orange County Infidel Society. They held, among other tenets, that it was right to indulge in lasciviousness, and that it was right to regulate their conduct as their propensities and appetites should dictate; and as these princi-

ples were carried into practical operation by some families belonging to the association, in one instance a son held criminal intercourse with his mother, and publicly justified his conduct. The step-father, and husband to the mother who thus debased herself, boldly avowed that, in his opinion, it was morally right to hold such intercourse. The members of this impious society were visited by God in a remarkable manner. They all died, within five years, in some strange or unnatural manner. One of them was seized with a sudden and violent illness, and in his agony exclaimed: 'My bowels are on fire—die I must,' and his spirit passed away.

"Dr. H., another of the party, was found dead in his bed the next morning.

"D. D., a printer, fell in a fit, and died immediately, and three others were drowned within a few days.

"B. A., a lawyer, came to his death by starvation; and C. C., also educated for the bar, and a man of superior intellectual endowments, died of want, hunger, and filth.

"Another, who had studied to be a preacher, suddenly disappeared, but at length his remains were found fast in the ice, where he evidently had been for a long time, as the fowls of the air and the inhabitants of the deep had consumed the most of his flesh.

"Joshua Miller, notorious as a teacher of infidelity, was found upon a stolen horse, and was shot by Col. J. Woodhull. N. Miller, his brother, who was discovered one Sunday morning seated upon a log playing cards, was also shot.

"Benjamin Kelly was shot off his horse by a boy, the son of one Clark, who had been murdered by Kelly; his body remained upon the ground until his flesh had been consumed by birds.

"I. Smith committed suicide by stabbing himself while he was in prison for crime.

"W. Smith was shot by B. Thorpe and others for robbery.

“S. T. betrayed his own confidential friend for a few dollars; his friend was hung, and he was afterwards shot by D. Lancaster.

“I. V. was shot by a company of militia. I. D., in a drunken fit, was frozen to death.

“I. B., and I. Smith, and J. Vervellen, B. R., and one other individual, were hung for heinous crimes they had committed. N. B., W. T., and W. H. were drowned. C. C hung himself. A. S. was struck with an axe, and bled to death.

“F. S. fell from his horse and was killed. W. Clark drank himself to death; he was eaten by the hogs before his bones were found, which were recognized by his clothing. J. A., Sr., died in the woods, his rum-jug by his side; he was not found until a dog brought home one of his legs, which was identified by his stocking; his bones had been picked by animals.

“S. C. hung himself, and another destroyed himself by taking laudanum. D. D. was hired for ten dollars to shoot a man, for which offence he died upon the gallows.

“The most of those who survived were either sent to the State prison or were publicly whipped for crimes committed against the peace and dignity of the State.”

This is a brief history of the Orange County “Liberals,” as they called themselves.

The days of the infidel are counted. What a fearful thing it is for him to fall into the hands of God in the hour of death! He knows this truth, and because he knows it he dies in the fury of despair, and, as it were, in the anticipated torments of the suffering that awaits him in hell. Witness Voltaire, the famous infidel of France. He wished to make his confession at his last hour. But the priest of St. Sulpice was not able to go to his bedside, because the chamber-door was shut upon him. So Voltaire died without confession. He died in such a terrible paroxysm of

fury and rage that the marshal of Richelieu, who was present at his horrible agony, exclaimed: "Really, this sight is sickening; it is insupportable!" M. Tronchin, Voltaire's physician, says: "Figure to yourself the rage and fury of Orestes, and you'll still have but a feeble image of the fury of Voltaire in his last agony. It would be well if all the infidels of Paris were present. O the fine spectacle that would have met their eyes!" Thus is fulfilled in infidels what God says in holy Scripture: "I will laugh at the destruction of those who laughed at me daring their life."

Witness Tom Paine. A short time before he died he sent for the Rev. Father Fenwick. So Father Fenwick went in company of Father Kohlman, to see the infidel in his wretched condition. When they arrived at Paine's house, at Greenwich, his housekeeper came to the door and enquired whether they were the Catholic priests. "For," said she, "Mr. Paine has been so annoyed of late by ministers of different other denominations calling upon him that he has left express orders with me to admit no one to-day but the clergymen of the Catholic Church." Upon assuring her that they were Catholic clergymen, she opened the door and invited them to sit down in the parlor. "Gentlemen," said she, "I really wish you may succeed with Mr. Paine; for he is laboring under great distress of mind ever since he was informed by his physicians that he cannot possibly live, and must die shortly. He sent for you to-day because he was told that if any one could do him good you might. He is truly to be pitied. His cries, when he is left alone, are truly heartrending. 'O Lord! help me!' he will exclaim during his paroxysms of distress. 'God help, Jesus Christ help me!' repeating the same expressions without any the least variation, in a tone of voice that would alarm the house. Sometimes he will say, 'O God! what have I done to suffer so much?' Then shortly after: 'If there is a God, what will become of me?' Thus he will continue for some

time, when on a sudden he will scream as if in terror and agony, and call out for me by name. On one of these occasions, which are very frequent, I went to him and enquired what he wanted. 'Stay with me,' he replied, 'for God's sake; for I cannot bear to be left alone.' I then observed that I could not always be with him, as I had much to attend to in the house. 'Then,' said he, 'send even a child to stay with me; for it is a hell to be alone.' I never saw," she concluded, "a more unhappy, a more forsaken man. It seems he cannot reconcile himself to die.'

The fathers did all in their power to make Paine enter into himself and ask God's pardon. But all their endeavors were in vain. He ordered them out of his room in the highest pitch of his voice, and seemed a very maniac with rage and madness. "Let us go," said Father Fenwick to Father Kohlman. "We have nothing more to do here. He seems to be entirely abandoned by God. Further words are lost upon him. I never before or since beheld a more hardened wretch."—*Lives of the Catholic Bishops of America*, p. 379, etc.

To the infidel and evil-doer these examples present matter worthy of serious reflection, while the believer will recognize in them the special judgment of God, which is too clearly indicated to be doubted by any honest mind. Let the unbeliever remember that the hour will come when he shall open his eyes to see the wisdom of those who have believed; when he also shall see, to his confusion, his own madness in refusing to believe. "Oh! that he would be wise, and would understand that there is none that can deliver out of the hand of the Lord."*

* Deut. xxxii. 39.

CHAPTER X.

THE PRODIGAL'S REPENTANCE—DEATH.

ONE day the famous Father Gerard, before he had entered the order of Friars Preachers, read in the fifth chapter of Genesis the following passage: "Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years, and died; Seth lived nine hundred and twelve years, and died; Enos lived nine hundred and five years, and died; Mathusala lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and died." Here he closed the book, and exclaimed: "Thus ends the life of nearly ten centuries. It now appears as if it never had been. What a folly not to prepare for a happy death!" Saying this, he abandoned the world and entered a Dominican convent, where he died in the odor of sanctity.

Death is indeed a powerful preacher, a great missionary. It was this missionary that preached to the prodigal. "I here perish with hunger," he said to himself. The unhappy young man had seen the life of his wicked companions. He had also witnessed several of them die the death of the impious. His life resembled theirs. His death, he thought, would not be different from theirs, unless he returned in due time to his father's house and led a better life. He had not as yet become quite an infidel. He had not as yet forgotten his catechism altogether. He remembered the judgment and punishment that awaited the wicked in the world to come. So he entered into himself and said: "How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger! I will arise, and will go to my father."*

* Luke xv. 18.

We too, if we attentively listen to the voice of death, will not fail to form a firm resolution to prepare for a happy death. There are many nowadays who view death merely as a dissolution of organs, the decomposition of a worn-out machine, as an extinction of the powers of life; in other words, they examine it simply with the eye of an infidel physician. It is not strange at all that these people should be insensible to the high moral grandeur which so often distinguishes the closing scene of mortal life, or that they should be surprised or offended at the importance which religion ascribes to this last act in the combat of her children. But far is it from the humble followers of a crucified Saviour to profess a scorn for death, which He Himself condescended to endure. Death is disarmed, it is true; it is vanquished; yet its aspect still bespeaks its origin, and the eye naturally turns from it in mourning. "Perhaps you do not know," says St. Leonard, "what sort of a grace it is to die a happy death. It is such a grace that the greatest saints never thought it was their due for anything they had done for God. Even if God had denied a happy death to His own Mother, He would have done her no wrong; for it is a grace so great that no one can merit it. Though all angels and men should unite their power to give us a just knowledge of the importance of a good or bad death, it would be impossible for them to do so, because they themselves cannot adequately comprehend the good or evil resulting from a good or bad death."

Death is the end of all our works, of our earthly pilgrimage; the harbor where we cast anchor, or are wrecked for ever. On death depends eternity; eternal happiness or eternal misery is its necessary result. If we die well, we shall be saved eternally; if we die ill, we shall be eternally lost. We can die but once. Hence the infinite importance of this final act of our life. Yes, the day of death is the master-day—the day that judges all the others. It is for

this reason that this crisis naturally impresses every one with a feeling of awe. The pinched and pallid features, the cold and clammy skin, the heaving, laborious, rattling respiration, and the irresistible force of that disease which no earthly remedies can overcome, speak of something appalling, and suggest the idea of an Almighty power manifesting displeasure and inflicting punishment.

What especially increases the sufferings of the dying is their remorse for sin committed, their dread of the approaching judgment, and the uncertainty of eternal salvation. At that moment especially the devil puts forth all his power to gain the soul that is passing into eternity, knowing that the time is short in which he may win her, and that if he lose her then he has lost her for ever. For this reason it is that the devil, who has always tempted her in life, will not be satisfied to tempt her alone in death, but calls companions to his aid. When any one is at the point of death, his house is filled with demons, who unite to accomplish his ruin. It is related of St. Andrew Avellino that, at the time of his death, several hundred devils came to tempt him; and we read that, at the time of his agony, he had so fierce a struggle with hell as to cause all his good brethren in religion who were present to tremble.

Now, the path which we are pursuing leads us necessarily within view of death; this angel of destruction gains upon us more and more every day, and he comes upon many too often unawares. Happy are those who are always prepared to follow his summons. He has two keys in his hand; with the one he opens heaven for the good, and with the other he opens the gates of hell for the bad. The greatest gain, therefore, in this life is to prepare ourselves every day for a happy death.

One of the means best fitted to prepare for a happy death is to bear constantly in mind the certainty of death and the uncertainty of the hour of death. God knows this, and

therefore He has ordered it so that everythin garound us should remind us of death.

All nature tells that we must die. If we ask the sun that shines in the heavens, he will tell us that we must die. The sun rises in the morning, ascends to his zenith, and then sinks slowly in the west, and disappears. Such is our life. At our birth we enter into this world. We have grown to manhood, to womanhood; we have, perhaps, acquired honors, riches, and applauses, only to lose them at the hour of death; we have grown up only to sink into the grave and disappear from the earth for ever.

If we ask the seasons, they will tell us that just as they succeed one another—just as summer succeeds spring, and autumn is followed by winter—so do we now succeed our forefathers; and when we too shall have passed away, our places shall be occupied by others.

If we ask the streams that hasten to the sea, they will tell us that our life is like a rapid stream. The first years of it were passed in obscurity, like the spring hidden in the grass. The stream hastens on through rugged rocks and gloomy forests; it dashes, flashing and foaming, over yawning precipices; it passes through blooming landscapes, until at last it sinks into the ocean, never more to return. Such is our life—a life of joy and of sorrow, a life of hope and of pain, of innocence and sin. We hurry on, until at last we sink into the silent ocean of eternity, never more to return.

If we look around us upon the earth, wherever our eyes fall we are continually reminded of death. Millions and millions lived before us upon earth. Where are they now? They have sunk into the grave; they have mouldered into dust. Whither are those powerful nations gone whose very name was once respected and feared? Where are the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans? They are dead. They have sunk into forgetfulness. Where are the mighty kings, the valiant generals, who once caused the nations of

the earth to tremble? The winds of heaven have scattered their dust. Their long-forgotten graves are trodden by every passer-by. Where are now all those great men, once so renowned for their learning, their brilliant talents, their wonderful discoveries? Their bones have long since mouldered in the grave, and their names are scarcely remembered by the learned. This whole world, with all its beauty, is but a vast graveyard, in which the bones of countless generations are slumbering in the dust. Wherever we go, be it through the busy streets, the wide, extended plain, the tangled forest, everywhere our foot treads on graves—the mould, the dust, the ashes, of six thousand years. If we look around us, wherever we will, everything we see reminds us of death. In the very place in which we now are others were before us. They are now in the grave. In a few years we shall follow them, and others shall take our place.

If we look around us on the streets, others have walked these streets before us, and are now dead. If we look around in our room, in our workshop, others have lived, worked, and perhaps sinned too, in that very room, in that very workshop, and they are dead. Where are those who in former years went with us to the dance, to the funeral? Where are those who sat beside us at the wake, and laughed and drank with us at the wedding? Where are the companions who played with us in innocent, happy childhood? Where are those with whom we sinned, and whom we led to sin? They are dead. Perhaps they died in sin. Perhaps they are now burning in hell, while we are resting here. Perhaps they are crying and shrieking in vain for one moment of time in which to do penance, while God, in His infinite mercy, now offers us once more the time, the grace of repentance. Yes, every moment of the day, every moment of the night, the death-rattle of a departed soul is heard in some part of the world; every day, on an average, about eighty thousand persons die. Even now, while you

are reading this, before you have read this sentence, a soul has passed from this world, and is standing, trembling and alone, in presence of the Eternal Judge. Every tick of the clock, every swing of the pendulum, every throb of the heart, tells us that we are hastening to the grave. Day and night, in joy or in pain, in innocence or in sin, our heart is ever beating our funeral march to the grave. The bed on which we lie down at night to rest reminds us of our grave. The sleep that closes our eyelids reminds us of that sleep of death which shall close our eyes upon this world for ever.

Death is not merely a necessary consequence of our frailty. No; death is not natural. What makes death so especially terrible is that it is not natural. Our body and soul were made to live together, and, had our first parents never sinned, we would never have died. Death is the punishment of sin. "By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death: and so death passed upon all men in whom all have sinned."* Yes, we must die; we must all die. The young and the old, the fair and the homely, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the just and the sinner, will die, and die but once.

Upon that one death depends our weal or woe for all eternity. If we die well, we shall be for ever happy; if we die ill, we shall be for ever miserable. If we die well, there awaits us in heaven a kingdom of glory, youth, beauty, wisdom, power, and joy without end; but if we die ill, torments eternal await us—the unutterable woe, the endless despair, of hell.

If we die a bad death, it can never be repaired; if we die once the death of Judas, who died after an unworthy communion, we shall never be able to die the death of a St. Paul. If we have the misfortune of committing a mortal sin, our soul is instantly dead, but there is yet hope for us, we may regain the life of our soul by worthily receiving the

* Romans v. 12.

sacraments. But if our body dies, our soul being at the time in the state of mortal sin, there is no hope for us; our soul remains in the state of eternal death. If we die a bad death, we lose everything—our wealth, our pleasures, our friends, our children; but, worse than all, we lose heaven, we lose our soul, we lose our God for ever. How important, then, it is to prepare for the hour of death, since we can die but once, and upon that once depends a whole eternity! If we lose our health, we send for a physician; we are willing to take the most bitter remedies; we are willing to leave our home, our friends, and all that is dear to us, and travel to the most distant climes; we are willing to fast and abstain; we are willing to spend all that we possess to gain our health. And yet, if our health is lost, we can always hope to regain it; but if we once die a bad death, our case is hopeless, our loss can never be repaired.

If we lose our property by some accident, by carelessness or mismanagement, we may regain it by prudent economy, by energy and industry; but if we have once lost our soul by a bad death, no prudence, no economy, no labor, will avail us; for once lost, for ever lost.

If we are engaged in an important lawsuit, what pains do we not take to succeed! We rest neither day nor night; we examine our papers, our deeds, over and over. We spend large sums of money in securing witnesses, bribing judges and lawyers, and no stone is left unturned that may aid us in gaining our ends; yet if we lose that case, we may hope to gain it at some other court. But if once our soul is lost by a bad death, no hope is left us; for no second trial is possible.

We know that we must die some time or other; yet what pains do we not take to escape death, or to keep death off as long as possible! If we lose our life, we may still hope to live eternally in the next world; but if we once lose our soul by a bad death, there is no hope for us, no life, no happiness.

Where shall we die? In the church of God? That is not impossible. In St. James's Church, Baltimore, in February, 1870, a woman received a stroke of apoplexy, and died whilst the priest was speaking. Father Schaffleitner died suddenly in Buffalo during Vespers. We may die on the street, on our way home, as Bishop Neumann did. We may die in the cars. One may die in a tavern, while his wicked companions are standing around him, with the sound of blasphemy ringing in his ears. There shall Jesus Christ meet him, and, if in sin, he will condemn him to hell. One may die in the house of ill-fame. One may die going home in a state of intoxication. When shall we die? Shall it be next year? shall it be next week? shall it be this very night? How many went to bed hale and hearty, and in the morning were dead! When the captains of Israel were assembled together at Ramoth Galaad, a messenger from Eliseus stood in the midst, and said: "I have a message to thee, O prince!" And they all asked eagerly: "To which one of us all?" Now, the message for each of us is that which the Prophet Jeremias sent to Hananias: "This year thou shalt die."* How many of those who a year ago were alive are now dead! How many of those who are alive now will be dead before another year has passed! Now let us put the question to ourselves: Are we at this moment in the state in which we would wish to be at the hour of our death? Who dares say that he is? When, then, shall we be prepared for death?

Some say that there is no danger. But just there lies the greatest danger. Jesus Christ assures us that death will come upon us when we least expect it. Let us mark well the words. When the devil, that father of lies, first tempted our first parents, he said to them: "Oh! no; there is no danger. You shall not die." He knows very well

* Jer. xxviii. 16.

that if he were to speak thus to us now we would not believe him. Therefore he no longer says, "You shall not die"; but he says, "You will not die soon." The devil tells us that there is no danger, there is time enough, whilst Jesus Christ tells us that there is danger. "Watch ye and pray, for death will come when you least expect it." Death will come like a thief in the night. Whom shall we believe, Jesus Christ or the devil? Death spares no one. Whether our conscience be in order or not, death will not spare us. We may or may not be necessary to our family; death will not respect us. Death spares not the suckling babe that nestles in the arms of its mother. Death strikes down alike the strong, the young man, and the hoary-headed sire; death reveres neither the golden locks of youthful beauty nor the silvery hairs of drooping old age. "Death," says the proverb, "is the echo of life"; and the echo, as we know, always repeats the very words that are uttered, and nothing else. So death will be the exact echo, the very reflex, of our life. "Death," says the Holy Ghost, "is the time of harvest." "Whatever a man has sown during life, that shall he reap at the hour of death.* If, then, during life we sow in our hearts sinful thoughts and desires, and defile our soul by immodest words and actions, by dishonesty and drunkenness, we shall reap the frightful consequences of these sins at the dread hour of death. Yes, we shall die as we have lived. Some say that they hope to die a good death; but what does to die a good death mean? To die a good death means to die without sin; to die without any affection for sin or for sinful pleasures; to die after having satisfied God's justice by worthy penance. To die a good death means to die with the firm resolution rather to endure all the torments of the martyrs than wilfully to offend God again by another mortal sin. It means to die with firm faith, with unwavering hope, with sincere charity. We

* Gal. vi. 8.

must, then, love God above all things, and our neighbor as ourselves. Now, suppose we were to die at this hour; should we have all these good dispositions? Who shall say yes? Let us rest assured that at the hour of death we shall not be better disposed than we are now.

It is a certain truth that no matter how good or virtuous we may be now, we shall not be saved without the grace of final perseverance, the grace of a happy death. But it is also a certain truth—a truth that we know with the certainty of faith—that no matter how pure, how holy, our life may be, we can never merit the grace of a happy death. Though we were to spend our whole life in the performance of good works, in penances, in liberal alms; though we were to perform all the good works of all the saints in heaven, we could nevertheless not merit the grace of a happy death. This is indeed a terrible truth, and the more terrible because it is so absolutely certain. If the greatest saints, even the most austere penitents, that ever lived, cannot by all their good works merit the grace of a happy death, how can we hope for such a grace—we whose whole life has been spent in sin, and who will not make a single sacrifice, a single effort, to obtain that grace? Will God crown us with eternal glory because we have spent our whole life in offending Him? No; God is just. He will render to every one according to his works.

The great St. Jerome was one of the most learned as well as one of the most austere penitents that ever lived. He was stretched on his death-bed. That solemn moment had come when men see things in their true light, without disguise, without passion. His beloved disciples stood weeping around him; they conjured him to tell them something of which he was most firmly convinced, and which they would always remember as his dying words. “Ah! my children,” said the dying saint, “I am at the point of death a few moments more, and I shall appear before my Judge.

I declare to you, then, it is my firm, unwavering conviction, that out of a hundred thousand persons who have lived in sin till the hour of death, scarcely one is saved. Yes, my children, I do not exaggerate; my mind is not wandering, my imagination is not disturbed by sickness or by approach of death. I know what I am saying, and I declare to you that it is my firm, unwavering conviction—a conviction strengthened by a long experience of over fifty years—that out of a hundred thousand persons that continue in sin till the hour of death, scarcely one is saved.”

Ah! are we not convinced? Do we want other proofs still? Father Thomas Burke, the great Dominican preacher, relates in one of his lectures that he was once called to assist a dying man—dying after a long life of sin. “The man had sense enough to sit up in the bed and say, ‘You are a priest?’ I said, ‘Yes, I am.’ ‘Oh!’ he said, ‘I am glad of it. Tell me: I want to know one thing. I want to know if you have the Blessed Sacrament with you?’ ‘I have.’ The moment I said so he sprang out of the bed on to the floor, kicked, and plunged, and roared like a maniac! ‘Oh! take away that God! take away that God! That man has God with him. There is no God for me!’ Oh! I protest to you he was dead before I left the room, crying out to the last, ‘There is no God for me!’”

Does any one of us wish to die thus? But if we persevere in sin up to the last moment of our lives, we have just as little hope for salvation. And why? Will not God give us His grace? Yes, God will give sufficient grace to every one, no matter how hardened, how wicked, he may be. But to give up a wicked habit instantly, after a long life of sin, requires not only ordinary grace, but an extraordinary, a miraculous grace; and this grace God is not bound to give to any one. God offers us this grace now. He has spoken to us in this hour. He calls us now to repentance. Let us obey His voice. Let us not turn a deaf ear to his call.

Or do we think that he will offer his grace to us at the hour of death? Let us not deceive ourselves. God is not to be mocked. Our Lord himself tells us what will happen to us at that hour: "You shall seek me, and you shall not find me, and you shall die in your sins."

To prepare, then, in time for a good death, is the most important of all our duties. It is, indeed, *the* only important duty. And yet, strange to say, it is just this duty which is generally the most neglected. It is for this reason that one day a holy missionary commenced his sermon in the following manner: "My brethren, I have to tell you great, very great news; and the news I have to tell you is that—" At these words all looked at him in amazement and listened with breathless attention. "My brethren," continued the holy priest, "you must all die, and, after death, you shall be judged with unerring justice." At these words the audience smiled, and shrugged their shoulders, and looked disappointed. The priest looked around with an air of astonishment, and said: "What! my brethren, you look disappointed. You think, perhaps, that I have deceived you. No, my brethren, it is you who have deceived me. You live in such a way as if you had never heard of death, as if you were never to die. My brethren, when I look around upon this world at the present day; when I see how men live, how eagerly they labor to acquire wealth, to enjoy honors and pleasures—when I see all this, I am tempted to believe that they do not know that they have to die, and that after death they shall be judged with a strict, unerring justice."

Indeed, the holy missionary was right. Ask that careless Catholic who neglects Mass so often on Sundays and holydays, who works on holydays without necessity, who neglects the sacraments from year to year—has he ever thought that he must die and render a strict account to God of all the graces he has neglected and despised? Ask that man who has been for so many years a member of a secret soci-

ety which has been condemned by God and His Church—has he ever thought that he must die, that death will tear him apart from those companions of darkness, for whose sake he sacrificed his God, his hope, his heaven?

Ask that father and mother who neglect their children's education, who neglect to send them to Catholic schools, to catechism, to Mass on Sundays and holydays—have they ever thought of death, and of the terrible account they have to give of the children whom God has confided to their care? Ask those parents who scandalize those little ones by neglecting their religious duties for so many years, by drunkenness, by shameful conduct—have they ever thought that they must die?

Ask that revengeful woman, whose heart is full of bitter hatred towards her neighbor, who will not forgive or even salute those who have offended her—has she not forgotten that she must die; that after death she shall be judged without mercy, as she has shown no mercy? And that unhappy drunkard—has he thought that he must die? Did he think, when he broke his most solemn promise, of death and of the unutterable torments reserved for drunkards in hell?

And that dishonest man, who cheated his neighbor by unjust speculations, by filching from his employers—has he thought that death shall snatch him away from his ill-gotten wealth, that blood-money, for which he has bartered away his immortal soul? Has he thought that death would hurry him, with his soul defiled by injustice, before the awful judgment-seat of God? How often has he thought of this? And that man who has grown rich by selling liquor to drunkards, he who steals the clothes from the drunkard's wife, he who steals the bread from the mouth of his starving children—has he thought of this?

Ask also that vain, foolish girl who has sold her innocence for a fine dress, a pretty ring, whether she has thought

that she must die? She received in baptism the snow-white robe of virginal innocence; see how she has defiled it. She has lost the glorious crown which is reserved for the virgins in heaven. Has she thought that she must die and appear before her heavenly Bridegroom with soul defiled and innocence lost? Unhappy creature! When she committed that enormous crime, and thought of destroying the fruit of her crime, did she think that she would have to die? Did she think, when she committed those secret sins, so abominable before God and his holy angels, that she would have to die, and that after death she would stand branded with all her shameful thoughts, desires, and deeds, a trembling culprit, before her eternal Judge? Did she think of this? Ask those husbands and wives did they think of death when they committed, under the veil of marriage, so many abominable and unnatural crimes, by preventing human life or murdering the poor helpless being before it could see the blessed light of day—did they think that they had to die, and, after death, render a terrible account of the holy sacrament of marriage, which they have so often abused and desecrated?

Have those men or those women who so often injure their neighbor's character by calumny, who so often defile their souls and the souls of their fellows by shameful conduct, immodest discourses, by those words of double meaning—have they thought that they must die, and after death render a strict account of every immodest, every uncharitable, every blasphemous word, nay, even of every idle word uttered? Have they thought seriously of this?

And the unhappy soul which has made so many sacrilegious confessions, so many unworthy communions; which has so long concealed that secret sin that weighs so heavily on its conscience—has it thought of death? Has it thought that after death it will have to give a fearful account of the blood of Jesus Christ, which

it has so often polluted? What must be the anguish of such men when death comes and tears them away in an instant from all the objects of their sinful passions! What will it avail that dying man, that dying woman, to have sacrificed their honor, renounced their faith, sold their hope of heaven and God, all to gratify the concupiscence of the flesh!

What will it avail that dying man to have acquired so much wealth by so many sacrifices and by the commission of so many grievous sins! Other hands shall spend it that have not labored for it. Others shall enjoy that wealth, whilst he who sold his soul to acquire it is rotting in the grave, and his soul is perhaps burning in hell. What will it avail that dying man to have taken so many unlawful oaths? What will it avail him now to have been a member of a secret society? He has been a shrewd business man; he knew how to make money, and how to keep it too; what will that knowledge avail him now?

There was once a miser who had grown rich by fraud and perjury. He loved his money more than his God. At last he fell dangerously ill. When he saw that his last moment had come, he ordered his servants to bring before him all his money and jewels. He gazed at his riches with weeping eyes; he touched his gold and jewels with his trembling hands. "Ah! my treasures," he cried, "my gold, my jewels, must I, then, leave you? Who shall possess you when I am dead? Woe is me! I have labored so hard, I have suffered so long, to call you mine, and now I must leave you for ever." And in the midst of these lamentations he died.

Now we have time to love and serve God, to acquire new merits, to acquire an increase of glory in heaven; but when once death comes, we can acquire no more merits. Death is that dark night in which no one can labor. Just as death finds us, so we shall be throughout all eternity. We have

yet time to be reconciled with our enemies ; but when death comes, we shall perhaps long for one moment in which to ask forgiveness of those whom we have offended, and that moment shall not be given us. Now we have time to restore the property which we have stolen, to restore the good name of those whom we have injured, to repair all the evil we have done, the scandals we have occasioned ; but when the hour of death comes, we may yearn and pray for a few years more, or even a few days, to repair all the evils of a long life of sin, and those few years, those few days, shall not be granted us. “ Ah ! what time is it ? ” asked a dying sinner of those around him. “ It is just midnight. ” was the answer. “ Midnight ! ” he shrieked in a voice of despair. “ Midnight ! Ah ! then my hour has come, and never-ending woe awaits me ! ” And so he died.

Suppose God were to send us this moment an angel from heaven to announce to us that we were to die to-morrow or that we were to die this very night. What a sudden change would come over us all ! Every face would turn pale, every heart would throb with terror. Nothing but sighs, and groans, and fervent prayers would be heard. We would hasten eagerly to the feet of the priest to confess our sins and cleanse our soul by tears of true repentance. Then we would be willing to perform any penance, to make any sacrifice, in order to save our souls and to be well prepared to meet our Judge. Then indeed we would gladly give back that money, that property, we possess unjustly. Then we would eagerly give up the company of that young man, that young woman, that so often caused us to commit sin. Then we would willingly promise to give up drunkenness, and to keep away from balls, theatres, and other sinful places of amusement. We would be willing to do whatever the priest would tell us, and would still fear that we had not done enough.

Let us do all this now, while we have yet time, in order

to be prepared to obey the summons of death at whatever moment it comes ; and death instead of being a terror and dread end of all that we love and cherish, will be the true dawn of the brighter and the better day, the opening of life eternal, the sweet, short, and blessed passage into the bosom of our Father and our God.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRODIGAL JUDGED—PARTICULAR JUDGMENT.

ST. JOHN CLIMACHUS tells the story of an old hermit who fell dangerously ill. Some hours before his death he seemed to be beside himself. He glanced fearfully around on every side, like one who is surrounded by enemies. The dying man imagined himself before a tribunal, answering accusations brought against him. The bystanders saw no one, but they heard distinctly what was said. "It is true," said the hermit, "that I committed that sin; but I confessed it, and fasted three years for it on bread and water. . . . That is true, too; I acknowledge it. But I confessed it and did penance for it. As for that other sin, I did not commit it, and you accuse me falsely. . . . There, I have no excuse to offer—I am guilty of that sin; but I throw myself on the mercy of God."

The rigorous account which was demanded of this old hermit in the hour of his death is sufficient to alarm us all. Which of us has led a life of penance for forty years? All of us, it is true, can say, "I have committed such and such a sin"; but which of us can say with the hermit, "I have confessed it, and fasted three years for it on bread and water"? Which of us, then, can flatter himself with having no reason to fear the judgment of God?

The hour of death is, in the history of every immortal soul, the hour which is of all others the most important, the most awful. In that hour the veil of eternity is drawn aside, and the soul stands for the first time trembling and alone in the presence of her Maker. Two eternities are be-

fore her; the one an eternity of happiness, the other an eternity of woe. In the very moment after death, in the very chamber of death, whilst the friends are dressing the body for the grave, while they are closing the eyes, and bandaging the mouth, and arranging the limbs in order for burial, the soul has heard her eternal doom pronounced—to heaven or to hell.

If the soul is adjudged to heaven, she shall be for ever happy; if she is doomed to hell, all the prayers in the world can benefit her nothing. This decisive moment shall come for every one of us, and it is our most sacred duty to prepare well for it while we have yet time.

St. Paul assures us that, if we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged. The prodigal son was not judged by his father, because he judged himself. He accused himself of all his crimes. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee." He sentenced himself to just punishments. "I am not now worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." This self-accusation and self-judgment saved him. His father forgave and received him with unspeakable joy. "Let us eat and make merry. This, my son, was lost and is found again." If we wish to meet Jesus Christ as a mild judge, we must imitate the example of the prodigal; we must judge and accuse ourselves sincerely, with an upright heart. If we wish to stand with hope and courage before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, we must not neglect now to approach the tribunal of mercy which Jesus Christ Himself has established.

At the hour of death our accusers will be the demon and those unhappy souls which we may have ruined by our bad example. In the tribunal of penance we have no other accuser but ourselves. There our guardian angel is beside us, and awaits our sentence, not with sorrow, but with joy. There Jesus Christ is present, not as an angry Judge, but as a merciful Saviour. At death, if we are in mortal sin, the

sentence will infallibly be, "I condemn thee for thy sins." But here, if we are truly repentant, the sentence will always be, "I absolve thee from thy sins." Let us take the case of a Catholic who, during life, has been careless in the practice of his religious duties. There are thousands such everywhere. This man thought very seldom of death; but death has come at last, and, whether he is ready or not, he must die. His friends are weeping around him, but their tears can not bring him back. He struggles with death, but his struggles are in vain; death is inexorable; there is no escape. And now he has become speechless; his eyes have grown dim, the cold sweat of death is on his brow, the death-rattle is in his throat; one moment more, and he is a corpse. Yes, he is dead, and his soul is in eternity.

Has it not happened to us sometimes to be talking quite inconsiderately, and on a sudden to find that others were listening before whom we would not have spoken thus for all the world? Something of this kind, but far more terrible, will be the first feeling of a sinner as he enters into eternity. Let us follow his soul. The voice of his friends have died on his ear, and he begins to hear other voices. He no longer sees the people in the room; they have vanished from his sight, and he now sees others in their stead. Who is it that he sees standing at the foot of his bed? A neighbor was standing there just now, but this is some one else. It is a form, beautiful indeed, but yet majestic and terrible. It is some one he had never seen before; and yet he ought to know that face, for it seems familiar to him. It is the very face he had so often seen in church. It is the face his mother looked upon as she was dying. It is the face we shall look upon when we die. Yes, it is Jesus Christ. He recognizes that face now; it is the very same, and yet how different! When he saw that face in pictures, it was crowned with thorns; it is now crowned with a diadem of matchless glory. When he beheld that form in the church, it was

naked and bleeding on the cross; it is now bright as the sun, and clothed with garments of royal splendor. Jesus is looking at him with eyes of fire, and the unhappy man turns away from those piercing eyes to find that there are other forms beside him.

There stands one at his right hand, and another on his left. Who are they? He ought to know them, for they know more of him than even he himself does. When he was born, they stood beside him, and during his whole life, of good or ill, they never deserted him. They watched him in his fearful death-struggle, and now they stand beside him as witnesses in the terrible judgment. The one is a bright and beautiful being, with golden locks and airy wings. He knows it; it is his guardian angel. The other is a black and hideous demon of hell. He crouches like a ravenous tiger at the side of the unhappy man. His looks are full of hate, and malice, and triumph too; for he has dogged the steps of this poor sinner all along, day after day, and year after year, and now at last the time has come for him to seize his prey. Oh! how unspeakable is the surprise and terror of this unhappy soul at such a sight! But why is Jesus there? Why are the angel and the demon there? He knows but too well: it is to judge him. He is to be tried—to be tried by an unerring Judge—by Jesus Christ himself. This is something new to him.

He never tried himself, he never examined his conscience. It was too much trouble. He was sometimes even afraid to look into his heart. Whenever the thought of death and judgment came to his mind, he banished it quickly, and consoled himself with the vague hope that he would escape in some way or other. He was a Catholic, and he thought that perhaps God would not be so strict with him. He had not been a very bad man; he never denied his faith. He knew many others that were worse than he; he thought that perhaps God would pardon him for not being worse than he was.

He did not know exactly how he would escape, but he fancied he would get off some way or other. It is the old story. Almighty God said to Eve, "Eat not of this fruit; for if you eat of it you shall surely die." Now, when the serpent asked Eve why she did not eat of the fruit, she answered, "If we eat of it, perhaps we shall die." And the serpent said, "No, no, you shall not die." So it is always: God forbids, the sinner doubts, the devil denies. God forbids us to commit sin, and threatens us with eternal death if we commit it; but the sinner begins to reason and to doubt of the truth of God's words, and then the devil comes and tells him: "No, no, God only wishes to frighten you. There is no great harm in that sin. No, no, you shall not die." And the sinner doubts God's words and believes the devil. So it has gone on from day to day; and now, when it is too late, the unhappy man sees how he has been deceived by the devil. It is clear to him now, but the knowledge comes too late; and he sees the devil gloating in malicious triumph over his carcass. The unhappy sinner is at last to be tried. He is standing, a trembling culprit, before his Eternal Judge. By what law is he to be tried? By those very Ten Commandments about which he heard so much, but which he has broken so often. God had said to him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no God but me." And the sinner preferred his money—his gods were his passions, his pleasures weak, sinful creatures, for love of whom he forfeited his soul.

God had said: "Thou shalt not take my name in vain"; and he had dishonored the holy name of God by his curses and blasphemies. God had said to him: "Thou shalt sanctify the Sundays and holydays"; and he had not kept those days holy. He had neglected Mass, he had spent the day in rioting and debauchery.

God had said : “Thou shalt not steal” ; he had stolen, defrauded his neighbor ; he had found articles of value, and never returned them to their lawful owner.

God had said : “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” ; and he had not loved his neighbor ; he had spoken ill of him, he had borne a grudge against him for weeks, months, and years.

God had told him : “Thou shalt not commit murder” ; and he had murdered his own soul by drunkenness.

God had said to him : “Thou shalt not commit any sin of impurity” ; and he had so sinned a thousand times in thought, in word, and in deed. He had grown so bold in sin that he thought God would not notice it. But now he knows that the devil and his own passions kept him blindfolded all the while. Now every sin of his past life rises up against him. Every sin that he committed from the cradle to the grave, every sin of thought, word, action, and commission—all appear ; not one is hidden or forgotten. His bitter enemy, the devil, who was always at his side, is now there as his accuser. And the devil is bold and defiant ; he is sure of his prey. “I claim this soul as mine,” he shrieks. “Look at it ; does it not resemble me ? Will you take a soul like that and place it in Paradise ?” At these words the sinner looks upon himself and sees his own soul. He never saw his soul before, and now he sees the horrid sight of one that is dead and rotting in mortal sin. Each sin has branded its own frightful mark upon that soul. There he sees the foul corruption of lust, there he sees the black scars of anger and hate, the horrid seals of sordid avarice. How hideous is his soul, and how changed from what it once was ! Once it was radiant with light and beauty, lovely and pure as the angel that stands by his side. Then it was a temple of God, the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost. It was purer than silver, and brighter than the finest gold ; it was a radiant star in the hand of the Most High. All

this it once was ; what is it now ? Alas ! what a woful change ! The soul that was a temple of God, it has become a sink of uncleanness ; the temple of the Holy Ghost a den of demons.

“I claim this body as mine,” cries the demon again, with a tone of defiance ; and as he speaks he points to the dead body as it lies on the bed. “I claim those eyes as mine by all the lustful looks they have ever given. I claim those ears as mine by all the calumny and scandal they have drunk in so greedily. I claim this mouth as mine, by all the immodest words, by all the curses and blasphemies, it has ever uttered. I claim those hands as mine by all the thefts, the immodest acts, they have ever committed. I claim those hands ; for they have ever been closed upon the poor and open to injustice. I claim those feet as mine ; for they were ever swift to carry him to the haunts of vice and sin, and slow to carry him to the house of God. See !” cries the demon, “this body is mine ; it bears my mark.” And as the devil speaks, he points to the foul marks of sin and shame, which the unhappy man knew so well how to conceal during life, out which can no longer be concealed in death.

“This man is a Christian,” cries the demon again with a mocking sneer. “In baptism he promised solemnly to renounce me ; but how has he kept his promise ? Has he not always been my willing slave ? He promised in baptism to renounce my works, and yet has he not always worked for me ? I ordered him to take revenge, and he instantly obeyed me. I tempted him to lust, and he not only defiled his heart, but he even went so far as to glory in his shame. I urged him to injustice, and at my bidding he wronged the poor, he oppressed the widows and orphans, he defrauded the laborer of his hire, he defrauded the servants of their hard-earned wages. Yes, he worked for me. It was by his advice that I led so many astray. It was by his arts that I brought so many innocent souls to ruin. It was

by his example that I gained over so many faithful followers.

“He promised to renounce my pomps and my glory; and where did I ever display my glory that I did not find him ready to serve me? I displayed my pomp in the theatre and ball-room, and he worshipped me there by his immodest words and gestures. I displayed my pomp in the gambling-house, in the bar-room, and he worshipped me there by his blasphemies, by his drunkenness. Even in the church, in the house of God, I displayed my pomp; I sent there vain women, my faithful slaves, and even there he worshipped me by his immodest glances, by his lustful desires. Just Judge! I appeal to you, has he renounced me, has he renounced my works, has he renounced my pomps?”

Then Satan turns to the sinner. “See, wicked wretch,” he cries, “can you deny this?” And as he speaks he unfolds before the unhappysoul the long list of her sins. “Do you remember the sin you committed in that house on such a night? I have taken care to note it down, as I knew you were so forgetful. Here, too, are the sins you committed that night in the ball-room, in the theatre, on your way home. Can you deny them? Here are noted down all the impure thoughts to which you consented in your heart; here are written all those immodest words, all those blasphemies, all your bad desires and actions. You told your confessor that you could not remember the number of your sins. Here is the number. I call God to witness if it is not the truth. Do you remember those sins that you were ashamed to tell to your confessor? Here they are, carefully noted down. Do you remember those important circumstances that you concealed? I make them known for you now.” How overwhelming is the shame and confusion of this unhappy man, as he sees all his sins now brought forth against him! The devil has indeed told the truth, because

the truth now serves his purpose better than falsehood. He knows he is a liar, and therefore he needs some one to acknowledge the truth of his accusation. "I have," he says, "witnesses, if you want them. Shall I call them up?" Jesus Christ gives his permission, and quick as a flash of light a troop of lost spirits come up from hell. They glare on the sinner as they fix on him a look of recognition. "Aha!" cries one of them with a fiendish laugh, "I think you know me"; and, as she speaks, she holds out her long, withered fingers towards him. "Do you not remember me? I am that unhappy girl whom you seduced. You led me to ruin; I will now lead you to hell." Yes, he knows her, though she is horribly changed. He recognizes that voice, he remembers that face. But there is another standing before him, and he shudders as he sees her. It is his poor wife, who had put up with all his harsh treatment, whom he had so often cursed and outraged in his drunkenness. Through want and hunger she was led to steal; at last, through grief and despair, she was led to drunkenness. She glares on him now with bloodshot eyes, like a furious tigress. "O husband!" she shrieks, "you were my torment during life; I will now be your torment through all eternity." But there are others standing near him—a young man and woman; he knows them too. They are his children. He received them from God to bring them up for heaven; he has neglected that sacred duty, he has scandalized them. They could find no place at home. They lost all affection, all respect for their parents, and after their day's work one went to the tavern, the other to the ball and dance and the lonely place of assignation; and after a short career of dissipation, they were cut off in their sins. They now meet him, and he knows that their sins are upon his soul. "O father!" they shriek, "father!" How the name, which was once a term of fondness, now pierces his soul! "O father! you gave us life only to

lead us to hell. We will not leave you; we will cling to you, and drag you deeper and deeper into the eternal flames." Has not the demon won his cause? But wait; perhaps the sinner has done penance. Has not his guardian angel anything to say in his favor? Alas! he looks sad; he has nothing good to say. "O Jesus, most just and holy Judge!" answers the angel, "all these accusations are true. I have given this man all the graces which Thou hadst in store for him. He had the faith, he had the Sacraments, he had many special graces, he had the Jubilee, the Mission; he had received many calls and warnings, but he heeded them not. I myself often spoke to his heart. I urged him to do penance, but he neglected it. He was seldom at Mass, and when he did go he loaded his soul with new sins—sins of irreverence, sins of sacrilege. He seldom went to confession, and when he went it was only to profane Thy precious blood, O Jesus! for he approached the sacrament without sincere purpose of amendment; he soon fell back into his old sins, and at last he died without repentance. There is, then, nothing left for me now but to resign my charge, and to return the beautiful crown—the crown which Thou hadst destined for him, but which Thou wilt place on the brow of another."

The prophet* tells us that the angels of peace shall weep bitterly; and, indeed, well might angels even weep at such a sight. The crown of immortality, the garment of glory, the never-ending joys of heaven, all might have been his; but now they are lost forever. Oh! how the demon exults; for he is now sure of his prey. "O Christ!" he shrieks, "do you not hear what the angel says? You would not believe me, you would not believe my witnesses; but now your angel has said it. He is mine, he is mine! He has always been mine. I did not create him, and yet he has always served me; you created him, and yet he refused to

* *Isaias xxxiii. 7.*

obey you. I never died for him, and yet he has been my willing slave ; you died for him, and yet he has blasphemed your name, he has broken your commandments. You tried to allure him by kindness, but you were never able to win his affections. I led him to hell, and he was always ready to follow me. O God ! you condemned me to hell for a single sin, for a sin of a moment ; and this man has committed thousands of sins—sins of thought, of word, and of deed. Eternal God, I demand justice ! O Jesus, Son of the living God ! if you do not condemn this wretch, there is no truth in your words, no justice in your awards.” The demon speaks boldly, but Jesus Christ suffers him to do so, because he speaks the truth. The unhappy sinner trembles as he hears the words of the demon. He turns to Jesus, and sues for mercy. “ O Jesus ! have mercy ! Oh ! do not let me perish ; for thou hast died for me. I never denied my faith. Have mercy on me ! Only one-quarter of an hour more, and I will do penance.”

Can Jesus resist such an appeal ? Can he turn away His face from such a soul ? If there was a real disposition to do penance in the heart of that sinner, he might yet obtain pardon. But in the other world there is no penance, no pardon. As soon as the soul has crossed the threshold of eternity her will becomes for ever fixed ; “ for wherever the tree falleth, there it shall lie.” *

The unhappy man has only the desire to escape punishment, but not to avoid sin. Jesus, then, must pronounce the sentence. His divine justice requires it. “ O wicked man !” says Jesus then, turning to the sinner, “ you ask for mercy, but it is now too late ; the time for mercy for you has passed. You ask for mercy, and you never showed any mercy to yourself, to your wife and children. You cry for mercy ; but did I not show you mercy all the days of your life ? I sent you my priests. You refused to

hear them. They warned you, and you despised their warning. They showed you the way to heaven ; you would not follow. You preferred the demon during life ; you shall now be his slave for all eternity. Depart, then, accursed soul, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his followers." And Jesus Christ has gone ; the angel, too, is gone. The devil approaches the dead body. The people are not yet done washing it. The devil begins to wash too. What can it be ? He is washing the forehead ; for on that forehead the mark of Christ, the holy cross, was placed in baptism. The devil now washes it away, and with a brand from hell he stamps there his own seal—the seal of damnation. Now the unhappy wretch feels the full extent of his misery. His soul is transformed into a hideous demon. How he howls in wild despair, as he realizes his situation ! "I am damned—damned for ever ! Oh ! I never thought it would come to this ! Are, then, God's judgments so severe ? After all, I only acted as others act. I never denied my faith. I always had a good name. What, then, will become of the companions I left on earth, who are even worse than I was ? Will they too be condemned ! Oh ! shall I never see Jesus Christ again ? Shall I never enter heaven ? Must I despair for ever ?" As he utters these words the mocking voices of myriads of demons ring wildly in his ear, "Never ! for ever."

We know what a comfort it is in suffering to be able to say, "It was not my fault ; I did what I could." But even this comfort will not be left to the lost sinner. He will say to himself : "I might have been saved. What the angel said is all true. I was a Catholic. I had the means of salvation. I was never happy in my wicked life. My sins made me miserable during life. Now I shall be miserable for ever. What a fool I was ! I might have done penance, and I would have been happier for time and eternity. How little God asked of me ! I had the Mission, I had the

Jubilee, and other opportunities. If I had but profited by them, I would not now be here. Now I can see that that accident, that sickness which made me so impatient, was a warning from God. Now I understand it was God that called me by means of that friend; God that spoke to my heart in that book, but I would not hear His voice. Now I see that it was God that spoke when my conscience warned me not to go to that place, to give up that company; and when I had sinned, in spite of this warning, it was God who sent me that terrible remorse. But I hardened my heart, I closed my eyes to the light. O fool that I was! What trouble I took to be damned, and how little was required of me to be saved! I am damned through my own fault. I had time enough to save my soul. How many hours have I lost in gambling and drinking, in gratifying my sinful desires! I had so many opportunities; had I only used even one-half of them well, I would now be in heaven. I could have been saved just as well as so many others who had as much to fight against as I. They, too, had business to attend to; they, too, lived in the world, in the midst of dangers and temptations, and yet they are saved. Why, then, am I alone lost?

“Yesterday God was ready; the sacraments were at hand, the church-door was open, the priest was awaiting me; but now all is lost. Had I now but a single hour to do penance and to obtain pardon!” Alas! the unhappy sinner laments in vain; his sorrow comes too late. The demon seizes him and hugs him as a huge serpent hugs its trembling victim. On, on, and now they fly on, on, as swift as a thought, till at last they reach the mouth of the infernal abyss. The devil then casts this lost soul into the dismal dungeon of hell, and there it shall burn for ever and ever. And now myriads of damned spirits rush upon that soul, and a wild shriek rings over the wide extent of hell: “One more Catholic is ours one more soul lost! one more devil in hell!”

This judgment is passed and executed in a moment. The body is not yet cold, and the soul is burning in hell. The friends and relatives of the deceased are standing around the corpse, entirely unconscious of what had just passed in the room. Some come to take a last look at their dead friend, and, as they gaze on the face of the corpse, they say : " Oh ! how natural he looks ! He looks as if he were smiling still." And they that speak little think that the soul is damned. They know not that Jesus Christ has been there and condemned that soul to hell. This is an every-day's occurrence. We, too, shall sooner or later experience the meaning of those dread words of the apostle : " It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Wherever death overtakes a man, there Jesus Christ meets him and judges him. One finds his death in the grog-shop, and there, in that very spot, with bad companions standing around, with the sound of blasphemy in his ear, Jesus Christ, unseen, meets that man's soul and condemns him to hell. Another dies in a wretched hovel, where filth, and ignorance, and sin have utterly brutalized his soul ; and there, in that hovel, Jesus Christ meets that soul, that degraded being, and condemns him to hell. Another dies in a bed of soft down, covered around with silken curtains ; and as he dies, he sees the face of Jesus Christ looking through the curtains ; and there He pronounces the sentence of condemnation against him who made a god of this world. Another is shot in the street, on his way to the place of assignation ; and then and there, in the street, Jesus Christ meets him and condemns him to hell.

Yes, wherever death meets us, Jesus Christ too will meet us ; and if we are in mortal sin, He will condemn us to hell. It may be to-morrow, soon—much sooner than we expect. It may be in the very act of sin. Perhaps we will be hurried, unprepared, before our Eternal Judge. Then there shall be no mercy ; nothing but justice—unerring justice.

If we love our own happiness, let us prepare ourselves while we have yet time. The decisive moment shall come for every one of us—that moment upon which a whole eternity depends.

It was this all-important truth that Philip Neri impressed so deeply upon the mind of Spazzara, a young man who came to him one day and said : “ O father ! I have some good news to tell you. My parents have at last consented to send me to the university, where I intend to study law.” “ Very well,” said the saint ; “ and when you have finished your studies, what will you do then ? ” “ Oh ! then,” said the young man, “ I shall receive my diploma and be admitted to the bar.” “ And when you have received your diploma and are admitted to the bar, what will you do then ? ” “ Then I expect to receive a great deal of patronage, and hope to become renowned for wisdom and eloquence.” “ And what then ? ” asked St. Philip. “ Oh ! then perhaps I shall become a judge or a governor, or receive some other important public office. I shall become rich, and be honored and admired by all.” “ And what will you do then ? ” asked the saint once more. “ Well, then, when I have grown old, I shall rest and enjoy the fruits of my labors in a calm old age.” “ Well, supposing all this comes true,” said the saint once more, “ what will you do then ? ” “ Then—then—” said the young man, in a more sober tone, “ why, then I suppose I must die, like every one else.” “ Yes, you must die at last,” said St. Philip, in a tone of fearful earnestness ; “ but what then ? What shall you do when your w n trial comes—when you shall be yourself the accused, Satan the accuser, and Almighty God your judge ? ” The young man was now quite serious ; he little expected such a conclusion. The terrible thought of the hour of death, the strict judgment after death, and the endless eternity that awaited him in heaven or hell—all this opened his eyes to the folly of earthly greatness. He went home, thought over

the matter seriously, and at last, enlightened and strengthened by God, he quitted the world and consecrated himself to the service of God in a monastery, in order to prepare most earnestly for that final "what then?"—that is to say, that awful judgment which shall be followed by eternity. Let us be wise; let us prepare in time for the hour of death—that hour of terror—when the past, the present, and the future will fill our souls with horror, when the world will recede from us, when the temptations of the devil will be most fierce, and when we shall have to give a strict account of all our thoughts, words, and actions. All this makes the last moment of our life the most frightful. It is, therefore, the greatest wisdom to prepare ourselves well for that decisive moment. We shall prepare well for that awful moment if at least from henceforth we make good confessions and are charitable to the poor. "If we judge ourselves," says St. Paul, "we shall not be judged." If we carefully examine our conscience every day, if we purify our souls every day more and more by good confessions, we need have no fear of God in the hour of death. St. Augustine assures us that if we side with Almighty God, we shall not be judged by Him. "Now, we side with God," he says, "as soon as we begin to hate our sins, condemn them, and accuse ourselves of them in confession. We begin to be good as soon as we begin to confess our bad actions."* To make a sincere confession is to lay the foundation of a life of holiness. It is then that all our works, especially our charity to the poor, are pleasing to Almighty God, and will inspire us with great confidence in the mercy of God. "Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the poor and the needy," says holy David; "the Lord will deliver him on the evil day."† The evil day is the day, the hour, of death. But in this hour the charitable Christian will experience great confidence in God. "Alms shall be," says

* Tr. xii. in Joan. sub. fine.

† Ps. xl. 2.

Holy Scripture, “ a great confidence before the Most High God to all those that give it.” * And again it is said : “ Alms delivereth from death, and maketh to find mercy.” † “ The goods of this world,” says St. Ambrose, “ will not follow us after death. Only the works of charity will accompany the dying. They will preserve them from hell.” Tobias says : “ According to thy ability be merciful ; for thus thou storest up to thyself a good reward for the day of necessity.” ‡ St. Cyprian says that Tabita was restored to life on account of her charity towards the poor. “ This woman,” says Holy Scripture, “ was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did.” § “ A death-bed is a good one,” says St. Francis de Sales, “ if it has charity for a mattress.” ¶ St. Vincent de Paul was wont to say “ that those who have been charitable in the course of their life towards the poor generally have no fear of death at the end of their life ; that he had witnessed this in many instances ; and that for this reason he recommended to all those who were afraid of death to be charitable to the poor.” It is related in his life that a certain man, who was very charitable to the poor, was always very much afraid of death. But in the whole course of his last illness, which prepared him for death, he was calm and cheerful ; he died with a joyous smile on his lips.

“ Yes,” says St. Jerome, “ I cannot remember ever to have read that a man who was given to works of charity died a bad death. He has too many intercessors in heaven, and it is impossible that the prayer of many should not be heard.” “ Works of charity alone,” remarks a certain author, ¶ “ lead man to God and God to man. I never saw a charitable person die a bad death.”

This confidence is a fruit of their charity to the poor :

* Job. iv. 12.

† Job. xii. 9.

‡ Tobias iv. 8.

§ Acts ix. 36, 40.

¶ *Spirit of St. Francis de Sales.*

¶ Ad Fratres in eremo apud St. Augustine.

for they know that whatever they have given to the poor, they have given to our Lord Himself, as our divine Saviour has declared, "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me."* For this reason the Fathers of the Church say that whatever is given in alms is put, as it were, into the savings-bank of heaven by the hands of the poor. "Secure your riches," exclaims St. John Chrysostom; † "they are fleeting. How can you secure them? By giving them in alms you will make them stay with you; but by keeping them you will make them leave you. Keep grain locked up, and it will be eaten up by worms and disappear; sow it out, and it will yield a rich harvest and remain. Thus, in like manner, riches put under lock and key will disappear; but given in alms to the poor, they will yield a hundred-fold." St. Cyprian says the same. These are his words: ‡ "A capital deposited in the hands of Jesus Christ cannot be confiscated by any government, nor can it become the prey of dishonest lawyers. That inheritance is secure which is deposited with God." Sophronius § tells us that Evagrius the philosopher heard one day, in a sermon, that in the other world a hundred-fold would be returned for everything given in alms. So he brought sixty pounds of gold to Bishop Synesius, that he might distribute them among the poor. He received, for this money, the bishop's note stating he would receive a hundred-fold in heaven. He told his children to put this note in his hands after his death, and bury him with it. Three days after his death he appeared to the bishop, and begged him to go to his grave and take back his note, as he had already received a hundred-fold from Christ, according to promise. Next morning the bishop, together with his clergy, went to the grave of Evagrius, and took from his hands the note, which then read

* Matt. xxv. 40.

‡ Tract. de Opere et eleemos.

† De Penitent.

§ C. 195.

as follows: “Evagrius, the philosopher, to his bishop: I did not wish that you should remain ignorant of the fact that, for all the money which I gave you, I have been rewarded a hundred-fold. You owe me nothing more.”

The alms, then, which the charitable man has given will inspire him in the hour of death with great confidence in Jesus Christ, his Eternal Judge. Holy David says: “Acceptable to God is the man that showeth mercy and lendeth. Glory and wealth shall be in his house; he shall order his words with judgment.”* “In these words the royal prophet gives us to understand,” says St. John Chrysostom, “that a man rich in works of charity will not be afraid of his Eternal Judge. In vain shall his sins rise to accuse him if the poor excuse him. He gave his alms to Jesus Christ Himself in the person of the poor. “*Opera tua sumus*—we are your works,” they will cry out to him. “We are so many advocates before the tribunal of Christ to defend your cause. We will gain for you the good graces of the Eternal Judge. We will prevail upon him to pronounce sentence in your favor.”†

What a happiness for us to have in our power these two easy means—confession of our sins and charity to the poor—to escape the sentence of eternal death! Yes, our good confessions and our works of charity will all be so many powerful advocates to gain our cause with Jesus Christ; they will gloriously prevail upon Him to pronounce sentence in our favor at the particular as well as at the general judgment, and this sentence is: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you covered me; sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me.”

* Ps. cxi. 3, 5.

† Homil. xxxiii. ad popul.

‡ Matt. xxv. 34

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRODIGAL AND HIS COMPANIONS JUDGED—GENERAL JUDGMENT.

IN Turkey there is a vast province which was formerly called Bulgaria. The inhabitants of that province were converted to Christianity in the ninth century. Amongst their apostles figured conspicuously a holy monk named Methodius, who was a very skilful painter. Bogoris, the King of the Bulgarians, had not as yet been converted to the true faith. One day he requested St. Methodius to paint some pictures for him, with which to ornament a palace which he had just constructed. He recommended the saint to choose for the subject of his painting something that when represented would freeze with terror all who beheld it. In conformity with these instructions, the saint undertook to paint the Last Judgment. The central figure of his painting was Jesus Christ surrounded by angels, seated on a throne of dazzling glory, his face wearing the aspect of that of an angry judge. All men, without distinction of age or rank, were assembled before his tribunal, where they awaited, trembling, the sentence that was to decide their eternal fate. There was shown in the several parts of the picture a force, an energy, a vivacity, a warmth of expression, that added still more to the horror of the subject. The work, being finished, was shown to the king, who was deeply moved at the sight of it ; but his emotion increased much more when the painter explained to him each part. He could no longer remain obdurate, and, corresponding thenceforward with the grace which spoke to him through a sensible object, he asked to be instructed in the mysteries of

religion, and a short time afterwards received baptism.—Schmid et Belet, *Cat. Hist.* i, 263.

Could we only behold a true picture of the Last Judgment and the awful catastrophe that will precede it! Could we only look upon it in the morning when we rise, and at night before we retire to rest! Two such glances daily at that picture would be well calculated to confirm us in our good resolutions of always making sincere confessions of our sins, and of being truly charitable to all our neighbors.

About eighteen hundred years ago there stood at the foot of Mount Vesuvius the city of Pompeii. This city became a favorite resort for wealthy Romans, many of whom had villas in its suburbs. Although a living picture in all the departments of social life—in the affairs of domestic and of public life, of the worship of the gods, and the shows of the arena; in architecture, painting, and sculpture—in fine, in all the appliances of comfort and of luxury in a wealthy community, Pompeii was doomed to utter ruin.

This calamity overtook it in A.D. 79, when a terrific eruption of Vesuvius occurred, which in one day buried the entire city in everlasting ruin. On the morning of the eruption, the amphitheatre was filled with thousands of spectators. Suddenly a vast vapor rose up from the summit of Mount Vesuvius, in the form of a gigantic pine-tree. Its trunk was blackness, its branches fire—a fire that every moment shifted and changed its hues; showing now fiercely luminous, now a dull and dying red, and again blazing terrifically forth with intolerable glare.

The agonizing shrieks of women filled the air; the men stared at one another, and were struck dumb. They felt the earth shake beneath their feet; the walls of the theatre trembled; and beyond, in the distance, they heard the crash of falling roofs. Presently the mountain cloud rolled toward them, dark and rapid as a torrent; it cast forth

from its bosom a shower of ashes, mixed with vast fragments of burning stone. Over the creeping vines, over the desolate streets, over the amphitheatre itself—far and wide fell that awful shower. Every one turned to fly, each dashing, pressing, crushing against the other; trampling recklessly over the fallen; regardless of the groans, and oaths, and prayers, and sudden shrieks, the enormous crowd rushed panic-stricken they knew not whither. Whither should they fly? Some, anticipating a second earthquake, hastened to their homes to load themselves with their most costly goods, and escape while it was yet time. Others, dreading the shower of ashes that fell like a torrent over the streets, sought shelter under the roofs of the nearest houses or temples or coverings of whatever kind. But darker, and larger, and mightier spread the cloud above them; it was a sudden and ghastly night, blotting out, in an instant, the bright, full noon. To add to the horrors of the disaster, the mighty mountain began to cast up columns of boiling water. Blending with and kneading together the half-burning ashes, the streams fell seething and scorching upon the now deserted streets. The lower part of the town was soon half choked with ashes; here and there might be heard the steps of fugitives crunching the ashes, their pale, haggard faces visible by the blue glare of the lightning or the more unsteady light of torches, by which they endeavored to guide their steps; but the boiling water or the winds extinguished these wandering lights, and with them the last hope of those who bore them. The cloud which had scattered so deep a darkness over the day had now settled into a solid, impenetrable mass; but in proportion as the darkness deepened, the lightning around Vesuvius increased.

The ominous rumbling of the earth and groaning of the troubled sea filled in, with their mingled thunder, the pauses between the falling of the showers. Sometimes the

cloud would seem to break from its solid mass, and by the glare of lightning to assume monster shapes, striding across the gloom, hurtling one upon the other, and vanishing swiftly into the turbulent abyss. They appeared like gigantic foes—the agents of terror and death. Sometimes the huge stones, striking against each other as they fell, broke into countless fragments, emitting sparks of fire, which burnt whatever they touched. Along the plains beyond the city the darkness was terribly relieved by the flames of burning houses and vineyards. Parties of fugitives, wild, haggard, and ghastly, some hurrying towards the sea, others flying from the sea back to the land, encountered and passed one another without a word, each hurrying to seek refuge in the nearest place of shelter. All the elements of society were broken up. In the darkness and confusion the wife was separated from her husband, the child from the parent. Nothing of the laws of society was left save the primeval law of self-preservation. There was an old man tottering along with a bag of gold in his hand, and leaning upon a youth, who bore a lighted torch. They were father and son—the father a miser, the son a prodigal.

“Father,” cried the young man, “if you cannot move on faster, I must leave you, or we both perish.”

“Fly, then, and leave your father,” said the old man.

“But I cannot fly and starve; give me thy bag of gold,” shrieked the youth.

“Wretch! wouldst thou rob thy father?”

“Aye! who can tell the tale in this hour? Miser, perish!”

The boy struck the old man to the ground, snatched the bag from his relaxing grasp, and fled.

Suddenly a glow and an intense glare filled all places. Through the deep darkness loomed the huge mountain—a pile of living fire. Its summit seemed riven in twain—two

monster shapes, confronting each the other, like demons contending for the mastery of the world. It was a night of dread and horror. Never, perhaps, till the last trumpet sounds shall such a scene again be witnessed. The awful destruction of Pompeii gives but a faint idea of the destruction of the universe—a destruction which will be followed by the general judgment of mankind. Although the Lord has left us in ignorance about the time of this universal destruction, yet He has foretold most clearly that it will take place. In a vision, He showed one day to St. John the Evangelist what was to happen at the end of the world. “And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunder,” says St. John, “and there was a great earthquake, such an one as never hath been since men were upon the earth, such an earthquake, so great. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail like a talent came down from heaven upon men : and men blasphemed God for the plague of the hail : because it was exceeding great.” *

St. Peter the Apostle adds: “The day of the Lord shall come as a thief; on that day the heavens shall pass away with great violence, the elements shall be melted with heat; and the earth and the works that are in it shall be burnt up.” †

And long before the Lord had sketched out to us the outlines of that tremendous day by the prophet Isaiah: “With breaking shall the earth be broken; with crushing shall the earth be crushed; with trembling shall the earth be moved; with shaking shall the earth be shaken, as a drunken man, and shall be removed, as the tent of one night; and it shall fall, and shall not rise again.” ‡ Our Saviour Himself assures us that on that day “the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light; and the stars shall fall from heaven; and upon earth there shall

* Apoc. xvi. 18, 21.

† 2 Ep. Peter iii. 10.

‡ Is. xxiv. 19, 20.

be distress of nations by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves: men withering away for fear, and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world; for the powers of heaven shall be moved. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn: and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with great power and majesty. And he shall send his angels with a trumpet and a great voice, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the farthest parts of the heavens to the utmost bounds of them. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away."* Here are most dreadful disasters foretold. They will be the forerunners of the general dissolution of the world, to announce the last terrible judgment, and to admonish mankind to prepare for it. The simple description of those dreadful events strikes us with terror. The heavens will echo with the loudest thunder; the sky will be rent in every part with most dreadful flashes of lightning; the whole air will resound with horrible voices or noises. The earth will be shaken from its foundations with an earthquake such as never has been felt before, nor has ever entered into man's mind to imagine. Such will be the general concussion caused by this earthquake that all the islands immediately vanish; and of the mountains, some will tumble to pieces and be levelled with the surface of the earth; others will burst out into volcanoes, and by their internal fire be dissolved and melted into a fluid. Then will follow a storm of hail infinitely exceeding what had ever been heard of or known. The hailstones will be of the weight of a talent—that is, of four-score pounds. The sun will darken to such a degree that it will appear as though covered with black hair-cloth, and the moon will redden like blood. The stars will seem to fall

* *Matt. xxiv., Luke xxi.*

from the heavens as thick as green figs are shake.. from the trees in a hurricane of wind ; the sky will appear to fold up like a roll of parchment. The whole fabric of the world will be unhinged and fall to pieces. All will be confusion, wreck, and ruin. At the sight of such events, what wonder if the wicked of every rank and denomination run to hide themselves for fear, and, from consciousness of their guilt suspect that the Great Day has arrived, and that the Almighty is coming to judgment, causing them to wish that the mountains and rocks may fall upon them, to shelter them from the face of the angry God and from the wrath of the Lamb ! But, strange to think, notwithstanding such an awful catastrophe, many of the wicked will remain obstinate in their evil dispositions, and, refusing in those last moments to turn their hearts to repentance and sue for pardon, will complete their impiety by blaspheming God for the calamities which they suffer and which they have done their share to call down upon themselves. As all mankind are sentenced to die, those who are not carried off by the disasters just mentioned will be despatched by the fire which will go before the Son of Man when He comes to judgment.

Such will be the frightful scenes, the universal confusion and destruction, on that day of wrath, of tribulation and distress, of calamity and misery. But while these stupendous operations of fire are subverting nature, and changing the whole face of the universe, the Son of Man descends from the highest heaven to come and judge mankind. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Judge of the world, appears in the firmament seated on a great throne, and at His presence the earth and heaven flee away or disappear ; that is, the earth, the atmosphere, and all belonging to the sky, are not only enwrapped in flames, but entirely pass and vanish out of sight, so that their place is not found, and cannot be distinguished.

The sun, the moon, and the stars shine no more; the rivers run no more; the winds blow no more; the towns and villages, the houses and churches and steeples, have disappeared. Lands and houses are worthless, for they are all in ruins. Nothing is now visible of the works of creation. The sole object that fills the expanse of heaven is the resplendent majesty of the Son of God sitting on His throne.

Then the dead of all ranks and degrees will appear before Him—namely, the last generation of the human race; those who have just expired in the general destruction of the world. This prodigious multitude of souls will be summoned to undergo the particular judgment which is appointed to all men at the hour of their death. When this numerous company of souls shall have been judged, Jesus Christ will send forth His messenger—an archangel—to blow the last trumpet: “Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment.” At this sound, in an instant, all the dead will rise up from their graves, never more to die. “In a moment,” says St. Paul, “in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, the dead shall rise again incorruptible.”* And all the individuals of the human race will appear at once and together, a wonderful spectacle, that never was seen before, and will never be seen after; for this great company will soon be divided into two bodies, which must separate for ever.

The prophet Ezechiel was carried in spirit to the midst of a plain of boundless extent. He there beheld heaps of bones without number, scattered throughout that vast plain. Then God spoke to the prophet: “Command these bones, speak to them in my name; command them to arise.” The prophet spoke; and in a moment a strange sight presented itself to his eyes. The dead bones began to move; they flew apart; they joined together with a horrible clatter; the

* 1 Cor. xv. 52.

nerves and muscles grew on the bones ; and in a moment they were covered with flesh and skin ; the Spirit of God breathed upon them from the four ends of the earth, and they sprang to their feet. In a moment the whole earth was swarming with living human beings.

It was thus that God showed to the prophet how bodies that had commingled with other substances and turned into dust could be brought back into existence. Indeed, since the beginning of the world not an atom of matter has ever been lost or destroyed. The substance of matter never perishes ; the substance of our bodies is not destroyed.

Our Lord, who created our bodies, who causes them to return to dust, can also restore these bodies. As God brought our body and the whole world itself out of nothing, so can He also bring back that body out of the dust. As the grain of wheat must rot and die before it can become fruitful, before it can produce life, so must this gross animal body of ours, says St. Paul, be sown in the ground ; it must rot there and die, and then a spiritual body shall arise—a body beautiful, glorious, and impassible.

All is dead ! all is reduced to ashes ! The whole earth is one vast solitude. Over all reigns the solemn stillness of the grave. But lo ! the solemn stillness is broken. The wild, appalling sound of the angelic trumpet is heard. It goes over land and sea ; it reaches the highest heavens ; it penetrates the deepest depths of hell. “ Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment.” At last the hour has come when the wicked companions of the prodigal—all the proud and self-conceited—shall hear and obey the word of God. See that proud man, who despises the words that God utters by His holy Church. He is a member of a secret society—a Freemason or an Odd-Fellow ; he is a self-conceited wisacre, puffed up and half-crazed by a little learning. He has, perhaps, grown somewhat richer than his forefathers were, and, like most upstarts, he has sold his faith and his virtue.

He has acquired all the vices of the rich without possessing any of their virtues. His heart has been hardened by avarice, by injustice, by impure gratifications. He has come to despise the words of the priest, the words of the Church, the word of God. Very well. He would not hear; he would not obey the word of God while living; he shall hear and shall obey it in death: "Arise, ye dead, **and** come to judgment." Arise from your marble tombs; **arise** from your neglected graves; arise from the dark rivers; arise from the depths of the ocean; arise from the deepest depths of hell.

Slowly and sullenly the damned arise from their dismal prison. They howl, they gnash their teeth, they curse and blaspheme in mad despair, for they know that new torments await them. They would fain fly and fain bury themselves in the depths of hell for ever from the wrath of the Eternal Judge. But the almighty power of God is upon them, and come they must.

All shall arise, but all shall not be glorified. Some shall be brighter than the sun, beautiful as the angels of God, while others shall be black and hideous as the demons of hell. O pious souls! what joy shall be yours when you behold your bodies, which were once despised by men—those bodies which you mortified by fasting and penance—made more beautiful than the morning star, radiant with immortal glory. "O blessed body!" you will exclaim, "faithful companion in my sufferings and trials, come, rejoice with me—the hour of your glory has come! You were despised during life; you were worn out by penance and hardships; you suffered with me; come now, and rejoice with me for ever." Such will be the language of all the blessed and innocent souls; such, also, will be the language of all holy penitents, who, like the prodigal, returned in due time to their Heavenly Father. But what will be the despair of the prodigal's companions—that is, of all those who have always

led wicked lives ? What will be the despair of that impure man, of that vain, proud woman, when their guilty souls shall come forth from the fiery dungeon of hell, and when they will be forced to enter once more into their foul bodies, which are now more hideous and hateful to them than hell itself !

O vain girl ! proud woman ! you, who now nurse your body so tenderly—you, who, even at the expense of your virtue, adorn yourself with silks, and gold, and jewels—you, who are now so anxious to preserve and heighten your beauty, so desirous to draw upon you the admiring gaze of all—ah ! what will be your shame, your agony, on that day when you shall see the body, that now seems so beautiful, hideous and loathsome and frightful, like a very monster from hell. “ Ah ! accursed body,” you will cry, “ abominable flesh ! it is through love of you that I am lost ; it is through love of you that I have lost heaven and God ! O accursed body ! O horrible carcass ! it was you that caused me to sin ; it was to gratify your vanity and brutal lust that I am damned for ever.”

This wretched man was courted and admired during life. Men vied with one another in seeking his company. They considered themselves blest when he looked or smiled upon them ; and now, what a change ! every one flies from him in horror and disgust.

This miserable woman was loved and adored during life. Her great beauty caused hearts around her to pine with jealousy and envy. She gloried in the triumph of her fascinations. She counted with joyous pride the broken hearts, the ruined homes, that she had caused ; the husbands seduced from their plighted troth ; the young men led astray from the path of innocence. She heeded not the tears of a fond mother ; she heeded not the tears of a heart-broken wife ; she gloried in her sinful power. Look upon her now ! Just God ! what a change !—black, hideous, deformed ; a hellish monster—an object of terror and disgust.

And the angels of God shall come, and shall separate the wicked from the just, as the goats are separated from the sheep. There you shall see the master on one side, and the servant on the other. There the priest shall stand on one side and shall see some of his own flock among the reprobate. There that young man, who sacrificed his soul to sinful love, shall be separated for ever from the object of his passion ; the drunkard shall be divorced for ever from his good and patient wife ; and the wicked and faithless wife shall stand on the left with the reprobate, and shall see her wronged and innocent husband standing on the right. No longer shall that frivolous young girl, who spends her time in reading novels and sentimental love-stories, whose only pleasure is to frequent balls, parties, theatres, and the like, sit beside her pure and modest sister. No ! no ! they shall be separated for ever. The one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.

And the wicked parents, who scandalize their children by cursing, quarrelling, and drunkenness, shall see their children placed on the right hand, while they themselves shall be thrust to the left. The wicked children, too, who disobey and grieve their parents, who despise and disown their parents, shall stand on the left. Nevermore shall they experience a mother's love and tender care.

Jesus Christ will bring you forth in presence of the whole universe, in presence of angels, and devils, and men ; in presence of your friends, your relatives, your parents. Every one shall witness your crimes. The eyes of every living being shall be turned upon you. He will draw aside the cloak that now hides your crimes. He will show you to the whole world, with your most shameful deeds branded upon your forehead ; and will say to all, *Ecce homo*—Behold the man ; behold this man whom I have created in my own image and likeness ; behold his works ; see how he has dishonored his person ; how he has degraded his soul, even

from his early childhood. *Ecce homo et opera ejus.* Behold this man; behold his works; behold all the sins of his youth; his lustful desires, his immodest actions. See the books that he has read, the songs that he has sung, the scandalous and impious words that he has uttered. Behold him in his manhood; behold him in his old age. How many sins has he committed!—sins of drunkenness, sins of injustice. He grew rich by oppressing the poor, by defrauding the widow and the orphan. See the crimes he has committed under the veil of marriage. *Ecce homo*—Behold the man whom I have enriched with so many graces, and see what return he has made for all my gifts. I gave him the sacraments, and he profaned them; I sent him holy inspirations, and he rejected them; I showed him so many edifying examples, and he only ridiculed them; I gave him riches; I gave him health; I gave him a good name; and he used them all only to offend and to dishonor me. “Nothing is hidden, that shall not be known.” *

All your most hidden actions and thoughts and intentions and desires shall be revealed. The eyes of every living being shall be riveted upon you. The whole world shall look upon the degradation of the impure. The heavens and the earth shall be made acquainted with the shameful crimes of their youth. They shall know that they dishonored soul and body by secret and abominable sins. They shall see that age only increased the fire of their passions. All men shall see how the fury of their passions sometimes carried them so far that they knew no bounds and transgressed the most sacred laws of nature. All men shall see that they did not even respect their own blood. Could they only be called forth now in the gaze of the world and their secret sins thus disclosed, they would die of shame. What, then, will their shame be when the whole universe shall witness their crimes?

* Luke xli. 2.

Suppose that girl who now keeps forbidden company, who allows improper liberties, who even dishonors her soul and body in secret, were caught in the act even by a single person, how great would be her shame and confusion ! O poor deluded creature ! on the day of judgment your sins shall be made known to all. You have employed every means to hide your crime ; you have chosen the fittest time, you have chosen the securest place, the most secret nook ; you never disclosed your crime to any one—no, not even to your confessor. So great was your shame at the thought of confessing that sin that, rather than acknowledge it, you chose to make sacrilegious confessions, or to stay away from confession altogether, though you knew that without a sincere confession there was no hope for you ; that you would be infallibly lost. You flattered yourself that your sin would never be known. You succeeded in deceiving the watchfulness of your father, of your mother, of your whole family ; you succeeded even in deceiving your parish priest. Every one looked upon you as a model of virtue and modesty ; even to suspect you of anything wrong would have been considered a crime ; and now, what will be your shame on the day of judgment ? Your father shall see your sins ; your mother shall see them ; your brothers, your sisters, your friends and neighbors, your parish priest, whom you deceived—all shall see your most secret actions and desires.

When you committed those secret and shameful sins, you thought that you were alone, and that no one saw you ; you forgot God. God saw you. You forgot that your guardian angel, that the devil, too, saw you ; and on the day of judgment they will bear witness against you ; even the lifeless objects around you shall cry aloud in judgment against you.

And now, amid that great spectacle, another wonderful sight is seen. All nations and peoples, from Adam to the last child born on the earth, are gathered together in the

Valley of Josaphat, on the east side of Jerusalem. What endless and innumerable crowds are there waiting in expectation ! The heavens open, and the blessed cross, the sign of the redemption, shines in the air. Beautiful and consoling sight to the good Catholic, but horrible sight to the damned. “Ha !” the sinner shrieks, “there is the sign of the cross. That is the sign I have so often insulted and blasphemed ; I have called it Popish superstition ; I have trampled it under foot ; and now it is revered by angels and saints, it is honored by God Himself. That cross was crimsoned for my sake with the blood of a God. It should be the source of my hope, and now it is only an object of terror to me. It proves too clearly the justice of all my torments. I was marked with its seal in baptism, and yet my feelings towards it were rather those of a Jew or a heathen than a Christian. By my sins I have nailed Him to the cross who is now to be my Judge.”

And now a light more brilliant still, brighter than a thousand suns, illumines the sky. Upon the refulgent clouds of heaven appears One who is like unto the Son of Man. He is more beautiful than the morning-star. He is clothed with majesty and glory ; He is surrounded by myriads of angels. It is Jesus, the Son of God, the Judge of the living and the dead.

Millions and millions of angels and archangels accompany Him. He seats himself on the judgment-seat, where every eye beholds Him. On His right hand sits His Blessed Mother, the Queen of Heaven. Around Him on thrones are seated the twelve Apostles. Who can imagine the joy of the elect when they behold the ravishing beauty of Jesus ? In the transports of their joy they fly into the air, they soar aloft like eagles. With trembling rapture they adore the foot-stool of their Saviour and God ! They are called and placed on the right of the judgment-seat ; and on the left are the wicked, awaiting their final doom. It is

the evening of that day, the last evening that will ever be. The examination has been made, and the final separation taken place. Jesus is about to pronounce the last sentence. He turns to those on His right and addresses them in words that bring eternal joy and happiness to their souls. He smiles upon them ; and as He smiles, He pours into their hearts the torrent of His delights. What transports fill those blessed souls ! Already, already their labors and sufferings are abundantly repaid. For let us imagine, if we can, what it is to behold the face of God, looking with complacency on us ; to behold the gates of heaven thrown open before us ; to behold the numberless multitudes of angels, our future companions, looking upon us with looks of love and with extended arms ready to bear us away to the mansions of heaven.

That blessed moment has come at last. Their loving Saviour stretches out His arms towards them, and, after a glorious rehearsal of all their good works, “ then shall the King say to them that shall be on His right hand : Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Come from this valley of tears, where you have long mourned, and enter your heavenly country, where tears shall be no more, and where grief shall be turned into joy. Come from a land of exile to your true country ; from your mortal pilgrimage, in the midst of crosses, labors, conflicts, and dangers, to your blessed and happy home, in the fair and lovely mansions of rest and peace in the eternal Jerusalem. Come, no longer to carry your crown of disappointment and of affliction, but to receive the rewards of your patience and labors. Arise, and come to take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

The song of exultation and triumph shall instantly burst from the lips of that glorious assembly. After having invited the just to enter into His kingdom, Jesus Christ will

turn to the wicked on his left hand, and with fire in His eyes and terror in his countenance, He will pronounce against them the dreadful sentence of their eternal doom. Every word of that last sentence will make the Valley of Josaphat resound with shrieks, groans, and lamentations: "Depart from me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels."

"Depart from me, ye accursed." I, your Creator, your Redeemer, now break for ever all the ties of love that bound you to me. Depart from me, your Creator. I formed you in mine own image. I created you to be sharers in my happiness, to be the heirs of my heavenly kingdom. For your sake I called into being the great universe. I filled you with graces and blessings, and had blessings greater still in store for you, had you remained faithful. But you repaid all my love with insult, all my favors with ingratitude. I loved you so dearly that I wept and suffered and even shed my heart's blood for you upon the gibbet of the cross, and for all my love you returned only coldness or hatred; you hated me, the source of all blessings. You loved malediction, and malediction shall be yours. I then give you my curse this day, here in the presence of angels and of men. This curse shall surround you like a garment; it shall enter like oil into the very marrow of your bones. "Discedite a me, maledicti"—Depart from me, ye accursed! And the fearful curse resounds throughout the vault of heaven; it penetrates to the deepest depths of hell; it re-echoes again and again like the roar of mighty thunder. Woe! woe! malediction!

"Discedite, maledicti!" Depart into that abode of sorrow and despair where the worm shall never die and the fire shall never quench. Depart into the abode of endless despair, where there is no hope—no, no even the hope of death! During life you served the devil and his angels; you calumniated the virtuous, you led others into sin, you ruined

innocent souls. Depart, then, accursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Depart from me, and bear my curse with you. A curse upon your eyes, never to see the least glimpse of light; a curse upon your ears, to hear no other sounds for all eternity than the shrieks and groans of the damned; a curse in your taste, to be ever embittered with the gall of dragons; a curse on your smell, to be always tormented with the intolerable stench of the bottomless abyss; a curse on your feeling, and on all the members of your body, to be for ever burning in a fire that shall never be quenched. I abandon you now and for evermore to be the objects of my wrath, of my malediction, of my everlasting hatred.

The unhappy sinner raises his eyes and beholds for the last time the glorious assembly of the Blessed. He sees among them the friends and relatives whom he knew and loved so well on earth. He sees there a loving brother and sister, a fond father and mother. He must leave them for ever. The unhappy mother looks up and beholds among the blessed her own dear child, who had so often slept on her bosom. She must now leave him for ever. The damned look up to Heaven, whose golden portals now open to the Blessed, but shall never, never open to them. "O Paradise!" they cry—"O Paradise, O home of the blessed, Paradise of delights, you are not for me! O God of beauty, unutterable loveliness! must I leave thee for ever? Farewell, Father of mercies! we are thy children no longer. Farewell, O Jesus! we are no longer thy brethren. Farewell, O adorable Redeemer! thou didst die for me, but thy blood was shed for me in vain. Farewell, O Holy Spirit! spirit of love, we by our sins have caused your love to turn to hate. Farewell, O Mary! you were once my mother, I may never call you mother again. Farewell, my Angel Guardian! you watched over me so faithfully, now you can assist me no longer. Farewell, my Patron Saints! you shall pray for me no longer.

The last farewell is over, and the condemned soul is in hell. Oh ! had I given myself in earnest to God, will be its thought; had I but earnestly tried to serve God, as I was so often urged to do by His graces, how much happier would my life on earth have been, and how different my eternal lot. If only one hour were now allowed me for repentance; but the hour of repentance is past ! “Out of hell there is no redemption.” Ah ! cursed be the power that created me ! cursed be the mercy that redeemed me ! cursed be the day on which I first saw the light ! cursed be the air I breathed ! cursed be the mother that bore me ! cursed be God and cursed be man ! It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the Almighty !

Whilst these unhappy souls are uttering their curses and bewailing their loss, a whirlwind of fire and flames envelops them, the bottomless pit yawns beneath their feet, a wild, confused shout, mingled with wailing, shrieks, and blasphemies, is heard—and all is over. The mouth of the bottomless pit is sealed for ever with the seal of justice of the omnipotent God, who holds in his hands the key of death and hell. And “the wicked shall go into everlasting fire, and the just into everlasting life.”

Heaven to these, and quenchless light—
Hell to those, and rayless night.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRODIGAL'S COMPANIONS PUNISHED—HELL OF THE BODY.

AT the beginning of the second century, there lived at Heliopolis, in Sicily, a young person named Eudoxia, who led a very irregular and scandalous life. One day, a priest, who was called Germanus, passing through that city, came to lodge with Eudoxia's parents, because they were Christians. At midnight he arose to say some particular prayers and recite the office of the Church. It so happened that there was in the office for that day a description of the torments of hell and the excruciating sufferings of the damned. As the good priest recited it aloud, Eudoxia, whose chamber was adjacent to his, heard the greater part of it. The silence of the night, the great darkness, the hushed repose of all nature, and especially the grace of God, which touched her heart, suddenly effected an extraordinary change within her. She began to reflect on her evil doings, and on the eternal torments which would be the inevitable consequence of her mode of life if she did not change it. Scarcely had the day appeared when she rose and went in search of the strange priest, to inform him of her resolution to alter her life. He confirmed her in her good dispositions, gave her some profitable advice, and promised that, if she were faithful, God would forgive her her sins. "I regret," added the pious priest, "being obliged to depart so soon ; but you will go and have yourself instructed by one of the priests of this city, who will baptize you, and all your sins will be effaced—forgotten." Eudoxia followed

his advice, and had the happiness of being martyred about the year 114.*

The conversion of Eudoxia is a striking illustration of the wholesome effects which are produced in souls by seriously reflecting on hell. Indeed, there is hardly anything better calculated to make us give up sin and lead a holy life than the frequent remembrance of hell. The Holy Ghost assures us of this truth. "Remember thy last end," says Holy Scripture, "and thou wilt never sin." "Yes," says St. Ignatius of Loyola, "he who warms himself often at the fire of hell during his life, will not fall into it after his death." St. Philip Neri used to say the same in other words: "Whoever," he said, "often goes into hell in the course of his life, will keep out of it after his death." And with good reason, for there is no thought more powerful to assist us in overcoming the greatest temptations than that of eternal torments. The greatest saints have often renewed the memory of these torments for their greater spiritual advantage. St. Augustine often preached on hell. Whilst speaking on this subject he trembled in his whole body, and affrighted his hearers by his palpitations more than by his words. "You tremble, my brethren," he said. "I, too, tremble, both for myself and for you. I have read our divine books; I have not read any passage in Holy Writ telling me not to fear." St. Jerome retired into the depths of a great wilderness. There his countenance was bathed in tears every day. The desert re-echoed with his sobs and sighs. He took a stone in his hand and struck his breast with it until his breast began to bleed. What made him do all this? His great fear of hell, as he himself acknowledges in his letter to Eustochium.

St. John Chrysostom had hell painted in glaring colors in the room in which he dwelt. At every glance and in every action he wished to recall to mind this salutary

* Bollandus, *Act. Sanct.*, 1st March.

thought of hell. St. Bernard, having meditated deeply on hell one day, made a resolution never to laugh again during his life. From the depth of his solitude he cried out : “ O hell ! country of torments and of fire, to think of thee fills my soul with horror.”*

St. Francis Borgia often made his meditation on hell. He was once asked why he appeared so unusually sad. “ I have made my meditation on hell,” was the reply, “ and I am so deeply impressed by it that it seems to me the whole world is looking upon me as a monster of that abyss, spreading terror wherever it goes.” St. Peter Damian tells us that his hair would stand on end at the mere thought of an unhappy eternity.

St. Frances de Chantal used to tell her sisters in religion “ that she would fear very much for the salvation of that one among them who would lose the fear of hell.” If, then, the saints had so great a fear of hell, what ought to be the fear of sinners ?

But some one may say, “ I am not a Catholic, and I hold that there is no hell.” The question is : Are you perfectly sure of this ? Can you prove it ? There have been men, far more learned probably, and far more wicked, too, than any who will read this book, and they tried very hard to prove that there is no hell. But they could never succeed. The infidel J. J. Rousseau was asked if there was a hell, and all he could say was that he did not know. The impious Voltaire wrote to a friend *that*, though he had tried long to prove that there is no hell, he could not succeed. All that such wicked men can say, with all their arguments, is that perhaps there is no hell. But to this “ perhaps ” is opposed a terrible yea. It is the assertion of the living God Himself. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, asserts in the clearest language that there is a hell. He asserts it at least fifteen times in the Holy Gospels. And is it more reasonable

* *Serm. de 5 regionib.*

to believe a man who doubts of what he says, or God, who knows what He asserts? Is it more reasonable to believe a man who has never thoroughly studied that which he denies, or the God of truth, who assures us that the heavens and the earth shall pass away, but that His words shall never pass away? Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us in the most solemn manner that there is a hell, that the just shall go into everlasting life, and that the wicked shall go into everlasting fire; that the damned in hell shall be salted with fire; that "their worm shall not die, and their fire shall never quench." Consider who it is that speaks: it is Jesus, the Blessed Saviour, who is so good and merciful.

Many a sinner wishes that there were no hell. But what do wishes avail? Whether you believe it or not, there is a hell; there is an eternal punishment. If we are told that there is a city called Rome, we may deny it, we may bring the most subtle arguments to our aid, but for all that the city exists; it is a fact. And if we are told by Christ that there is a hell, and an eternal punishment, we may deny it, and bring the most subtle arguments to the contrary; still hell—an eternal hell—is a fact that cannot be ciphered away.

Holy Church, the pillar and ground of truth, declares, in the clearest terms, that hell exists, and she strikes with her anathema all those who dare deny its existence. All ages, all nations, unite in proclaiming that there is a hell. The demons themselves bear witness to it; reason requires it. The soul that quits her body in the state of mortal sin, at enmity with God, remains in that state for all eternity; she is fixed, unalterable, and for this reason she can no more repent. "Wherever the tree falleth, there it shall lie." As she can no more repent, her sin can never be forgiven; it will always remain; and on this account she continues to be for ever a subject of punishment.

This ought to be sufficient proof for the existence of hell,

of everlasting punishments. However, if there be any one who still doubts, let him look upon Jesus on the cross. The cross, the blood, the wounds of Jesus preach most eloquently the dread reality of these never-ending torments. An eternal God suffers, an eternal God dies a most cruel, shameful death. And why? Certainly not to save man from temporal punishment, but to save him from eternal torments.

Again, let him who doubts the existence of an everlasting hell look into his own conscience. Call to mind that secret sin, committed when the darkness and silence of night surrounded you, when only God's all-seeing eye beheld you. Whence came the fear and shame that then overwhelmed you? Did not your conscience torture you with the remembrance of hell, of the torments reserved for the wicked?

But some one may ask, Would it not argue cruelty and a want of mercy in God were he to punish the wicked for ever? The answer is plain: God has decreed that the rewards destined for the just in heaven in return for their good lives on earth should surpass all that the eye has seen, the ear has heard, the heart has conceived. In like manner has God decreed that the punishments which the wicked have to suffer in hell for their bad lives should surpass all that we can see, all that we can hear, all that we can conceive in our heart. God has decreed that the rewards of the just should last for ever, and he has also decreed that the punishments of the wicked shall be everlasting. It is the will of the Lord that by the everlasting rewards of the just His infinite mercy should be glorified for all eternity; and it is also His will that by the everlasting punishments of the wicked His infinite justice should be made manifest for ever and ever. Let us "think well of the Lord"; that is, we must believe that the justice of God is just as great as his mercy. Let him who doubts of hell, of its everlasting punishments, remember what our Lord said of Judas, the traitor: "Woe

to that man ! It were better for him if he had not been born." * Why ? Because he went into hell. To-day, hell may seem the greatest folly. He who believes not in hell now, when he can escape it, shall believe in it hereafter when he can no longer escape it.

Now, what is hell ? It is impossible to picture the reality. Whatever is related of hell in the sacred Scriptures, in the writings of the fathers of the Church, or in the sermons of holy missionaries, is nothing compared to the reality. God made hell as a particular place of punishment for the wicked. It is therefore the centre of all evils. "I will heap evils upon them." † As in heaven God has united every good, so in hell He has united every evil. He will punish sinners in proportion to the mercy which He showed them on earth, but which they abused. But the mercy that He has shown to sinners on earth has been exceeding great. He went so far as to shed all his blood to save them. If, then, His mercy towards sinners was exceeding great, exceeding great also will His justice be in punishing them. Hence all that can be said of the pains of hell can never approach the reality.

There is a hell of the body and a hell of the soul. "Fear Him that can destroy both soul and body in hell." ‡ As soon as the soul has quitted the body in the state of mortal sin, she is judged and condemned, and instantly sinks, like a heavy stone, swiftly to her destination in hell, to the centre of the earth, where it is likely that hell is situated. Almighty God has said that "He will turn the wicked into the bowels of the earth." §

In the days of Moses, the great servant of God, there were three wicked men whose names were Core, Dathan, and Abiron. They revolted against Moses, the leader of the people of God ; and God told Moses that He was going to punish

* Matt. xxvi. 24.

‡ Matt. x. 28.

† Deut. xxxii. 24.

§ Ecclus. xvii. 19.

these wicked men. Moses went and told the people to come away from those men, and the people obeyed him. Then Moses said to them: "By this you shall know that God has sent me: if these wicked men die like other men, then do not believe me; but if the earth opens and swallows them, and they go down alive into hell, then you shall know that they are wicked."

No sooner had Moses done speaking than the earth opened under the feet of Core, Dathan, and Abiron. It drew them in with all they had, and they went down alive into hell. Then the earth closed up over them again.* The same thing happened to the cruel king Theodoric, who lived in Ravenna. At the same time Pope John was living in Rome. The Pope went one day to the town where Theodoric was living. When the king heard that the Pope was come, he had him arrested and put in prison, where he was soon after killed by Theodoric's order, as was also another good man called Symmachus. Soon after this, St. Gregory relates, the cruel king Theodoric himself died. In the Mediterranean Sea there is a little island called Stromboli, and on this island a great mountain, from the summit of which fire was wont to issue. A holy hermit lived on the island in a small cell. It happened that on the night when King Theodoric died the hermit was looking out of his window. He saw three persons, whom he knew to be dead, near the top of the fiery mountain. The three persons were Theodoric, who had died that night, Pope John, and Symmachus, who had been unjustly killed by Theodoric. Theodoric was between the other two. When they came to the place where the fire was coming out, he saw Theodoric leave the two, and go down into the fiery mountain. So, says St. Gregory, those who had seen the cruel king's injustice saw also his punishment.

Job calls this prison a place of darkness, where no order

* Num. xvi.

but everlasting horrors have their settled abode. That is to say, there is no order as regards the actions of the damned, but there is perfect order as regards the justice of God ; for “ God punishes disorders with order, follies with wisdom, sin with sanctity, injustice with equity,” says St. Gregory. The sun, in striking several persons with the same rays, makes different impressions on them, because they feel its heat according to the disposition in which it finds them. So the same fire torments the damned, but not with equal violence ; they are more or less punished according to the greater or less gravity of their crimes.

Moreover, order shines in their sufferings, because each bad thought, word, and action shall have its own peculiar punishment. The part that sinned most shall be the most grievously punished. Finally, order appears in the choice of chastisement: the proud man shall suffer contempt and confusion, the impure shall suffer physical pain, the intemperate, hunger and thirst.

The instruments of the sufferings shall be the creatures which they abused for their sinful pleasures, because, as the wise man says, each one is tormented by things which be used to commit sin. The object of their unlawful joys shall become the instruments of their just punishments.

But what is their position in this dark, hideous prison ? They shall be cast into the fire as dried wood ; they shall be gathered into the abyss like bundles of sticks ; they shall be heaped there like bricks in a brick-kiln, without the least power of motion.

When God in loving-kindness had freed the Jewish people from the galling yoke of the Egyptian tyranny, he led them through the desert towards the beautiful land of promise. But the Jews were ungrateful, stiff-necked, and rebellious. In spite of all God's favors, in spite of all the prodigies he had wrought before their eyes, these ungrateful people murmured against God and rebelled against their

loving Lord. But God's punishment was swift and terrible. He sent upon those ungrateful people a multitude of venomous serpents. At the sight of this countless multitude of poisonous reptiles, at the sight of their flaming eyes, their horrid jaws, their poisonous fangs, the Jewish people grew pale with terror—they fled on every side, shrieking and trembling. They tried to hide themselves, they tried to escape, but in vain. Whithersoever they turned, the enraged serpents followed them. Wheresoever they hid, they found serpents. There were serpents flying in the air; there were serpents crawling on the ground; there were serpents on the right, serpents on the left. Whithersoever they turned they were met by fierce, venomous serpents. The wife shrieked for help and called upon her husband; but the husband lay upon the ground, stiff, and black, and swollen in death. The mother sought to save the child that nestled at her breast; but, quick as a flash, her own bosom was pierced by the serpent's fangs. The little boy rushed towards his mother, stretched forth his tiny arms, and called for help; but them other lay dead upon the ground, strangled by the serpent's slimy folds. The brother and sister encouraged each other to fight boldly against the fearful enemy; but they soon felt the dread poison, like fire, coursing swiftly through their veins and throbbing in their maddened brain. The brave, stalwart man tried to tear away the serpent that fastened its foul fangs upon his heart; but in vain. He felt the serpent's slimy folds twining around his neck. He saw before him the glare of the serpent's eyes. He breathed the hot breath of the serpent's jaws. He felt in his burning brain the serpent's deadly fangs. There was no escape: the serpents were urged on by the swift vengeance of a just God.

Ah! what fearful company—what fearful company! And yet it is but a faint picture of the unhappy state of the damned soul when condemned to the unutterable torments

of hell. When a soul enters hell, condemned by the judgment of God, the devil executes the judgment. For as he is king of hell, so he is also judge. He fixes in hell the place where the soul is to be, the manner of her torment, and the instruments of that torment. St. Frances of Rome saw souls going into hell after they had been condemned by the judgment of God. They went thore with letters of fire written on their foreheads. "He shall make all, both little and great, have a character on their forehead."* The letters showed the names of the sins for which they had been condemned to hell, such as blaspheming, or impurity, or stealing, or drunkenness, or not hearing Mass on Sundays, or not going to the sacraments, and so forth. As soon as one of these souls came to the gates of hell, the devils went and seized hold of her. But how do the devils take hold of these souls? As the lions in Babylon took hold of those who were thrown into their den. When the people were cast over the wall into the den, the lions opened their jaws and roared, and caught the people in their jaws and crushed them, even before they had fallen to the ground. So is a soul received when she enters hell. The devils carry away the soul, bear her through the flames, and set her down before the great monster, Lucifer, to be judged by him who has no mercy. Oh! that horrible face of the devil! He opens his mouth; he delivers the tremendous sentence, which all hear, and hell rings with shouts of spiteful joy and mockery at the unfortunate soul.

The soul is then snatched away and hurried to that place which is to be her home for ever and ever. All around her are devils, some to strike, others to mock. And the stroke of the devil may be learned from the story of Job. "Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with a grievous ulcer from the sole of his

* Apoc. xii.

foot to the top of his head. Then Job took a tile and scraped off the corrupt matter, sitting on a dunghill. Now when Job's friends heard all the evil that had come upon him, they came to him. For they had made an appointment to come together and visit and comfort him. And crying, they wept and sprinkled dust on their heads. And they sat down with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights. And no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great." *

The devil gave Job but one stroke; that one stroke **was** so terrible that it covered all his body with sores and ulcers, making him look so frightful that his friends did not know him again. That one stroke was so terrible that for seven days and seven nights his friends did not speak a word, but sat crying, and wondering, and thinking what a terrible stroke the devil can give. But the soul that has been condemned eternally to hell, has, on one side, a devil to strike her. He will strike her every minute for ever and ever, without stopping. In what condition, then, will her body be after the devil has been striking it every moment for millions and millions of years?

But one comfort Job had: when the devil had struck him his friends came to visit and console him, and when they saw him they wept. But in hell there will be no one to come to visit and comfort and sympathize with the soul; neither father, nor mother, nor brother, nor sister, nor friend will ever come to console those who have once entered there.

Another instance of the awful power of the devil is given in the life of Nicola Aubry, an innocent married lady in France. To read the torments which the devil made this innocent person endure, is enough to make the hair stand on end. When the Bishop of Laon held the Blessed Sacrament before the face of the poor, possessed woman and con-

jured the devil, in the name of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, to depart from this innocent person, the devil felt horribly tormented, he made the poor woman writhe most fearfully. Her limbs cracked as if every bone in her body were breaking. The fifteen strong men who held her could scarcely keep her back. They staggered from side to side; they were covered with perspiration. Satan tried to escape from the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The mouth of Nicola was wide open, her tongue hung down below her chin, her face was shockingly swollen and distorted. Her color changed from yellow to green, and became even gray and blue, so that she no longer looked like a human being. It was rather the face of a hideous, incarnate demon. All present trembled with terror, and turned away their eyes in horror, especially when they heard the wild cry of the demon, which sounded like the loud roar of a wild bull. They fell on their knees, and, with tears in their eyes, began to cry out: "Jesus, have mercy!"

The Bishop continued to urge Satan. At last the evil spirit departed, and Nicola fell back senseless into the arms of her keepers. She still, however, remained shockingly distorted. In this state she was shown to the judges, and to all the people present. She was rolled up like a ball. The Bishop now fell on his knees in order to give her the Blessed Sacrament as usual. But suddenly the demon returns, wild with rage, endeavors to seize the hand of the Bishop, and tries even to grasp the Blessed Sacrament itself. The Bishop starts back; Nicola is carried into the air; and the Bishop rises from his knees trembling with terror, and pale as death.

The good Bishop takes courage again; he pursues the demon, holding the Blessed Sacrament in his hand. Satan endeavors to escape, and hurls the keepers to the ground.

The people call upon God for aid, and Satan departs once more with a noise which resembles a crash of thunder.

Suddenly he returns again in a fury, but the Bishop pursued and urged Satan, holding the Blessed Sacrament in his hand, till at length the demon, overcome by the power of our Lord's sacred Body, went forth amidst smoke and lightning and thunder. Thus was the demon at length expelled for ever on Friday afternoon at three o'clock—the same day and hour on which our Lord triumphed over hell by his ever-blessed death.

Nicola was now completely cured. She could move her left arm with the greatest ease. She fell on her knees, and thanked God and the good Bishop for all he had done for her. The people wept for joy, and sang hymns of praise and thanksgiving in honor of God and of our dear Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. On all sides were heard the exclamations: "Oh! what a great miracle. Oh! thank God that I witnessed it." Who is there now that could doubt of the Real Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar? Many Protestants present also said: "I believe now in the Presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I have seen it with my eyes. I will remain a Calvinist no longer. Accursed be those who have hitherto kept me in error! Oh! now I can understand what a good thing is the holy Sacrifice of the Mass." A solemn *Te Deum* was intoned, the organ pealed forth, the bells rang a merry chime, and the whole city was filled with joy.

Here we have an innocent person tormented by the devil in a most frightful manner; yet it is certain that the devil could only torment her to the extent of the permission which he had received from God; but hell is his domain, and there he has full permission from God to torment and strike the damned soul as much as he pleases. This permission is given him not for a few hours, or months, or years, but for all eternity. No human or heavenly power can go to rescue the damned soul from the ferocious bar-

barity and cruelty of the devil. Her place, like her torment, is eternal.

Besides the striking devil, the soul has also another devil to mock at and reproach her. "Remember," says the mocking devil to the soul, "where you are, and where you will be for ever; how short the sin was, how long the punishment. It is your own fault. When you committed that mortal sin, you knew how you would be punished. What a good bargain you made to take the pains of eternity in exchange for the sin of a day, an hour, a moment. You cry now for your sin, but your crying comes too late. You liked bad company; you will find bad company enough here. Behold all the evil spirits, declared enemies of God and man, who in hell have power from God to tear and torment the damned as much as they like. They are your companions for ever and ever."

One day a demon, by the mouth of a possessed person, spoke these terrible words: "When a soul, after leaving the body, is given up to us, we know all the circumstances of the case, and this is necessary, for we are the executors of his sentence; we know all the causes of his condemnation, that we may be able to impress upon him more forcibly the causes of his eternal woe. We represent to him the graces received, the occasions of salvation offered him, the laws of God which he could but would not observe, and at the same time we overwhelm him with torments. When some souls, after having tasted the sweetness of divine love, become lukewarm, and at last fall into hell, there is a special demon perpetually beside them to remind them of the favors they once received but abused."

Did you ever see two deadly vipers fly at each other? Their eyes burn with rage; they shoot out their poisoned stings; they struggle to give each other the death-blow. They struggle till they have torn the flesh and blood from each other. The like of this happens in hell. There you

may see bad children, in dreadful anger, beating their parents; they fly at them; they try to take life away from those who gave them life. "Cursed parents!" they shout, "if you had not given us bad example, we should not now be in hell." "Accursed father!" cries a boy, "it was you who showed me the way to the public-house." "Accursed mother!" cries a daughter, "it was you who taught me to love the world. You never warned me when I went into that company which was my ruin." "Cursed husband!" cries that wife, "before I knew you I was good; I obeyed the laws of God; it was you who led me away from God, and made me break His laws. Like the devil, you ruined my soul, and, like the devil, I will torment you for ever and ever." See in hell that young man and young woman: how changed they are! They loved each other so much on earth that for this they broke the laws of God and man; but now they fight each other like two vipers, and so will continue to fight for all eternity.

Not many years ago a young man came in the middle of the night to a Redemptorist convent in Europe. He rang the bell and knocked loudly at the door. One of the fathers who happened to be up went to open the door. The young man fell at his feet, crying, in accents of despair, "O father! help me, help me. I am lost! I am damned!" The father thought that the young man had perhaps been drinking freely and was now suffering from the delirium tremens. He therefore advised him to go home; but the young man besought him in still more piteous accents to help him. "This very night," said he, "whilst sleeping alone in my room, I was suddenly aroused; I saw before me the figure of one with whom I had sinned. She had the face of a demon, and she was enveloped in flames. She cried in a voice that penetrated to the very marrow of my bones, 'Accursed wretch! it is you who, have damned me; I shall never let you rest till you also burn in hell.' She then

sprang upon me and gored my breast with her fiery horns." At these words the young man bared his breast. It was all mangled and bleeding, so that the priest shuddered at the sight. They both went straightway to the house of the young woman. They aroused the inmates of it, and entered the room of the unfortunate creature, and found her dead.

A wicked wretch once said : " If I am damned, I shall not be alone ; I shall have many companions with me." Fool ! do you not know that every companion will be a new torment and tormentor ? What a torture for you were you to remain chained together for life with your most bitter enemy ! What, then, will it be for you to remain in company with innumerable enemies of God and man for all eternity ? You have no courage to live in a cloister of strict observance, where you would have many companions good and holy. How will you remain in hell with numberless damned souls, that are the shame of nature, the opprobrium of the universe, monsters of ugliness ? What an affliction and torment never to have any one to look kindly on us, to speak a gentle word to us ! What unspeakable desolation to be in a company whence all honor, all respect, all civility, all virtue are banished ; where there reigns but fury, hatred, and irreconcilable enmity ; where compassion has no place ; where whoever complains of his misfortunes shall be answered with bitter raileries ; where during all eternity there shall not be found a single creature to console the damned soul ; but where, on the contrary, all will rejoice at her pains and everlasting perdition ; where all the bonds of friendship are broken ; where all beautiful relationship is lost ; where they shall mortally hate one another, and so intensely that a word of friendship shall never proceed from them ; where the father shall hate his son and the son his father, and the friend his friend ! And they shall hate one another with so much the more intensity as they have been instrumental in one another's ruin. Such is hell.

A severe fright is one of the most painful things in the world. A single indignant look that Philip II., King of Spain, cast upon two of his courtiers who behaved irreverently in church, was enough to drive one of them out of his senses, and to cause the death of the other. Some years ago, a woman travelling through England came to an inn, where she stayed over night. During the evening the guests amused themselves by telling ghost-stories, and the lady went to her room, her mind filled with what she had heard. About midnight she was aroused by a strange noise. She sat up in bed and listened, but could hear nothing. She lay down again to sleep, and was again aroused. Straining her ears, she heard distinctly sounds of the clanking of chains, footsteps coming up-stairs and moaning. The footsteps came nearer and nearer to the door. All on a sudden the door opened, and she saw in the pale moonlight a tall, spectral figure with long, matted hair, a grisly beard, and with clanking chains on his hands and feet. She tried to attribute it to her imagination; but no, it was a terrible reality. She endeavored to shriek, but the blood froze in her veins, the tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. The ghastly apparition drew near her bed. She could not move; she was as it were spell-bound. The strange visitor sighed and moaned; then cast himself at the foot of the large bed in which she was lying. Who can describe her agony, the long hours till morning? She dared not, she could not move. When morning had come, the servant came to call her, and found her pale as death; even her hair had turned gray through terror in that single night. The strange visitor was a poor maniac, who had been kept in a distant room, and had broken his chain and wandered to the lady's room.

The damned soul will be lying helpless in the lonesome darkness of hell. The devils come in the most frightful shapes on purpose to frighten her. A holy religious saw at his death two such monstrous and ugly devils. He cried

out, saying that rather than see them again he would walk till the day of judgment on fire of sulphur and molten metal. St. Bridget* tells us that she saw a woman who had been condemned to hell coming out of a lake of fire, without any heart in her chest, without lips on her countenance, with eyes dissolved on her cheeks, with serpents on her bosom, who cried out to her daughter, who was still alive: "My daughter, no longer a child but a venomous serpent! Wretch that I am for having brought you forth, but much more so for having taught you to commit sin! As often as you return to the commission of sin, from the bad example I gave you, my pains are fearfully renewed."

The hearing is continually tormented. You have heard, perhaps, a horrible scream in the dead of night. You may have heard the last shriek of a drowning man before he went down into his watery grave. You may have been shocked in passing a mad-house to hear the wild shout of a madman. But what are these to be compared to the horrible uproar of millions and millions of tormented creatures mad with the fury of hell? There the damned are heard roaring like lions, hissing like serpents, howling like dogs. There are heard the gnashing of teeth and the fearful blasphemies of the devils, and, above all, the roaring of the thunders of God's anger, which shakes hell to its foundations.

There is in hell a sound like the noise of many waters. It is as if all the rivers and oceans of the world were pouring themselves with a great splash down on the floor of the dismal abode. Is it really the sound of waters? It is. Are the rivers and oceans of the earth pouring themselves into hell? No; it is the sound of oceans of tears running down from the eyes of the damned. And those tears run eternally. They cry because the sulphurous smoke torments their eyes; they cry because they are in darkness; they cry because they have lost the beautiful heaven, and are shut out from the face of

* B. vi., *Revel.* lii

God ; they cry because there is no hope of redemption for them. It is thus that the hearing of the damned is tortured, because they listened with sinful pleasure to so many slanderous discourses, to so many immodest conversations, to so many words of double meaning.

The scent, too, has its peculiar torment. There are some diseases so bad, such as cancers and ulcers, that people can not bear to breathe the air in the house where they are. There is something worse. It is the smell of death, coming from a dead body lying in the grave. It is related in the life of St. Walburga that a murderer, having killed a pilgrim, took him in his arms to bury him in a hidden place. The murdered body clasped him so strongly that the wretched assassin could not by any means detach himself from it, even with the sword, so that the mangled body, by its stench, caused the death of the murderer.

But what is the smell of death in hell ? St. Bonaventure says that if one single body was taken out of hell and laid on the earth, in that same moment every living creature on the earth would sicken and die. Such is the smell of death from one body in hell ; what then will be the smell of death from countless millions of bodies laid in hell like sheep ? This torment is inflicted upon the damned because, while on earth, they liked to stay in the pestiferous air of bad companions, of public-houses, of the houses of ill-fame, of those low haunts of sin and shame which lead to hell.

The taste, in punishment of gluttony and intemperance, is tormented by ravenous hunger. The prophet Isaias says (chap. ix. 20) that in hell hunger will be so horrible that every one shall eat the flesh of his own arm. Tormented by insupportable thirst, Dives, from hell, asked nothing of Abraham but a drop of water, while he was tormented with gall, wormwood, and disgusting liquids. The Roman tyrants forced several martyrs to drink boiling resin and molten metals. But torture such as this gives no idea of the

torments prepared by the devil and his angels for those who fall into his hands.

The feeling of the damned is tormented in various ways. "He will give fire and worms into their flesh, that they may burn and feel for ever."* St. Basil assures us that in hell there will be worms without number, eating the flesh, and their bites will be unbearable. St. Teresa tells us that the Lord one day showed to her the frightful place of hell. She says that she found the entrance filled with venomous insects. The bite or the pricking of one insect on the earth sometimes keeps a person awake and torments him for hours. What will be his suffering in hell, when millions of them make their dwelling-place in the mouth, the ears, the eyes, and creep all over the body, and sting it with their deadly stings through all eternity. There will be no escape from them where it is not allowed to stir hand or foot.

Above all, the feelings of the damned will be tormented by fire—by a fire so scorching, so hot and intense, that a mountain of bronze thrown into it would melt in an instant—a fire which burns everything, but burns nothing away, which causes all kinds of torments, and the pains of diseases—a fire made by God for the purpose of being a fit instrument of His vengeance—a fire enkindled in the wrath of the Almighty† to burn the souls as well as the bodies—a fire that has no need of fuel to sustain it, being kept alive by the power of God—a fire that devours the reprobate in such a manner as to preserve them in order to devour them constantly for ever and ever—a fire that preserves in the damned as much sensitiveness to sufferings as it has activity to cause them to suffer—a fire which is, as it were, intelligent, making a distinction between sinners, between the senses and the mental faculties which have served as instruments to offend the Almighty, and pro-

* Judith xvi.

† Deut. xxxii. 32.

portioning the pain to the degree of perversity which it punishes—a fire so penetrative as to identify itself, as it were, with its victims—a fire of which our fire on earth is only a picture of fire—a fire which is sad and sombre, serving only to make visible such objects as can torment the sight. So there is in hell only one night—one everlasting night of darkness. No stray sunbeam, no wandering ray of starlight, ever strays into that deep darkness. All is thick, black, heavy, aching darkness, which is made worse by the smoke of hell.

Stop up the chimney when the fire is burning, and in half an hour the room will be full of smoke. The great fires of hell have been smoking now for nearly six thousand years ; they will go on smoking for ever. There is no chimney to take this smoke off ; there is no wind to blow it away. Great, black, sulphurous clouds rise up every moment from the dark fires, till the roof of hell stops them, and drives them back again. Slowly they go down into the abyss, where they are joined by other clouds.

Such is the fire that surrounds the damned, as a coffin surrounds a dead man. A house on fire is not an uncommon sight, but a house made of fire has never been seen. Hell is a house made of fire. The roof and the walls are red-hot ; the floor is like a sheet of red-hot iron. Torrents of fire and brimstone are constantly raining down. Floods of fire roll themselves through hell like the waves of the sea. The wicked are sunk down and buried in that fiery sea of destruction and perdition. Every one of them is lying fastened as it were in a coffin, not made of wood, but of solid fire. There the reprobate lies, and will lie for ever. It burns him from beneath ; the sides of it scorch him ; the heavy burning lid on the top presses down close upon him ; the horrible heat within chokes him. He pants for breath ; he cannot breathe ; he cannot bear it. He gets furious. He gathers up his knees and pushes out his hands against

the top of the coffin to burst it open. His hands and knees are fearfully burned by the red-hot lid. He tries with all his strength to burst open the coffin, but he cannot succeed. He has no strength remaining. He gives it up and sinks down again, to feel once more the horrible choking. Again he tries, again sinks down, and so the struggle goes on for ever.

But not only are the damned surrounded by fire and enclosed in it as within a coffin; they are also thoroughly penetrated with the fire of hell. All the body is salted with fire. The fire burns through every bone and every muscle. Every nerve is trembling and quivering with the sharp flame. So this fire will burn the soul as well as the body. Take a spark out of the kitchen fire, throw it into the sea, and it will go out. Take a little spark out of hell, less than a pin's head, throw it into the ocean; it will not go out. In one moment it would dry up all the waters of the ocean, and set the whole world in a blaze. "It is an unquenchable fire."*

A priest who spent some years in Italy told the following story. When at Naples, he was shown a table. In that table was seen the impress of the hand of a damned soul that appeared to a young man who had been the cause of her eternal ruin. She appeared to him all on fire, and said: "You are the cause of my damnation." In saying this, she touched the table but slightly with her hand, and as her hand, like the rest of her body, was all fire, it burnt the table, and left in it its impress for ever.

Not long ago a young man came in all haste to a priest, begging him to hear his confession without delay. "Why are you in so great a hurry to make your confession?" said the priest. "Alas! your reverence; I have been unfortunate enough to commit a great crime with a young lady. She died immediately after the sinful action, and appeared

* Matt. ii.

to me in a most frightful state. She was all on fire—all on fire from head to foot. She threatened to take away my life, and draw me into hell, and torment me there for having been the cause of her eternal damnation. O father! hear my confession—please hear it at once, that I may not go to hell!”

See, then, careless Catholic, trembling slave of human respect! you who have stayed away for years from confession because, forsooth, you had no time; because, of course, it was not fashionable to go to confession—none but the poor, low Catholics, the low Dutch and Irish, as you call them, go to confession—see here is the end of your indifference, here is the end of your false pride, of your fashionable neglect, here is the end of all—fire, living, torturing, devouring fire!

See, unhappy man, poor slave of human respect! you who have preferred that secret society, that oath-bound club of Freemasons or Odd-Fellows, to the holy Church of the living God, here is the end of all your godless secrecy, of all your oath-bound fellowship—it is fire. You bind your free will—that noble gift of God—you enslave it by so many secret, sinful oaths; in hell you shall be bound to that fiery dungeon by chains that shall never be broken.

Unhappy man! you who have so often dishonored God by cursing and blaspheming, by immodest and slanderous conversations, see here the end of all your blasphemies, of all your calumnies, of all your words of double meaning—it is fire.

And you, careless parents, who neglect your children's education, who neglect to send them to Catholic schools, to Catechism, to Mass on Sundays and holydays of obligation, who scandalize your little ones by neglecting your religious duties, by drunkenness, by shameful conduct, see, here, unnatural parents, here is the end of your neglect—see, here is the end of your scandals.

The revengeful man or revengeful woman may here see the end of hatred. You will not forgive, you will not speak to your neighbor, you will not salute those who have offended you. Behold the end! And you, unhappy drunkard, see the end of all your broken promises, of all your drunkenness; it is the avenging fire of hell. Behold the end and final home of all unrepentant and unpardoned sin in the eternal fire of hell.

Are these things fables, or are they Gospel truths? They cannot be denied; Jesus Christ has taught them; faith teaches them; the Scriptures and theologians attest them. What folly, then, to purchase by a momentary pleasure everlasting torments!

If a person said to you, "If you cast yourself into a burning furnace, I will give you a kingdom," would you be foolish enough to do so? The devil says to you, "If you cast yourself into hell, I will give you a little pleasure in yielding to your passion," and will you be senseless enough to yield? You cannot bear to hold your finger in the flame of a lighted candle, and yet you show so little fear of the eternal flames of hell! Is not this the greatest blindness and folly? Well did three noble youths answer their wicked companions, who tempted them to abandon their life of piety and devotion by saying: "Your life is too severe; you are too delicate; this kind of life is not fit for you." The youths thus repulsed their wicked suggestions. One said: "If I cannot now bear the crosses of a Christian life, how shall I be able to suffer hereafter the pains of hell?" The other answered: "Because I am delicate, and cannot bear much, I prefer, for the sake of heaven, to undergo a little severity during my short stay on earth, rather than suffer eternal punishments." The third replied: "I can suffer here below, because God will assist me with His grace; but in hell I would be entirely abandoned by God for ever." What beautiful sentiments! what wise answers! Every

Christian should often repeat them to himself. He should remember that all the crosses and trials in this world last but for a short time; that they disappear altogether, as it were, if compared with the everlasting torments of hell. He should never forget that the sinful pleasures and joys of this world are in hell turned into most excruciating pains. This wholesome remembrance will induce him to avoid mortal sin, and lead a holy life.

In the lives of the Fathers of the Desert, we read that a holy hermit named Martinian had already passed twenty-five years in a most austere retreat. His virtue was much extolled. A wicked woman named Zoe said one day before some persons: "Bah! I have no faith in his virtue, and I will engage to make him do whatsoever I desire." She dressed herself in her finest apparel, over which she put on some tattered rags, and, taking some provisions with her, set out for the desert where dwelt the holy hermit. It was late at night when she reached his cell. She told him she had lost her way, and must crave his hospitality for the night. Martinian was touched, gave up his cell to her, and passed the night outside. Next morning the wretch stripped off her rags, reappeared before the hermit, and shamefully urged him to offend God, telling him that no one would know anything of it. Martinian hesitated a moment how to answer, but all at once he told Zoe to wait a few moments. Retiring to a corner of his cell, he heaped up wood and kindled a great fire. Then taking off his sandals, he sat down on the ground and put his feet in the fire. The pain soon made him cry aloud. The temptress ran in, and then started back in terror. Martinian took occasion from this circumstance to exclaim several times: "Alas! if I cannot bear this fire for some minutes, how shall I bear the fire of hell for all eternity?" Zoe was so touched by this reflection that she changed her life and became a saint.

Let us also profit by this reflection. Let us not add by our

sins fuel to the fire of hell. Let us, by heartfelt sorrow, by a sincere confession, and by a true amendment of our life, endeavor to escape the horrible flames of that fire. Let us avail ourselves of the light of those eternal flames; let that light be to us a guide to lead and keep us on the narrow path that leads to the eternal joys of Heaven.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRODIGAL'S COMPANIONS PUNISHED—HELL OF THE SOUL.

FATHER SURIN, a learned theologian of the seventeenth century, relates the following curious event, which took place in 1634, at Loudun, in the diocese of Poitiers. Several persons possessed of the devil were exorcised, and the priest who performed that difficult task sometimes interrogated the evil spirit on questions of great interest. One day he said to him : “ In the name of God, I command thee to tell me what pains are suffered in hell ! ” “ Alas ! ” answered the evil spirit, “ we suffer a fire which is never extinguished, an eternal curse, and especially a rage, a despair impossible to describe, because we can never see Him who made us and whom we have lost by our own fault. ” “ What wouldst thou do to enjoy the sight of God, were such a thing possible ? ” “ Oh ! if God could permit it, I would consent with all my heart to climb a pillar that would reach to heaven, were it all over bristling with sharp points, keen edges, piercing thorns. I would consent besides to suffer ten thousand years, only to have the happiness of beholding God for a single moment. Ah ! if men knew what they lose in losing the grace of God ! ” Such was the reply of the devil, and surely he ought to know what is the greatest torment in hell, he who has been the enemy of God and living in hell for so many ages.

It would seem that the greatest torment of hell is the intelligent fire which devours the unhappy reprobates ; but such is not the case. The most excruciating torment of all,

the most intolerable for the human soul, is to be deprived of seeing God, with the thought of being deprived of him for ever. This is what is called the pain of loss. And to understand in some measure what this pain of loss is, we must remember that we have been created to be for ever happy. This love, this yearning for happiness, which every one feels in his heart, will never be destroyed, not even in hell. Impelled by this desire, and blinded by passion, men seek happiness in riches, in sensual pleasures, in drunkenness. They try to find happiness in politics, in acquiring an honorable position in society, in the pursuit of earthly knowledge. These vain images of happiness deceive many until the soul is severed from the body. At the hour of death, all these false, fleeting pleasures disappear, and God, the true source of all happiness, stands unveiled before the soul in all His ravishing beauty. He shows Himself to her in His power, in which He created the whole world out of nothing; He lets her see His wisdom in governing the world; He lets her see His love, in which He became man, died for us, and even gave Himself as food and drink in the Blessed Sacrament. He lets her see His liberality, with which He rewards the just in heaven. Yes, God shows Himself to the soul such as He is; He lets her have as great a knowledge of all His infinite perfections as she is capable of attaining, in order to make her understand most clearly the infinite eternal happiness which He has prepared for those who served Him faithfully on earth. This knowledge of the greatness, amiability, and goodness of God will remain imprinted upon the soul for all eternity. In the light of this knowledge, which is communicated to the soul in a moment, she will also see the justice of the punishments which God inflicts for ever in hell upon those who did not keep His commandments.

Then it is that the soul rushes towards God with all the impetuosity of an intelligent immortal spirit. If you have

ever stood upon the banks of the Niagara and gazed on the rapids, you must have noticed how the waters hurry on past rocks and trees, roaring and foaming and bounding, till at last they leap wildly into the yawning abyss. Such a sight is at least a faint picture of the fierce impetuosity with which the soul rushes towards God, the source of all happiness, after she has left the body. But who can describe the wild agony of the soul when she finds herself repelled from God, tied down by the chains of hell, oppressed by the heavy weight of mortal sin? The famished soul yearns to possess God, the centre of her happiness, but all her efforts are fruitless; she is cast off from God; she is chained for ever. Were all the riches of this world, were all the honors, all the pleasures, of this life placed before the soul, she would turn away from them at that moment; she would curse them all. The lost soul yearns for God alone, for she can be happy only in God.

In our present life, we do not feel any great sorrow for not seeing God, because we are not yet in the right state to experience such pain. A king at the age of three or four years would feel no pain at losing his kingdom; he would even play with the usurper who wore his crown and wielded his sceptre; but at the age of twenty or thirty, when his judgment is formed, he would feel such a calamity very keenly. In this life we are but as children, not capable of being greatly afflicted for not seeing our Lord.

But no sooner has the reprobate soul left the body than she sees clearly, and understands perfectly, what she has lost. She sees the immense happiness she would have had in heaven with God and His angels and saints. And now she sees that all this happiness is lost—lost by her own fault—lost hopelessly and for ever. How painful is the cry of a child that has lost its mother! How heartrending are the wailings of those whose sister is leaving them to go to a strange country, perhaps never to see them again! Ima-

gine, then, what the wailing will be when the soul hears these words from God: "Depart from me, accursed one, for ever."

How just are the judgments of God! During life, God invited that sinner, God wished to dwell in his heart. "My delight," says He, "is to be with the children of men." But that man despised God; he drove God away from him by his sins. How often did Jesus stand at the door of the sinner's heart and crave admittance. Jesus watched and waited patiently there, but that man would not hearken to His voice, he hardened his heart. How often did God call and invite him to give up sin and return like the prodigal son to the bosom of his father. God promised to receive him with open arms and to give him the kiss of peace. God wished to fold him under His wings, as the hen folds her little ones; but he would not come. And now, all is changed. God's terrible threat is fulfilled upon that sinner—"You shall seek me, but you shall not find me." You renounced me, you left me, you turned your back upon me and clung to creatures, preferring them to me, your God and Maker, and placing all your happiness in them. It is just, then, that I, your God and Redeemer, should also despise you and banish you from my presence, and from the happy company of all my faithful servants; it is just that I should curse you with a father's curse, with a mother's, a Creator's, a Redeemer's curse. "Depart from me, accursed one, into everlasting fire."

Then it is that, seeing God without the hope of ever enjoying Him, the sinner's unrequited love turns into an intense and devilish hate. Then it is that the sinner curses God the Father, who created him; he curses God the Son, who redeemed him; he curses God the Holy Ghost, who sanctified him. Then it is that he curses all those who helped in causing him to lose God. Then in his impotent fury he curses himself for having lost God.

Accursed be the hour in which I was conceived ; accursed be the day on which I was born. Cursed be my father and mother, who neglected to watch over me, who neglected to send me to a Catholic school, to church, to have me instructed in religion. Cursed be those wicked companions who led me into sin. Cursed be those bad books that caused me to lose my faith, to lose my virtue. Cursed be those shameful secret sins which I committed so often, never confessed, and never truly detested.

The lost soul even curses the sweet Mother of God and all the Saints and Angels, whose loving mercy she despised. She curses the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed for her on the cross. She curses the Sacraments, which she so often neglected or abused. She curses the holy Church, which taught her the saving doctrines of Christ. She wishes to destroy God, but feels that she is powerless. She curses God, but knows that God is loved and adored by thousands of happy beings, who enjoy that Heaven that she has lost. Henceforth the memory, the intellect, and especially the will of the reprobate soul will be most frightfully tormented for having lost God. The lost sinner will remember with how little trouble he might have avoided hell. He will repeat to himself: "So little was required for my salvation; it was only to make a good confession. What little labor would this have been ! Because of a little shame I did not make it. How foolish I was ! How often did I hear the truth in sermons ! How often did my conscience and my friends admonish me to make the confession ! But all in vain. How many have committed more and greater sins than I. But they were wise enough to confess their sins, and do penance in time ; they are in Paradise. What a fool I have been ! I am lost for ever through my own fault. But now this repentance is unavailing—these reflections come too late."

With this torment of the memory will be combined that

of the intellect, which will make the most fatal reflections. "During life," the sinner will say to himself, "I loved ease and luxury, fine garments and a costly dwelling. To gain these, I scrupled not to defraud my neighbor. I stole from my employers, I took false oaths, I joined secret societies, I even sold my virtue. I stayed away from Mass, neglected the Sacraments, denied my faith, and turned my back upon Jesus Christ. I was willing to commit every crime, provided I could become rich, provided I could dress in costly garments, and live in a rich and splendid dwelling. How frightful is my torment now that I find myself torn from that luxurious dwelling for which I sacrificed my faith, my soul, my hope of heaven, to find myself plunged into the horrid darkness and the devouring flames of hell. During life, I loved liberty and license. The Church of God commanded me to hear Mass on Sundays and holydays of obligation; she commanded me to abstain from meat on Fridays and fast-days, to go to confession and communion at least once a year; she forbade me to marry before a civil magistrate or preacher; she forbade me to quit my lawful wife and marry another. But I refused to be bound by these laws; I wished to be free, and do as I pleased. God commanded me to keep away from the meetings of heretical sects; to keep away from balls, theatres, and other haunts of sin; to avoid immodest and dangerous company, to give up immodest and sinful practices. But I wished to be free, to think and act as I pleased. How terrible is my agony, my despair now, when I find myself bound hand and foot, and chained like a galley-slave to the dreary dungeon of hell!

During my lifetime, I loved to listen to backbiting and calumny, to immodest discourses, to words of double meaning. How great now is my punishment in hell, where I hear nothing but curses, blasphemies, wailing, and shrieks of despair! When on earth I loved the darkness. I chose

the darkest night, I chose the most secret nook, in order to gratify my brutal lust. Now that I find myself in hell, I shall have darkness, eternal darkness. I loved to gaze upon immodest objects; I loved to read immodest books. Not only in the ball-room and the theatre, not only in the house of ill-fame, but even in the church, in the house of God, I fed my lustful eyes by gazing immodestly on those around me. Now that I am in hell, my eyes shall look upon no other objects, they shall see most hideous demons and the ghastly souls of the damned. While on earth, I loved to drink and drink until I degraded myself below the level of the brute. I did not wish to give up liquor, though my friends, my wife, my children, the priest of God, conjured me to do so. Now that I am in hell, I shall drink my fill of torturing fire, of the poison of serpents, of the gall of dragons. When on earth, I was not willing to give up that unlawful company which God and the Church forbade me to keep. I was not willing to give up the secret society I had joined. I rather gave up my religion, the holy Sacraments, and my hope for heaven than renounce that society. I was not willing to give up visiting the bar-room, associating with drunkards and gamblers, though my friends, my children, my wife, and the priest of God conjured me to do so. I was not willing to give up that house which was so often the occasion of sin for me. Now that I find myself in the gloomy vaults of hell, I have for company the most degraded beings that ever existed. I have the company of a countless multitude of villains, murderers, blasphemers and madmen—all chained together, all tortured by unquenchable fire, by the never-dying worm, howling and shrieking in mad despair. Such are and will be my companions for ever, for having chosen to live and die in mortal sin. Here I have no longer a protector, a friend, a loving father, a kind mother. No; all the ties of friendship, all the ties of nature, the strong ties of love, are for ever broken, for ever

turned into devilish hate. Every evil spirit, every damned soul, insults me, curses me, tortures me, in his fury, as much as he pleases. I must submit to all ; I must submit to it, in just punishment for having refused to submit to the will of God on earth.

If you have ever been on the ocean on a calm moonlight night, you might have noticed here and there a small wave arise and tremble for awhile in the shining moonlight, and then sink back and be lost in the bosom of the boundless ocean. Such is time ; such is all time, counting from the beginning of creation to the end of the world. Like a wave it arises, sparkles for an instant, and then sinks back to be lost for ever in the silent ocean of boundless eternity. For eternity existed before time, and eternity will continue to exist when time shall be no more.

How to describe the eternity of the pains of the damned . It would require the language of an angel. It would require the language of those fallen angels who have been suffering the torments of hell from the beginning of the world. Could one of those lost spirits stand before us at this moment, and describe the meaning and significance of "the loss of a soul" ; could he but speak of the death of the soul—that death that never dies. Let him tell of the anguish of that remorse that comes too late, and never goes away. Let him describe the fierce fire, that never quenches ; the gnawing worm, that never dies. Let him dilate on heaven and all its beauty—the heaven not possessed or enjoyed. Let him describe the eternal regret of a soul that had been created for heaven, that had once even half-tasted of its happiness, then lost it all, and lost it through her own fault. Let him tell of the loss of God—of God the supreme, the unutterable beauty, the boundless ocean of joy and happiness. Let him speak of God's infinite love, of His excessive desire to make His creatures happy, and yet all lost, irreparably lost ! Oh ! could such a spirit speak to us now, we should

never forget it. Could he stand before us, we should need no feeble human words. For whatever man can say or imagine of hell must fall infinitely short of the dread reality. No eye has seen it nor ear has heard it, nor has it ever entered into the heart of man to conceive what God has in store for those who hate Him.

For ever to suffer, with never a ray of hope; for ever to burn, and never to be refreshed; for ever to hunger and thirst, and never to be appeased; for ever to rave with impotent fury, and never to be pitied; for ever to despair, and never to be comforted—O fearful eternity!

To suffer the torments of fire is an excruciating pain, but yet it may be endured. The martyrs have exulted in the midst of the flames. To suffer the pangs of shame and remorse is an awful pain, which few can bear. To be deprived for a time of the enjoyments of Heaven, of the possession of God, is a pain which far exceeds all corporal suffering. But were all these pains and torments of hell to be united and increased a thousandfold, and were they to last for millions and millions of years, provided only that they once came to an end, then would hell cease to be a hell. Were God to send an angel from Heaven to announce to the damned that, after as many millions of years as there are grains of sand on the shores of the sea, their torments would come to an end, how great would be their happiness. Their blasphemies, their howlings of despair, would cease; they would burst forth into canticles of praise and gladness; hell would be changed, as it were, into Heaven. But this happiness shall never be theirs.

A sermon of an hour's duration now seems an age in length; a half an hour's prayer is too wearisome; at times, men have not the patience to wait even to the end of the Mass or Benediction. The crying of a child, the moaning of a sick person, is insupportable; the fast of half a day frightens them; the very name of penance is an affliction.

tion. A headache, a toothache makes them so impatient that they disturb all those about them. But not pain or penance only—even the finest music, the most palatable food, the most agreeable company, becomes intolerable if it lasts too long, or if it is always the same. Let those, then, who cannot bear a harsh word, who cannot prevail on themselves to confess the secret sins which weigh on their conscience, say how they will be able to suffer the fierce torments of hell for all eternity? There they will listen, not to a sermon, not to pleasant music, but to wailing and howling and gnashing of teeth, blasphemies and shrieks of despair. There not a mere headache or toothache will afflict them, but spasms, anguish, and torments unutterable; not for an hour, not for a long night, not for one whole week, not for one entire year, but for myriads of ages, for endless centuries, for ever and ever, without relief, without hope, without end, as long as God shall be God.

How many are there now living in hell who, could they speak, would testify to the truth of this. What a story could Cain, the first murderer, tell! “Ah!” he cries, “I have been suffering here for thousands and thousands of years, but my sufferings are not for one moment lessened. Day after day, month after month, year after year, the world grew older and more wicked, till at last the great deluge came, and cleansed the earth with its avenging flood. The deluge came and went, but not for me. The whole earth was covered with water, but not a drop came to me to quench my thirst—not a drop fell upon my burning tongue.

“The prophets appeared upon the earth, and foretold the rise and growth of vast kingdoms and empires. Ages after ages rolled by, and at last their prophecies were fulfilled. The day dawned when these kingdoms and empires arose. They grew powerful, and, as ages passed away, declined or were shattered by the storm of revolution. They crumbled

away one by one, and sank back into forgetfulness. But with all these countless, changeful years there came no change for me. I have been ever burning, as I am still burning, in these flames, and I must burn here for all eternity.

“The prophets foretold that the Redeemer would one day come and save the world, and after long years and ages of weary expectation the Redeemer came at last. He was born; He lived and died to redeem the world; He saved the world, and returned to Heaven; but for me there was and is no redemption.”

For how many years has the unhappy Judas been burning in those fierce flames, and how many tears of bitter remorse has he shed! When shall his torments end? When shall God wipe away his tears? Perhaps when he shall have shed as many tears as there are grains of sand on the sea-shore, leaves in the forest, drops in the ocean, and stars in the firmament. Perhaps then an end may come to his sufferings. His torments shall be then beginning. Add a million of years to eternity, and it shall not be increased; take away a million of years, it shall not be diminished. Even then their eternity is not a moment lessened, for theirs is an end that never ends, a death that never dies.

What tongue shall describe the unhappy fate of the damned soul? The weight of an endless eternity presses upon her like a huge mountain. She looks up to heaven: it is for ever closed against her. In her agony she cries aloud: “O blessed gate! O gate of Paradise! shalt thou never open for me? O Paradise of delights! shall I never possess thee? O blessed light! shalt thou never shine for me?” The thunders of God’s parting malediction rings in her ears: “Never, never!” She looks at the gates of her prison and cries: “O gate! shalt thou never open for me?” She hears a voice that distinctly says to her: “Never, never!” for the gae of hell is sealed with the dread seal of the Almighty.

She looks at the torments that surround her and cries : “ O torments ! O fire ! will you never give me a moment’s relief ? ” “ Never, never ! ”

She looks into her guilty conscience. All the sins of her past life are preying like ravenous vultures upon her bleeding heart, and she shrieks, in despair : “ Oh ! shall I never have one hour, one solitary hour, wherein to blot out these damning sins with the sweet tears of repentance ? Oh ! for one single hour to cast myself at the feet of the priest of God, to hear from his lips the sweet words : ‘ Go in peace ; thy sins are forgiven. ’ O happy years of my childhood ! will you never more return ? O blessed hours of innocence and peace ! shall I never see you any more ? ” Never, never ! The angel of God has sworn by Him that liveth for ever and ever “ that time shall be no more. ”

How great is the pain which a sick man feels whilst lying on a bed of fever. Throughout the long weary night he cannot sleep. He feels every throb of his burning brow ; he hears every tick of the clock ; he counts each moment as it slowly drags along. How long the night seems ; every hour seems to him an age. How eagerly does he yearn and pray for the morning light. What would be his misery were the light of morning never to dawn, and that long dreary night of pain to last for ever !

What must the agony of the damned be, as they try to turn around in their bed of fire, and peer through the thick darkness of that long, long night !

“ *Custos, quid de nocte ?* ”—“ Watchman, what of the night ? ” * How many hours of our torments have already passed ? When shall this dreary night be ended ? When shall the morning of our redemption dawn upon us ? Never, never ! The pendulum of eternity swings from side to side, and with every stroke the fearful words are heard : ever, for ever ! The hands of that eternal time-piece never

* Isa. xxi. 11.

move round, but point always to the same dread sentence of damnation: For ever—never, never—for ever! O fearful eternity! For ever shall they burn in that fire. For ever gnaws the worm; never shall it die. For ever shall they howl and gnash the teeth; never shall they be comforted. For ever shall they be excluded from the face of God; for ever rejected by Jesus; for ever accursed by the Holy Ghost. Never shall they hear one word of blessing; never one word of consolation. For ever lasts their agony; for ever their sins; for ever their despair. O fearful eternity!

Fain would the damned annihilate themselves, and destroy for ever their unhappy existence, but in vain. They can only increase, they can never end, their torments. In their agony they cry aloud: "O God of justice, God of vengeance! come, destroy me; annihilate this being Thou hast given me." But God is deaf to their cries. He offered them eternal life, and they refused it. Now they shall seek death, and shall not find it. He offered them redemption, and they spurned His offer. Now they shall yearn to be redeemed, and redemption shall never be theirs.

"O ye demons!" they cry, "come and kill us, come and destroy us." The demons rush upon them and torment them anew, but destroy them they cannot. They led a life of ease and pleasure while on earth; it is but just that they shall now live a life of endless torment in hell. They refused to glorify God's mercy while on earth, now they shall glorify God's infinite sanctity and justice for ever. The sun shall rise and set, and the moon grow full and wane again; the grass shall grow green and wither, and the birds sing, and their song shall be hushed in death; the flowers shall bloom and fade; men shall be born, and shall make merry and die away, and nations shall rise and flourish, and sink back into forgetfulness; the whole earth shall be shaken by whirlwind and earthquake; yea, the heavens and

the earth shall flee away before the face of God, and be folded up as a scroll, and the blessed shall enter the joys of heaven, and their song of gladness shall resound for ever and ever; while the unhappy damned shall be burning in that fire that changes not and is not lessened—without hope, without end, as long as God is God.

The celebrated Joseph Dominick Mansi, one of the most learned men of his age and of all Italy, in his youth did not lead a very regular life. His profession was that of a notary. One day he passed a church where a sermon was being preached. Impelled by curiosity, he entered. The subject of the sermon was the eternity of the torments of the damned. From time to time the preacher paused, and electrified his audience by crying out: "O eternity that shall never end!" The tone in which he pronounced these words produced an extraordinary effect on Mansi. He left the church absorbed in thought, and went on his way. Only now and then he stopped, and repeated to himself: "O eternity that shall never end!" On returning to his house, just as he was about to sit down to table, an inner voice seemed to repeat the same words in his ear: "O eternity that shall never end!" By night as well as by day, at prayer and at business alike, that important sentence sounded in his ear and occupied his mind. Touched, at length, by this heavenly warning, he left the world, became a priest, and in 1769 was consecrated Archbishop of Lucca.

May this reflection never leave the heart of a Christian—for life is very short, whilst eternity is endless: Is it good traffic, at the price of a few years of a sinful life, and those uncertain, to gain an eternity of torments? When Dathan and Abiron were swallowed up alive by the earth suddenly opening under their feet, those who were present at the painful spectacle instantly took to flight,* and in

* Numbers xvi. 34.

their flight cried out : “ Let us quickly depart hence, that the earth may not also devour us.” Alas ! thousands of sinners have been cast into the abyss of hell, where they burn, and will burn eternally, in punishment of their sins. Let us take a wholesome lesson from them. Let us avoid their crimes, their evil habits, which may also precipitate us into endless torments. Let us leave the company of sinners, hate and detest our own sins, clear ourselves by a sincere confession, lest hell devour us while we are in the state of mortal sin.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FATHER OF THE PRODIGAL—GOD'S MERCY.

A MAN who is very sick is willing to take the most bitter medicines, and place himself at the mercy of the most cruel surgeons if he knows the grievousness of his sickness, and the great danger he incurs of losing his life. When the Prodigal Son saw himself consumed with miseries and debaucheries, and that he could not have even the husks of swine wherewith to sustain his life, he said: "I here perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father. I will ask his pardon. I trust in his goodness. He will receive me at least as one of his servants. I am ready to do whatever he tells me rather than perish with hunger." In like manner, a Christian will be ready to amend his life and do penance for his sins if he comes to understand his miserable state, and the great risk he runs of being lost for all eternity.

It is for this reason that terrible truths—truths calculated to open the wounds of the heart—have been set before the reader. Those truths ought to inspire one with a wholesome fear of the judgments of God; they ought to induce the sinner to make his peace with God by means of a good confession, and confirm in him the resolution to lead henceforth a most Christian life, in order to escape the eternal torments of hell, and become one day a worthy citizen of heaven.

But with many, even after they have experienced the desire of repentance, a certain fear and uneasiness as to the past as well as to the future may prevail. Many who have

indeed grievously sinned, and who would wish to return to God, are still kept back by the fear that their sins are too great, that there is no hope, no pardon for them. For such persons there is much comfort if they would only open their minds and hearts to it—to the thought of God's great goodness and mercy. The patience of God in calling and awaiting the return of the sinner to his friendship, and his exceeding great joy in receiving and welcoming him back, are unutterable. To them may be said what Moses, the great servant and prophet of the Lord, said to the Israelites: "The Lord is a forgiving God, gracious and merciful, long-suffering and full of compassion."* And in the same sense the great apostle, St. Paul, often repeated these words to the Christians of his time: "The Lord is the father of mercies and the God of all consolation."† Yes, indeed, the Lord is merciful; and He is merciful especially to all poor sinners. He is merciful in all places. "The earth is full of the mercies of the Lord," says holy David. The Psalmist does not say that the earth is full of God's justice, full of his punishments, but that it is full of his mercies. "Nay," says he, "the tender mercies of the Lord are above all his works."‡

There is nothing more peculiar to God's nature than to be merciful and to spare. To understand this rightly, it must be considered that God is our father. Our divine Saviour assures us of this. He has taught us to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven." Again and again in Holy Writ He calls God by the endearing name of "Our Father." Now, what is meant by the term "father"? Let us try to understand fully the meaning of this beautiful word. We see a poor man laboring day and night, watching and praying, suffering cold and hunger. Who is he? Why does he endure all this? It is a *father*. He has children whom he loves, and would wish to see happy. That thought makes him forget all his own sufferings. Should one of those

* Exod. xxxiv. 6.

† 2 Cor. i. 3.

‡ Ps. cxliv. ix.

children go astray and become wicked, how sorely is the heart of that poor father grieved ! But still he keeps on suffering and toiling, even for his wayward child. He says to himself, " Who knows ? perhaps my child will have more sense by and by. Perhaps he will be sorry for his faults, and lead a better life."

Now, such a father is God—a good, kind, compassionate father, who is infinitely merciful. King David had many children, one of whom, Absalom, became very wicked—so wicked as at last to rebel against his father. He placed himself at the head of a large army with the intention of dethroning King David. This monstrous crime assuredly deserved death ; but yet the father, instead of condemning his unnatural son to death, gave orders that he should be spared. Absalom, however, was slain whilst flying from the field of battle. As soon as the glad tidings of victory were brought to King David, his first question was, " Is my son well ? Is he safe ?" And when he was told that Absalom was dead, instead of rejoicing over the victory he burst into tears, and would not be consoled. " O my son Absalom !" he cried ; " my son ! my son ! Oh ! that I were dead in thy place, my son ! My dear son, Absalom." David wept over this unworthy son simply because he was father to that son. Now, God is the best and tenderest of fathers, and we are all his children. But God has not only the heart of a father. He has also the heart of a mother towards us, his frail, erring children. He himself assures us of this when he says : " I shall take you in my arms. I shall caress you. I shall press you to my heart, as a mother caresses her darling child." Again he says : " Can a mother forget her own child ?" and adds : " Even should a mother forget her own child, I shall not forget you." Yes, God loves not only like a mother, but even more than a mother. But His love is not sufficiently known among men. Why, we do not even understand the great love which lies in a mother's heart,

much less the boundless love that burns in the heart of God. How great is the happiness of a good Christian mother whose son is virtuous and obedient! How intense is her love for him! She cannot herself measure the greatness of her love; but one thing she does know, and that is, if it were possible for her, she would love him even a thousand times more tenderly and ardently than she does. Such also is the love even of the poor mother whose child is disobedient and wicked, abuses her and curses her. He runs away from home; he prefers the society of wicked companions to her love. How the heart of that poor mother bleeds. Her days and nights are spent in weeping. Her life is dark and desolate. But does she hate her child, or cease to love him because of his ingratitude? Ah no! far from it. Her love only grows stronger and more tender. Like the ivy that clings to the mouldering ruin and saves it from falling utterly, her love still clings to her child, though ruined and despised and forsaken by all.

Some years ago there was a poor widow who had an only son. She loved this son dearly, and spared no pains to instil into his heart the principles of virtue. In spite, however, of all her care, the young man went off with wicked companions, and became the scandal of the whole neighborhood. He often abused and struck his mother, and even threatened to kill her. This unhappy young man gave himself up to every crime. At last, he was arrested and cast into prison. One day a stranger knocked at the prison-door. The jailer came out to see who it was, and learned to his surprise that it was the mother of this wicked man. "Ah!" she said, weeping, "I wish to see my son." "What!" cried the jailer, in astonishment, "you wish to see that wretch! Have you forgotten all that he has done to you?" "Ah! I know it well," replied the widow, "but he is my son." "Why!" cried the jailer, "he has robbed you of every cent." "I know it," she replied, "but he is still my

son." "But he has struck you, abused you, and even threatened to kill you," said the jailer. "'Tis true," was the answer. "I am still his mother—he is still my son." "But," cried the jailer, "he has not only abused and robbed you, he has shamefully abandoned you. Such an unnatural son is not worthy to live." "Ah! but he is my son; I am his mother." And the poor widow sobbed and wept, till at last the jailer was touched, and permitted her to enter the prison; and the fond mother threw her arms around the neck of that unnatural, ungrateful son, and pressed him again and again to her breaking heart.

God it is who has implanted this love in the mother's heart. How great, then, how unbounded must His love and mercy for poor miserable sinners be, since the love of all the mothers on earth is but a tiny stream from the immense ocean of God's infinite love for men! Yes, as the holy Scripture assures us, "God is love." God is infinitely merciful. God has created us all for heaven. He has created no one in order to send him to hell. Strictly speaking, it is not God who sends the sinner to hell, but the sinner himself who chooses hell in preference to God. It is the sinner who damns himself through his own wilful malice. There are many who complain of the rigor of God's justice in condemning souls to hell. But who is to blame if souls are condemned? It is the sinner himself, and not God. It is always with regret that God punishes the sinner. It is the sinner who forces God to chastise him. God, indeed, hates sin of every kind, but at the same time He loves and pities the poor sinner, and, therefore, He makes use of various means to call him back from his evil ways. We all fear God naturally. Just as Adam fled away and hid himself from the face of God, so we all fear at times, and especially after we have committed sin. We commit some faults every day; perhaps even some grievous sin is weighing on our conscience; we, therefore, feel the want of a merciful God

—a merciful Father, who forgives everything, and receives us again into His friendship.

Let us look back for a moment into our past life, and we shall see clearly that there were times when God, as a merciful Father, called us in a most especial manner. Perhaps God's call came in the shape of some great affliction. We had a happy home; the purest of earthly joys were ours. God gave us a loving wife, a fond husband, a darling child. There was a loving heart to sympathize with us in all our joys and sorrows. Our soul was centred in those dear objects. We had our paradise on earth. Ah! there was danger of loving them too much; danger of forgetting God. But the angel of death entered our abode, and that sympathizing heart stood still, that kindly eye was closed, that loving voice was silent. Then we wept, and moaned, and murmured, perhaps, even against God. We did not know; we did not see that that was a warning for us. It was the voice of our good Father calling to us, and bidding us look up towards heaven. Or, perhaps, God sent us a fit of sickness. We were in the enjoyment of robust health; our hands were full of business; we had not time to go to confession. God stretched us on a sick bed, and there we had to take time—time to suffer, time to pray, time to examine our conscience, and make a good confession.

There was a man in North Carolina during the time of the late war who said that he used to run away from the priest, from God. He went to North Carolina expressly to be far away from the priest and the church. "But at last," as he said, "the good Shepherd caught the stray sheep by the leg." He cut his foot with an axe while working, and was placed in a hospital. Many of the rich in their pride of wealth forgot God. God sent the war, and with it reverse of fortune. They lost everything, and were reduced to poverty. It was the Heavenly Father calling in mercy, and entreating those who had forgotten Him to turn to Him

On the day of judgment we shall see how often our Lord called us and spoke to our heart. Sometimes he speaks to us in a book ; sometimes in a sermon ; sometimes by remorse of conscience ; sometimes in the person of a friend, of a wife, or of children. Sometimes God enlightens us all of a sudden, and shows us the enormity of our sins, the terrible danger in which we stand, and the madness of losing His friendship, the hope of heaven, and peace of heart, for a mere momentary gratification. At other times God recalls to our mind the peace and happiness we enjoyed before we fell into sin, and the solemn promises we made to be faithful to Him and to love Him.

When Adam committed his first sin, he was filled with terror and remorse, and fled away and tried to hide himself from the face of God. But God had pity on him : He called after him, and said, in a tone of compassion : “ Adam, where art thou ? ” It is thus that our Blessed Lord still goes after the sinner who tries to flee away and hide himself from the face of God. “ My child,” says our Saviour to the sinner, “ what has become of you ? Do you not hear my voice ? What have I done that you have abandoned me and cast me out from your heart ? Can you ever find a better Lord, a kinder Father than I am ? Ah ! remember how happy you were when you were yet in my grace ; when you were yet pure and innocent ; and now, see to what a pass your sins have brought you ? ”

Has the sinner never, even in the midst of the wildest gayety and of his sinful pleasures, felt a strange bitterness, an unaccountable melancholy, a feeling of utter loneliness, settling upon his heart ? He could not tell the cause ; he felt weary and heartsick, he knew not why. What was the cause of this strange, unaccountable sadness ? It was the voice of our Heavenly Father calling him from the base and shameful pleasures of the world to His pure and blessed love.

As soon as we have committed our first sin, God calls us back by sending us remorse of conscience. He has been calling us unceasingly ever since. He calls us now once more by the voice speaking through these pages. Is it not astonishing that God should call and seek the sinner, who is His enemy? One does not seek an enemy except through revenge, through hopes of gain, or from motives of fear. But God has nothing to hope or fear from a sinner; He can annihilate him or precipitate him into hell. Why, then, does the Majesty of Heaven seek the sinner? It is because God is a Father, who loves and desires the salvation even of His erring children.

Not only does God seek the sinner, but he seeks him *first*, and invites him to be reconciled. When the question arises of being reconciled with an enemy, it is extremely painful to nature to make the first advance; each one believing himself to be in the right, desires to receive satisfaction for the offence that has been offered. What outrages have been committed against God! We are invariably the aggressor, and the fault is always on our side. Nevertheless, God seeks the sinner first by the graces with which he enlightens his mind and touches his heart. And not only does He invite the sinner to be at peace with Him, but He even makes the invitation in the manner of a suppliant, just as if God Himself were the offender, and the sinner had it in his power to inflict evil on Him. "We are, therefore," says St. Paul, "ambassadors for Christ, God, as it were, exhorting by us. For Christ we beseech you, be ye reconciled to God."*

Many are there whom their Heavenly Father has been following and calling and inviting these thirty, forty, and even sixty years. In the revelations of St. Bridget,† we read that there was a rich man, as noble by birth as he was vile and sinful in his habits. He had given himself over by

* 2 Cor. v.

† Lib. vi. c. 97.

an express compact as a slave to the devil ; and for sixty successive years had served him, leading such a life as may be imagined, and never approaching the Sacraments. This prince at last came to die ; and Jesus Christ, to show him mercy, appeared to St. Bridget, and commanded her to tell her confessor to go and visit him, and exhort him to confess his sins. The confessor went, and the sick man said that he was not in need of confession, as he had often approached the sacrament of penance. The priest went a second time ; but the poor slave of hell persevered in his obstinate determination not to confess. Jesus again appeared to St. Bridget, and told her to request her confessor to return. He did so. On this occasion the priest said to the sick man : “ I suppose you do not know who sent me to you three times to hear your confession. It is Jesus Christ Himself, for He appeared three times to His great servant, and each time requested me, through her, to exhort you to make your confession, as he wished to show you mercy.” On hearing this the dying man was touched and began to weep. “ But how can I be saved,” he exclaimed, “ I who for sixty years have served the devil as his slave, and have committed innumerable sins ? ” “ My son,” answered the priest, encouraging him, “ do not doubt ; if you repent of them, on the part of God I promise you pardon.” Then, gaining confidence, he said to the confessor : “ Father, I looked upon myself as lost, and already despaired of salvation ; but now I feel a sorrow for my sins which gives me confidence, and since God has not yet abandoned me, I will make my confession.” And he made his confession four times on that day, with the greatest marks of sorrow, and on the following morning received communion. On the sixth day, contrite and resigned, he died. After his death, Jesus Christ again appeared to St. Bridget, and told her that that sinner was saved ; that he was then in Purgatory ; and that she should

pray for his delivery from the Purgatorial flames. Thus we see that God dearly loves the sinner even when he is guilty of sin, or else he would not constantly follow him and call him back from his evil ways.

And even though the sinner turn a deaf ear to the voice of the Lord, God does not immediately abandon him, but waits patiently for his return. "Behold," says the Lord, "how I stand at your door and knock." * "He that rises early to seek wisdom, shall not go far before he meets it, he shall find it sitting at his door." † How infinite is the goodness and mercy of God! He is not content with coming to seek us and knocking often at the door of our hearts; but as if He were tired of knocking, He sits down at our door, to let us know that He would have entered before had He not found it shut. Instead of going away and leaving us, He chooses rather to sit down and wait, that we may be sure of finding Him as soon as we open the door.

Though we may have delayed to open our heart to God and to comply with His inspirations, yet He has not, on that account, gone away. He has too great a desire of entering to be so easily repulsed, and therefore He sits at the door of our heart and waits until we open and let him in. To understand in some measure the excessive patience and charity with which God waits for the return of wretched sinners, we have but to consider with what earnestness He has, at all times, recommended the important lesson of patience and meekness to all those who labor in persuading the wicked and impious to leave their evil ways. Moses once complained to God in the following moving words: "Why wilt Thou have me carry this people in my bosom as a little child or an innocent lamb? Dost Thou not remember that they number more than two millions of souls, that they are a rebellious nation, daily manifesting their faithlessness? How can I bear them all in my

* Apoc. iii. 20.

† Wisd. vi. 15.

bosom Still, this complaint did not induce God to change His will. He insisted that Moses should speak to those passionate and indocile men precisely as he would speak to a child which has cast itself into his arms. "Moses," said God to the holy lawgiver, "it is my will that thou lead my people back to their duty and maintain them therein, in no other way than by the mildness and patience of paternal affection."

What one day befel Elias is worthy of notice. This holy man possessed sincere and burning zeal. If what he desired was not done quickly, he listened to nothing but his zeal. He even went so far as often to wish himself dead. Now, God once allowed him to see something which might serve as a most wholesome lesson to him. On a certain occasion, in which his zeal was at its height, and at the very moment when he had wished for death, God commanded him to keep himself ready to see his Majesty. He immediately heard so great a crash that it seemed as if the elements were let loose and the mountains were moving from their places. But the prophet was told that God was not in this awful crash. Then he heard the stormy whistling of a furious north-wind, which appeared to uproot everything. Again was the prophet told that God was not in the storm. This was followed by a fire which threatened to lay everything in ashes. Once more was he told that God was not in this destructive fire, that the Divine Majesty took no pleasure in such violent, stormy things. At last, the prophet perceived an east wind blowing gently and evenly, with a slight, an extraordinarily sweet rustling. "Ah!" said Elias, "this is certainly the Lord God." He cast himself upon the ground, and, veiling his head with his mantle, worshipped God, and gave Him thanks for having made known to him the great workings of His Divine Spirit, and what was most pleasing to Him upon earth—viz., patience and forbearance with sinners.

One day Father Martin Gouttierez, S.J., complained very much to Almighty God about the faults of certain souls. He thought his complaints were very just, especially as all his zealous efforts for their amendment had been unavailing. Our Lord was pleased to instruct him in the following manner. He showed him, in a vision, a silver vessel containing a very small heart, which was drowning in a few drops of water. Near this vessel the zealous father saw another full of water, and containing a heart so large that the entire mass of water was scarcely sufficient to wet it. Whilst reflecting on the meaning of this vision, he heard the following words: "The heart which you see drowned in a few drops of water represents your own, which immoderately grieves at the slightest occurrence. But the large heart, which does not sink in spite of the great quantity of water, represents the heart of God, which, without being discouraged, bears with all men, with idolaters, infidels, heretics, the impious, and sinners of every kind, awaiting the happy day of their conversion with the most admirable patience. Now this patience, goodness, and long-suffering of the Lord must be your model."

The whole of the New Testament is full of great examples of the patience and meekness of Jesus Christ towards sinners. All His precepts might be reduced to the one precept of patience and mercy. One day, when the Apostles felt themselves provoked because the inhabitants of a certain town would not allow them to enter it, they asked of our Divine Saviour to make fire come down from heaven upon the inhabitants of that town. But the God of goodness and mildness blamed the apostles for this request, telling them that they spoke not as Apostles, that this severe spirit was not the spirit which He had so often preached and sought to impart to them. "Ye know not of what spirit ye are. I will have mercy,"* said He. With what

* Matt. ix. 13.

great patience and meekness did He not for three years bear with Judas, His betrayer, without depriving him of the office of procurator, or deposing him from the Apostleship! He did not even so much as reveal his crimes to any one.

“The Lord waits,” says Isaias, “that He may show mercy to you.”* For this reason it is that God prevents the devil from killing the sinner and dragging him into hell. He forbids the earth to open under his feet, He suffers him to breathe His air, He preserves his life often, even miraculously amidst the greatest dangers, He delays His punishments as long as possible, that the poor ungrateful wretch may repent and at last return to His friendship. And, when obliged to punish, when He can delay no longer, He does it with such slowness that He discharges His anger little by little, to oblige the sinner to repent of his sins and to arrest the arm of His vengeance. God might have destroyed the city of Jericho in one instant, yet He spent seven days in destroying it. In like manner, He might have destroyed the world by water in one moment, yet He spent forty days in this work. Why? In order that those who were destroyed might have time for doing penance, and so be saved.

Father Patrignani (*Corona d'Esempi*, IV. Esempl. 13, t. iv.) relates that a certain woman had committed a great many crimes, but Jesus patiently waited for her conversion. As the woman seeks the lost penny in the sweepings, so did Jesus seek this lost soul in the very midst of her sinful career. This woman at last went so far in her wickedness as to receive Holy Communion unworthily. After having received, she drew from her mouth the sacred particle and placed it in a handkerchief. She then went to shut herself up in her room, where she threw the Blessed Sacrament on the ground, and began to trample it under her feet. But

* Isa. xxx. 18.

lo! she casts her eyes down, and what does she see! She sees the Sacred Host changed into the form of a beautiful Infant, but all bruised and covered with blood; and the Infant Jesus said to her: "What have I done to you that you treat me so ill?" Upon which the wretched creature, full of contrition and repentance, threw herself on her knees in tears, and said to Him: "O my God, dost Thou ask me what Thou hast done to me? Thou hast loved me too much." The vision disappeared, and the woman changed her life and became a model of penance. Oh! the great patience of God in waiting for the return of the sinner.

When Solomon perceived that God acted in so patient and mild a manner towards poor sinners, he could not help expressing his joy at it in the Book of Wisdom. "Great God," he cries, "what joy it is for me to see Thee, the mighty Lord of Hosts, dealing with men so mildly and acting towards us so considerately, as though Thou didst fear to hurt us or cause us the least sorrow! Oh! how happy are we that Thou canst do all Thou willest, and that Thou willest not what Thou canst do. By this, Thy gentle manner of treating us Thou surely dost wish to teach us that it is peculiar to Thee to be merciful and to spare." "Therefore, despise not, O sinner!" says St. Paul, "the riches of the goodness and patience and long-suffering of the Lord." For you must know that God is so patient with you in order that you may do penance and return to His friendship. But God does not simply seek out and call the sinner to repentance; He does not only wait patiently for his return, but He receives the repentant sinner with the greatest joy. "If a man's wife abandon him," says the Lord, "shall he receive her again? But yet, if you return to me, I will receive you."* "Yes," says the Lord, "if I shut up heaven, and there fall no rain, or if I give orders and command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among

* Jer. iil. 1.

my people, and my people upon whom my name is called, being converted, shall make supplication to me, and seek out my face, and do penance for their most wicked ways: then will I hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sins, and will heal their land." * "Indeed," says our Divine Saviour, "I will not cast out him that cometh to me." † He was never known to reject any one who addressed himself to Him. To draw sinners after Him, He condescended to frequent their company, and to eat with them. He declared that it was for them that He came into the world.

He illustrates His love and tenderness for sinners, and the great joy with which He receives them, by four excellent figures. The first is that of a merchant, who sold all that he possessed for the purpose of buying a pearl of great price. This pearl is our soul, and the merchant is the Son of God. What has He given to purchase our soul? His goods, His blood, His sufferings and labors, and His life.

The second figure by which our Saviour illustrates His love and joy in receiving sinners, is that of a woman who, having lost a piece of silver, lit her lamp and swept her house, and, after having found it, invited her friends to rejoice with her. "Thus," says the Son of God, "there is joy in heaven upon one sinner doing penance." "Observe," says St. Thomas, "that the Son of God does not say that He has bought this drachm of silver (by which is meant our soul, at the price of His blood, but that He has found it; for He so esteems a soul that He believes that He has it for nothing, although He has paid the price of His blood for it. He does not invite the angels to rejoice with the man that was lost and then found, but with Himself, as if the sinner were of such an infinite consequence to Him that He could not enjoy the felicity of His heavenly kingdom without him."

* 2 Paralip. vii. 13, 14.

† John vi. 37.

The third figure is that of a shepherd, who left ninety nine sheep and went into the desert to search for one that was lost, and after having found it placed it upon his shoulders, and invited all his friends to rejoice with him. When he found the strayed one he did not beat it with his crook or allow his dog to punish it for wandering, nor did he drive it before him, but lifted it in his arms, and bore it on his shoulders, perhaps because he thought it was fatigued, or perhaps because he feared it would wander astray again. "Thus," says the Son of God, "there shall be more joy in heaven upon the sinner doing penance than for the ninety-nine who are just."

The fourth figure is that of the Prodigal Son, who returned, worn out with miseries and debaucheries, to his father's house. His father, seeing him approach, ran out to meet him, and placed a ring on his finger; after which he treated him as one who returned in triumph, with every mark of rejoicing, without once reproaching him for his crimes and disobedience, or giving him an opportunity to utter the apology he had framed for the occasion. Behold how Jesus receives a sinner who, in the character of a true penitent, returns to Him! He receives him by His graces and inspirations. He gives him the kiss of peace, forgets the past, receives him into His love and confidence, fills his heart with consolation, and bids the angels to take part in His joy.

How great is the loving condescension of Jesus! When we consider the sanctity of God, that awful sanctity which once cleansed, by the deluge, a guilty world—when we consider this awful sanctity, we naturally think that when Jesus came into personal contact with public and notorious sinners, His divine sanctity would flash through and crush to the earth those guilty creatures. But no! That He might banish our fears, Jesus even assures us that He came not to judge but to save the world. "I am

come," He says, "not to call the just, but to call sinners to repentance."

There is especially one wicked and notorious sinner who comes to Jesus. She comes to hear, not indeed out of any wish to do better, but merely because her sister Martha has persuaded her to come. She goes along the street in all the haughty pomp and insolence of her beauty. Her long hair is glittering with jewels; she throws shameless glances around her as she goes; there is sin in every look and word and gesture. She goes to hear Jesus of Nazareth preach, and to brave His power. At last, she comes within His influence; her eyes are bent upon Him; the sweet sound of His voice reaches her ear. Ah! what ails her now? What a sudden change comes over her! Her eyes are riveted on Jesus; her color comes and goes. The tones of that voice have gone down to depths of her soul of which she herself knew nothing. A moment ago, and she gloried in the triumph of her fascinations; she exulted in her sinful power. Young, rich, and beautiful, she set public opinion at defiance. She had many admirers, and that was the height of her ambition. But now, all at once a new light flashed upon her soul: it is the knowledge of the deep, shameful degradation of sin. And then there comes upon her with a crushing force the terrible view of God's dread justice, of death, and of eternity. Ah! where shall she hide herself? Whither shall she fly? She would have instantly sunk to the earth in shame and terror had she not been upheld by the gentle hope of God's mercy. And now she rushes home with a wild tumult in her heart which she had never felt before. Who could that preacher be that so strangely stirred her soul? Who was that man who knew her soul so well? At the very sound of His voice a new light had flashed upon her mind, her trembling will had yielded to His sway, and her proud heart had been crushed within her. Who could it be but God? She had heard of the Emman-

uel—the God with us, who was to be born of a virgin, and, enlightened by divine grace, she felt that this must be He. Yes, she had seen her God, and yet, guilty as she was, she did not die. No, she felt no dismay; on the contrary, a strange, unutterable yearning took possession of her soul; she could not, she would not, rest; she must see that heavenly face again. She thought in her heart: “He may banish me from His presence, but I must gaze once more upon the face of my God, even though it be for the last time.” She learned that Jesus was to be at a banquet in the house of a certain Pharisee. She knew that her presence there would be felt as a leprosy by all, but what cared she? What was the world to her now? She cast off her silken robes and put on a homely attire. She tore the glittering jewels from her hair and trampled them under foot. With dishevelled locks flowing down her shoulders, and an alabaster vase of precious ointment in her hands, she walks rapidly through the streets to the house of the Pharisee. The guests stare wildly at her as she enters; their looks are full of anger and disgust. But she heeds not their looks, she sees no one but Jesus. All eyes follow her in wonder as she kneels at Jesus’ feet. They think that He will shrink from her; but see! Magdalen grows bolder still—she even kisses His sacred feet with her sinful lips! Surely, now, the God of all sanctity will arise and spurn this wicked woman. But no; He bears the touch of her polluted lips. The bursting tears of this poor lost creature flow unrebuked upon His feet, and with her long hair she wipes away the moisture of her tears. At this sight the Pharisee is scandalized, and says in his scornful heart: “This man is certainly no prophet; if he were, he would have spurned this sinful woman from him” And the Pharisee spoke the truth. Jesus was no prophet. No! He was more than a prophet; He was God—the God of love—the God of mercy—the God who had created that poor lost creature and called her by

name, who had allured her and spoken to her heart. And now Jesus turned His eyes upon her and then upon the Pharisee, whose thoughts He read, and amid the breathless silence of all present, He said: "Simon, I have a word to say to you." And the Pharisee answered, "Speak, Master." Then Jesus said: "A certain man had two debtors; the one owed him five hundred talents, and the other only fifty. But as they could not pay him, he forgave them. Now, which of the two, think you, loveth him most?" And Simon answered: "I suppose he to whom he remitted the most." Then Jesus said: "You have judged right." And, pointing to Magdalen, He said: "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, and you gave me no water for my feet but she, with her tears, hath washed my feet, and with her hair hath wiped them. You gave me not the kiss of friendship, but she, since she entered, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she with precious ointment hath anointed my feet. Therefore I say to you: her manifold sins are forgiven, because she hath loved much." And then He said gently to the sinful Magdalen: "Go now in peace; thy sins are forgiven thee." Ah! where will you find a heart so tender, so compassionate, as the loving heart of Jesus? With what loving tenderness did He not receive His weak and erring apostle! Peter had denied Him thrice, and had even declared, with an oath, that he knew Him not. At that moment his eyes met the eyes of Jesus. It was a moment when all dignity and beauty were gone from the face of our Lord. His face was livid and swollen with blows, marked and disfigured with blood; but the unutterable sweetness of the Godhead was looking in gentle reproaches through those pleading, earnest eyes, and the unhappy apostle was pierced to the heart. He hurried away from the throng, and wept and sobbed aloud as if his heart would break. To his dying day he never forgot that look of Jesus, and whenever

he thought of that reproachful glance, his tears began to flow anew.

Even now our Lord Jesus Christ, who is present in the Blessed Sacrament upon the altar, looks forth upon all. He looks upon the good and innocent with a quiet joy. But on some He looks with fixed and anxious gaze. It is that young man, that young woman, who have strayed from the path of innocence; or, perhaps, it is that hoary-headed sinner that has stayed away from the Sacraments for years. The eye of Jesus is on that soul, watching to see if he will open his heart and return, at last, to His fond embrace. There is a crowd around the confessional. Our Blessed Saviour sees them all. But there is one among them that Jesus looks upon with more than a mother's compassion: it is that poor sinner who sits there bowed down with the heavy weight of his sins. Jesus loves to see the good and the pious go to confession; but He is even more pleased when he sees a poor sinner, who has been away for years, kneeling at last at the feet of the priest.

Perhaps that poor sinner is in doubt whether he will go to confession or not. He is trying to rouse up courage and confidence to enter the confessional. Perhaps he is in danger of making his confession in a careless manner, without true sorrow and firm purpose of amendment. Perhaps he is in danger of concealing some sin, or unwilling to do what the priest requires of him. Fear and despair are weighing on his heart, and harrowing his conscience. With him this confession is a matter of life and death. Whilst he sits or kneels there, with clouded brow and saddened face, he feels that he is unworthy to be among those innocent children and those good, fervent people. But there is an eye upon him watching him tenderly and sadly: it is the eye of Jesus Christ.

Have you never seen how the surgeon hurries along on the battle-field or in the hospital? He passes by those who

are but slightly hurt, those who are recovering. At last he meets with one who is dangerously wounded ; at once he stops and bends over him with the most tender anxiety. It is precisely in this manner that our dear Saviour acts. He flies first to that poor man, whose soul is covered with the deadly wounds of sin. He tries to rouse him from his insensibility ; He tries to soften his heart, to encourage him, and raise his drooping spirits. At last, when the poor sinner has finished his confession, and obtained the absolution of the priest, Jesus Christ presses him to His heart with unbounded joy, and the angels of Heaven rejoice with Jesus over this poor sinner "even more than over ninety-nine just that need not penance."

Take courage, then ; let no man say he is too weak, that his passions and temptations are too strong to be resisted. God Himself will assist you to overcome every temptation, and "with God's assistance you can do everything." You will find that as soon as you form the firm resolution to break with sin, to go to confession, to lead a good life, that very instant your conscience will cease to torment you, and you will experience a peace of heart which surpasses all understanding. But you will say, perhaps, "I know that God's grace is all-powerful, but how do I know that God will give me this grace ?" Such a thought is in itself an offence and a dishonor to God. What ! did not God give His grace to Mary Magdalen, who was so long the slave of sensual passion ? Did He not give His grace to David, who was guilty of the horrid crimes of murder and adultery ? Did not God give his grace to St. Augustine, who was guilty of the most shameful crimes, and even of heresy ? Is not your soul of as much value as the soul of Mary Magdalen ? Did not our Blessed Lord shed his heart's blood for you as well as for her ? He suffered and died for each one of us as well as He suffered for them. He thought of us when He prayed and wept in the garden till the blood

oozed out through every pore of His body. He thought of us during every hour of His bitter passion. He thought of us and prayed for us as He hung bleeding and dying upon the cross. It is true that we have repaid all God's favors with the blackest ingratitude, but God Himself says: "I will not execute the fierceness of my wrath, because I am God and not man." *

The conversion of King Manasses is a most striking proof of this truth. Manasses was twelve years old when his father died. He succeeded him on the throne, but did not succeed to his piety and fear of the Lord. He was as impious as his father was pious towards God and His people. He introduced again all the abominations of the Gentiles, which the Lord had extirpated from among the children of Israel; he apostatized from the Lord; he brought in again and encouraged idolatry; even in the temple of the Lord he erected an altar to Baal; he introduced into the temple of the true God such abominations as were never heard of before, and which are too shameful to relate. To crown his impiety, he made his son pass through fire in honor of Moloch; he used divination, observed omens, and multiplied soothsayers to do evil before the Lord, and to provoke Him. The Lord often warned him through His prophets, but in vain. At last "the Lord spoke to His prophets, saying: Because Manasses, king of Juda, hath done these wicked abominations, beyond all that the Amorrhites did before him, and hath made Juda also to sin with his filthy doings, therefore, thus saith the Lord the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring evils upon Jerusalem and Juda, that whosoever shall hear of them, both his ears shall tingle. I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the weight of the house of Achab, and I will efface Jerusalem, as tables are wont to be effaced . . . and I will deliver them into the

* Osee xi. 9.

hands of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies."

Manasses, instead of entering into himself, added cruelty to idolatry. He shed so much innocent blood that, to use the words of Holy Writ, "he filled Jerusalem up to the mouth." According to Josephus, "he went so far in his contempt for God as to kill all the just of the Children of Israel, not sparing even the prophets, but taking away their lives day by day, so that streams of blood were flowing through the streets of Jerusalem." Now, do you think so impious a wretch could be converted? O wonderful power of prayer! So great is thy efficacy with God, that should a man be ever so impious and perverse, he will not fail to obtain forgiveness of the Lord if he prays for it with a sincere heart. "And the Lord" says Holy Writ, "brought upon Jerusalem the captains of the army of the king of the Assyrians, and they took Manasses and carried him, bound with chains and fetters, to Babylon. In his great distress and affliction he entered into himself, and he prayed to the Lord his God, and did penance exceedingly before the God of his fathers, and he entreated Him, and he besought Him earnestly; and the Lord heard his prayer, and brought him again to Jerusalem unto his kingdom." From that time forward he endeavored to serve the Lord the more fervently the more grievously he had offended Him. He abolished idolatry, destroyed the temples, altars, groves on the high places put up in honor of the heathenish deities, repaired the altar of Jehovah in the Temple of Jerusalem, and sacrificed upon it victims and peace-offerings, and offerings of praise, and he commanded Juda to serve the Lord the God of Israel.

How good, how merciful the Lord is! How His ways are above the ways of men! A man commits a murder, and is hanged for it. He may be very sorry for his crime; nevertheless, he will not be forgiven. A man commits the most

terrible crimes against God ; he is sorry, and God forgives him, and receives him again with joy into His fond embrace. "Therefore, it is better for me," says King David, "to fall into the hands of the Lord (for His mercies are many) than into the hands of man."*

You say there is no hope for you because you have been too great a sinner. But there is hope precisely because you have been so great a sinner. Why has God borne so patiently with you during the many years that you have been living in sin ? Why did God not strike you dead when you were uttering such dreadful curses ? Precisely that you may return at last to His arms and may cease to offend Him. God wishes to save you. He really wishes to forgive you, no matter how enormous your sins may be. If He did not really wish this, you would have been long ago burning in hell. "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, saith the Lord God, and not that he should be converted from his ways and live ? . . . When the wicked turneth away from his wickedness which he hath wrought, and doeth judgment and justice, he shall save his soul alive ; because he considereth and turneth away himself from all his iniquities which he has wrought, he shall surely live and not die. Therefore will I judge every man according to his ways. O house of Israel ! saith the Lord God, be converted and do penance for all your iniquities, and iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions by which you have transgressed, and make to yourself a new heart and a new spirit : and why will you die, O house of Israel ? For I desire not the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God, return ye

* 2 Kings xxiv.

and live."* "On what day soever the wicked man shall turn from his wickedness, his wickedness shall not hurt him. None of the sins which he hath committed shall be imputed to him." God promises to forgive every sinner. He makes no exception. He says that even though your sins were as red as scarlet, as numerous as the sand on the sea-shore, and as black as ink, you shall be made whiter than snow. Men who say there is no hope for them because their sins have been too great, would do well to ponder over the story told in the Life of St. Augustine. This great bishop, while walking on the sea-shore one day thinking about the greatness of Almighty God, and especially of the greatness of His goodness and mercy, saw a little child sitting close to the sea. The child had a small spoon in its hand, and was dipping the spoon into the water. St. Augustine went to him and said: "My little child, why are you dipping that spoon into the water?" And the child answered: "I want to empty all the water out of the sea." "But," said St. Augustine, "it is of no use for you to try to empty the great sea with that little spoon. If you were to try for ever, you could not do it." The child then said: "I am an angel from heaven, and God has sent me to tell you that it would be easier for me to empty the sea with this little spoon, than for you to understand all the greatness of God's goodness and mercy." God's mercy is an ocean which has no depth, and whose bounds we cannot behold. Is it not rashness to attempt to drain it by saying there is no hope for the sinner? The greatest sin that can be committed is to despair of God's mercy. To doubt of God's mercy is to deny either His infinite power or His infinite goodness; that is, to be guilty of blasphemy. To doubt of God's mercy is to doubt of the Gospel and of the very existence of God. Read the Holy Scripture, open the pages of history, and it will be found that no sinner ever had recourse to God with an

* Ezech. xviii. 21-23, 27-32.

humble and contrite heart who did not obtain the pardon and full remission of all his sins. If God did not really intend to forgive, would He have so repeatedly promised to pardon? God commands us, under pain of eternal damnation, to hope in His mercy. Would He do this, if He did not intend to pardon those who sought forgiveness? Would God invite all to come to Him if He intended to cast them off? God commands us, under pain of eternal damnation, to forgive our enemies as often as they offend or injure us. Will He not, then, forgive us, His creatures, all our offences against Him? He does not expect us to be more merciful than He Himself is. God even condescends to beg and entreat us to return to Him. "Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you." He desires our salvation more than we ourselves desire it. Like a good father, He ever entreats us to have pity on our poor souls.* What more can even God Himself do for us? He swears a solemn oath that He will forgive: "I swear that as I live I do not wish the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live."

Father Lireus relates the following story: A certain young nobleman gave himself up to gambling. In one afternoon he lost all his money, and contracted a great debt besides. Enraged at this loss, he commenced to utter the most frightful blasphemies. "Now, O Jesus Christ!" said he blasphemously, "I am done with Thee; I no longer care for Thee nor for Thy threats; Thou canst not make me suffer a greater loss than I have sustained to-day." What happened? In the afternoon of that very day he met with an accident. The carriage in which he was riding home was upset and he broke his leg. The fracture was very bad and brought on a dangerous fever, so much so, that the physicians entertained serious doubts about his recovery. The young man now understood that God was able to make him undergo a still greater loss than that of his money, to wit,

* *Ecclus. xxx. 24.*

his wealth and even his life probably. But instead of entering into himself and asking God's pardon, this great sinner blasphemed God more than ever. "God," said he, "Thou rejoicest in showing how it is in Thy power to punish me still more severely. Very well, show me now that Thou canst inflict on me the greatest punishment possible. And since, after the loss of my money, health, and life, there is no greater misfortune than that of eternal damnation, show me how it is in Thy power to cast me into hell. If I were Thy God"—horrible to relate, horrible to hear—"if I were Thy God, I would do this to Thee also!" O most horrible blasphemy! Why was it that hell did not open that very instant to devour so execrable a blasphemer? But God is merciful. As the impious young man in his despair and rage refused to listen to any good advice, God inspired His servant to enter his room and whisper into his ear the following words: "My lord, there is a good friend of yours here who wishes to take leave of you." "Who is it?" asked the dying sinner; "let him come in." At these words the good servant showed him a crucifix, saying: "Behold, my lord, this is your best friend, who wishes to say a word to you." At that very moment the grace of God touched the heart of the blasphemer, and enlightened him to see his miserable state. He raised his eyes and fixed them on the crucifix. The eyes of the crucifix seemed to become alive, and to cast looks of mercy upon the dying man, and he heard a voice coming forth from the crucifix saying unto him: "My child, I will show you that it is in my power to do to you what is best and not what is worst. Had I wished to cast you into hell, I could have done so long ago. But no, my child, I will do to you not what is worst, but what is best. You say that were you my God, you would cast me into hell for ever. Now, I am your God—well, I will make you happy with me in Heaven for all eternity, although you have not deserved such a mercy." At

this voice of mercy the dying sinner took the crucifix into his hands, pressed it to his lips, and shed a torrent of tears ; he made a general confession with such contrition of heart that even his confessor could not help weeping. After having received the last Sacraments, he continued to shed bitter tears of sorrow and true love for God, and soon after died in this happy state.

How true are those words that the Lord spoke one day to Blessed Henry Suso. "Imagine," said He to His great servant, "that the whole world was on fire, and then see how quickly a handful of straw cast into it is consumed. But I forgive a repentant sinner a thousand times quicker than a handful of straw can be burned up in the largest fire." "Ah, yes!" exclaims the holy Curé of Ars, "all the sins ever committed are but a grain of sand beside a huge mountain if compared with the mercy of God." Hence the Lord wishes every priest to tell poor sinners what He one day commanded His prophet to tell them for their encouragement, namely, "Say to the faint-hearted, take courage, and fear not. If the wicked man shall do penance of all his sins, I will no longer remember his iniquities which he hath wrought. Why will ye die? Return ye and live. My children, why will you destroy yourselves, and of your own free will condemn yourselves to everlasting death! Return to me, and you shall live."

Have you forgotten that I am that Good Shepherd who goes about seeking the lost sheep, and, on finding it, makes a festival, saying: "Rejoice with me because I have found my sheep that was lost" ?* And He lays it upon His shoulders rejoicing, and thus carefully keeps possession of it in His fond embraces, for fear He should lose it again.

Have you forgotten that I am that loving Father who, whenever a prodigal son that has left Him returns to His feet, does not thrust him away, but embraces him, and as

* Luke xv. 6.

it were fainted away for the consolation and fondness which He feels in beholding his repentance.

With what tenderness did I, the moment she repented, forgive Magdalen, and change her into a saint ! With what kindness did I forgive the paralytic, and at the same moment restore him to bodily health !

And with what sweet gentleness, above all, did I treat the woman taken in adultery ! The priests brought that sinner before me, that I might condemn her ; but I, turning towards her, said : " Hath no man condemned thee ? Neither will I condemn thee ; I who came to save sinners. Go in peace, and sin no more." It was out of compassion for sinners that I have been pleased to be bound in swaddling-clothes, that they might be released from the chains of hell ; that I have become poor, in order that they might be made partakers of my riches ; that I have made myself weak, to give them power over their enemies ; that I have chosen to weep and shed my blood, in order that by my tears and blood their sins might be washed away." It is thus that the Lamb of God, the Saviour of the World, speaks to encourage every poor sinner to return to His friendship.

But the sinner may say, " How can Almighty God ever again look upon me with kind eyes after I have offended Him so many times in the most atrocious manner ? Indeed, I have rendered myself undeserving of such a grace." So spake the prodigal son in the Gospel : " Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee. I am not now worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants."* It is quite natural for a poor sinner to think and to speak thus. But it is still far more natural for God to rejoice in the sinner's conversion. It is true, we have not behaved towards Him as good sons, yet notwithstanding that, our Heavenly Father has not lost His fatherly affection for us. Let us return to Him in confidence, call Him

* Luke xv. 19.

by the endearing name of Father, and His heart will be touched with the greatest compassion for us; it will plead in our favor far more powerfully than we ourselves, or even the saints in Heaven, can plead. The reproach that He will make is to give us the kiss of peace. As to our past offences, He will, as Holy Writ assures us, cast them behind His back, thus giving us to understand that He will never look at them again, that He will forget them, and never make them the cause of the least reproach. "I will bring them back again," says the Lord, "because I will have mercy on them, and they shall be as they were when I had not as yet cast them off. And their heart shall rejoice as through wine, and their children shall see, and shall rejoice, and their heart shall be joyful in the Lord." * In Holy Scripture we read of the conversion of many sinners. But never do we read of a reproach made by God to a sinner after his conversion. Magdalen was a public prostitute; Matthew a great usurer; Zaccheus a notorious sinner; Peter denied his divine Lord and Master; Thomas was for some time quite obstinate in his unbelief. Yet, after their conversion, Jesus Christ never reproached any one of them with a fault of their life past.

When our dear Saviour reproached Jerusalem with its faithlessness and obstinacy, He said: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent to thee." † Why did He not say, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that hast killed the prophets," as had happened there so many times? For the reason just given—as God no longer remembers past offences which have been once forgiven, so He never makes any of them the subject of reproach.

After even the best of men have forgiven an insult, they cannot help experiencing now and then a certain feeling of aversion and dislike for those by whom they have been offended. But such is not the case with Almighty God. On the

* Zach. x. 6, 7.

† Luke xiii. 34.

contrary, our Heavenly Father rejoices so much the more, the greater the sinner is who is converted and returns to His embrace.

How great is the joy which holy and zealous priests experience in the conversion of sinners! St. Francis Xavier, St. Bernardine of Sienna, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Alphonsus called the confessional their paradise, on account of the joy which they experienced in reconciling truly penitent sinners to God. St. Ignatius of Loyola required the missionaries of his Society to let him know every month how many sinners they had converted, how many confessions they had heard, and how many heretics and infidels they had received into the Church. He read the letters containing these good tidings with the greatest joy. His joy at the conversion of sinners was often so great that it prevented him from sleeping at night.

At the close of a mission in which St. Francis de Sales had spent day and night hearing confessions, he wrote to St. Jane Frances de Chantal as follows: "These have been golden days for me. Oh! what joy I feel at the conversion of so many souls! I have been reaping in smiles and tears of love amongst my dear penitents. O Saviour of my soul! what a joy was mine to see among others a young man of twenty, brave and stout as a giant, return to the Catholic faith, and confess his sins in so holy a manner that it was easy to recognize the wonderful workings of Divine grace leading him back to the way of salvation. I was quite beside myself with joy, and gave him many a kiss of peace." Now, if holy priests experience such joy at the conversion of sinners, how much greater must the joy of Jesus Christ be at their return to His friendship, since He is their Chief Pastor, who purchased them at the price of His precious blood!

Let us not, then, be afraid of Jesus Christ, but be afraid rather of our own obstinacy, if, after having offended Him.

we will not listen to His voice, which invites us to reconciliation. "Who is it that shall condemn?" says the apostle. "Christ Jesus who died, who also maketh intercession for us."* If we persist in our obstinacy, Jesus Christ will be constrained to condemn us, but if we repent of the evil we have done, what fear need we have of Jesus Christ? Who has to pronounce sentence on us? Think, says St. Paul, that the self-same Redeemer has to sentence thee who died just in order that He might not condemn thee, that self-same One who, that He might pardon thee, has not spared Himself.

And we may know, further, that, should we love Him, our past sins will not stand in the way of our receiving from God those specially great and choice graces which he is wont to bestow on his most beloved souls; for our Heavenly Father does not only rejoice so much the more, the greater the sinner is who returns to His grace and friendship, but He is wont also to take particular care of him in order not to lose him again. Hence He gives him many efficacious graces to overcome his temptations and passions. He reminds him from time to time of his former sins, in order that they may serve as so many tongues to tell him constantly to love his God and Father so much the more, the more he has sinned. Thus it often happens that those who for some time were great sinners, after their conversion serve God more faithfully and love Him more ardently than many of those who never lost their baptismal innocence.

"There is no respect of persons with God," says St. Paul.† The Lord distributes His graces to truly repentant sinners as well as to innocent souls. Elias was a holy prophet of the Lord. At his command the clouds rained, and at his bidding they ceased to rain. But Jacob, the hermit, enjoyed the same power after his conversion from a very

* Rom. viii. 34.

† Col. iii. 25.

sinful life. Innocent Daniel was thrown into a den of lions, but those wild animals respected the servant of God. A similar respect was shown by wild animals to St. William of Aquitania, although he had for some time been a great persecutor of the Church. We read that St. John—that most innocent apostle—was cast into a caldron of boiling oil without suffering hurt. And we read the same of St. Boniface, who was but a sincerely penitent sinner. It is related in the *Lives of the Saints* that St. Raimond, who always led an innocent life, walked dry-shod over the water. St. Mary of Egypt, who led a very sinful life for seventeen years, did the same many times after her conversion. She spent several years without taking any corporal food, just as if she had been another innocent Catherine of Sienna. Thus, God grants the same favors to holy penitents as to innocent souls, and thereby fulfils the promise made by Him through the prophet Ezechiel : “ The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness.” *

But not only do holy penitents receive the same favors as innocent saints, many of them even seem to be more highly favored by God. Which of the apostles was made Head of the Church? Was it St. John or St. James, whose lives were always blameless? Not so; it was St. Peter, who denied his divine Master three times. And did not St. Paul, who persecuted the Christians with implacable hatred, become a vessel of election to preach the Gospel among the Gentiles? The innocent apostle St. John always remained faithful to our Lord, and stood beneath His cross at Mount Calvary. Yet it was not to him that our dear Saviour appeared first after His resurrection, but to St. Peter, His sinful apostle. It was not Martha but Magdalen, the penitent, that sat at the feet of our Lord and listened to his sacred doctrine; and it was she, too, to whom our Lord first ap-

* Ezech. xxxiii. 12.

peared after His resurrection. How great are the graces and privileges which our Lord afterwards granted to so many holy penitents ! To St. Augustine, for instance ; to St. Margaret of Cortona. To this last saint, in particular, who had formerly spent several years in sin, God revealed the place prepared for her in Heaven amongst the seraphim ; and even during her life He showed her many signal favors, inso-much that, beholding herself so highly favored, she one day said to God : “ O Lord, how is it that Thou lavishest so many graces on me ? Hast Thou, then, forgotten the sins I have committed against Thee ? ” “ And have you forgotten,” our Lord answered, “ what I have told you, that when a soul repents of her faults I no longer remember the outrages of which she has been guilty towards me ? ” During a certain period of her life our Lord called her by the name *poverella* (poor little one). But this name became at last wearisome to her. So, full of confidence in the goodness of our Divine Saviour, she one day asked Him frankly, “ And when, O Lord, shall I hear myself called Thy daughter ? ” Our dear Lord replied that she was not as yet worthy of being called by that sweet name, as she was still a child of sin, but that she should make a good general confession of her sins. These unexpected words were a thunderbolt to Margaret’s heart. Bursting forth into most bitter tears, she turned suppliant to her beloved father St. Francis, to her beloved protectress St. Mary Magdalen, begging them to obtain for her a clearer knowledge of and a more intense sorrow for her faults, so that she might be entirely cleansed from the least remnant of sin. She was heard to such an extent that in her general confession she spent a whole week exposing every circumstance of her disorderly life, with such a deep sorrow that it would be difficult to show a Peter more full of compunction, a Magdalen more full of grief. After she had finished her general confession, she was permitted to receive Holy Communion. No

sooner had she received our Lord than she heard Him say to her, "My daughter!" At the sound of this sweet name she fell into an ecstasy of inward joy. Having recovered a little, she exclaimed: "O supreme sweetness and goodness of our dear Lord! O happy day for me, promised by my Jesus! O word full of consolation, that Thou hast deigned to call me daughter!" Thus is verified what Holy Scripture says: "All things work together unto good,"* even sins, as the gloss subjoins.

But will not innocent souls murmur at this love and mercy of God for sinners? Will they not speak as the faithful son in the Gospel: "As soon as this thy son is come, who hath devoured his substance with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf"?† Oh! no, holy innocent souls! Show yourselves content with all this. Remember that you, too, are weak creatures, and rejoice in the graces and favors which Jesus Christ confers on all those who went far astray from Him for some time, but afterwards left their evil ways and returned to the Good Shepherd. Persevere in your piety, and your reward is most certain. "My son, thou art always with me, and all I have is thine."

But do you, wretched sinners who have hitherto been prevented from returning to the Lord by the consideration of the great number and hideousness of your sins, hearken to the words of the wise man: "Think well of the Lord. Think of the Lord in goodness, and seek Him in simplicity of heart."‡ Think of the Lord in a manner worthy of His goodness and exceedingly great mercy. Should you have committed all the sins that ever were committed, should you have stayed from confession for how long soever, let all this be no reason for you to stay away any longer. God is ever ready to receive you with open arms, to embrace you as His dearly beloved children, with so much the more joy and gladness the further you have strayed away from Him.

* Rom. viii. 28.

† Luke xv. 30.

Wisdom i. 1.

“Fear not,” said He one day to St. Margaret of Cortona—“fear not to obtain the full remission of all thy sins. Thou wilt infallibly obtain it, and thou shalt inflame others colder and more coy. I have destined thee as an example to all poor sinners, in order that they may clearly understand that I am that compassionate Father who welcomes back His most rebellious and most contumacious children, and that, if they ask my pardon and prepare to receive my grace, they will ever find me ready to give it just as quickly as I have turned to thee.”

From the moment of your repentance, all the disorders, all the crimes, of your life, no matter how black, how hideous they may be, will be drowned, as it were, in the ocean of God’s mercy, and disappear as the darkest night disappears at the rising of the sun. “As far as the east is from the west,” says the Lord, “so far I will put away from me all your iniquities.*

How mean, how cruel, is that sinner, both toward God and himself, who will not return to God merely because God wishes, as it were, to force His mercy upon him! What black ingratitude to reject the mercy of God, and to continue to return evil for good! Having heard the merciful voice of the Lord, do no longer harden your heart against it. Say in all sincerity: Yes, O merciful Lord! it is Thy word, Thy infallible promise, Thy love, Thy mercy, that I hear. Can I delay to turn to Thee with a full and sweet confidence, and beg Thee to hear, at my return, the sighs and groans of my sorrow, the humble and sincere protestation of my reciprocal love? Since Thou deignest to be so merciful to me, oh! come and take possession of my heart as Thou didst of the heart of the Apostle St. Peter after his lamentable fall. Come and enable me, with him, to say with as much truth, “Lord, Thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love Thee.” †

* Psalm cii. 12.

† John xxi. 17.

But as to you, O holy, penitent Christians who have for some time so grievously offended Almighty God, but who have been again received in His fond embraces, never forget this goodness of your Heavenly Father in your regard—He who loves you as if you had always led a most innocent life, as if you always remained as pure as when you came forth from the sacred laver of baptism. Never forget what you owe to such a good God, to such a merciful Father. What wonder that Magdalen shed most bitter tears for thirty years after her conversion, although she had been assured by Jesus Himself that her sins were forgiven? What wonder that St. Peter constantly wept over the offences he had offered to his divine Master, although Jesus Christ Himself had granted him the forgiveness of his sins? Alas! if we consider that Almighty God, who stands in need of no one, who in a moment could destroy the whole world, has taken no other revenge on poor, penitent sinners than favoring them, we feel constrained to love Him *every day more and more* ardently. O dear Saviour! O merciful Jesus! I too am quite grateful, and know but too well how good, how merciful Thou hast been to me, the most wretched of sinners. It is therefore my firm resolution to love Thee always, and to praise Thy mercy in time and for eternity.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PRODIGAL'S PRAYER—PRAYER THE KEY TO GOD'S MERCY.

ONE day St. Anselm met a boy playing with a bird. The poor bird tried to fly away, but it could not, as the boy held it by a thread which he had tied to its leg. The little bird tried to fly away again and again, but the boy always pulled it back, and laughed and leaped for joy as he saw it flutter and fall upon the ground. St. Anselm stood gazing for a considerable time at this strange sport, and showed the greatest compassion for the poor little bird. Suddenly the thread broke and the little bird flew away. The boy began to cry, but St. Anselm expressed the greatest joy. All present were astonished to see so great a prelate take such interest in this childish sport. But St. Anselm said: "Do you know what I thought of on seeing this boy amuse himself thus with the bird? Ah! it is thus, thought I, that the devil makes sport of sinners. He ties them at first, as it were, with a slender thread, and then sports with them as he pleases, drawing them from one sin into another." Some he ties by indifference to God and to their own salvation, others by too great love for the goods of this world; some, again, he ties by the sin of avarice, others by the sin of uncleanness, others by the sin of theft. Many a one of the unfortunate sinners, seeing his great misery, will cry out like St. Augustine: "How long, O Lord! Wilt Thou be angry for ever? Remember not my past iniquities." And perceiving himself still held back by them, he cast forth miserable complaints, and reproached himself, saying: "How

long? how long? To-morrow! to-morrow! Why not now? Why does not this hour put an end to my filthiness?" These complaints he uttered, and he wept with most bitter contrition of heart, not feeling courage enough to renounce his evil ways.

"Oh! would to God," cries many a sinner, "that I were freed from this accursed habit of drinking, of swearing, of sinning against the angelic virtue of holy purity! What am I to do?" Like the little bird, this poor sinner wishes to get free from his sinful habits, but in vain. The devil keeps him tied, and drags him back into his old sins. At last the unhappy wretch, seeing that he cannot get free, gives way to despair.

The poor sinner, deprived of God's grace, is like a child that is helpless and abandoned. He is unable, of his own strength, to rise from a state of sin and recover the friendship of God. "If any one," says the Council of Trent, "asserts that without the preceding inspiration and grace of the Holy Ghost man can believe, hope, love, or repent in such a manner as he ought, let him be anathema." Consider well the word: "Repent in such a manner as he ought." Judas repented, for Holy Scripture says of him: "Then Judas, who betrayed Jesus, seeing that He was condemned, repenting himself, brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and ancients, saying: I have sinned in betraying innocent blood."* But this was not such repentance as is required for justification; it proceeded only from natural motives, and consequently ended in despair. "And Judas," as Holy Scripture says, "went and hanged himself with a halter."

We may, indeed, fall into sin without any assistance; but rise from it we cannot, except by the special assistance of God. I can pluck out my eyes, but to set them in again properly is beyond my power. I can likewise lose the grace of God,

* Matt. xxii. 3.

but to recover it again without God's assistance is more than I can do. St. Peter remained chained in prison until an angel came and said to him, "Arise," and the chains fell from his hands.* Had St. Peter not been awakened by the angel, he would not have thought of rising; and had he thought of it, he would not have been able to free himself from his fetters. In like manner, the soul which has once been chained by sin will scarcely ever think seriously of being converted and returning to God. Should it even think of this, all its efforts will not suffice to break the chains of sin and free it from the slavery of the devil, if God's grace does not come to its aid.

God alone can change the sinner's heart. "The heart of man," says Holy Writ, "is in the hand of the Lord; He turns it whithersoever He wills." God can in one moment enlighten the sinner so that he understands the misery and danger of his state. The Lord can so move his will that he makes a firm resolution to amend. He can in one moment inspire the heart of the sinner with so much confidence in His mercy that he firmly hopes for the forgiveness of all his sins. Now, it is this unspeakably great grace that the sinner surely obtains if he prays for it. The prodigal prays: "Father, I have sinned; I am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." His father's heart was touched by this prayer; he is forgiven and received back with joy. Let all sinners pray in like manner to their Heavenly Father, and let them rest assured that fire does not burn so more quickly than God enlightens and forgives sinners when they ask His light and forgiveness. The woman of Cana had no sooner said "Lord, help me!" than she was heard, and received the grace of conversion. The Samaritan woman, too, received the grace of conversion as soon as she asked our Lord for the living water of which He had spoken to her. No

* Acts xli. 7.

sooner had the publican prayed in the Temple, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!" than he was instantly forgiven, and left the Temple justified. No sooner had the thief on the cross said to our Saviour, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom!" than he was forgiven, and even received the promise that he would be with Him what day in Paradise.

There is one who is as yet groping in the darkness of unbelief and error; he is far away from God, from the true religion, from the means of salvation. Now, if he prays to God for salvation, his prayer will be heard.

Chlodwig (Clovis), heathen king of the Franks, when, with his whole army, in imminent danger of being defeated by the Alemanni, prayed as follows:

"Jesus Christ, Thou of whom Chlotilde (the king's Christian wife) has often told me that Thou art the Son of the living God, and that Thou givest aid to the hard-pressed and victory to those who trust in Thee, I humbly crave Thy powerful assistance. If Thou grantest me the victory over my enemies, I will believe in Thee and be baptized in Thy name. For I have called upon my gods in vain. They must be impotent, as they cannot help those who serve them. Now I invoke Thee, desiring to believe in Thee; do, then, deliver me from the hands of my adversaries."

No sooner had Chlodwig uttered this prayer than the Alemanni became panic-stricken, took to flight, and soon after, seeing their king slain, sued for peace. Thereupon Chlodwig blended both nations—the Franks and the Alemanni—together, returned home, and became a Christian.

There is another. He is not as yet a member of the Catholic Church. He is living in doubt and uncertainty as to which of all religions is the true one. Common sense tells him that no salvation is possible except in the true religion. Now, God will enlighten him to know the true religion, if he perseveres in prayer for this grace.

The Rev. F. Thayer, when as yet a minister of the Anglican Church, lived for some time in great doubt as to whether the Anglican Church was the true one. So he had recourse to God; he prayed for light in the following manner:

“God of all goodness, Almighty and Eternal Father of mercies, and Saviour of mankind, I implore Thee, by Thy sovereign goodness, to enlighten my mind and to touch my heart, that, by means of true faith, hope, and charity, I may live and die in the true religion of Jesus Christ. I confidently believe that, as there is but one God, there can be but one faith, one religion, one only path to salvation, and that every other path opposed thereto can lead but to perdition. This path, O my God! I anxiously seek after, that I may follow it and be saved. Therefore I protest before Thy divine Majesty, and I swear by all Thy divine attributes, that I will follow the religion which Thou shalt reveal to me as the true one, and will abandon, at whatever cost, that wherein I shall have discovered errors and falsehoods. I confess that I do not deserve this favor for the greatness of my sins, for which I am truly penitent, seeing they offend a God who is so good, so holy, and so worthy of love; but what I deserve not I hope to obtain from Thine infinite mercy, and I beseech Thee to grant it unto me through the merits of that precious blood which was shed for us sinners by Thine only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth, etc. Amen.”

Truly, so sincere and humble a prayer could not remain unheard. God enlightened him so as to see that the Roman Catholic Church was the only true church in which alone salvation was possible. He renounced his heresy and became a Roman Catholic.

There is another. He is a Roman Catholic, but his faith in some of the truths of the Catholic Church is not very lively; for instance, in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in

the Blessed Sacrament. From this want of faith proceed his coldness in prayer and irreverent behavior in church, his wilful neglect of hearing Mass on Sundays and holy-days of obligation, his rare reception of the sacraments, his lukewarmness, and so many other faults. Now, if he prays and continues to pray to our divine Saviour for a lively faith, for a thorough change of his heart, his prayer will be heard.

A young cleric once heard a missionary preach on the Real Presence and on the great love of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The missionary spoke with as lively a faith as if he saw Jesus Christ with his eyes. The young cleric was struck at this, and said to himself: "O my Lord! what shall become of me? I, too, must one day preach on Thy Presence in the Holy Eucharist; but how feeble will my words be in comparison with the words of this pious priest!" The young cleric related this afterwards, and he added that from that time forward he had always begged of Jesus Christ the gift of a lively faith in His Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament, and that he had done so frequently during Mass, particularly at the time of the Elevation. Gradually his faith became so lively that in this light of faith he saw our Lord more distinctly in the Blessed Sacrament than He could have been seen with the eyes of the body, had He vouchsafed to show Himself in a sensible manner.

There is another. He has been leading a life of debauchery for many years. His evil habits are deeply rooted. He seems to be entirely under the control of his sinful passions. He feels indeed the great misery in which his soul is plunged. He now and then tries to rid himself of it; but in vain. He feels too weak to resist his passions. He is tempted to despair of his salvation. Whence shall he obtain courage and strength to free himself of his evil habits and lead a better life? Ah! he must pray to the Lord to assist him, and the Lord, who is the most merciful Father, will go to

meet His erring child, and deliver him from his enemies and sins.

Father Hunolt, S.J., relates that there was once a certain vicious young man who often sincerely wished to change his life, but who, on account of his deeply-rooted evil habits, believed his conversion utterly impossible. He thought that whatever he might do would be of no avail to excite true sorrow and contrition in his heart. One day, overwhelmed with melancholy, he left home in order to seek some relief in the society of his companions. On leaving the house he met at the door a poor beggar. As soon as he saw him he remembered the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Whatsoever you have done to the least of my brethren, you have done to me." He then went and took a loaf of bread, and, throwing himself on his knees before the beggar, he gave it to him, thus praying in his heart: "My Lord Jesus Christ, I adore Thee in the person of this poor man! Most gladly would I give Thee my whole heart, but I cannot, because it is too hardened; for the present, at least, take, I beseech Thee, this loaf of bread, which I am still able to give. Do with my heart whatever Thou wilt." O the wonderful power of prayer? No sooner had he prayed thus than he felt a most bitter sorrow for all his sins, and shed a torrent of tears. He made a good confession, and ever afterwards received many extraordinary graces.*

There is another. He does not wish to hear of the misery of his soul, in order not to be tormented by the stings of his conscience; he even hates the very thought of conceiving a desire of amendment; he has become hardened in sin; were hell open before his eyes, he would still continue to offend Almighty God; he resembles an incarnate demon. He has not only no sorrow for his sins, but he has not even the least desire to ask of God the grace to be sorry for them.

* Eleventh sermon on the "Following of Christ."

How can he be saved who has not even the least desire to obtain anything from God ?

This, I must confess, is a pitiable, but not a desperate, state ; for, if such a hardened sinner will pray with perseverance, God will give him the desire to pray for the grace of contrition. Has He not declared, "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that he be converted and live" ? God has the greatest desire to see all sinners saved, and He is ready at any time to give them the graces necessary for their salvation ; but He wishes that they should pray for every good thought and desire, and for efficacious grace to put their good desires into execution. Let such a sinner pray : "Lord, give me a true desire to pray to Thee for my salvation" ; let him persevere in thus praying, and then let him rest assured that God will finally enlighten his mind so as to understand the miserable state of his soul. He will touch his heart with true sorrow for his sins, and strengthen his will so as to be able to rise from his fatal state and be saved.

In 1858 there lived in Philadelphia a young lady who had gone so far in her wickedness as to commit the most heinous crimes, no longer through weakness, but out of pure hatred of God. Her accomplice had died suddenly in the very act of a most shameful sin, and afterwards appeared to her enveloped in flames of fire. From that time forward she felt in herself as it were an inward burning so intense that she imagined herself in hell, and uttered most frightful cries. This punishment, far from making her repent of her sinful life, served only to increase her hatred of God. For three months she did nothing but pour forth the most execrable blasphemies against God, the blessed Mother of God, and the saints. The sins which she committed during that time are so enormous that the mere recital of them would make one shudder with horror. Ah ! so impious a wretch as this, you may

think, will never be converted. But, O the wonderful power of prayer! So great is its power with God that, should a man be ever so impious and perverse, he will not fail to obtain forgiveness if he asks for it. The great sinner of our story had a lady friend, by whom she was repeatedly requested to say some prayers. She refused for several days to pray, but yielded at last to the urgent request of her kind friend to ask God's pardon. The promise of Jesus Christ, "Whosoever asks shall receive," was soon fulfilled. At that time some of our Fathers gave a mission in Philadelphia. She went to one of them to make her confession. Her sorrow for her sins was so great that she could hardly speak in the confessional. She requested her confessor to make known the great mercy which God had shown her after having prayed for it a few times.

St. Alphonsus told indeed a great truth when he said "that one of the greatest pains of the damned is the thought that they could have saved themselves so easily by asking of God to give them true sorrow for their sins and a firm will to amend their lives. No one, therefore," says the saint, "can excuse himself before God by saying that his salvation was impossible, on account of the difficulties and obstacles which he met in the way of salvation. God will not hearken to such an excuse; He will answer: 'If you had not strength and courage enough to overcome all obstacles and difficulties in the way of your salvation, why did you not ask me to come to your assistance?' If a man has fallen into a deep pit, and will not take hold of the rope that is let down to draw him up, it is clearly his own fault if he perishes. Thus the sinner, too, is lost through his own fault, if he neglects to pray for his salvation. 'I have waited for you so many years,' the Lord will say to the sinner, 'in the hope that you would at last ask for the grace of true repentance and for the amendment of your sinful life. Had you only asked, you would have instantly received;

for to call on me for assistance is to be delivered and saved.'”

Would to God that all those saints now in heaven who for a while led a sinful life on earth could stand before us at this moment! Would that we could ask them in person: “Beloved souls, why did you not die in your sins? Why were you forgiven?” “Ah!” they would answer, “it was because we implored the Lord for mercy and forgiveness.” “But how did it happen that you did not relapse into your former sins? How were you able to persevere in leading a penitential life until death?” “Beloved brethren,” they would answer, “know that this good-will, this strength and courage, came not from ourselves. No; of ourselves we were too weak, like you. We were often tempted to commit the same sins again; but then we had recourse to prayer, and God assisted us and preserved us from sin. Prayer makes the soul unconquerable. No evil spirit has the least power over her as long as she prays. It is, then, by prayer that we were enabled to give up sin, to lead a penitential life, and to die as holy penitents.”

Ah! would that some of the souls now burning in hell could come forth and tell us why they were lost! What would the impenitent thief say who was crucified at the same time with our Saviour? — “Ah!” he would say, “I confess that I was a very wicked sinner throughout the course of my whole life; I committed many crimes, for which I have deserved hell a thousand times. But my companion on the cross was not less guilty; his sins cried not less to Heaven for vengeance; yet he ascended from his cross into Heaven, whilst I, from mine, was hurled into the depth of hell; he rejoices for ever, while I am tormented in everlasting fire. What brought him into Heaven? It was the simple prayer: ‘Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.’ What brought me to hell? It was

the neglect of prayer ; I remained hardened in my sins and died as a reprobate because I would not pray."

Let us rest assured that all the damned would give the same answer were they allowed to tell us the cause of their damnation. O language full of terror to hardened sinners who do not wish to give up their sinful lives and return to God ! O language full of sweetness and consolation for all those who pray to be delivered from their sins, and to be received again as children of God !

Ah ! would to God that I could stand on a high mountain, surrounded by all the sinners in the world. I would cry aloud, at the top of my voice : " Pray, pray, pray ! You will not die in your sins ; you will be forgiven ; you will be saved, if you pray ! God does not require that you should go and sell everything and give it to the poor, or be put to the rack, or be nailed to a cross, in order to save your souls. Conditions so painful as these He does not require of you. He requires the easiest in the world ; all that He asks is that you should pray and sincerely entreat Him to save you. He is still the same God ; He is still as powerful to help you, just as merciful to forgive you and to receive you again into His friendship, as He was when He said to the good thief : ' This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. ' " He will be to you the same powerful, the same merciful God that He was to St. Magdalen the Penitent, to St. Augustine, to St. Margaret of Cortona, to St. Mary of Egypt, and to many other souls whom He has delivered from their sins, and even changed into saints. But you must avail yourselves of His promise : " Amen, amen I say unto you, whatever you ask the Father in my name, He shall give it to you. " * Jesus Christ has made this promise, and He will never fail to keep it. " **Heaven and earth will pass away, but His word shall never**

* John xvi. 23.

pass away." He alone is lost who does not pray ; he alone will be saved who perseveres in prayer. On the last day all the saints of Heaven, as well as also all the damned souls of hell, will bear witness to this truth ; on that great day we too shall bear witness to it, either with the elect on the right, if we *have prayed during life*, or with the damned on the left, *if we have neglected to pray*.

In order to be sure to bear witness to this truth with the elect on that great day, let us say every day of our life the following ejaculation with all the fervor of our heart : " My Lord Jesus Christ, for the sake of Thy sufferings grant me such faith, hope, charity, sorrow for my sins, and **love for prayer as will sanctify and save my soul.**"

CHAPTER XVII.

MISAPPREHENSION OF GOD'S MERCY — DELAY OF CONVERSION.

ST. ALPHONSUS, in his book *Glories of Mary*, tells of a poor sinner who, among other crimes, had killed his father and brother, and was in consequence a fugitive. One day in Lent, after hearing a sermon on the mercy of God, he went to confess his sins to the preacher himself. The confessor, on hearing the enormous crimes which he had committed, sent him to the altar of the Blessed Virgin, that she might obtain for him heartfelt sorrow and the pardon of his sins. The sinner obeyed and began to pray. The sorrow obtained for him by the Mother of God was so great that he suddenly died from excess of grief. On the following day, while the priest was recommending the soul of the deceased sinner to the prayers of the people, a white dove appeared in the church, and let a card drop at his feet. The priest took it up, and found the following words written on it: "The soul of the deceased, on leaving the body, went straight to heaven. Continue thou to preach the infinite mercy of God."

The Lord of mercy addresses to every priest the words: "Continue thou to preach the infinite mercy of God." There are many sinners who despair of salvation. They give up all hope of ever recovering the grace of God. Some say to themselves: "Could I but once more be reconciled with the Almighty, I would never again commit a mortal sin. I would lead a far different life." On such sinners God has mercy, for He sees them ready to profit by His

mercy. He therefore sends them a good priest, a charitable friend, to encourage them to hope in His mercy. He permits them to hear or read a sermon on His goodness to inspire them with the hope of forgiveness. Without delay they cast themselves at the feet of the priest, make a sincere confession of their sins, with the firm purpose of abandoning their sinful lives, and of being, for the time to come, faithful in the service of God.

But there is another class of sinners represented by the prodigal's companions. They, too, are glad to hear the infinite mercy of God extolled. But instead of accepting with gladness the pardon that God so generously offers them, they obstinately neglect His offer. If a young woman who keeps sinful company with a young man is told to leave his company and go to confession, what will be her answer? "O Father! I cannot give him up now; I am not yet prepared to go to confession. What would people say if I were to keep company with him no longer?" If a revengeful woman is told to speak to her enemy, and to make amends for all she has said about her neighbor, what would she say? "I cannot do it; I cannot speak to that woman."

If a man is told to restore everything that he has stolen or gained by dishonest means, what answer would he make? "I cannot do it; I should be reduced to beggary." If a young man who has been for years a slave to sinful habits is asked when he intends to give up his shameful habits and go to confession, "Oh!" he will say, "I cannot go now, but I will go at some other time. There is time enough to do penance and to be reconciled with Almighty God. I wish to enjoy myself a while. The Lord is merciful. I shall do penance and make a good confession at some other time, at least on my death-bed, and God will forgive me."

Yes, all say: "God is merciful. I shall do penance some other time, and God will forgive me." True, God is merci-

ful. If He were not merciful, who would be living to-day? And He has even sworn an oath that He will forgive us, no matter how numerous, no matter how enormous, our sins may be, provided that we turn to Him with our whole heart; but without real change of heart, without true, earnest contrition, God will not, God cannot pardon us—no, not even for a single venial sin. By putting off our conversion from day to day, we deliberately declare in the face of Heaven and earth, and renew the declaration every day, that we will not do penance, even though we have the power and the time to do so. Of our own free will, therefore, we exclude ourselves from God's mercy and compel God to condemn us. By putting off our conversion we wilfully abuse God's mercy and make of it a motive for sinning. We remain in sin and refuse to do penance because God is patient and merciful. Does not this partake of the malice of the devil? Because God is good, we will be wicked; because God is merciful, we will remain hardened; we will persevere in sin and remain impenitent just because God is patient and long-suffering. We continue to sin on from day to day, and from year to year, because God does not punish us instantly and cast us into hell in the very act of sin. This course of action is a fearful mistake and misapprehension of God's kindness to us. If we reject the pardon that God now so generously offers us, the time will come when we shall ask for pardon, and it will not be given us. "You shall seek me," says Jesus Christ, "but you shall not find me, and you shall die in your sins."

In order to understand aright this fearful truth, we must remember two other great truths: God numbers, weighs, and measures all things. He numbers the stars; He measures the drops of rain which He sends upon the fields of the good and of the bad. He watches still more carefully over things of greater importance—over the number of graces which He has designed for each one of us, that we may

work out our salvation. He also watches over the number of sins which He is willing to forgive us, over the number of insults which He is willing to endure from us. He has decreed from all eternity how far He will allow each one to continue in his wicked life. He has decreed the number of times that He will grant pardon. He has resolved on the measure of sins that He will bear with before utterly forsaking the sinner. God waits, perhaps, for a certain sermon, a certain good advice, a certain inspiration; and if that inspiration, if that last call, be neglected, then woe to the sinner, for God will call him no more. The graces which God had destined for him have been all abused, and shall not be granted him. The number of times that God had resolved to pardon him is exhausted; the measure of his sins is filled to overflowing.

God promised Abraham the land of Canaan, but He did not fulfil His promise until four hundred years had passed away. The reason of this was because "the iniquities of the Amorrhites were not yet filled up."* That is, the number of their sins was not yet great enough to cause them to be utterly abandoned by God. "If they continue to fill up the measure of their sins," said the Lord, "I will destroy them all, and give their country to your posterity."

The Lord said to the same patriarch: "The cry of the abominations of Sodom and Gomorrhah has reached my ears; the measure of their enormous sins is filled up."† There is no more mercy for them; I abandon them to my justice.

What in each case is this fatal number? How great is this measure? The secret is hidden from men. No one can know it for certain; we only know in general that for some the number of sins is seemingly greater, for others less. For the angels it seemed very small. The first sin they committed caused their eternal ruin. Millions of souls are cast into hell for one mortal sin. The unhappiness of the

* Gen. xv. 16.

† Gen. xviii.

human race comes from one single mortal sin. God made the measure a little greater for the inhabitants of Damascus. He said by the mouth of one of the prophets: "I will pardon three times to the people of Damascus, but if they commit four I will not give them grace to repent."

He gave a still greater number to the children of Israel in Palestine: "They have," said He by Moses, "already tempted me ten times, and have not obeyed my voice; they shall not see the land I promised with an oath to their fathers." Thus the measure of sin is unequal, the number of offences different. Reprobation begins for some at their first mortal sin; for others at the tenth; for others at the hundredth—all depends on the will of God. A master who has two insolent servants may endure the insolence of the one longer than that of the other. Nor is it necessary that the sin which completes this terrible number must be greater than the others; it is enough that it be the last. The minute preceding the striking of the clock is not longer than other minutes, but it makes the clock strike precisely because it is the last. Sometimes the last sin may even be less enormous than others already committed. To fall into a precipice, it is not necessary that the last step taken be longer than the preceding steps—it may be much shorter; nevertheless, it is enough to cause the fall.

Now, when the measure of sins is filled up, what happens to the sinner? One of two things: either he dies immediately, or God still allows him to linger on earth. If he dies immediately, God, without waiting a single moment, casts him into hell. In this way He chastised the rebel angels, not leaving them a moment for repentance, as it were, after their sin had been committed. Thus He daily punishes many sinners, carrying them off in the flower of their youth, in the midst of their licentiousness, by a fall, by the stroke of an enemy, or by some other accident.

A young man, a native of Borgo, Taro, a carpenter by

trade, was excessively addicted to drunkenness, and showed himself unwilling in confession to correct this great vice. Father Piamonti consequently dismissed him without granting him absolution. Meanwhile, the young man, instead of entering into himself and repenting, went about boasting that he had been absolved by another priest, and had even received the blessed Eucharist on occasion of the general Communion. For this impiety he was very soon punished in a most exemplary manner; for the day had not yet passed before the sacrilegious young man received a dangerous wound from the cut of a sword. Every one was persuaded that the misfortune happened to him in punishment of his crime; but the wretched man fell again into worse disorders than before, and was in a few months visited by divine justice with a more severe chastisement still, being shot dead, without a moment of time wherein to make his reconciliation with God.*

If God does not always punish the sinner immediately when the measure of his sins is full, but allows him still to remain on earth, He withdraws His efficacious graces from him, and delivers him up to a reprobate sense. St. Basil remarks that when a sinner has filled up the measure of his sins his evils become incurable; he gets outside the circle of God's mercy and into that of His justice, from which he shall never escape.

“I shall bear with the citizens of Damascus; I shall bear with the inhabitants of Tyre; I shall bear with the children of Ammon until their third and fourth sin, but their fourth sin shall be their last. I shall have mercy on them no longer. I shall punish them, I shall let them die in their sins, and condemn them to eternal torments.”

Suppose a man were condemned to quit the country within thirty days at the penalty of losing his life if found within the realm after that time. What would be thought

* *Life of Father Piamonti*, chap. vi.

of him if, instead of making every preparation for his departure, and eagerly seizing the first opportunity to depart, he were to spend his time in drinking and gambling and amusing himself to the last moment? It would be thought that he had lost his senses. A very similar case is that of one who has committed mortal sin, and who knows that the sentence of eternal death is pronounced against him the moment after the commission of that sin. Death may overtake him at any moment, and if he dies in such a state he will surely be lost for ever. Is it not utter folly to continue so? Sooner or later that sinful life must be given up if a man has any hope or desire for salvation. This life has been given us to do penance, and yet we have wasted the greater part of it in vain and sinful amusements, in hoarding up perishable riches. We have lost so many good opportunities of abandoning sin, and those opportunities will never return.

But the sinner is apt to think that there is time enough to do penance. "I shall do penance when I am old," he says. But suppose you should die in your youth, because the number of your sins is filled up? You will do penance next year. But suppose you should die this year, because the measure of your sins is filled up? What then? You will go to confession next Easter. But suppose you should never see another Easter, because the number of your sins is filled up before that time? You will go to confession in a month or two, as soon as you have finished the business that you have on hand. But are you sure that you will live yet another month? Next week, then, I will give up that bad company, I will restore that money, those ill-gotten goods. But suppose you should die before the end of this week, because the number of your sins is filled up? To-morrow, then, I will go to confession. To-morrow? Why not to-day? Perhaps the morrow will never dawn for you, because the measure of your sins is filled up. I do not think

that I will die so soon. That is the very reason why you should fear; for death will come when you least expect it. At last death comes upon you, and you are not prepared. Ah! do not believe the devil; he is your bitter enemy, he is plotting your ruin. Believe rather the priest of God, believe your friends, believe Jesus Christ, who loves you, who has shed every drop of His blood for you. Jesus has your life in His hands; He knows what He says when He tells you that death shall come upon you when you least expect it.

But you say that you will make a good confession and settle everything at the hour of death. Are you sure that at that hour you will be able to make your confession? You may die senseless, you may die without a priest; and what then? Do you not know that it is a terrible thing to fall unprepared into the hands of the living God? Do you not know that, in order to obtain forgiveness of your sins, you must have true contrition? With the grace of God, true contrition is easy of attainment for those who sin through weakness or inattention, because when they are calm and self-possessed they hate sin. Every human heart feels pity for them; much more the all-compassionate heart of God. But as for those who know that they are in mortal sin, and are resolved to remain in it; who continue to sin on with wilful determination; who wilfully reject all the graces that God now offers them; who continue year after year to heap sin upon sin, till the evil becomes a fixed habit, a dire necessity; who knowingly and obstinately continue to sacrifice their reason, their will, their memory, their imagination, their body and soul, their hope of heaven, and God Himself, to sin and to the devil, knowing at the same time that their lives are in the hands of God, that any moment may be their last, that at any moment their guilty souls may be hurried before the judgment-seat of God—for them there is so little hope of true contrition at any future time that

to make them contrite would require a miracle of grace—a miracle more extraordinary than would be required to raise a corpse to life.

Many say that they intend to give up sin and do penance in their old age. But if they give way to all their wicked passions until they are old, they will not be able to conquer them in their old age. It may be said that many have enjoyed the world when young, and yet in their old age they have stopped sinning and have led edifying lives. This is true. Many have stopped sinning in their old age—that is, they have stopped committing public and notorious sins. They have given up the ball-room, the theatre, the house of infamy. But what does this prove? Does it prove that they have really given up sin and every affection for sin? Does it prove that their heart is really changed? Not at all. If that were the case, then those who are locked up in the penitentiary would be saints. They do not go to the ball-room, or to the theatre, or to the house of infamy. But have they on that account really changed their lives and given up sin? Open the prison doors and let them free again, and you will see whether or not they have really given up sin. This is precisely the case with those old, hoary-headed sinners who seem to have given up sin. Exteriously they may have changed, simply because they cannot help it; but in their hearts, in their desires, they are still the same. The man who has grown old in sin no longer goes to the house of infamy, but he goes thither in thought and desire. Like the snow-crowned volcanoes of South America, his head is white with snow, but his heart is burning with the fire of lust.

Who has ever had a racking headache, or toothache, or a burning fever, and tried to pray or to examine his conscience while thus suffering? It is almost impossible to pray or to examine one's conscience while in such a state. But it is much harder to change the heart, to give up sin, than it

is to pray. If it is hard to examine the conscience when a person is sick, it is a thousand times harder to do it when dying. And many would put off their conversion to the hour of death. In that last and awful moment, when the memory is confused, who can remember all his sins? In that last moment, when the strength is gone, who will be able to hate sin and love God with all his strength? In that last moment, when speech is lost, who will be able to make a full, sincere confession? How will he who has given scandal be able then to repair all the scandals he has given during his whole life? How will he be able to bring back all the souls that he has led astray and ruined? How will he be able to restore the property and good name of those whom he has injured? Can all this be done in one moment?

Let the sinner look back for a moment on his past life. See how God has called you again and again to give up sin and return to a life of virtue. God spoke to you through the priest; and, lest you should hear the voice of God, you stayed away from the sermon; or if you did go sometimes, it was not to follow the advice of the priest of God, but to criticise and condemn what he had said. God gave you health and abundance, and you used these gifts only to forget and offend the Giver. God brought you to a sick-bed, He reduced you to poverty, and you murmured and blasphemed against Him, saying: "What have I done that God should treat me thus?" God warned you by the terrible examples of those of your acquaintance who had to suffer sickness and poverty on account of sins that were not as grievous as those you had committed. You have seen some even who were hurried out of this life unprepared, and who died in their sins. God sent you these warnings, and yet you did not heed them; you continued to live on as sinful and careless as ever. God called you and warned you through the voice of your conscience. Sometimes He spoke in gentle

tones, sometimes in terrible earnest. Sometimes He entreated you to give up sin ; sometimes He threatened you with the fearful chastisement of hell. God spoke to you amid the hum of business ; He spoke in the silence of midnight, in solitude, amid the gayest amusements, and in the midst of your guilty pleasures. Day after day, year after year, He called you, but you hardened your heart and turned a deaf ear to all His threats, to all His entreaties. You would say : “ I have no time now to think of such matters ; I will think of them hereafter when I have more leisure.” At another time you would say : “ What great harm have I done ? I think I am as good as other people.” Thus you continually resisted the Holy Ghost, and stifled the voice of your conscience amid the noisy brawl of the drinking-saloon and the gambling-table. At last, when conscience ceased to warn you, you rejoiced, as the worthless son rejoices because his father is dead and can reproach him no longer. It is thus God called and warned you ; and though you could have easily given up sin, you did not. Do you think, then, that you will be able to give up sin when you are old, when you are stretched on your death-bed ? No, you will not ; but you will say : “ I have seen several who have led a sinful life, and yet on their death-beds they sent for a priest, made a good confession, and died an edifying and a beautiful death.” Yes ! they died such a beautiful death. Ah ! could those souls return to earth, they might tell a different tale. May God preserve us from such a beautiful death ! They died such an edifying death. Well, it may be, it is not impossible ; but, in truth, it is very improbable. If such a sinner was really converted on his death-bed, it was only by a miracle of God's grace ; and, of course, miracles are possible, but they are not frequent. But should God work such a miracle for us ? Why not expect that after death God will raise us to life again, as He has raised many others ? The careless Catholic, the infidel, the dishonest man, the

drunkard, the member of the secret society, the slave of impurity, men who have despised and mocked the priest during life, are very willing to send for the priest at the hour of death, and to acknowledge that the Sacraments are very useful and even necessary. But are we to understand, by the simple act of sending for a priest at the last moment, that they hate sin and love God with their whole heart? How do such men generally make their confession? One says to the priest: "O Father! I have such a racking headache I cannot remember anything. I include all my sins; please give me absolution." Another says: "I have nothing particular to confess. I am not a robber or murderer, thank God."

Another loses his speech and dies, without being able to make any confession at all. This is the last confession of such sinners—that confession on which depends their weal or woe for all eternity.

It may be that the dying sinner confesses his sins, kisses the crucifix, and receives the Sacraments; but is his contrition sincere and supernatural? Does he weep for having offended God, for having lost Heaven and deserved hell? Not at all. He is sorry merely because he must die so soon, because he is about to receive the just punishment of his crimes. This is the case with the careless Christian on his death-bed. Could he by the special favor of God recover from his sickness, he becomes just as careless as ever; he goes back to his old habits, he despises the priest, and laughs at his own fears for having been so easily frightened. A doctor was attending a young woman who had led a very unchristian life. Before her death she sent for the priest, made her confession, and received the last Sacraments with every sign of true contrition. The doctor was naturally astonished at such a sudden change in his patient, and after the priest had departed said to her: "Are you, then, really in earnest? If you were to recover, would you really give up sin and lead a virtuous

life?" The woman laughed and said, "You must think that I am very silly; I have not even the remotest idea of such a thing." "Why, then," asked the doctor, "did you go to confession and receive the Sacraments?" "Oh! you see," was her answer, "one should not be singular. It is the custom when people are dying to send for the priest. As soon as I get well I will try to make up for all the time I have lost here." Such sacrilegious hypocrisy may fill us with horror; but there are hundreds and thousands of persons that lead a bad life who receive the last Sacraments with no better dispositions than this woman.

There is a man who has been a careless Catholic for years and years. He never went to confession, never went to his Easter duty. He was a member of a secret society. He looked with pity and contempt upon those who went regularly to confession. Religion, he thought, was good enough for women. He often said, especially when he was in the company of Protestants and infidels, that one religion was as good as another; that it mattered little what a man believed, provided he was honest. He turned a deaf ear to the words of the priest. He was very much inclined to think, too, that religion was, after all, an invention of the priests; that he could get on much better without it. This man falls sick at last; he is at the point of death. His friends and relatives send for the priest. The dying man makes a hurried confession; he presses the crucifix to his lips; he is anointed; and he dies, and his soul goes where? To heaven? Can we believe that our Lord will say to such a man: "Come, good and faithful servant; you have believed everything that I taught through my holy Church; you have always loved and practised your holy religion—enter into the kingdom of heaven"?

If that man gets to heaven so easily, then those Catholics who practise their religion, who fast, pray, give alms, confess faithfully, would be the greatest fools; all those con-

verts who have made so many sacrifices in becoming Catholics would be madmen. If it be so easy to get to heaven, then the holy martyrs who shed their blood for the faith would be fools. Those generations of Irish Catholics who suffered poverty, and hunger, and exile, and death, rather than deny their holy faith, were fools and madmen. If it be so easy to get to heaven, Catholics may as well stay away from Mass, from confession, enter as many secret societies as they please, speak against the priests, turn Protestants, or Jews, or infidels. All they have to do is on their death-bed to send for the priest, kiss the crucifix, strike their breasts, and after death they will go straight to heaven. Can we believe this?

Another man has defrauded his neighbor or the Government; grown rich by dishonest speculation or by selling liquor to drunkards. He has stolen the clothes from the drunkard's wife and the food from the mouths of the starving children. At last he falls sick. His relatives send for the priest. The dying man makes a hurried confession, he is anointed; he dies. And his soul goes where? To heaven? What! is it possible to think that he can restore in a few moments all that he has defrauded and stolen during his whole life? Can we think that God will say to him: "Come, good and faithful servant; you have always been honest, you have been faithful even in little things—come, I will place you over great things; enter into the joy of your Lord"?

Another man has spent years grovelling in the very sink of impurity. He has defiled soul and body by the most shameful sins. And now this monster is dying. The priest is sent for. The cries of ruined souls are ringing in the ears of the dying wretch. The curse of Jesus Christ is on him: "Woe to him that scandalizes one of these little ones. It were better that a millstone were tied around his neck, and that he were drowned like a dog in the depths

of the sea." The priest may bless the dying man ; he may sprinkle holy-water around him ; he may pronounce the words of absolution ; but the dying sinner hears around him the mocking laughter of demons. The priest of God anoints him, presses the crucifix to his lips, prays for him, weeps for him. He is dead. He is judged. His soul is in eternity. Is it saved ? Is it in heaven ? What ! will God say to that polluted soul : " Come, good and faithful servant ; you have preserved your baptismal innocence ; you have kept soul and body pure and undefiled—come, enter then into the joy of the blessed " ?

Let us not deceive ourselves any longer. To make a good confession, to be truly sorry for all our sins, to detest them sincerely, to be firmly resolved never to commit them again, to undergo cheerfully all the punishments due to them—all these are pure, free gifts of God. Now, the Lord has called us so many times to repentance, and as many times have we refused to hearken to his calls. He has sent us so many warnings, and we have as often turned a deaf ear to them all. We have, then, good reason to believe that the measure of our sins is nearly filled up. We have just as good reason to believe that the number of graces needed to work out our salvation may be soon exhausted. If we do not profit by the few that may be left, we shall infallibly be lost. The grace of God has its moments. Its light shines and disappears. The Lord approaches and withdraws. He speaks and is silent. Master of His gifts, He attaches them to such conditions as He chooses. Such is the ordinary cause of His providence. Choice graces are, generally speaking, a recompense for faithful correspondence with preceding graces. If we do not correspond with them, we become unworthy of greater favors. To what a degree of sanctity and happiness may we not be raised by a moment of grace well used ! But a moment of grace neglected may also cast us to the bottom of the abyss.

Abraham will be blessed for ever for having been faithful to the command of God to sacrifice his son Isaac; and Saul will be a reprobate for ever for not having obeyed, on one occasion, the voice of the Lord.

What would have become of David, of St. Peter, of St. Mary Magdalen, had they not profited by the favorable opportunity, by the moment of grace, which was for them the moment of salvation? Happy would Jerusalem have been had it still made a good use of the last day of grace which the Lord gave it. It was her day: *In hac die tua*—"In this thy day."* But this indocile people shut their eyes in order not to see at all. They still resisted the impulses of grace, the tender invitations of God's mercy. They let the decisive moment pass away. Hence their blindness and their misfortune for all eternity. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent to thee for thy salvation, how often have I wished, by my preaching, by my example, by my miracles, by my promises, by my threats, and by all possible means, to gather thy children, to draw them to myself with tenderness and affection, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings when she sees them pursued by a bird of prey, and thou wouldst not. To punish thine infidelity, I abandon thee to the fury of thine enemies. Thy habitation shall be made desolate." † Jesus says, "How often"—behold the number of graces given for thy salvation; "Thou wouldst not"—behold the refusal of man; "Thou shalt be deserted"—behold his reprobation and chastisement.

Let us turn our eyes for a moment to the heights of Calvary. We see there three crosses erected. On the middle cross hangs Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world, while two thieves are hanging beside him, one on the right hand, and one on the left. Jesus created these two men. He created them in love. He created them for heaven. He

* Luke xix. 42.

† Matt. xxiii. 37.

died for both. He shed His heart's blood to redeem the one as well as the other. He offered grace and forgiveness to the one as well as to the other. Both men were great criminals. They were, as Holy Writ assures us, highway robbers and murderers.* Both were seized and cast into prison; both were condemned to the death of the cross; both were actually dying in the very presence and by the side of Jesus Christ. Both are dying; and both of them are still blaspheming, even with their dying breath. They are blaspheming the God who created them; they are blaspheming the Redeemer who is bleeding and dying for them; they are blaspheming the eternal Judge who in a few moments will decide their fate for all eternity.

These two sinners are dying by the very side of that loving Redeemer who prays aloud even for his murderers. They are both witnesses of the wonderful patience, the God-like meekness, of Jesus in the midst of His sufferings, as well as of the extraordinary miracles that accompany His death and attest His divinity. They see the sun grow dark at mid-day; they see the earth shaken and the rocks rent asunder; they see the graves burst open and the dead come forth to bear witness to the divinity of Him who hangs between them on the cross.

And now for each of these sinners the decisive moment has come—that awful moment on which depends their eternal salvation or eternal damnation. Up to this moment the lives of both have been much alike. They have walked the same path of sin, they have received the same graces, they have shared the same punishment; and now at the last moment comes a change. One of the criminals opens his heart to the grace of God, while the other wilfully rejects it. One corresponds with the last impulse of grace; the other remains cold, hardened, and impenitent. Henceforth their lot is entirely different. “One is taken and the other is left.”

* Luke xxiii. 33.

God ordered Josue to command the priests to go seven times around Jericho, sounding trumpets of jubilee—that is, of penance and pardon—and bearing the Ark of the Covenant, wherein were kept the tables of the law, some manna, and the rod of Moses; assuring him that at the seventh time the walls would fall of themselves; that he should enter the city with his army, put all the inhabitants to death, and burn it entirely, pronouncing a malediction against him who would attempt to rebuild it.

God here shows us how He goes around our hearts a certain number of times, how He causes to resound in our ears the trumpets of jubilee—that is to say, interior and exterior graces. He uses the manna of consolation to attract us, and the rod of His paternal chastisement to correct us; but after these tours of mercy, if the sinner is not converted, the last tour finished—that is, the last grace given—he is abandoned to justice and condemned to eternal fire.

St. Bonaventure relates that a rich man of a very disorderly life, named Gedeon, was attacked with a most dangerous illness, of which it was expected he would die. He had recourse to St. Francis, who by his prayers cured him, at the same time warning him to change his life, lest something worse should befall him. This wholesome warning, his health miraculously restored, the sickness, were three graces from God to him for his salvation; but the unhappy man abused them. No sooner had he recovered his strength than he relapsed into his former disorders. But by a just chastisement of God it happened that while asleep in his bed the roof of his house suddenly fell in, and he awoke in the eternal flames of hell.

We may rest assured that if we do not now correspond to the grace of God, if we do not follow the good thoughts, the holy inspirations, the remorse of conscience, the invitation of the priest, the entreaty of our friends, but continue to despise all these graces, God will at last withdraw His effi-

acious graces from us, and leave us only sufficient graces by means of which we may possibly work out our salvation, but will not do so. Then follows a reprobate sense. The understanding becomes darkened, the will grows weak and stubborn to good, the heart is hardened. We no longer see our danger, we care not for God's threats, we are as insensible as a corpse. When the impious man falls into the depths of iniquity, he despises, says Holy Scripture,* he laughs at everything sacred, at the most serious warnings and menaces of God, at eternal torments. All seems to him imposture ; he grows bolder as he goes on, and even rejoices in the evil he commits. Melted wax resumes its hardness when it is removed from the fire, because it is no longer exposed to the heat of the fire, which caused it to melt. In like manner, by putting off our conversion we place our understanding and will in so dangerous a state that they are no longer sensible to the impressions of grace, which they formerly received so easily. By opposing the movements of grace we become too weak to be able to obey those movements when they come, even though they should of themselves be strong enough to touch the heart.

What a fearful thing it is to persist in resisting the grace of God ! Those who do so incur the further danger of rejecting the decisive grace, throwing away the final moment on which depends their eternal well-being. Would that men could be brought to reflect seriously on this great truth ! But it is what they least think of, though they stand every moment on the threshold of eternity. Certainly, he who, with closed eyes, should run and dance on the brink of a frightful precipice, would deservedly pass for a fool, because he invites a horrible death. Yet the greater part of men are no wiser ; for they pay so little or no attention at all to what will be their eternal fate. They fear to lose their wealth, their friends, their honor ; they are afraid of the

* *Prov. xvii. 3.*

passing sorrows of this life ; but they never tremble to contemplate the frightful torments of the next. Dives began to think of heaven only when he was irrevocably plunged into hell by his crimes. Need we wonder at what we read in the Gospel: "Wide is the gate and broad the way that leadeth to perdition ; and many there are that enter it. How narrow is the gate and strait the way that leadeth to life, and how few there are that find it."* These terrible words were spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. They are, therefore, infallibly true, and confirm what our Lord said on another occasion: "Many are called, but few are chosen." God has indeed the greatest desire to save all men ; yet all are not saved. He made heaven for all, yet all will not enter into it.

One day St. John Chrysostom preached in the city of Constantinople. "How many in this city," said he to his hearers, "do you think will be saved? How shall I answer the dreadful question, or ought I to answer it at all? Among the thousands of men and women who throng this city, perhaps hardly a hundred will be saved. And would to God that I were certain of the salvation of so many!"

We read that when St. Bernard died, a holy anchorite, who died at the same time, appeared to the Bishop of Langres, and told him that thirty thousand men had died at the same moment, and that only St. Bernard and himself, who had gone straight to heaven, and three souls who had been sent to purgatory, were saved out of that vast number.

A man who had died from the violence of his contrition was afterwards restored to life by the prayers of a holy religious. He said that sixty thousand souls from all parts of the earth were presented with him before the divine tribunal to be judged, and that only three of them were sent to purgatory, and all the rest were condemned to eternal torments.

A doctor of the University of Paris appeared, after his

* Matt. vii. 13.

death, to the bishop of that city, and told him that he was damned. The bishop asked him if there was any knowledge in hell. The unhappy wretch answered that he only knew three things: 1. That he was eternally damned. 2. That his sentence was irrevocable. 3. That he was eternally condemned for the pleasures of the world and the body. Then he asked the bishop "if there were still men in the world." "Why?" asked the bishop. "Because," said he, "during these days so many souls have fallen into hell that I thought there could not be many more remaining."

Alas! the number of those who follow their passions and unruly appetites, who constantly transgress the commandments of God, is considerably greater than the number of those who comply with their religious duties. "How can you be astonished if I say that few will be saved," asks St. John Chrysostom, "when you see so many wicked in youth, and so many others negligent and lukewarm in old age? What vanity among women, what avarice among merchants, what pride among the learned, what injustice among the judges, what corruption in all!"

God does not wish to save man by force. He does not wish to destroy the nature of things, but to preserve it. He allows the nature of each being to act in the way that being wills. He made man a free being; He endowed him with a twofold liberty—with the liberty to labor for his salvation or for his damnation. He therefore does not compel men to accept salvation against their will. Where is the man who drags another, in spite of himself, to his banquet? This would be offering an outrage instead of conferring an honor. People are punished against their will, but they are not rewarded in like manner. Reward is given to merit, and we cannot acquire merit unless we are willing to take pains to acquire it.

All who are sent to hell are sent there against their will;

out heaven is open only to those who wish to enter there, and who strive earnestly for their salvation.

As long, then, as we put off our confession and live in sin, we shall continue to be the enemies of God; and if we die in that state, we shall infallibly be lost. The moment, however, that we give up sin and make a good confession, our sins are washed away, and we become children of God. Why, then, do we wait? Why do we hesitate? Why do we put off our confession till to-morrow, when we can make it so easily to-day? God offers us pardon and grace now; we have time and ability to make a good confession. To-morrow, perhaps, it will be no longer in our power to do so; we may be in eternity. Now is the acceptable time, now is the time of salvation. If we will do penance now, God will accept it. Our dear Saviour now knocks at the doors of our hearts; He calls us, He entreats us to return to His friendship. He promises to forgive us everything if we come to Him with a contrite heart. We can still pray, we can examine our conscience, we can confess our sins; and the priest is awaiting us in the confessional with a compassionate heart. Let us listen to the voice of our friends and relatives, who love us; to the voice of the priest, who wishes us well; to the voice of our conscience, which is the voice of God. Let us not resist that voice any longer, otherwise it will become silent, and then woe to us! what will become of us? We have now every reason to hope for forgiveness; if we delay longer, our hope will be turned into despair. Now the grace of God enlightens our mind and touches our heart. Let us not resist that grace, which has been purchased for us by the tears and by the blood of Jesus Christ. If we hesitate longer, this grace will pass away, never to return.

He who does penance only in his old age or on a death-bed, when he can sin no longer, when the world rejects and despises him—such a one has every reason to fear that his penance is insincere and worthless, because his penance is

not free ; it is only prompted by natural, slavish fear. On the contrary, if we do penance while we have the power to commit sin, while the world, with its sinful pleasures, invites us, we show clearly that we are in earnest ; we have every reason to hope for pardon ; and the thought of so noble a deed will be our greatest consolation at the dread hour of death. Is it so very agreeable, so very honorable, to be a slave of the devil, to be bound by the chains of the most shameful sins, the most degrading passions ? Is it prudent, is it reasonable, to live thus longer in mortal sin, when we know that every moment may be our last, and that, if we die as we stand, we shall infallibly be lost ? Let us show that we are not cowards ; that we can trample human respect under foot ; that we dare practise openly the dictates of our conscience ; that we are humble and honest enough to go to confession, no matter what others may think or say about us. And even if we cannot finish our confession at once, it is well to make at least a beginning. We shall find that it is not so difficult a thing as we imagine. Arise ! then ; delay no longer. “ Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ROAD HOMEWARD—INSTITUTION OF CONFESSION.

WHILE a pious missionary was one day travelling in one of the wildest regions of North America, he stopped at the principal villages, and often found in them savages whom grace brought to him from a considerable distance. He instructed them, baptized those whom he thought well disposed, and then went on his way to other places. On one occasion an Indian full of fervor presented himself. As soon as he was well instructed in our holy religion, the missionary baptized him and gave him Holy Communion.

A year after the missionary returned to the place where this Indian convert dwelt. As soon as the latter was aware of the missionary's arrival, he ran to throw himself at his feet. He knew not how to express his joy in seeing again him who had begotten him to Jesus Christ. He entreated the father to grant him once more the happiness he had made him enjoy the year before. "Of what happiness do you speak?" asks the missionary. "Ah! my father, do you not know? The happiness of receiving the Body of my God?" "Most willingly, my child; but first you must go to confession. Have you examined your conscience well?" "Father, I examined it every day, as you charged me to do last year." "In that case, kneel down, and declare to me the faults into which you may have fallen since your baptism." "What faults, father?" "Why, the grave faults you may have wilfully committed against the commandments of God and the Church." "Grave faults?" answered the Indian, all amazed. "Can any one offend

God after they are baptized, and especially after having received Communion? Is there anywhere a Christian capable of such ingratitude?" Saying these words, he burst into tears, and the missionary too could not help weeping as he blessed God for having prepared for Himself, even in the remotest places, worshippers who may indeed be called worshippers in spirit and in truth.*

After having become by baptism children of God and tabernacles of the Holy Ghost, we should cease to offend Almighty God. After the pardon granted in baptism, it would be but justice to sin no more. It would be a pleasing sight to see the child grow up to manhood and old age, and bear unsullied with him to heaven the white robe of his first innocence. Yet how small is the number of those happy Christians who never commit a mortal sin! Such is the weakness, such is the wretchedness, of human nature! Alas! what a misfortune for a soul to lose her baptismal innocence. The purity of that first innocence is so spotless that all other purity seems tarnished, as it were, in comparison with it.

Were God to punish us immediately after we have fallen into sin, what would become of us? But the infinite goodness and mercy of God have prepared a road for His prodigal child, for every poor sinner to return to His friendship. The Sacrament of Penance is this blessed road on which God stretches out His merciful hand to the repentant prodigal as a sign of pardon and that He will change the soiled robe for a new garment of innocence.

But this duty of confessing our sins seems a hard one to fulfil, and for this reason unbelievers, heretics, and bad Catholics object to confession. It is a doctrine of the Holy Catholic Church that we must either confess our sins or burn in hell. There is no other alternative. Listen to the words of the Holy Church: "If any one says that it is not

* Debussi, *Nouv. Mois de Marie*, 135.

necessary to confess all and every mortal sin, even the most secret sins—all that one can call to mind after a diligent examen—let the same be anathema ; let him be accursed.” This alone is sufficient proof for every good Catholic ; for the voice of the Church is the voice of God.

The practice of confession is as old as the world itself. The first person to hear confession was Almighty God Himself. The first sin that was ever committed on earth had to be confessed before it was pardoned, and God pardoned no one without confession. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, ate of the forbidden fruit, and thereby committed a mortal sin. Almighty God called Adam to account ; Adam confessed his crime. “ Yes,” he said, “ I did indeed eat of the fruit, but it was my wife that gave it to me.” Eve also confessed her crime, and put the blame on the serpent : “ I did eat the fruit,” said she, “ but it was the serpent that deceived me.” Our first parents confessed their sin, they repented of it, and God pardoned them, and even promised them a Redeemer.

Cain also committed a mortal sin : he murdered his innocent brother. But Cain refused to confess his crime, and God granted him no pardon. God called Cain to account, and asked him : “ Where is thy brother Abel ?” And Cain answered impudently : “ I know not ; have I then to keep watch over my brother ?” And God cursed Cain, and set a mark upon his brow, that he might serve as a warning to all men.

God not only heard confession Himself, but he gave a positive command requiring confession of sins. It would be tedious to cite all the passages of the Old Testament wherein this command is clearly specified. One alone is sufficient : “ Whosoever shall commit a sin and carelessly transgress the commandments of God, the same shall confess his sin and restore.”* Moreover, the Jews were commanded to

* Numbers v. 6, 7 ; Lev. xxvi. 40 ; Prov. xxviii. 18.

bring an offering according to the nature of their sins ; for each sin had its own specified offering. It is then clear that they had to confess their sins to the priests, that he might be able to offer the suitable sacrifice.

Not only the priests of the Old Law, but the prophets also, heard confession. King David committed a grievous crime. In order to gratify a sinful passion he put an innocent man to death, and then took away that man's wife. God sent his prophet to the king to upbraid him for his wickedness, and the prophet related to the king the following touching parable : " There lived," said he, " in a certain city two men ; the one was rich, the other was poor. The rich man had a great many sheep and oxen, but the poor man had nothing at all but a little lamb he had bought at a great price. He nourished it with great care. It grew up in his house with his children ; it ate of his bread, it drank of his cup, it slept in his bosom, and he loved it as a daughter. Now, a stranger came one day to the house of the rich man, and there was a great feast. But the rich man spared his own sheep and oxen, and took the poor man's lamb ; he killed it, and served it up to the stranger." King David, on hearing this, was exceedingly angry, and he cried out : " I swear by the living God that the man that has done this deed shall die, and shall restore the lamb fourfold ; for he has had no mercy." Then the prophet, looking sternly at the king, cried out : " Thou art the man ; it is thou who hast done this deed. Listen now to the word of the Lord thy God : I have anointed thee king, I have delivered thee from the hands of thine enemies, I have given thee thy master's house and possession ; and if these were little, I would have bestowed upon thee far greater gifts. Why, then, hast thou despised me, thy Lord and God, and murdered an innocent man, and taken away his wife ? And now, because thou hast done this deed, the sword shall destroy thy children ; I will raise up evil against thee out

of thine own house. Thou hast dishonored me in secret ; but I will dishonor thee and thy household in the sight of the sun, before the eyes of the whole world ; and this thy child, the fruit of thy sin, shall die." On hearing this, King David was terrified and conscience-stricken. He humbled himself before God and His prophet, and confessed his sin, and the prophet, seeing the king's repentance, pardoned him in the name of God. "Now God has taken away thy sin," said the prophet, "thou shalt not die."

The example of the great St. John the Baptist, the last prophet of the Old Testament and the first of the New Law, shows us more clearly how customary it was among the Jews to confess their sins. The Evangelist says that the "people came to St. John from all directions, and he baptized them, and they confessed their sins."* Even at the present day the practice of confession still exists among the Jews in many parts of the world.

Confession, then, was in use in the Old Law, but it was and is also in the New Law. Men sinned in the Old Law ; men sin also in the New. Our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ tells us expressly that He came not to destroy the law, but to perfect it.† When our divine Saviour came on earth, confession of sin was already in use not only among the Jews, but also among the heathens. That confession was in use among the heathens is a fact proved by such abundant and such incontestable evidence, that to deny it is to betray a very gross ignorance of history. It is an undeniable fact that confession was in practice among the pagans of Greece and Rome. No one, not even the emperor himself, could be initiated into their mysteries without first confessing his sins to one of their priests. In Egypt, in Judea, in China, in Peru, the same practice of confession was strictly observed. Even at the present day, confession is practised among many heathen nations. In China, in

* Matt. iii. 6.

† Matt. v. 17.

Thibet, in Siam, in Judea, in Persia, the heathens still confess their sins to their heathen priests, just as they did two thousand years ago. Not only the Jews, then, but the heathens also, confessed their sins.

Our divine Saviour perfected this universal custom, this express law, of confession by raising it to the dignity of a sacrament, and thereby rendered it even still more binding. It is this circumstance, and this alone, that can account for the remarkable fact that the sacrament of confession never met with any opposition either on the part of the Jews or on the part of the heathens. It appeared quite natural to them, for they had been accustomed to it even from the beginning of the world.

God Himself heard confession in the Old Law; God Himself also, the Son of God, our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, heard confession in the New Law.

It was about noon, one warm summer's day, that our divine Saviour came with his disciples to the well of Jacob, not far from the town of Sichar, in Samaria. Hungry, and thirsty, and footsore from his long journeys in search of erring souls, He sat down beside the well, whilst his disciples went into the city to buy food. And Jesus sat there all alone beside the well, his head resting on his hand. There was an expression of longing desire on His divine countenance, for He expected some one. And a certain woman came out of the city to draw water. Jesus said to her: "Give me a drink." The woman was surprised and touched by the great condescension, for the Jews despised and hated the Samaritans. "How is it," said she, "that you who are a Jew ask a drink of me who am a Samaritan? for the Jews do never associate with us Samaritans." "Woman," answered Jesus, "if you knew the gift that I have to bestow, if you knew who I am that speak to you, you would ask a drink of me, and I would give you living water." "Good sir," said the woman, "you have no vessel

here and the well is deep, how then can you give me this living water?" Jesus answered: "Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again, but he that drinks of the water I have to give, shall not thirst for ever. Yea, it shall become in him a fountain of living water, springing up into eternal life." Now came the moment for which Jesus had sighed and waited with such anxiety. This poor woman felt in her heart a great desire to drink of this living water. "Good sir," said she, "give me this water, that I may not thirst any more, and then I need not come here to this well." This is the course which the Saviour always pursues in winning souls. He first awakens in the heart of the sinner a great desire to receive His graces, and then He purifies his soul, and shows him his own misery, and thus prepares him for his graces.

The Samaritan woman begged Jesus to give her this living water, and Jesus immediately said to her: "Go and call your husband." A strange command. Where, one might ask, is the connection here? The woman asks for the living water, and Jesus tells her to go and call her husband. Now begins this poor woman's confession. "Call your husband," said Jesus. The woman cast down her eyes and answered quietly: "Good sir, I have no husband." "You have said the truth," answered Jesus; "you have no husband. Five husbands you have had, and the one you have now is not your husband—you have told the truth." The poor woman immediately acknowledged her sins; she blushed and hung down her head, and said: "Good sir, I see that you are a prophet." She was now filled with reverential awe for Jesus—for she felt that He could see into her heart. But, at the same time, the extraordinary mildness of Jesus filled her with great confidence in Him. She next began to ask Him which was the true religion. Jesus explained all to her with the utmost simplicity, and finally told her that He Himself who was speak-

ing to her was the long-expected Redeemer. The poor woman's joy was unbounded. She forgot to close the well, though it was strictly forbidden to leave it open—she forgot her jar of water—she could think only of the living water she had just discovered. She hastened back to the city, and cried aloud to all she met: "Come out to the well: I have found the Redeemer of the world." To confirm her words, she was not ashamed to cry out boldly: "I know that he is the Redeemer, for he has told me all my sins." This is one of the confessions which our divine Saviour heard Himself, in order to show us the necessity of confession.

Our Saviour not only heard confession Himself, but He also gave this divine power to His apostles. And it is fitting to remember here that this power of forgiving sins was given by God the Father to Jesus Christ, even as man. In the Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter xxviii. 18, we read that Jesus Christ said: "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth." By saying "all power in heaven and on earth is given to me," He plainly gives us to understand that He had also received from His heavenly Father the power of forgiving sins; and that He had this same power even as man is clearly implied in the words "is given to me." Had our Saviour when he uttered this considered Himself as God, He could not have said "is given to me," because as God He already had this power of Himself. He spoke as man, then, when He said "all power is given to me," and as man He could and did receive from His heavenly Father the power of forgiving sins. He even proved it by a miracle when some Scribes called this power of His into doubt. When the people brought to our Lord a man sick of the palsy, He said to the sick man: "Son, be of good heart, thy sins are forgiven thee." Then some of the Scribes said within themselves, "He blasphemeth," thinking, as Protestants do, that God alone could forgive

sins. But then our divine Saviour wishing to show them that He "even as man" had received power from His heavenly Father to forgive sins, wrought a great miracle in confirmation of this truth. He said: "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, then he saith to the man sick of the palsy, Arise, take up thy bed and go into thy house; and he arose and went into his house, and the multitude seeing it feared and glorified God, who had given such power to men."*

Now this power which Jesus Christ as man had was again delegated by Him to other men, that is, to St. Peter and the rest of the apostles. This He did in the most solemn manner on the very day of His resurrection. On Easter Sunday night the apostles were assembled in the supper-room in Jerusalem. They had the doors and windows firmly barred and bolted, for they feared the Jews might break in on them and drag them to prison. Suddenly, Jesus Himself stood in their midst, and saluted them with the sweet words, "Peace be with you." The apostles were afraid, for they thought they saw a ghost. Jesus encouraged them and bade them touch Him: "See my hands and feet," He said, "it is I myself; feel and see; a ghost has no flesh and bones as I." The apostles trembled with joy and wonder, and still hesitated. Jesus then told them to give Him something to eat, and He ate with them, and then they saw clearly that He was risen from the dead. Our divine Saviour now said to them: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you";† that is, with the same powers with which I, as man, am sent by my Father, I also send you as my delegates, as the pastors of my Church. And that there might not be the least doubt that in these words of His He included the power of forgiving sins, nay, to show in an especial manner that this power was included, He immediately breathed upon the apostles, and said to

Matt. ix. 2

† John xx. 21.

them : " Receive ye the Holy Ghost : whose sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven them ; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." * Here, in the clearest terms, Jesus Christ gives His apostles the power of forgiving sins, in such a manner that when they here on earth exercise this power by passing sentence of forgiveness over a penitent sinner, their sentence is ratified in Heaven, and the sins of the penitent are actually forgiven.

Mark well the words : " Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them." No man who really loves the truth can find any other meaning in these words than their plain and natural meaning. Those words may be examined in any grammar or dictionary of the English language, in any language at all, in the Syro-Chaldaic, in the very language our divine Saviour spoke ; and if we are sincere, we shall, we can, find no other meaning in them than their natural and obvious meaning : " Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them." What plainer words could our Saviour have used, what other words could we ourselves use, to express the fact that the apostles really received the power of forgiving sins ?

Suppose the Emperor of Russia were to send an ambassador to this country, and, giving him full power to act as plenipotentiary, would say to him : " Whatsoever conditions you agree to, I also agree to them ; and whatsoever conditions you reject, I also do reject them." Would not such language be clear and explicit enough ? Would not every one see that this ambassador was invested with the same power as the emperor himself ? Now, this is precisely the language of our divine Saviour to His apostles : " Whatsoever sins you shall forgive, I also forgive them ; and whatsoever sins you refuse to forgive, I also refuse to forgive them."

When God formed the first man out of the slime of the earth, He breathed into his face the breath of life, and that

* John xx. 23.

instant man became a living soul, a living image of God. Now, also, God breathes upon His apostles the breath of life, and that very instant they became not merely images of God, for they were that already, but really Gods, as it were, having all power in heaven and on earth. "As the living Father hath sent me, so do I also send you." The heavenly Father had sent Jesus Christ to forgive sins, and to transmit this power to others, and Jesus in like manner sends His apostles with the power to forgive sins, and to transmit this power to their successors.

Our divine Saviour came on earth to forgive the sins of all men ; but He was not to live always here on earth, and, consequently, He had to leave this power to His successors, the apostles. The apostles, too, for the same reason, had to transmit this power to their successors, the bishops and priests, and this power must necessarily remain in the Church as long as there are sins to be forgiven.

The apostles clearly understood that they had received this divine power to forgive sins, and to transmit this power to their successors. In the Acts of the Apostles, as well as in their writings, we find express mention made of confession. St. Luke tells us that whilst the apostles were at Ephesus the faithful came and confessed their sins, and those who had been addicted to magic sciences brought their books together and burnt them publicly.* The Apostle St. John also tells us: "Let us confess our sins, for God is just and faithful." † God is just ; He requires a candid confession. God is faithful ; He will really pardon the sinner through the priest, as He has promised.

St. Paul the Apostle says expressly that he and the other apostles received from Christ the power of forgiving sins. ‡ St. Clement, the disciple of St. Paul, whom St. Paul names in his Epistle, preached only what he had heard from St. Paul. This disciple speaks expressly of confession. He

* Acts xix. 18.

† 1 John i. 9.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 18-20.

says that "in the other world neither confession nor penance will be of any avail." All the Fathers of the Church from the apostles down to our own day, speak of confession as a sacrament instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. All the older heretics and schismatics, without exception, the Armenians, the Copts, Greeks, Russians, have retained confession even to this day.

But nothing would seem better calculated to convince any one of the divine institution of confession, than its universal introduction and practice. It is a certain, undeniable fact that confession has always been practised from the time of the apostles down to the present day. Here, in America, it is practised in the North, in the South, in the East, and the West. Confession is practised in every country in Europe; it is practised in Asia, in Africa, and Australia; in the far-off islands of the Pacific. Everywhere, wherever a Catholic priest and a Catholic congregation are to be found, there is confession practised; and it is not only practised but required under pain of eternal damnation. To confess is exceedingly contrary to flesh and blood; to confess is most humbling to our pride, and most afflicting to our self-love. Most assuredly no human authority could have succeeded in laying so heavy a yoke and burden upon men. Human authority may succeed in abolishing confession in certain countries where it is practised. But no human authority could ever establish confession, making it a universal law all over the world. When the Protestants abolished confession in certain places of Germany, they soon perceived that the greatest disorders and licentiousness commenced to prevail, and that no one was any longer in security; so they themselves requested the Emperor Charles V. to issue an edict which would oblige all to go to confession, "for," said they, "since confession has been abolished, it is impossible to live in peace with one another."

But the emperor knew that neither he nor any other hu-

man authority was able to introduce confession, and that no human authority was able to establish confession, much less could any human authority maintain so difficult a precept. So he could not help laughing at such a request, and at the ignorance and stupidity of those who made it.

But suppose any human authority to have tried to introduce confession, who would have been the most violent opponents of this practice; who would have been the very first one to shake off this heavy burden? The Catholic bishops and priests. Why? Because they feel the pressure of this yoke and burden more than laymen. Not only are popes, bishops, and priests themselves to confess their sins, they are also bound to hear the confessions of others. What can be harder than this? How often must not the priest hazard his own health, his life, and even his immortal soul in order to hear the confession of some poor sinner! How often must the priest visit the plague-stricken in hospitals! How often must he remain for hours in a close room beside those infected with the most loathsome diseases? When St. Charles Borromeo was living, the pestilence broke out at Milan. More than one thousand priests died of it, because they assisted the plague-stricken and heard their confession. A few years ago a certain priest of this country was called to hear the confession of a dying person. The priest was unwell; he suffered from a violent fever; nevertheless, he went. He had to travel on foot for thirty miles to reach the dying person, and, after having administered to him the last Sacraments, he himself fell a corpse to the floor.

Now, could the Catholic priest bear such trials, could he brave such dangers, were the hand of God not with him? Would he suffer so much, and suffer it only in order to be able to assist and console his children, to hear their dying confessions, and to reconcile them to God—would he suffer all this did he not believe and know that confession is from God, did he not know that as priest of God he had the

power of forgiving sins? But all those hardships which the Catholic priest must sometimes endure in the exercise of the sacred ministry, are but slight when compared to the interior trials, the trials of the soul, which he must often undergo precisely on account of confession. But the voice of the Lord must be obeyed. He commanded the apostles and their lawful successors to teach all nations. He commanded them to baptize all who would believe in their word. He told them that no one would enter into the kingdom of heaven without baptism. The same Lord gave power to the Apostles to forgive sins: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." Let us praise and magnify the Lord for having given such power to man.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PRODIGAL'S CONFESSION—NECESSITY OF CONFESSION.

TWO gentlemen went one day to visit a church in Paris. While examining its monuments and ornaments, their attention was attracted by a priest engaged in hearing confessions in one of the side chapels, and they began to laugh and joke at the expense of the penitent and confessor. "It is a laughable affair," said one of the gentlemen to his companion; "I must amuse myself a little. Leave me for a short time; we'll meet this evening at the theatre." "What do you mean to do?" said the other. "Never mind," answered the first, "I wish to do something that shall afford you matter for amusement." So, leaving him, he went to examine some paintings till the priest came out of the confessional. When he came out, the gentleman followed him into the sacristy, and said: "Sir, I am thinking of going to confession, but let us go slowly about the business, if you please. You know, I presume, that men like me are not all saints; I, in particular, claim for myself a greater share of indulgence on your part than others, so as to make some equality between it and my faith, which, I assure you, is none of the strongest. I even wish you to begin by resolving certain difficulties, exaggerated perhaps by prejudice, but still sufficient to make me neglect, nay even hate and despise, confession." "You are, then, a Catholic?" asked the priest. "Of course I am," answered he; "I often even went to confession in my youth. But what I read, heard, and saw of confession has been more than sufficient to keep me away from it; you can imagine

the rest yourself." "Easily," answered the priest; "but you have not succeeded equally well in finding out the way to overcome your prejudices. Confess your sins, sir, and you will soon change your opinion." "What, without previous explanations on the subject! I find a difficulty in bringing myself to do so; I should first wish to see the necessity of confession proved." "Go to confession, sir, with a sincere resolution of changing your conduct, and you will have no more doubt on this subject than I have." "How! what do you mean?" "That you have lost your faith by your bad conduct; you have judged ill of confession only after having abandoned yourself to vice."

The gentleman blushed, and after a moment's hesitation—"That is exactly the truth," said he, throwing himself into the arms of the priest—"that is exactly the truth! How is it possible that I did not make that reflection myself? I cannot go to confession to-day, as I came only with the intention of annoying you and insulting your ministry. Avenge yourself on my folly by becoming my conductor: I pledge my word of honor to come to you on whatever day you may appoint"; and he kept his promise.

After this first step all his prejudices vanished, and during the rest of his life he continued to think of confession like a Christian, because he lived like a Christian (*Soirées Villageoises*, vol. i.)

It is licentiousness alone that makes men object to and keeps them from confession. They who fly from it are assuredly never actuated by the desire of becoming more virtuous, but by the contrary desire of more freely gratifying their passions. The man of pure and chaste morals fears not the humble confession of his faults. The tree is known by its fruit; and thus we never hear an upright, moral man speak badly of confession. Confession is one of nature's wants. Everything which is truly interior must be outwardly expressed. The love for Christ within us must manifest itself

externally in works of charity to the brethren, and what we do unto these we do to Him also. It is the same with contrition and the confession of sins before God, an act itself purely internal; if it be deep, strong, and energetic, it seeks an outward manifestation, and becomes the sacramental confession before the priest; and what we do to him we do again unto Christ likewise, whose place he represents.

Origen rightly compares sin to an indigestible food, which occasions sickness at the stomach, till it has been thrown off by a motion in the bowels. Even so is the sinner tormented with internal pain, and he only enjoys quiet and full health when, by means of confession, he has, as it were, eased himself of the noxious internal stuff. The man who never opens his heart to any one, who never reveals his joys and his sorrows, who never discloses to a kindly friend the dark deeds that press so heavily on his conscience, is not to be trusted, and cannot be happy. Man is so constituted that he does not believe in his interior feelings unless he sees an outward manifestation of them, and, in fact, an internal sentiment is only ripened to consummation when it has acquired an outward shape. He therefore who truly and heartily hates sin, confesses it with an involuntary joyful pain; with pain, because it is his own sin; but with a joyful pain, because after confession it ceases to belong to him and to be his. This accounts for the well-known fact that criminals have often confessed their sins during sleep, or during a drunken or crazy fit, and many, unable to endure the remorse of conscience, have delivered themselves up to justice and confessed their sins publicly. And what are all the immoral books that now pollute society—the novels, the lewd poetry, and the rest—other than a public confession of the crimes and of the wicked lives of their authors?

Very great, therefore, is the impious folly of Protestants who deny the necessity of confession. In spite of them-

selves, they have often involuntarily acknowledged the fact that confession is a want of the human heart.

The celebrated Cardinal Cheverus, who was formerly Bishop of Boston, was much beloved by Protestants as well as by Catholics, on account of his great learning and virtues. It often happened that even Protestant ladies of the most respectable families in Boston came to consult him. They told him their family troubles, their troubles of conscience, and asked his advice—precisely as Catholics do in confession. One day, a lady told the bishop that there was one doctrine of the Catholic Church which she disliked exceedingly, and which prevented her from becoming a Catholic, and this was the doctrine of confession. She could never prevail on herself to confess her sins: “Madam,” answered the bishop smiling, “you say that you dislike confession, but your dislike is not so great as you imagine; for to tell you the truth, you have been really confessing to me this long time. You must know that confession is *nothing* else than the confiding of your troubles and failings to a priest, in order to obtain his advice, and to receive through him the forgiveness of your sins.”

What happened to this celebrated cardinal happens also to almost every priest. There are many noble-hearted souls created by God for a high purpose—to shine amid the angels throughout all eternity. Their sensibilities are so keen that they seem born only to suffer and weep. Their path to heaven is indeed a path of thorns. Their griefs and yearnings are such that but few can understand them. God help these noble souls if they are deprived of the strength and consolations of the Catholic Church! Out of the Church they must bear their anguish alone. In the hour of happiness, they were told that religion would console them in the hour of sorrow. And now the hour of sorrow has come. Whither shall they turn for strength and consolation? To books—to the Bible? Books are cold and wear-

some ; their words are dead. Oh ! how they envy the penitent Magdalen, who could sit at the feet of Jesus and hear from His blessed lips the sweet words of pardon and peace ! They turn to God in prayer, but God answers them not by the Urim and Thummim ; and, in their doubt and loneliness, they envy even the Jews of old. In vain do they listen for the voice of God, because God has appointed a voice to speak and answer in His name ; but that voice is only within the shepherd's fold ; and they are kept without the fold by the cruel enemy, where the voice of the shepherd cannot reach them.

What are they to do to find relief ? Are they to apply to the Protestant minister ? An interior voice tells them to apply rather to a Catholic priest. The Rev. Father Bakewell tells us that, when a Protestant, he felt a strong desire to confess his sins. This desire grew stronger and stronger every day, so much so that he felt very unhappy because he could not satisfy it. One day the Protestant minister, who had a special affection for Mr. Bakewell, noticed that something unusual was troubling the mind of his young friend. So he called him and asked him the cause of his sadness. " Reverend sir," says Mr. Bakewell, " I want to go to confession." " Nonsense," replied the minister, with a sneer ; and then a discussion ensued between the minister and his disciple. The minister resorted to all sorts of arguments to dispel from Mr. Bakewell's mind what he termed Catholic notions, but all to no purpose. Mr. Bakewell was a man of sound judgment, and empty declamations could not satisfy him. Then, by an inconsistency which nothing could justify, the minister said to Mr. Bakewell : " Since you insist upon going to confession, the Book of Common Prayer declares that I have the power to hear you. I am ready." It was more than Mr. Bakewell could bear. " Sir," said he, " you have just told me that confession is absurd, contrary to the teaching of Christ, that it is priests' inven-

tion, a source of immorality, and now you expect to hear me; permit me to say that I will never confess to a man who has no faith in confession—this looks too absurd; I will apply to a priest, for he believes, and I do believe with him, that Christ has placed in his hands the twofold power of loosing and binding.” A few days after, Mr. Bakewell was received into the bosom of the Church.

Now, what are these unsolicited manifestations of Protestants made to a Catholic priest? Are they not an evident proof of the undeniable fact that confession is a want of nature? Nay, even all our would-be infidels have ever been compelled to acknowledge this fact. Many of their emphatic avowals regarding the efficacy of confession might be adduced. Nay, many infidels have oftentimes, but especially at the hour of death, had recourse to this consoling sacrament. Mezerai, Toussaint, Maupertuis, De Boulainvilliers, La Mettrie, Dumarsais, D’Argens, Boulanger, De Tressan, De Laugle, Fontenelle, Buffon, Montesquieu, La Harpe, etc., went to confession before their death with all the sentiments of compunction and Christian piety. All the great standard-bearers of infidelity during the past century would have confessed their sins at their last hour had they not been hindered from so doing by their impious associates. Even D’Alembert himself expressed his desire of reconciling himself with his God. Condorcet, his friend, who shut out from the dying man the pastor of St. Germain, satanically congratulated himself upon such a triumph. “Oh!” said he, “were I not present, he would have flinched like the rest of them.”

Diderot was in the best dispositions possible, he had frequent interviews with the parish priest of St. Sulpice, but his friends hastened to take him to the country, in order to save the philosophical body from the shame, as they called it, of his conversion. Voltaire went to confession during many of his attacks of sickness; but not at his last hour,

because his chamber-door was shut upon the chaplain of St. Sulpice, who was thus prevented from going to his bedside; and Voltaire died in such a terrible paroxysm of fury and rage that the Marshal of Richelieu, who was present at his cruel agony, exclaimed, "Really this sight is sickening, it is insupportable!" Listen to what his Protestant physician, M. Trochin, says of it: "Figure to yourself the rage and fury of Orestes, and you will still have but a feeble image of the fury of Voltaire in his last agony. It would be well if all the infidels of Paris were present. Oh! the fine spectacle that would have met their eyes!"

But one may say: "Oh! I am willing to confess my sins to God, but not to the Catholic priest." St. Thomas of Villanova answers: "As long as God was not made man, there was no strict command for man to confess his sins to man; but since God became man, He has given all judgment to His Son, for He is appointed judge of the living and the dead; and to Him, therefore, is man to render an account of his sins. But, because Christ has ascended to Heaven, He has delegated his priests to exercise that power, and He has declared in express terms that they have jurisdiction over sins to bind and to loose. And oh! I wish you would understand what a great benefit and a great mercy this was."* "Let no one say to me," says St. Augustine, "'I do penance in my heart, I confess all my sins to God and to God alone, who was present when I committed sin. It is He who must forgive me.' Then in vain was it said to the apostles, 'Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained!' Then the Church has received the keys to no purpose; and so you make a mockery of the Gospel." To give the priest the power to forgive sins, and yet not to oblige any one to confess his sins to him, would indeed be to make a mockery of the priest. For how can the priest forgive a sin without know-

* *Dominica III. Quaa.*

ing it? And how can he know the sin unless the sinner himself confesses it. In the sacrament of confession, the priest is a physician and judge. He is a physician, and consequently he must know the nature of the malady that afflicts the soul before he can cure it. He is a judge, and must consequently know what and how he has to judge.

What should we say of a judge who, without examining the cases brought before him, without questioning either the plaintiff or the defendant, would condemn at random one to be sent to prison, another to be hanged, and order another to be set at liberty? Should we not think such a judge most unjust? What, then, should we think of a priest who would absolve one and refuse to absolve another without asking any questions, without even listening to the penitent, but merely following his own blind caprices? Would not such a priest be guilty of grievous injustice? But it is precisely thus that every priest would be forced to act were Christians not strictly bound to confess all their sins to him.

As no one is foolish enough to say, "I will go to God and to God alone for the remission of original sin, I will send my children to God alone instead of sending them to the baptismal font," so, let no one be foolish enough to say, "I will go to God alone for the forgiveness of actual sin"; for, as the former is forgiven only by means of baptism, so is the latter forgiven only by means of the sacrament of penance. Do all the good you can, distribute all you have among the poor, scourge yourself to blood every day, fast daily on bread and water, pray as long and as much as you are able, shed an ocean of tears on account of your sins—do all this, and yet if you have not the firm will to confess your sins, "you will," says St. Augustine, "be damned for not having been willing to confess them. Open therefore your lips, and confess your sins to the priest. Confession alone is the true gate to heaven."

St. Bonaventure relates that one of his brethren in religion was considered a saint by every one who knew him. He was seen praying in every place. He never spoke a word. In order not to be obliged to break silence, he made his confession only by signs. When St. Francis heard of this, he said: "Such conduct is no sign of sanctity. Know that this brother is a child of perdition. The devil has tied his tongue in order that he may not confess his sins in the manner he ought." The words of the saint were soon verified. This unhappy man soon after left the convent and died a bad death. For him, then, who has grievously sinned after baptism there is no other means left of obtaining God's pardon than by confessing his sins to the Catholic priest. This the devil, the great enemy of our salvation, knows well—hence his artifices to keep men from confession. When the Prodigal Son arose at last to return to his loving father, the tempter stood beside him and said: "What are you doing? You cannot go back to your father in that plight. You are all in rags. Your father will be ashamed of you. He will not own you. Besides, the distance is too great. You will lose your way. You will be attacked by robbers and wild beasts. Moreover, you are now too weak and sickly, you will faint and die on the way. Wait yet a few days longer. This famine will not last always. You will have better times by and by. If you go back to your father, you will be scolded and treated even more harshly than before. If you go back now, every one will say that you are a coward—every one will laugh at you." How cunning and crafty is Satan! It is thus that this infernal spirit always tries to keep the poor sinner from returning to God, his heavenly Father.

There is a man who is not yet a Catholic, though inclined to become one. The devil makes him believe that confession is not a divine institution, but an invention of men; **that it is even blasphemous to say and believe that man can**

forgive sins; that confession is too difficult a duty for man to perform, and that therefore a God of infinite kindness could not oblige man to perform it; that a secret confession made to Him alone is all that is required. There is a Catholic who has stayed away from confession for thirty, forty, or fifty years. He makes up his mind at last to go to confession. Then comes the devil and whispers in his ear: "Oh! there is no hope for you. You have stayed away too long from confession. Your sins are too great and too numerous. You cannot obtain forgiveness. Besides, you will never be able to remember all of them. It is useless for you to go to confession."

There is a young woman who has been leading a worldly life. She has been keeping dangerous company. She has permitted sinful liberties. She sometimes reads sentimental novels and weekly magazines. She hears a sermon; her conscience is aroused; and she wishes to make a good confession. But the devil comes to her and says: "What are you going to do? The priests are too strict. Do not go near them. They will make you promise a great many things; and then after the confession you will break your promises, and you will be worse than before."

There is another unhappy soul. She has been for years making bad confessions and sacrilegious communions. At last she wishes to make a good confession, to tell everything that is on her conscience; but the devil comes and whispers in her ear: "Oh! what will the priest think of you if you tell these horrid sins? The priest never heard such sins before. He will be horrified—he will scold you." In using such artifices to keep men from confession, the devil is like to Holofernes besieging Bethulia. Seeing that he could not take the city by main force, Holofernes destroyed all the water-conduits. Thus the inhabitants, for want of water, saw themselves forced to surrender. The devil knows that the sacrament of penance is the only happy channel through

which the divine grace of reconciliation flows upon the sinner. He knows that the sinner remains in his power if he succeeds either in making him not believe in the necessity of confession, or in inducing him to stay away from it, or to make a bad confession. The devil knows well how true are the words of our Saviour: "Whose sins you shall retain, they are retained"—that is, they will not be forgiven for all eternity. How many souls are now burning in hell for not having believed in the necessity of confession, for having put off confession too long, or for having made bad confessions!

The Rev. Father Furniss, C.S.S.R., relates that there was a certain gentleman living in the North of England, in Yorkshire. He led a very wicked life, and knew that those who lead wicked lives deserve to go to hell. He wanted to be bad during his lifetime, and still not go to hell when he died. So he began to think how he might gratify his passions and still save himself from hell after all. He thought that he had found out a way to save his soul after leading a bad life. When I am dying, he thought, I will repent and send for the priest, and make my confession, and then all will be right. But then he remembered that if he had to send for the priest when he was dying, perhaps the priest might not be at home; or perhaps his illness might be very short, and the priest could not come soon enough to hear his confession. He was frightened when he remembered that he might die before the priest could arrive. So he thought of another plan. He would get a priest to come and live always in the house with him, so that at any moment he could send for the priest. This thought pleased him very much, for he felt sure that if a priest was always living in his house he should be quite safe. But he forgot those words, "As people live, so shall they die." He forgot that he was offending God very much, and that, after all, how we shall die depends entirely on God.

A year or two after this his last illness came, and it came upon him very suddenly, when he was not expecting it. He felt that he was dying, so he told his servants to go and fetch the priest to hear his confession. The priest was in the house, and the servants went directly to find him. They went first of all to the priest's own room, which was next to the room in which the gentleman lay dying. The servants, not finding the priest in his own room, went through the whole house, from the highest to the lowest room, but could not find him anywhere. They called out his name all over the house, but there was no answer to their call. So they went back to their master, and told him that the priest was nowhere to be found. Then the gentleman saw how he had been deceiving himself, despair came into his heart, and he died without hope of salvation.

A few moments after he had died the servants happened to go again into the priest's room, and there they saw the priest reading the prayers in his office-book. "How long," they said, "has your reverence been here?" "I have been here all the morning." "Did you not go out of the room any time?" "No," said the priest, "I have not been out for one moment." "Did you not then see us come into this room two or three times, or hear us calling out your name?" "No," said the priest, "I did not see any one come into this room, or hear any one call out my name." "As people live, so they die."

If we have followed the Prodigal Son in his sins, let us follow him now in his repentance. The Prodigal Son made up his mind to return to his father, no matter what it would cost. He was sorry for what he had done, and was determined to make reparation to the best of his power. No evil companion, no suggestion of the devil, could prevail upon him to stay any longer in a strange country—in a state of mortal sin. He was determined to make his confession to his father and obtain forgiveness. We, too, must show such

determination, and say to ourselves: No matter what it may cost me; no matter what the neighbors may say; no matter what my friends may say, I am determined with God's help to make a good confession and to give up this life of sin.

Let us be wise, and let us be wise in time—that is, let us confess our sins in time, for in the world to come there is no one to hear our confession and give us absolution; not even the apostles can do so. It is only in this world that we can find a created being who has power to forgive the sinner, who can free him from the chains of sin and hell; and that extraordinary being is the *priest*, the Catholic priest. “Who can forgive sins except God?” was the question which the Pharisees sneeringly asked. “Who can forgive sins?” is the question which the Pharisees of the present day also ask; and the answer is, There *is* a man on earth that can forgive sins, and *that* man is the Catholic priest.

And not only does the priest declare that the sinner is forgiven, but he *really forgives* him. The priest raises his hand, he pronounces the words of absolution, and in an instant, quick as a flash of light, the chains of hell are burst asunder, and the sinner becomes a child of God. So great is the power of the priest that the judgments of Heaven itself are subject to his decision; the priest absolves on earth, and God absolves in Heaven. “Whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed also in Heaven” (Matt. xviii. 18). These are the ever-memorable words which Jesus Christ addressed to the apostles and to their successors in the priesthood.

Suppose that our Saviour Himself were to come down from Heaven, and were to appear here in our midst; suppose He were to enter one of the confessionals to hear confessions. Now, let a priest enter another confessional, for the same purpose. Suppose that two sinners go to confes-

sion, both equally well disposed, equally contrite. Let one of these go to the priest, and the other to our Saviour Himself. Our Lord Jesus Christ says to the sinner that comes to Him : " I absolve thee from thy sins " ; and the priest says to the sinner that goes to him : " I absolve thee from thy sins " ; and the absolution of the priest will be just as valid, just as powerful, as the absolution of Jesus Christ Himself.

At the end of the world Jesus Christ will Himself judge all men ; " for the Father judges no one, but He has left all judgment to his divine Son." But as long as this world lasts, Jesus Christ has left all judgment to His priests. He has vested them with His own authority, with His own power. " He that heareth you," He says, " heareth me." He has given them His own divine Spirit. " Receive ye the Holy Ghost : whosoever sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven ; and whosoever sins you shall retain, they are retained."

The priest is the ambassador, the plenipotentiary of God. He is the co-operator, the assistant, of God in the work of redemption. This is no exaggeration, it is the inspired language of the apostle : " Dei adjutores sumus." * " We are the co-operators, the assistants, of God." It is to the priest that God speaks when He says, " Judge between me and my people "—" Judica inter me et vineam meam." † " This man," says God, speaking to the priest, " is a sinner ; he has offended me grievously ; I could judge him myself, but I leave this judgment to your decision. I will forgive him as soon as you grant him forgiveness. He is my enemy, but I will admit him to my friendship as soon as you declare him worthy. I will open the gates of Heaven to him as soon as you free him from the chains of sin and hell."

There lived in the city of Antwerp, in Belgium, a certain nobleman who had, in his youth, the misfortune to fall into a very grievous sin. Day and night his conscience tortured

* 1 Cor. iii.

† Isa. v.

aim, but yet he could not prevail upon himself to confess this sin; death, even hell itself, did not seem to him so terrible as such a confession. One day he was present at a sermon which gave him much consolation. The priest said, among other things, that "one is not obliged to confess those sins which he has entirely forgotten." The nobleman now did all in his power to forget this sin. He was rich and so he cast himself into the whirl of gay amusements—every pleasure, lawful and unlawful, was enjoyed; he sought to bury his sin beneath a mountain of new sins; but all in vain! Far above the sweet music, far above the gay song and the merry laugh, louder than ail, rose the voice of his conscience, and amidst the gayest crowds he carried a hell in his heart.

He now tried another plan. He began to travel. He travelled over many lands; he saw everything that was quaint or beautiful. A change of climate, he thought, would bring about a change of heart; but he was sadly disappointed. Every day he saw new sights; without everything was new and changing, but within—in his soul—was ever that dead, dreary sameness, for he carried himself with him everywhere—everywhere that wicked deed haunted him. The blue skies and the sunny lands smiled not for him; his guilty conscience cast a gloomy shadow on all he beheld. Weary and heart-sick, he returned to his native city.

He there applied himself earnestly to study, and thought to beguile his soul into forgetfulness. He dived into the abstractions of mathematics and philosophy, he soared aloft and calculated the courses of the stars, he listened to the lectures of the most learned professors; but all in vain. Every book he opened seemed to tell him of his sin. The voice of his professor sounded in his ear, but far louder deep down in his soul, sounded the voice of his conscience.

The unhappy man was at last almost driven to despair

Another sermon, however, gave him new courage. He heard that "charity covereth a multitude of sins," "that God can never despise a contrite and humble heart." He heard that good works, alms-deeds, as also perfect contrition, obtain from God the forgiveness of our sins. He now applied himself with all the fervor of his soul to the practice of good works. He spent whole nights in prayer, he fasted long and frequently, he performed the most rigorous penances, he bestowed liberal alms on the poor, he visited prisons and the hospitals, he assisted and consoled the suffering and dying; but though he consoled many and many a one, there was no consolation for himself. Every moment his conscience upbraided him: "You must do the one, and the other you must not omit"; you must do good works, but you must also confess your sins!

The unhappy nobleman had now tried all that man could do, had tried every means but the only right one, and had tried all in vain. There was but one resource left. He was weary of life, and was resolved to end it by suicide. He stepped into his carriage and drove off to his country-seat. As he passed along the road he overtook a venerable old man, whom he recognized as a religious priest. The nobleman immediately stopped his carriage and invited the aged priest to enter. The priest, in order to please the nobleman, yielded to his request. The good old father was very friendly and talkative. They spoke of various things, and the conversation soon turned upon religious matters. The priest spoke at length of the clearly-distinctive notes of the Holy Catholic Church. He spoke with a joyous pride of her holy Sacraments, especially of that most touching proof of God's infinite mercy—the holy Sacrament of Confession. "What hope could there be for the poor sinner," cried he, with enthusiasm—"what hope could there be were it not for confession? Yes, yes, confession is the last plank after shipwreck; confession is the sinner's last and only hope of

salvation." At these words the nobleman started up as if stung by a serpent. "What!" cried he, "what is that you say? Do you know me? How do you know me?" The priest was quite astonished by this sudden outburst, and excused himself, saying: "My dear sir, I have never before had the honor of knowing you. If I have inadvertently said anything to wound your feelings, you must excuse me. Old people, you know, are generally talkative. However, if you should have any troubles of conscience, you may be sure I would be only too happy to assist you." "But," cried the nobleman, excited, "what if I do not wish to confess?" "Oh! then," said the priest, quietly, "if you do not wish to confess, why then—never mind it. You know there are other means." These last words fell as a ray of sunshine upon the dreary and clouded soul of the nobleman. "There are other means," thought he, and he began to breathe again freely once more. He now felt the greatest confidence in the good old priest, promised him solemnly that he would be willing to undergo every penance if he could only be relieved from the objection of going to confession. They soon arrived at the country-seat, and the priest was obliged to stay over night. They passed the evening in agreeable conversation. The hour for retiring came, but the nobleman would not suffer the priest to retire to rest until he revealed to him those "other means" of which he had spoken. The priest now advised him to remain awake yet for a few hours to enliven his confidence in God, and to examine his conscience carefully. "Not, of course," said he, "in order to confess, for that you do not wish to do, but that you may call to mind all your sins, and be truly sorry for them. To-morrow morning I will tell you the rest."

You may imagine that the nobleman slept little that night. Early the next morning he was at the priest's door. "I have complied faithfully with your injunctions," said

he. "What have I to do next?" "Oh! all you have to do now," answered the priest, smiling, "is to come with me into the garden." They stepped forth into the cool morning air. "Well, how are you," said the priest, in a kind tone. "Do you not feel better?" "Better!" answered the nobleman, "oh! no; far from it." "But," said the priest, "perhaps you forgot something in your examen of conscience. Did you think of this sin, and this, and this?" And so he went on gradually through the long train of sins of which the human heart is capable. He descended into the deepest depths of human degradation, and named even those sins that are so dark and shameful that one is afraid to acknowledge them to himself.

Scarcely had the good priest named a certain sin when the nobleman became greatly agitated. He hid his face in his hands and sobbed aloud. "Yes! That's it! That's it! That is the abominable, the accursed sin that I cannot—that I will not confess." The priest could not help weeping at witnessing the struggle of this poor soul. He consoled the nobleman, and told him that there was no need of confessing it any more. "You have confessed already," said he; "let it now be forgotten. You can include whatever other sins you remember, and now kneel down and receive the absolution." The nobleman fell on his knees and wept like a child. He kissed again and again the hand of the aged priest, and arose with a heart as light as if he had that of an angel who never knew aught of sin. He felt as if he stood in a new creation. Never before did the sun shine so brightly; never before did the heavens look so blue; never before did the birds sing so sweetly. His happiness was as a foretaste of heaven.

If we have followed the Prodigal in his sinful career, let us now follow him also in his good confession. Let us say with him: "I will go to my father and say to him: father I have sinned against Heaven and before thee. I am no more

worthy to be called thy son” ;* and our heavenly Father will receive us again into His grace and friendship. He will look upon us again as His children, and say to His angels : “ Behold this poor sinner, he was dead and is come to life again, he was lost and is found.” “ Confession is the gate to heaven ” †

* Luke xv. 18, 19.

† St. Augustine.

CHAPTER XX.

QUALITY OF THE PRODIGAL'S CONFESSION—ITS INTEGRITY.

A FAMOUS missionary in Italy was one day preaching to an immense multitude. He stood in the open air, under the clear blue sky, and the wide field around him was thronged with the thousands who had come to hear him. It was summer, and the lofty trees around with their rich foliage made an agreeable shade to the audience. A dead silence fell upon all, and all eyes were riveted upon the speaker. There he stood, his arms extended, his eyes raised to heaven; he was rapt in ecstasy. A moment more and the missionary broke the solemn stillness, and cried aloud in a voice so strong and awful that it caused the ears of his hearers to tingle, and penetrated the very marrow of their bones: "Oh! my brethren, how many, many souls are damned. Just now God opened my eyes, and I saw the souls of men falling into hell as the dead leaves fall in the harvest-time." And, lo! as he spoke, a mighty wind there arose, and the green leaves dropped from the trees though it was yet summer, and the earth was strewn with the fallen leaves, and all who heard him were filled with unspeakable terror.

Were God to open our eyes this moment, we would also see how the souls of men even now are falling into hell thick as the snow-flakes fall in winter. Did not the Son of God come on earth to save all men? Did not the Blessed Jesus pour out the last drop of his heart's blood to rescue all men from hell? Did he not make the way to heaven so easy that all we have to do to be saved is to will it earnestly?

This is all most true, and yet even now the souls of men are falling into hell. And why? There is scarcely one in the world who has never committed a sin; and there are few, very few who have never committed a mortal sin; and there are millions who never confess their sins, never repent of them; and millions again who confess them, indeed, but who do not confess them all, or who do not confess them in a manner as they ought.

In order to obtain the forgiveness of our sins in confession, the confession must be like that of the Prodigal Son. His confession was humble. "Father," he said, "I am not now worthy to be called thy son, for I have sinned against Heaven and before thee." Our confession must always be humble, for in being humble it will always be entire; that is, no mortal sin will be purposely omitted or concealed. He who is truly sorry for his sins is most willing to confess them all; he is even apt to confess them more minutely than is necessary. Integrity of confession is required for eternal salvation; for any deadly sin purposely omitted will never be blotted out of the soul. Should a dastardly fear and a misplaced shame withhold any one from making known to his confessor a single mortal sin, he will, on this account alone, remain under God's displeasure, and in danger of eternal perdition.

There are many instances of this. A young person of eighteen, who lived in Florence, in Italy, had the misfortune to fall into temptation and commit a great sin. No sooner had she done so than she found herself covered with confusion and torn with remorse. "Oh!" said she to herself, "how shall I have the courage to declare that sin to my confessor? What will he think of me? What will he say to me?" She went, nevertheless, to confession, but dared not confess that sin. She got absolution, and had the misfortune to receive communion in that state. This horrible sacrilege increased still more her remorse and trouble.

She was, as it were, in hell, tormented day and night by the reproaches of her conscience, and by the well-founded fear of being lost for ever. In the hope of quieting her conscience, she gave herself up to tears and groans, to continual prayer, to the most rigorous fasts and to the hardest privations ; but all was in vain. The remembrance of her first crime and her sacrileges harassed and pursued her incessantly. Her soul was, as it were, in an abyss of sorrow and bitterness. In the height of her interior anguish a thought came into her mind to go into a convent and make a general confession, in which it would be easy for her to declare her sin. She did so, and commenced the confession she had proposed making ; but still enslaved by false shame, she related the hidden sin in such a garbled, confused way that her confessor did not understand it, and yet she continued to receive communion in that sad state. Her trouble became so great that life appeared insupportable. To relieve her heart, tormented as it was, she redoubled her prayers, mortifications, and good works to such an extent that the nuns in the convent took her for a saint, and elected her for their superior. Become superior, this wretched hypocrite continued to lead outwardly a penitential and exemplary life, embittered still by the reproaches of her conscience. To moderate her horrible fears a little, she at length made a firm resolution to confess her sin in her last illness, which came sooner than she expected. Then she immediately undertook a general confession, with the good intention of confessing the sin she had always concealed ; but shame restrained her more strongly than ever, and she did not accuse herself of it. She still consoled herself with the thought that she would declare it a few moments before her death ; but neither the time nor the power to do so was given her. The fever rose so high that she became delirious, and so died. Some days after, the religious of the monastery being in prayer for the repose of the soul of this pretended saint,

she appeared to them in a hideous form, and told them : “ Sisters, pray not for me ; it is useless. I am damned ! ” “ How ? ” cried an old religious ; “ you are damned after leading such a holy and penitential life ! Is it possible ? ” “ Alas ! yes. I am damned for having all my life concealed in confession a mortal sin which I committed at the age of eighteen years. ” Having said this she disappeared, leaving behind her an intolerable stench, the visible sign of the sad state in which she was. This story is related by St. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence, who wrote in the fifteenth century.*

Such then is the melancholy end of all those who conceal their sins in confession and die in that state. They suffer a hell in this world, as well as in that to come.

The sinner says, “ I feel so much ashamed, I cannot confess my sins. ” If the confession were made to an angel, a bright and beautiful spirit from heaven, then indeed might one hesitate, and feel afraid and ashamed to tell all his shameful secret sins to a spirit so pure, so holy. Not to an angel, however, have we to confess, but to a poor sinful mortal like ourselves ; to a fellow-creature subject to temptation like ourselves ; to one who stands in need of the grace of God as much as we do ; to one, perhaps, who stands more in need of God’s grace than we do, for his duties, his responsibilities, his dangers are far greater. Why then should we be afraid to tell our sins to the priest ? What is there in the priest that should cause fear in us ? Shame ? Is it not better to suffer a little shame now than to endure unutterable shame on the day of judgment and eternal shame in hell ?

Tertullian, who lived in the second century, said : “ There are many Christians who are ashamed to confess their sins, thinking more about their shame and confusion than about their salvation. Though we hide something

* Abbé Favre, *Le Ciel Ouvert*, 45.

from men, can we hide it also from God? Which is better: to be damned for having concealed our sins, or to be saved for having confessed them?"

One day a certain priest saw the devil standing at the confessional. He asked him what he was doing there. "I make restitution," answered the devil; "I give back to the sinner the shame which I took from him when about to commit sin." This is always a very successful trick of the devil. When he sees any one about to commit sin, he takes away from him all fear and shame; but as soon as he has committed it, the devil gives him back all the fear and shame he had taken from him, and thus throws the unhappy soul into despair.

When the wolf wishes to carry off a lamb, he seizes his helpless victim by the throat, so that it cannot warn the shepherd, and cannot cry for help. It is thus that the infernal wolf, the devil, acts with souls. He is afraid that they will tell their sins and thereby escape from his clutches; he therefore holds them by the throat, so that they cannot make a full and candid confession.

"Remark," says St. Anthony of Padua, "that through many chambers can the demon have access to the house of our conscience—that is, our mind—but that only through one door can he be expelled, that is, through the mouth, by confession. He can enter by the five senses, but only by the lips can he be ejected. When, therefore, the demon has obtained possession of this castle, the first thing he does is to block up the way by which he could be driven out—that is, he makes man mute; for with this door closed he feels secure in his possession.*"

Sin and obstinacy tie the tongues of many sinners. We read in the *Magnum Speculum* that a person possessed by the devil was led to a holy man, to whose questions the demon said: "We are three within him; I am called *Clau-*

* *Dominica iii. in Quad.*

dens Cor (the closer of the heart) ; my office is to prevent men from having contrition ; but if I fail, then my brother, called *Claudens Os* (the closer of the mouth), endeavors to prevent him from confessing his sins ; but if he confesses and is converted, my third brother here, named *Claudens Bursam* (the closer of the purse), labors to prevent him from making restitution, filling his mind with the fear of poverty ; and he succeeds more frequently than either of us.”

The famous Socrates was one day going along the street, and happening to pass a house of ill fame, he saw the door open and one of his own disciples coming out. As the young man beheld Socrates, he was filled with shame and went back into the house. But Socrates went to the door and called him : “ My son,” said he, “ leave this house instantly, and know that it is indeed a disgrace to enter such a house, but it is an honor to leave it.” What Socrates said to his frail disciple is wholesome advice for Christians. It is indeed a shame, a dishonor, to commit sin ; but it is a glory, an honor, to confess it. By sin we become enemies of God and slaves of the devil, but by confession we again become children of God and heirs of heaven.

Suppose we were afflicted with a very dangerous cancer ; should we be ashamed to go to the physician and tell him about it ? Would we not suffer him even to probe the painful wound ? Certainly we would ; and why ? Because life is very dear to us, and we are willing to endure the greatest pain and the greatest humiliation rather than lose our life. And shall we not suffer a little pain, a little humiliation, to save our immortal soul ? Can we not endure a little shame in order to free our soul from the horrible cancer of mortal sin ?

Suppose we owed a hundred millions of dollars to a king. But the king being moved with pity, forgives us the whole debt on condition that we go to one of his ministers to acknowledge this immense debt, upon which acknowledg-

ment the minister is to give us a receipt of payment. Should we not feel only too happy to pay off our great debt on so easy a condition? Should we not go at once and comply most cheerfully with such a condition?

But do we not know how great a debt we have contracted with Almighty God by a mortal sin? This is a debt which all the money of the world, all the saints in heaven, all the good works of the just on earth, are not sufficient to cancel; nay, even the fierce fires of hell, though burning throughout all eternity, can never destroy a single mortal sin. It is a debt which makes us so hideous in the sight of God that, could we be permitted to enter with it into heaven, we should at once empty that beautiful abode of eternal bliss of all its angels and saints. See then how good the Lord is. To pay off this debt, and to obtain a receipt for it, all that He requires of us is to go to a lawful minister of His—to a priest—and acknowledge to him the full amount of our debt. Can that condition be too hard which affords us an opportunity to escape hell? Indeed God has shown Himself extremely indulgent on this point. He could certainly have made a far more difficult condition as the means of obtaining pardon, as the only path to salvation and the only plank left after shipwreck.

Confession is the great, the wonderful institution of the infinite mercy of God. There have been many sinners who have entered the confessional without the least intention of changing their conduct; many even have entered for no other purpose than to mock the priest and ridicule this divine institution; but they went away quite changed. They entered as wolves and left as lambs.

The good priest spoke to them kindly, his heart was touched with pity for them; he made them enter into themselves and reconciled them with their God.

It is related of St. Alphonsus that he never sent away a sinner without giving him absolution. Now, it is morally

certain that many a sinner came to him who was not disposed to receive absolution. But then the great saint spoke to the poor sinner with the utmost kindness; he represented to him in forcible language the miserable condition of his soul, and the great danger of eternal damnation; he inspired him with a salutary fear of the judgments of God, and at the same time prayed hard and with tears in his eyes to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to obtain for the sinner that change of heart and that sorrow which disposed him for the forgiveness of his sins, for the worthy reception of the sacrament of penance. Go, then, to confession, and go without fear; ask the priest to be kind enough to help you make a good confession. If you experience a particular difficulty in confessing a certain sin, tell your confessor of the difficulty, and he, in his kindness, will make all easy for you. All that is necessary to be done is to answer his questions with true sincerity of heart.

Suppose you fell into a deep pit, filled with fierce, venomous serpents, would you be ashamed to take hold of the rope which a friend let down in order to draw you out of the horrible place? Would you not seize the rope with eagerness? Would you not be for ever thankful to the friend who had delivered you from the poisonous fangs of the serpents? Most certainly you would. And have you no thanks to offer your best and truest friend, the priest of God? Will you not suffer him to deliver you from the poisonous fangs of the hellish serpents, that have been so long swarming in your soul? Will you not suffer the priest to free you from the power of those demons of hell, that for years have been haunting you, have been tempting and tormenting you day and night, sleeping and waking? Will you not suffer the priest to free you from the devils, who are ever trying so hard to deprive you of the glory and joys of heaven, to drag you, with them, deep down into the flames of hell?

“But oh!” you will say, “if I tell such a sin the priest will be scandalized and horrified. I am sure he never before heard such dreadful sins as mine. What will he think of me?”

What! the priest will be scandalized? Did you ever know of a physician being scandalized or offended at a patient for being very sick? Why, the very fact of his being sick is precisely the reason why the physician comes to him. If he were well, he would not need the physician. The priest is the physician of the soul, and it is precisely because the soul is sick that you stand so much in need of his assistance. A father feels more compassion for a sick child than for one that is well.

“The priest never heard such sins before.” That is unfortunately a sad mistake. The priest must study for many long years to prepare himself for the sacred ministry. Before he is ever permitted to enter the confessional, he must study for years in moral theology every possible sin that man can commit. He must study his own heart, and the knowledge of his own heart gives him an insight into the hearts of his fellow-men. He knows from his own experience how strong are the human passions, how weak the human heart. He knows every fold of the heart; its most secret desires, its hidden weakness, its natural tendency to evil. The priest has had, moreover, a long experience in hearing confessions. It is his duty often to probe the inmost recesses of his heart; he has to become acquainted with sin in its most hideous and revolting forms. There is little reason to fear that the priest will be astonished at what is told him; and if he should seem astonished, it is not so much at the sins which the sinner confesses as that he has not fallen into even greater sins.

You say, “If I tell such a shameful sin, what will the priest think of me? He will have a bad opinion of me.” The priest will honor you for your courage if you make a

frank, honest confession. It is certain that it requires more courage to make a clear, candid confession than it does to brave death upon the battle-field. The courage of the soldier on the battle-field is a mere animal courage. The horse and the mule, too, rush headlong into the very jaws of death ; but the courage of him that confesses even his most secret sins is moral courage, it is sterling virtue. Men who brave death on the battle-field display in that action less real moral courage than a little school-girl does who goes to confession ; they had not courage enough to go to confession ; they were cowards, they dared not. Many a young man who thinks himself very brave, and who would be insulted if you called him a coward, is a coward who dares not go to confession.

The priest will honor the sincere penitent, he will esteem him, he will even love him ; for, by making a candid confession, he has become a child of God and an heir of heaven ; and after confession the soul becomes bright and beautiful as an angel of God.

At the close of a mission where St. Francis de Sales had spent day and night in hearing confessions, he wrote to St. Jane Frances de Chantal as follows : " Oh ! how great is my joy over the conversion of so many souls. I have been reaping in smiles and in tears of love amongst my dear penitents. O Saviour of my soul ! how great was my joy to see, among others, a young man of twenty, brave and stout as a giant, return to the Catholic faith, and confess his sins in so holy a manner that it was easy to recognize the wonderful workings of divine grace leading him back to the way of salvation. I was quite beside myself with joy."

Another time a great sinner brought himself with much repugnance to make a general confession to St. Francis de Sales, in which he detailed the many sins of his youth. The saint, charmed by the great humility with which the penitent went through the painful task of confessing his sins,

expressed to him his joy and satisfaction. "You wish to console me," said the penitent, "because you cannot esteem such a guilty creature as I am." "You are mistaken," answered the saintly bishop; "I would be a perfect Pharisee were I to look upon you as a sinner after absolution. At the present moment your soul is, in my estimation, whiter than snow, and I am bound to love you for two reasons—the first, because of the confidence you have shown me by candidly opening your heart to me; and the second, because, being the instrument of your birth in Jesus Christ, you are my son. And as to my esteem for you, it equals the love that I bear you. By a miracle of the right hand of God, I see you transformed from a vessel of ignominy to a vessel of honor and sanctification. Moreover, I should indeed be very insensible did I not participate in the joy that the angels themselves feel on account of the change wrought in your heart; how I love that heart which now loves the God of all goodness!" The penitent went away so satisfied that ever after his greatest delight was to go to confession.* Such is the joy and love of every priest for and over every poor sinner who has sincerely confessed his sins.

But you will say: "Oh! if I tell such horrid sins, the priest will scold me." Could you but look into the priest's heart, you would not judge him so harshly. The priest is indeed an enemy of sin, but he is the truest friend of the sinner. The priest knows very well how much it costs to make a confession. How often has your wife, or your mother, or your sister, or some kind friend, entreated and even scolded you before you would consent to go to confession. How often has your conscience warned and terrified you before you would consent to confess. The priest knows all this very well. He knows, too, how often you made up your mind to go to confession, how you lost courage and put the confession off till some other time. He knows all

* *Spirit of St. Francis de Sales.*

the enquiries you made, all the pains you took to find out an easy confessor, one who would not be too hard on you. The priest knows also how much time you spent in preparing for confession, in waiting for your turn at the confessional ; how you lost thereby a good day's work, and were even in danger of losing your employment. The priest knows of all your sacrifices and struggles ; and do you think he will scold you or treat you harshly when you come to him in spite of all these obstacles ? Oh ! no. The priest knows from his own experience how much it costs to make a full and candid confession. He is a man like yourself, he has a human heart, human weaknesses, temptations like yourself. He too has to cast himself at the feet of a brother priest for confession.

Our divine Saviour assures us that the angels of heaven rejoice over one who gives up sin and enters upon a life of penance. He says that there is even more joy in heaven over one sinner doing penance than over ninety-nine just who need not penance. If the angels of heaven rejoice when you come repentant to confession, will not the heart of the priest rejoice when he sees you humbly kneeling before him ? As the heart of a mother rejoices on finding her long-lost child, so does the heart of the priest rejoice when he sees the poor lost prodigal returning home at last.

“ Oh ! ” you will say, “ but perhaps the priest will speak of my sins, and reveal them to others. ”

Suppose you were to confess your sins to the wall, would you be afraid that your sins would be revealed ? You may be just as certain that the sins you tell the priest will never be revealed. The priest is bound by the most sacred, the most solemn obligations—he is bound by every law, natural, ecclesiastical, and divine—to observe the utmost secrecy with regard to every sin and imperfection revealed to him. He is not allowed to speak of your sins out of confession, even to yourself, unless you give him permission to do so. So

strict is the obligation of the seal of confession that could the priest release all the damned souls in hell by revealing a single sin he heard in confession, he would not be permitted to do so. Nay, he must even suffer imprisonment and death—he must be willing to endure every torment—rather than break the seal of confession.

One of the greatest monsters that ever sat on a throne was Wenceslaus IV., King of Bohemia. So great were his debaucheries that he was generally called by his subjects “Wenceslaus the drunkard.” As is always the case with wicked men, he became jealous of his wife. Being resolved to find out whether his suspicions were well grounded, he sent for the confessor of the queen. This confessor was the holy priest, St. John Nepomuck. The tyrant commanded the priest to reveal all that the queen had confessed to him. St. John answered firmly that such a thing was utterly impossible. The emperor tried to win the saint by rich presents; but the confessor spurned such a sacrilegious proposal. The emperor threatened him with imprisonment and death. The confessor answered: “I can die, but I cannot break the seal of confession.” The tyrant ordered him to be put to the torture. The holy confessor was stretched on the rack, burning torches were applied to his side, he was commanded to reveal the secrets; but he only raised his eyes to heaven and repeated again and again the sweet names of Jesus and Mary. The tyrant, furious at seeing himself thus baffled, ordered the holy priest to be set at liberty. A few days afterwards, St. John was crossing the bridge over the river Moldau, which flows through the city of Prague. It was night. The holy confessor noticed that men were following him slowly. He recommended himself to God, and went on courageously. When he had reached the middle of the bridge, just above the most rapid part of the current, the ruffians who were following rushed upon him, bound him hand and foot, and cast him into the river.

There was none to witness the sacrilege, but the all-seeing eye of God beheld it. And God soon revealed the murderous deed and proclaimed the sanctity of his servant. A thousand brilliant lights—like twinkling stars—appeared on the dark flood, and floated over the body of the glorious martyr. The people rushed in crowds to behold the wonder. The tyrant himself witnessed it from his palace window. He could murder the glorious confessor, but he could not prevent the people from honoring him. Next morning the priests of the city, with the bishop at their head, followed by vast numbers of people, went in solemn procession and carried the body of the brave martyr in triumph to the cathedral. The church now honors St. John of Nepomuck as a saint and martyr, and his blessed tongue, which refused to violate the seal of confession, is still incorrupt after a lapse of more than three hundred years, and appears as if it still belonged to a living man. Thus suffered and died St. John of Nepomuck, rather than break the seal of confession, and so must every Catholic priest suffer and die rather than breathe a word of what he has heard in confession.

Every priest can say most truthfully with St. Augustine: “That which I know by confession is less known to me than that which I do not know at all.” Yes, the breast of the priest, of this angel of peace, is a sealed abyss which neither the fire nor the sword of tyrants can open. The law which shuts the lips of the confidant of our secrets is so rigidly strict that no interest in the world—not even the safety of an empire, not even the safety of his own life, nay, not even the safety of any kind of good imaginable—can authorize its violation.

It may be further observed that if any one forms the habit of concealing faults, venial though they be, he exposes himself to the danger of having, at the hour of death, to withstand the fierce assaults of his hellish foes, who at that last moment avail themselves of every slight advan-

tage, and bring up against him all his sins, mortal and venial, to throw his poor soul into consternation ; and if they chance to find sins not confessed, even though these be not looked upon by us as mortal, they exaggerate and magnify them in their baneful light, and make them appear greater than they really are, in order to force the sinner into discouragement, dejection, and despair of God's mercy. Venerable Bede relates that a certain soldier, who was a great favorite of King Coered, was often exhorted by him to go to confession, as the king was aware of the ungodly life the man was leading, and with how many sins his soul was defiled. But the soldier parried all the pious king's endeavors, by promising to fulfil his duty at some more convenient season. Being at length seized with a dangerous disease, the king, for the love he bore him, went in person to visit him, and profited by the occasion to exhort him anew to settle his accounts with God by an exact confession. The sick man replied that he meant to confess on his recovery, because he feared that if he should confess before getting well, his friends might say that he did it out of fear of death. The king most graciously returned to pay him a second visit, and on his entering the room the sick man began to exclaim: "Sire, what do you want with me now? You can give me no help!" "What folly is this?" replied the king, in an indignant tone. "No folly," replied the dying man, "but the very truth. Know thou that but a few minutes ago there came into the room two youths of most engaging appearance, who presented me with a book, beautiful indeed to look at, but very, very small in size. In it I saw the list of my good deeds registered ; but, good God ! how few and how trifling they are ! Behind these youths appeared a group of infernal spirits, horrible to behold, one of whom bore on his shoulders a vast volume of great weight, which contained, written in dread characters, the list of my sins. I read there not only my grievous but

even my most trivial offences, those which I committed in passing thought. At the first appearance of this frightful vision, the chief of the infernal crew said to these two angelic youths: 'What are you staying here for, since you have neither part nor lot in this man, who is already our prey?' 'Take him, then,' replied the latter, 'and lead him whither the burden of his iniquities is weighing him down.' At these words they disappeared. Then one demon struck me a blow with a fork on the head, another on the feet, which makes me suffer fearful torments, and I now feel them creeping into my very vitals, whence they will soon tear out my wretched soul." * Having said this, he breathed his last most miserably.

Mark well that the devils reproached this wretched man with the sins he had committed by passing thoughts, although they were well aware that he was laden with a multitude of the most grievous sins, which would have sufficed for his damnation. Certain it is that the enemy has often made use of venial sins at the hour of death as powerful engines of war for the undoing of the servants of God. Ecclesiastical history bears witness to the truth of this statement.

We should, therefore, discover to our confessor all the temptations of the demon, and all our evil inclinations. We should confess with simplicity—that is, without duplicity or excuses, or cloaking our failings. To excuse the evil intent whereby we have sinned is not to confess, but rather to hide and excuse faults. This is not to appease but rather to irritate the Divine Majesty. We should not strive to excuse our sin or give it another face, either alleging that we have been led into it by the persuasion of others, or else by enlarging on the occasions which have tempted us to transgress. Women, especially, are too apt to commit this fault in their confessions. They like to tell long stories, into

* *Hist. Eccl.*, lib. v. c. 14.

which they interweave the history of their sins at full length ; the upshot of which is that they lay the blame on their neighbors, or on such of their household, servants or other people, as may have given occasion to their transgressions. At times, too, it happens that, overcome by a certain shame, they excuse their intention, giving it some color of goodness, or at least making it appear less bad than it really was. For God's sake, let them be on their guard against such double-dealing, as this mode of confessing sins is excusing rather than accusing themselves of their faults. In this manner of confessing they run great risk of not receiving pardon at all, or at least of not deriving from the sacrament all those advantages which they hoped to receive.

Let every one, then, approach this sacrament with an efficacious sorrow for sin, to which must be joined profound humility and an unshaken trust in God's mercy. Let all declare with great simplicity, and without palliation or excuse, all their sins as well as their evil dispositions, such as generally give rise to sins. By doing this frequently, especially when burdened with some notable transgression, not only shall we be wholly cleansed, but we shall, moreover, gain strength against similar falls for the future.

It is true that the fulfilment of the duty of confessing our sins is difficult, but in complying with this duty we must not consider the difficulty, but rather our salvation, and the invaluable peace that flows therefrom. The confessional is not a tribunal established to brand the guilty one with disgrace, nor to pronounce a sentence that may ruin his reputation or dishonor his memory, but a tribunal whose office it is to re-establish us in our forfeited birthrights, and to bring back to our souls that heavenly peace and happiness which had been banished from it by sin.

See the sinner after confession : his countenance is radiant with beauty ; his step has become again light and elastic,

because he has thrown off a load that bent him to the earth ; his soul, feeling itself once more free and the companion of angels, reflects upon its features the holy joy with which it is inebriated ; he smiles upon those whom he meets, and every one sees that he is happy. He has again entered that sweet alliance with God, whom he can now justly call his Father ; he trembles now no more when he lifts his eyes to heaven ; he hopes, he loves ; he sees himself reinstated in his dignity of a child of God, and he respects himself. Now that the soul rules over the body, a supernatural strength vivifies and animates him ; he feels himself burning with zeal and energy to do good ; a new sun has risen upon his life, and everything in him puts on the freshness of youth.

Confession is resurrection—sweet resurrection, indeed. Oh ! what happiness and consoling joy dost thou bring us. Ah ! how unhappy are they who know not the sublimity of confession, who know not the calm and peace that follow from it.

O confession ! precious pledge of the immense love of our Divine Master ! Oh ! the sweet, the delicious tears with which thou bedwest our cheeks ! Oh ! the gnawing remorse to which thou puttest an end ! What undefinable happiness, what unspeakable peace dost thou bring to poor sinners ! How many men who live in the lap of ease and affluence, who are clothed in purple and gold, have searched the whole world to find a little peace for their souls, and have only been able to find it in confession !

Fortune, with an unsparing hand, had lavished all her favors upon them, and the world all its honors ; health and strength had been given them ; and still their life was a burden and weighed heavily upon their shoulders. They came to kneel in the confessional, and by revealing what was hidden, what was so heavily pressing upon them, they instantly found that which they looked for in vain through the world—they found the first, the most desirable of all

good—ease of mind and peace of conscience. Among the thousands of examples which could be inserted, the pleasing instance of the conversion of a brave officer by a sermon of Father Brydaine will suffice.

Wishing to hear so illustrious a preacher, the officer entered the church at the very moment that this pious priest was speaking on the advantages of a general confession. The officer, convinced of his arguments, immediately formed the resolution of going to confession. Accordingly, he went up to the pulpit, spoke to Father Brydaine, and decided upon remaining there until the end of the retreat. He made his confession with all the sentiments of a true penitent. It seemed to him, as he himself said, that a heavy load was taken off from his head. The day on which he had the happiness of receiving absolution saw him bathed in tears as he left the confessional—in those sweet tears that love and gratitude drew in torrents from his eyes. He followed the saintly father into the sacristy, and there, before a number of other missionaries, the faithful and edifying officer thus expressed the sentiments with which he was animated :

“Gentlemen, I beg you to listen to me, and you especially, Father Brydaine. Never in my life have I felt any pleasure equal to that which I feel since I have made my peace with God. Really I do not believe that Louis XV., whom I have served for thirty-six years, can be happier than I am. No, the king, in all the magnificence that surrounds his throne, though seated in the lap of pleasure, is not so contented and happy as I am since I shook off the horrible load of my sins.”

And then throwing himself at Father Brydaine's feet and taking his hands in his, “How I ought to thank God,” said he, “for having led me by the hand, as it were, to this place. O father! nothing was farther from my thoughts than that which you have induced me to do. I can never

forget you. I beg of you to pray to God that He may give me time to do penance ; if He assists me I feel that nothing will appear too difficult to me." Such is the joy of every prodigal son of the church after a good confession.

Yes, the confessional is the threshold of the Father's house ; it is at the confessional that the unhappy prodigal finds an indulgent Father, who pardons and embraces him. It is here that the sad tale of woe ever finds an attentive ear, that sorrow is never useless, and that a sigh from the heart of man is always sure to penetrate the heart of God.

It is here that that unheard-of scene between three persons takes place, where the sinner fills the office of accuser, accused, and witness ; and the priest that of instructor and judge—and that in the presence of a God who is present only to execute and ratify the sentence. Here everything is divine, everything mysterious. Here justice and mercy unite in the kiss of peace. Here hell is closed for the guilty one, because he has laid open his heart. Here heaven comes down to the sinner, because the sinner humbles himself. Here the fires of God's judgments are quenched in the tears of repentance. Here, by one act of obedience and humility, the proud sinner cancels a whole life of iniquity and rebellion. Here shines again that light which banishes incertitude and remorse, and which establishes anew the interrupted communion of man with God and His saints. Let a man be ever so disfigured with crime, let him be so poor as not to have even a crust of bread, or let him be so rich as not to be able any longer to form an unsatisfied wish ; let him be so unhappy as not even to wish for hope, or so depressed by remorse of conscience as to be unable to enjoy a moment's repose or an instant of forgetfulness ; and then let him come hither and cast himself on his knees, for here there is an ear to listen to him, a power capable of absolving him, and a tender heart still able and willing to love him.

He shall not be required to make known either his name,

rank, or position in society ; all that shall be enacted from him is a hearty sorrow for his sins, and an humble obedience to that voice that invites him to be converted and to change his ways. God, who sees and knows all things, requires no more of him. See, already peace comes back to him, and he has gained heaven ; pardon descends upon his head, and he who imparts it to him in the name of God knows but this : that he has absolved a sinner, and made him unspeakably happy. Indeed, without confession, without this salutary institution, guilty man would fall into despair. Into what bosom could he discharge the load that weighs so heavily on his heart ? Into his friend's ? Ah ! who can trust in the friendship of men ! Would he make the trackless deserts his confidants ? To the guilty one the very deserts seem to re-echo continually to the loud cries of his conscience. When nature and men are merciless, it is a touching thing to find a God ready to pardon. The Catholic religion alone is the first and only one that has joined together, like two sisters, innocence and repentance.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PRODIGAL'S SORROW—CONTRITION.

MORE than eighteen centuries have passed since the Son of God accomplished the great work of redemption by His bitter passion and death. As the time of His sufferings drew nigh, Jesus entered Jerusalem with His disciples ; and the people of the city, on learning of His approach, hastened forth to meet Him. In their hands they bore branches of the palm and the olive ; they spread their garments on the ground before Jesus ; they filled the air with loud hosannas, and with sweet hymns of praise and gladness. But strange to say, amidst the music and rejoicing—amidst the glory of His triumphant entry, Jesus is sad ; Jesus weeps and sobs aloud as if His heart would break. This is indeed strange beyond expression. Was Jesus sad because He disliked rejoicings ? Oh ! no. For we see Him often present at banquets of the Pharisees. We see Him present at the merry wedding feast of Cana, where, in order to increase the gaiety, He works an unheard-of miracle, and changes water into wine. Jesus was no enemy of innocent rejoicings. Why, then, does He weep midst the rejoicings of His triumphant entry into Jerusalem ? Jesus Himself tells us the cause of His tears. He protests that He weeps because Jerusalem does not know Him. “ O Jerusalem, didst thou but know, this day, the things that are for thy peace ; but now they are hidden from thine eyes.”* What can this mean ? Why, the whole city can scarce contain itself for joy. No sound is heard save that of praise and gladness.

* Luke xix.

“Blessed be the king who cometh in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven, and glory on high.”* Such is the triumphant hymn with which the people greet Jesus; and yet Jesus weeps and laments because the city does not know Him. “Oh! didst thou but know and understand this day.”

Such was the welcome which Jesus received from the Jewish people; such, too, is the welcome which He receives at the present day from so many of His own Christian people. He is welcomed by all, He is known but to few. Like the Jewish people, many Christians welcome Jesus; they hasten to the sacraments with every outward mark of devotion; but like the Jews, too, though they welcome Jesus, though they receive Jesus, they do not know or care to know Jesus. In spite of the solemnity of the season, in spite of the outward marks of devotion, so many Christians of the present day often approach the sacraments with such little preparation, with such unworthy dispositions, that instead of being a joy and honor to Jesus, they rather fill His heart with sadness. They load Him with insult.

Let us return to Jerusalem a few days after the triumphant entry of Jesus. Behold this very same Jewish people. They are following an unhappy criminal who is being led to death. Ask them who this criminal is, and they will tell you, “It is Jesus of Nazareth.” What! Jesus of Nazareth? Is it possible? Is not this the same Jesus who was welcomed only a few days ago with such unparalleled honors? Is not this the same people who but a few days ago cried out, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”; and now their hoarse cry rings wildly through the air, “Crucify him! crucify him!” Yes, it is the very same Jesus; it is the very same people. No wonder, then, that Jesus wept on the day of His triumph. No wonder

* Luke xix.

that He complained that this people did not know Him. O ungrateful people ! could you not dishonor Jesus by a shameful death, without first honoring Him with such a glorious triumph ?

But let us turn to ourselves. Were a stranger to pass through the city at the season of Lent, were he to see the churches so well filled, and the confessionals so well crowded with penitents, what a good opinion would he form of the Catholics here. Wherever we turn we behold eyes filled with tears, countenances stamped with contrition—everywhere signs of sincere devotion. Here truly, he would say, Jesus is honored ; here He rejoices, here He celebrates a glorious triumph. Yes ; but return here in two months, in two weeks even, and the penitent faces will be seen at parties, balls, theatres, frolics, in drinking-saloons ; at the gambling-table the very same hands ; in families, among relatives and neighbors, the very same quarrels ; in the stores the same false weights, the same fraud ; the old curses and blasphemies will be heard in the streets and public places. This is indeed a change of scene, and this change of scene is renewed every Easter.

Whence comes this fickleness ? The Jewish people, in the impulse of the moment, hastened forth to meet Jesus without well knowing whom they welcomed. So in like manner many Christians, carried away by the devotion of the season, hasten to welcome Jesus without knowing Him ; they hasten to be reconciled to Jesus without understanding well whom it is they have offended. The prophet bitterly bewails such blindness : “ There is not one who does penance for his sins, not one who asks himself seriously, What have I done ? ” * This is the origin of the sad inconstancy of the greater part of Christians. Did they, like the Prodigal, but fully understand the greatness of their sins, they would, like him, truly repent of them. But such is not the case

* Jer. viii.

They have no true contrition, and, consequently, they soon fall again and again into the very same sins that they have but a short time before confessed.

Now, it is of faith that true sorrow for our sins is absolutely necessary for salvation, for if there is no true sorrow there can be no pardon. The examen of conscience is necessary; but were we to spend a whole year in examining our conscience without sincere sorrow or contrition, we cannot obtain pardon.

Confession is necessary; but it may happen that we forget a sin, or cannot find a confessor, or that we cannot speak the language of the priest, or that we have lost our speech. In such cases it will be sufficient if we make an act of perfect contrition, with the sincere resolution to confess our sins as soon as possible. But were we to confess all our sins with even the minutest accompanying circumstances, if we have no contrition we cannot obtain pardon.

Satisfaction is necessary; but it is sometimes impossible, and may be dispensed with. A person, for instance, may be too poor to make restitution; in that case it will suffice if he have the sincere desire to restore as soon as possible. But though he were to restore everything and had not true sorrow, he could not receive forgiveness.

Absolution is necessary; but sometimes there is no priest at hand. It will be sufficient then to make an act of perfect contrition, and have the sincere desire to confess as soon as possible, and we shall be forgiven; but were we to be absolved by all the bishops and priests of the Church, even by the Pope himself, and had not true sorrow, we should not receive forgiveness.

Water is necessary for baptism; but when water cannot be had, the want may be supplied by the baptism of desire, or by the baptism of blood; but if contrition is wanting, its lack cannot be supplied by anything whatever. **No contrition—no pardon!**

So important, so necessary is contrition that, though a sinner were guilty of all the crimes that ever have been or ever will be committed on the face of the earth—if he has not true contrition, he can and ought to be absolved; while, on the contrary, he who has only committed a slight venial sin—if he has no contrition, cannot and should not receive absolution.

God will not pardon without contrition. "It is," as Tertullian says, "the only price for which God pardons." God cannot pardon without contrition, for to be without sorrow for an offence is to give new and continued offence.

True contrition, then, is absolutely necessary. To have the desire for contrition is good; but the wish is not sufficient. Tears are good, but tears are not sufficient. It is not sufficient to look sad and strike the breast again and again; it is not sufficient to read the act of contrition out of a book; it is not sufficient to mutter the act of contrition with the lips. No! contrition must be real and heartfelt.

What then is contrition? Contrition is a hearty sorrow for having offended God. It includes a sincere hatred of sin, and the firm resolution to offend God no more. Every sin and vice, as our dear Saviour Himself declares, proceeds from the heart and has its seat in the heart. When we sin, it is, properly speaking, not our eyes, or ears, or tongue, the members of our body that sin, but the soul, animating our members. The soul uses the senses as the instruments of sin. It is the soul, the will, that sins, and consequently it is the soul, the will, that must repent. Our contrition, then must necessarily be interior and heartfelt. The very word contrition itself implies its true nature. Contrition is derived from the Latin word "conterere," which means to bruise, to crush, to break. To have true, heartfelt contrition, therefore, means to be heartbroken for having offended our dear Lord.

~~Tears are not necessary~~ as expressions of sorrow for sin;

the feeling of pain is not necessary; and yet the sorrow must be real and earnest, proceeding from the heart. Now, if sincere, heartfelt contrition is so necessary, what are we to think of those penitents who approach the confessional and confess their sins with such cool indifference, that one might be tempted to suppose they had come for no other purpose than to relate some interesting anecdote? If the priest tells them to make an act of contrition, he must often observe, to his grief, that they do not know how to make the act. Many of them do not even know what contrition, true sorrow, is, or what it has to do with confession. The greater part, however, know, indeed, how to make an act of contrition, but unfortunately, even their contrition consists generally in striking the breast a few times, and in muttering a certain formula of prayer which they learned in their childhood. If the priest asks such a penitent whether he is sorry for his sins, the answer is of course "yes"; but it is a "yes" that evidently does not come from the heart—it is a "yes" that is just about equivalent to "no."

It is not the number and enormity of the sins that fill the priest with pain and anxiety. It is the want of disposition, of true contrition, in the penitent, that causes him often the most cruel martyrdom.

The sorrow for sin must not only be sincere and heartfelt—it must also be a sorrow above every other sorrow. The sorrow which we feel at the loss of an object is proportionate to the value of the object. But God is a good infinitely superior to every other possible good. Consequently the loss of God should cause us greater sorrow than the loss of every other good. Great is the sorrow of a poor orphan as she stands by the death-bed of her beloved mother—as she gazes on her pale, cold brow, and on those loving eyes which shall open upon her never more. Yet our sorrow for having lost God by sin must be far greater. Great is the sorrow of a tender mother as she bends over the lifeless

body of her only child, the child of her hope and love. And yet our sorrow for having offended God must exceed even this sorrow. Yes, if we are truly sorry for our sins, we must be willing to lose our health, our riches, and our honor; to lose friends and parents, to endure every pain, and even death itself, rather than lose God by consenting to another mortal sin. It is not necessary that this sorrow for losing God should be sensibly felt. We may indeed experience more sorrow at the loss of our honor—at the loss of a dear friend or relative; nevertheless we must be ready to lose all rather than lose God. We may feel more terror at the sight of torment and death, and yet we must be ready to suffer the most cruel death rather than consent to a single mortal sin.

Contrition must not only be interior and sovereign, it must also be supernatural. We must be sorry for having sinned, because by sin we have offended and lost so good a God.

Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria, committed many enormous crimes. He ordered the faithful Jews to be cruelly massacred; he plundered the Temple, and desecrated the Holy of Holies. But the vengeance of God was swift and terrible. The impious king was stricken down with an incurable disease. A most excruciating pain tortured him; his body was devoured by worms; his rotten flesh fell piecemeal from his body, and the stench which proceeded from him was intolerable. The unhappy tyrant began now to repent of his crimes. He promised God that he would restore everything he had stolen from the Temple; he even promised that he would renounce infidelity, travel all over the world, and preach everywhere the true God. This looked like an extraordinary contrition; yet the Holy Ghost tells us of this man in holy Scripture: "This wicked man prayed to God, but in vain! He received no mercy!"

He died in a strange land, miserably in his sins. And why so? Is not God infinitely merciful? Has not God sworn by Himself that "He wills not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live?" Why then did not God pardon this sinner? Although this wicked man wept bitter tears, though he promised to restore everything, though he promised to change his wicked life—he, nevertheless, received no pardon, because his sorrow was only natural sorrow. He did not weep for having offended God. He only wept because he suffered such cruel torments, and because he saw that he was soon to die. His contrition was not supernatural. Look at many a drunkard: he weeps; he curses the hour in which he first tasted liquor. But why does he weep? Is it because he has offended God? Oh! no. He weeps because he has lost his situation—because he has fallen into disgrace. His sorrow is therefore only natural. He cannot receive pardon on that account.

The swindler and the thief are sorry for what they have done. But is it because they have offended God? No! They are sorry because they have been arrested and put in prison. Such sorrow is vain before God, and can merit no pardon.

The unhappy young man who has wasted his health and happiness in striving to satisfy a brutal passion, laments and curses the day on which he was first led into sin. But does he weep for having offended God? No; he weeps because he has ruined his health, because he finds himself branded with a shameful disease, because he feels that he is a burden to himself, an outcast, an object of scorn to his fellow-men. His contrition is, therefore, not supernatural, and cannot merit pardon.

The unfortunate who sighs and weeps like another repentant Magdalen, weeps not because she has offended God, but because she has lost her honor; because she must now hide her face behind the veil of shame. Her sorrow is therefore only natural sorrow; she can receive no pardon for it.

Contrition, then, in order to be acceptable to God, must be supernatural. It must come from God. We must be sorry for our sins because by them we have offended so good a God, and thereby lost heaven and deserved hell.

But contrition must not only be interior, sovereign, and supernatural, it must also be universal. We must be sorry for every sin, every mortal sin, without exception. King Saul was commanded by God to destroy all the wicked inhabitants of Amalec, and not to spare even a single one. Saul obeyed, but his obedience was not perfect. He destroyed everything, he burned down everything, he killed all the common people, but the king, who was the most wicked of all, he spared. God punished Saul for this want of obedience by taking away his crown and his life. There are many Catholics who, when they go to confession, act just as Saul acted. God has commanded them, under pain of eternal damnation, to destroy every mortal sin, and every affection for mortal sin, by a sincere and universal contrition. They obey, indeed, but their obedience is not perfect. By contrition they destroy the slight, every-day failings; but there is one pet sin that they always spare, one wicked passion, their ruling passion, which they do not destroy by a true and earnest contrition. A certain person, for instance, comes to confession. He confesses that he cursed, that he was angry. He is perhaps truly sorry for these sins; but he has also been drunk several times, and for this sin, though he may confess it, he has no real, earnest sorrow. Such a man's confession is a sacrilege; his sins are not forgiven.

Here is another sinner. He confesses that he has eaten meat a few times on Friday, that he has missed Mass and worked a few times on Sunday, but he has also eaten meat without necessity on fast-days, he has also missed Mass and worked on holydays of obligation without necessity. These sins he hardly remembers, and has no real contrition for

them. He has no sorrow for all his mortal sins, and, therefore, he can receive pardon for none. His confession is worthless.

Another confesses that he has stolen and cheated very much; that he has wantonly damaged his neighbor's property. He is sorry for these sins, he is even willing to make restitution to the best of his power. But there is another sin for which he has no real, earnest sorrow. He often takes pleasure in immodest thoughts and desires; he is a slave to the accursed habit of self-abuse. For these sins he is not truly sorry. His confession is, therefore, a mockery; he can receive no pardon from God.

The mother of a family confesses all her sins, and is truly sorry for them. But there are some sins that she scarcely ever mentions in confession, some sins for which she has no true contrition. She allows her children to remain out late at night; she does not keep them away from dangerous company,—from balls and parties; she allows them to read sentimental and immoral books—novels, trashy love poetry, and the like. Under the veil of marriage, she commits unnatural sins; she tries to hinder the most sacred laws of nature. Her sins are not forgiven.

A young girl confesses that she has been proud and vain; that she has been disobedient to her parents a few times. She is perhaps sorry for these sins. But there is another sin which she does not mention in confession, and for which she has no true sorrow. She often reads sentimental and dangerous books; she often remains out late at night; she keeps dangerous company; she sometimes allows improper liberties; she often harbors wicked thoughts and desires. These sins she does not confess, and, even if she confesses them, she has no true sorrow for them. Such a person's confession is worthless; it is a sacrilege. She does not obtain pardon from God; but the curse of God weighs on her soul; and until she truly repents of these sins, no

priest in Christendom, no bishop, no pope, can absolve her.

We must not only confess all our mortal sins, but we must also be truly sorry for them, otherwise we can obtain pardon for none. The reason for this is, that God never has pardoned, and by an unchangeable decree has bound Himself never to pardon, any one unless he first repents of all his sins, and repents of them from motives of a supernatural character.

Again, sorrow for our sins, to be good, must be accompanied by a firm resolve not to fall again into the same sins. To repent truly and sincerely is to grieve over the evil we have done, and to refrain from doing again the evil over which we grieve. In order that our past sins may not be imputed to us, sorrow and tears are not enough, amendment is also necessary.

Cesarius relates * a frightful occurrence which took place at Paris. There was in Paris a canon of the Church of Notre Dame, who was a priest in name, but certainly not in the practice of the virtues becoming his holy state. This canon, being at the point of death, entered into himself, acknowledged the wretched state of his soul, and seemed to be a really penitent and entirely changed man. Having sent for his confessor, he accused himself, with abundant tears, of all his sins, and received the holy viaticum and extreme unction with every outward token of piety. He then gently breathed out his soul in peace. After his death a magnificent burial service was prepared, and the day appointed for it was so fine that it looked as if heaven and earth were leagued together in order to enhance the pomp of the funeral obsequies. Every one deemed him the happiest man that had ever appeared on the face of the earth, since, after having enjoyed this world to the full, he had by so happy a death secured for himself the glory of

* *Mirac.*, lib. ii. c. 15.

Paradise. Such was the common talk ; for man sees what is outside, but God beholds what lies hidden within. After a few days the canon appeared to a servant of God, and brought him the sad news that he was damned. " But how so ?" asked the holy man, quite astounded ; " you confessed with sorrow and tears, and received the holy sacraments with devotion." " ' True," said the lost soul, " I did confess, and I was sorry, yet not with an efficacious sorrow, since my will, in the very act of repenting, felt itself spurred on to sin afresh ; and I thought it quite impossible that, if restored to health, I should not return to that which I so dearly loved. So that while I detested the evil I had committed, I had no earnest and firm purpose of renouncing it." Having said this, he disappeared.

Sorrow for our sins, moreover, must be accompanied by sincere humility. " God will never despise a contrite heart when he sees that it is humbled."* The publican in the Gospel looked upon himself as one of the greatest sinners in the world. He durst not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but held them downcast, and with shame on his countenance fixed them on the ground. He smote his breast, and thus moved God to compassion, appeased his wrath, and obtained his pardon. Such are the sentiments with which we should approach the holy tribunal of penance. For the inward shame which we feel at the sight of our offences has a large share in obtaining our pardon ; and it is out of mercy to us that God has decreed that, in order to obtain forgiveness, it should not be enough to repent in secret and be seen by Him alone, but that we must express our sorrow at the feet of the priest, and thus be covered with that most wholesome confusion which is of so great avail to obtain pardon for our sins.

If, like the Prodigal, we sincerely acknowledge before God the evil we have done in sinning, if we consider the

* Psalm I.

greatness of the God whom we have offended, if we consider our own vileness and audacity in daring to insult a God of so great a majesty, we shall naturally feel humbled and shall appear like criminals before the Lord, own our abjection with great confusion, detest our misdeeds, and implore forgiveness: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." *

The sinner thus humbled before God presents so touching an object in his sight that He is instantly roused to compassionate pity, forgives the transgressions of the culprit, and hastens in all tenderness to clasp him lovingly to his bosom, to treat him not as a criminal, nor as one who has ever been guilty, but as a beloved child. With such humble contrition, with sorrowful confusion, should the sinner draw nigh to the laver of confession. He may then rest assured that our loving Redeemer, beholding him in these good dispositions, will not fail to shower down His most precious blood in such abundance on him as to cleanse him from all stain and render him whiter and purer than the lily.

But let it be observed that this humility, which should ever accompany sorrow for sin, must not be false. Humility is false whenever it is not joined with a strong and firm hope of obtaining forgiveness. There are two sorts of humility: one is the gift of God, the other comes from the devil. The humility which is God's gift brings with it, indeed, a knowledge of our sins and miseries, but has this property, that, while it lowers the soul in its own estimation, it raises it to hope, and finally leaves it all calm and reposing in the arms of the Divine goodness. The humility, however, which is counterfeit, and from the devil, brings with it, in like manner, a knowledge of our own sins and weakness, but it has this most injurious quality, that, while it bends low the soul, it takes away hope, or at least dimin-

* Luke xv. 18, 19.

ishes it, and leaves us full of cowardice, diffidence, and discouragement. The humility which is God's gift is holy; that which comes from the devil is wicked. The humility which comes from God disposes us for pardon, whilst the humility that comes from the devil prevents forgiveness. Our confessions, therefore, must be made in a spirit of faith and hope; they should be accompanied with a sorrow not only humble, but full of faith and trust in God. Without such hope we should never obtain pardon, were we to seek it for all eternity; because sorrow for sin, unaccompanied by hope of forgiveness, so far from appeasing, only irritates Divine mercy. Cain repented of his crime after he had murdered his own brother; but because he did not trust in the Divine goodness, his sorrow availed him nothing. "My iniquity," he said in his folly, "is greater than may deserve pardon."* Judas Iscariot in like manner repented, and exclaimed, with tears flowing down his cheeks, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood."† And further, he made restitution of the money for which he had bartered away the precious life of his divine Master. But what did all this avail him? Nothing whatever. His sorrow was devoid of any gleam of hope; and, giving himself up for lost, he went and hanged himself on a tree.

Of such a nature is the repentance of certain persons who, after falling into some serious faults, or seeing that they relapse constantly into the same sins, are filled with bitterness, distrust, and false humility, and say to themselves: "God will not pardon me; I think He has turned His back upon me, for my weakness is beyond endurance, and I am continually yielding to the same faults." Now, this is the contrition of Judas and Cain, devoid of all trust in God's goodness.

The devil appeared once to Faverius, a disciple of St. Bruno, while he was dangerously ill on his sick bed, and,

* Gen. iv. 13

† Matt. xxvii. 4.

after terrifying him in many ways, began to remind him of his sins, and to throw them in his face with impudent assurance. The servant of God replied that he had already confessed these sins and received absolution, and therefore had every cause to trust that God had pardoned him. "Confessed your sins! Confessed your sins!" replied the fiend. "You have not told all; you have not made a proper confession; you have not explained the circumstances of your sins. Your confessions are all invalid; they are good for nothing; they will serve only to make your judgment the heavier." The holy monk, thus reminded of his faults, shown to him by the fiend in that accursed light which makes us see things in a false medium, and represents God as always using fire and the knife in His treatment of sick souls, was greatly alarmed, and began to be tortured by the most agonizing scruples, being so horror-stricken and full of dismay that he was on the point of falling headlong into the abyss of despair. But the ever Blessed Virgin, the true Mother of mercy, who never forsakes those who are really devoted to her, appeared to him most opportunely at this terrible moment, with her Divine Infant in her arms, and addressed him as follows: "What fearest thou, Faverius? wherefore lose heart? Hope and be of good cheer; thou hast all but reached the port. All thy sins have been forgiven thee by my most winning Child. Of this I give thee my assurance."* At these words the racking and anguish felt by the dying man at the thoughts of his sins gave place to a humble, confiding, peaceful sorrow, and shortly after he breathed his last in great calm of soul. From this we may perceive the difference between contrition, which is God's gift, and that which comes from the devil. This latter is a sorrow full of diffidence and disquiet; the former is a trusting and peaceful repentance. Let every one, then, ever strive after the gift of

God, and take care to possess it whenever he goes to confession. This kind of sorrow alone appeases God, obtains pardon for sin, and perfectly reconciles the soul with God.

There are many persons who seem to think that the whole efficacy of the sacrament of penance depends on lengthy details, and in saying in many words what could be all said in very few. The sign of a good confession is not the multitude of words, but the sorrow of the heart, and him alone may we judge to be converted, and to have made a good confession, who strives to blot out by heartfelt sorrow those sins of which his tongue makes the outward avowal. The verbal confession of sin is to be valued only inasmuch as it is the expression of a true and heartfelt repentance. Our dear Lord cursed the barren fig-tree, which, though full of branches and leaves, yet bore no fruit; so does He reject and abhor such confessions as abound in many unnecessary words, but are barren of the fruit of efficacious contrition. Sorrow, and great sorrow, is what is needed, not long explanations and needless details, if confession is to restore the sinner to grace. The truth of this is confirmed by the following incident.

Cæsarius Heisterbach relates that a young student at Paris, having fallen into many very grievous sins, betook himself to the monastery of St. Victor, and, calling the prior, fell at his feet in order to accuse himself of them. Scarce had he begun to open his lips when his contrition became so vehement that his utterance was checked, and his confession hindered, by tears, groans, and convulsive sobs. The confessor, seeing that the youth was unable from excessive grief to say another word, bade him write down his sins on a sheet of paper, and come back again when he had done so, hoping that by this means the young man would find it easier to make a confession of all his crimes. He complied, and returned to the same priest; but no sooner did he begin to read from his paper than, overcome anew with sorrow

and tears, he was unable to proceed. The confessor then asked him for the paper, and as in reading it a doubt arose in his mind on some point, he begged the penitent's leave to show his confession to the abbot, in order to get his opinion. The contrite youth willingly consented, and forthwith the prior went to see the abbot and put the paper into his hands. The abbot on opening it found nothing but a blank sheet, without so much as a single stroke of the pen upon the page. "How now," said he, "do you want me to read what is not written?" "But," replied the prior, "I have this moment read on that very paper the full confession of this my penitent." Then both began to examine the paper afresh, and found that the sins had been blotted out of it, even as they were already blotted out of the conscience of the sorrowing youth.* Behold! this young student had not yet made his confession, and still had already received a full pardon; for though he had said nothing with his tongue, he had spoken much with his heart, and nothing now remained for him to do save to fulfil the obligation of subjecting his sins to the sacramental absolution.

One day a great sinner went to hear a sermon by St. Antony of Padua. Immediately after the sermon the sinner approached the saint, and entreated him to hear his confession. Though greatly fatigued, Antony immediately entered his confessional to console the heart of the penitent. But the latter was so overcome with sorrow as to be quite unable to make his confession, his sobs and groans completely depriving him of the power of speech. As the saint was greatly pressed for time, he told his penitent to go home and write down his sins and then come back. The man obeyed: he went home, wrote down his confession, and then returned to his confessor. Now, when St. Antony opened the paper, he saw with joy that he held in his hand a blank sheet of such dazzling whiteness that no one would

* *Histor. Mirac.*, lib. v. cap. 10.

ever suppose it had been written upon. The saint looked upon this prodigy as the happy indication of perfect contrition.

The grace of true and sincere sorrow for our sins is no water of this earth, but of heaven. "If any assert," says the Council of Trent, "that without a preceding inspiration and grace of the Holy Ghost man can believe, hope, and love, or repent, in such a manner as he ought, let him be anathema." "No one," says the holy Church, "can repent of his sins in such a manner as he ought without a particular grace of God."

Man, it is true, can of himself commit sin and offend God grievously, but to rise again from his fall by heartfelt sorrow he cannot, except by God's grace. Now, this exceedingly great grace will be given to us so much the sooner the more earnestly we pray for it, especially while assisting at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. It was through the blood of Jesus Christ, visibly shed on the cross, that the dying malefactor obtained the grace of conversion, of sincere repentance. In like manner, it is through the same blood, invisibly shed at Mass, that the heavenly Father will grant us the grace of true contrition for our sins if we offer to Him the blood of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, in satisfaction for them, and beseech Him, by the merits of this blood, to have mercy on us.

But as our prayer may not be fervent enough soon to obtain for us this great grace of contrition, let us have recourse to the all-powerful prayer of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the refuge of all poor sinners, and she has obtained this unspeakably great favor for the most abandoned sinners, even in their last hour.

St. Teresa gives an account of a merchant who lived at Valladolid, in Spain. He did not live as a good Christian should live; however, he had some devotion to the Blessed Virgin. When St. Teresa came to the town where the

merchant was living, she wanted to find a house for her nuns. The merchant heard that the saint was seeking a house ; so he went to her, and offered to give her a house which belonged to him. He said he would give her the house in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. St. Teresa thanked him, and took the house. Two months after this the gentleman suddenly became very ill. He was not able to speak or make a confession. However, he showed by signs that he wished to beg pardon of our Lord for his sins, and soon after died. "After his death," St. Teresa says, "I saw our Lord. He told me that this gentleman had been very near losing his soul ; but He had mercy on him when he was dying, on account of the service he did to His blessed Mother by giving the house in her honor." "I was glad," says St. Teresa, "that his soul was saved, for I was very much afraid it would have been lost on account of his bad life." Our Lord told St. Teresa to get the house finished as soon as possible, because that soul was suffering great torments in Purgatory. It would not come out of Purgatory till the convent was finished and the first Mass said there. When the first Mass was said, St. Teresa went to the rails of the altar to receive Holy Communion. At the moment she knelt down she saw the gentleman standing by the side of the priest. His face was shining with light and joy, and his hands were joined together. He thanked St. Teresa very much for getting his soul out of the fire of Purgatory, and the saint then saw him go up into heaven.

Let us, then, pray ; and let us pray to the Mother of God for contrition, and we shall infallibly obtain this grace through her all-powerful intercession ; for her divine Son, Jesus Christ, can refuse nothing to his Mother.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PRODIGAL'S RESOLUTION—PROXIMATE OCCASION OF SIN.

MANY years ago there was a bold young fisherman living on the coast of Norway. On a dark, stormy night he took it into his head to go out in his little fishing-boat. His parents and brothers entreated him to stay, but he would not hear them. He was determined to go in spite of every remonstrance. He sailed on bravely in his tiny bark, till at last the sun arose, warm and bright, upon a placid, glassy sea. Overcome by fatigue and heat, the young man fell asleep. Suddenly aroused from his slumbers by a loud shouting at a distance, he looked round and saw his father's boat. The crew were crying aloud, and waving their hands to invite him back. But they made no effort to reach him. What was the matter? what could they mean? The young man seized his oars, and began to pull lustily towards them. But he was amazed to find that the fishing-boat towards which he had turned the prow of his bark, appeared now on his right side and soon after on his left. He had evidently been making a circle. He was going round in a spiral curve, and now he was commencing another and a narrower one. A horrible suspicion flashed upon his mind. He threw off his cloak, and pulled like a madman at his oars. But though he broke the circle a little here and a little there, still round he went, and every time he drew nearer and nearer to the centre. He could distinctly hear the roaring of the water; and as he looked he could see a downward funnel hissing and foaming. He threw down

his oars in despair, and, standing up, flung up his arms frantically. The wild sea-bird screamed in his ears; he cast himself flat on his face; he shut his ears with his hands, and he held his very breath. The boat spun round and round—the gurgling waters roared above him as he was whirled headlong down into the yawning abyss.

The story of this unhappy fisherman is the story of the greater part of men in our age and country. In our day the whole world has become an immense whirlpool of the grossest vices. Within its vortex are daily drawn thousands of souls, to be buried for ever in its depths. They are driven into it by different currents; some by the current of licentious and infidel literature; others, by the current of ignorance of the true religion; others, by the current of sinful pleasures; others, by the current of godless education; others, by the current of secret societies; others, by the current of lewd, infidel companions; others, by the current of unfortunate marriages; others, by the current of infidel governments, rebelling against Christ and His Church. If we sincerely desire not to be lost for ever, we must keep out of such currents; that is, we must avoid the proximate occasions of sin.

After the Prodigal had been kindly received by his father, he firmly resolved never again to leave his father's house and expose himself to the proximate occasion of sin. Sad experience had taught him that every proximate occasion of sin is a torrent that leads to the fathomless abyss of everlasting perdition. And by proximate occasion of sin is meant any object, person, place, or circumstance that frequently leads one into sin. In this matter, every one has to examine his own conscience, for the occasions of sin are very various.

There is one, for instance, who frequents the society of certain companions, in whose company he knows that he is sure to be tempted to sin by immodest conversation, by dis-

courses against charity, or by cursing, quarrelling, or gambling. For such a one these wicked companions are a proximate occasion of sin.

There is another who knows from sad experience that his frequent visits to the saloon and the bar-room are the cause of his drunkenness. For him the proximate occasion of sin is evidently the bar-room, the drinking-saloon.

Another knows that when once he begins to drink he cannot stop until he has drunk to excess. For him the proximate occasion of sin is intoxicating liquor.

Another has an employment which causes him to fall very frequently into sin. A man, for instance, keeps a bar-room. Now a bar-room, if properly conducted, is not sinful in itself; but the owner knows from experience that so long as he keeps this bar-room he himself cannot give up the sin of drunkenness; and that, moreover, he is continually instigating others to sin by selling liquor to drunkards, thereby causing them to commit thousands of sins. This business is for him the proximate occasion of sin.

Another has an immodest picture, or the picture of one whom he loves with sinful passion, and the sight of this picture incites him to evil thoughts and desires. The picture is the proximate occasion of sin.

Another has an occupation in which he is continually tempted, almost forced, to cheat and to steal. He buys and receives stolen goods. He is continually tempted by the bad example of others to steal from his employers, on the plea that he does not receive enough wages. Or he cheats in buying and selling because his employer tells him to do so. This employment is the proximate occasion of sin.

Another works in a factory, in a foundry, in a printing-office or store, where he is continually obliged to listen to curses and blasphemies, where he must hear his holy faith ridiculed and misrepresented; where he is almost continually tempted to take part in shameful, immodest discourses. If

he very frequently yields to these temptations and commits sin, that place and his fellow-workmen are for him the proximate occasion of sin.

Another helps to print, to sell Protestant, infidel, and immoral books. Another sings or plays in heretical or infidel churches, and thus gives scandal and encourages others in false worship. These employments are for such persons proximate occasions of sin.

Another sends his children to heretical or infidel schools, where they are in evident danger of losing their faith and their innocence. These godless schools are for the children, and, consequently, for the parents and guardians of the children, the proximate occasion of sin.

A young man lives in a house where he is continually tempted to sin, or a young woman lives in a place where she has fallen into sin again and again. Such places and circumstances are for such persons proximate occasions of sin.

Another frequents the theatre and ball-room; she goes to fairs, pleasure-parties, excursions, watering-places, where she is always tempted to sin, and, unhappily, very often yields to the temptation. These places of amusement are for her the proximate occasion of sin.

A man keeps company with a person whose very presence causes him to fall into thousands of sins of thought and desire, and tempts him into taking certain common but sinful liberties. The company of this person is for him the proximate occasion of sin.

He who has the misfortune to be living at this moment in the proximate occasion of sin is bound under pain of sin, as he hopes for salvation, to give up this occasion, no matter what it may cost. As long as he remains in the proximate occasion of sin, the devil laughs at all his good resolutions. As long as he remains within the power of the devil, the evil spirit does all he can to keep his victim enslaved; and should that person have the happiness to cast him out of

his heart by a good confession, the devil has no rest till he enters again. He knocks at the door of the heart by his temptations. He knows from experience the weak side, the ruling passion, of all of us.

The foolish may say: "There is no great danger. I am strong enough. I am sure I could live for ever in the proximate occasion of sin without falling. I hate sin; no one can ever induce me to commit it. I would rather die than sin again." Who is sure of this? Who is certain that he will not fall if he remain in the proximate occasion of sin? No man. It is certain, on the contrary, that the strongest will fall if he remain in the proximate occasion of sin. The proximate occasion leads into sin in two ways. First, it increases the natural weakness of man, his natural inclination to sin, and, secondly, he who seeks out the proximate occasion of sin deprives himself of the special assistance of God. Every one knows that at times, at least, his will is very weak, his passions fearfully strong. Even the great apostle St. Paul experienced this sad effect of original and actual sin, this corrupt inclination to evil. "I feel," he says, "in my members an inclination which wars against my reason. I do not the good which I wish to do, but the evil which I hate."* When a man places himself wilfully in the proximate occasion of sin, this natural inclination to sin becomes so strong that it is morally impossible to resist it. Suppose one were starving with hunger, and sees before him a table filled with the choicest viands, would he be able to refrain from stretching out his hand and taking of the food? Or suppose one who is parched with thirst sees before him a cup of cool, fresh water, or a goblet of sparkling wine, would he have the strength to resist his ardent longing for a cooling drink, would he leave that cup untouched? How often does it not happen that persons who have long been starving with hunger or parched with thirst,

* Rom. vii. 19.

when at last they find food, eat and drink with the greatest avidity, even though they know that by so doing they lose their life. And do we think that we shall be able, without the special grace of God, to resist our furious passions in presence of the very object of our passions, which we wilfully seek out and love? Why do we seek them out? Why do we go to meet them, unless with the desire and purpose of enjoying them? And yet we would fain deceive ourselves with the thought that we are resolved to avoid sin at the very moment that we go to meet it and even invite its approach. Is the soul blind or senseless that it knows not that the presence of the object of its passion has a fascinating power over it, which without God's special grace it will not be able to resist. But this special grace God does not throw away on those who wilfully turn their backs on Him to go to meet danger. He who goes alone to meet sin must stand or fall alone; and beyond doubt his fall will be speedy, for which he has himself and not his God to accuse.

In proximate occasions of sin even saints have fallen, and persons on the point of death have been lost. Father Segneri, S.J., relates that a female who had lived in the habit of sin with a young man, called for a confessor at the hour of her death, and with tears confessed all the wickedness of her life. After this she asked leave of her confessor to send for the young man, in order to exhort him to change his life at the sight of her death. The confessor very imprudently gave the permission, and taught her what she should say to her accomplice in sin. But what happened? As soon as she saw him, she forgot her promise to the confessor and the exhortation she was to give to the young man. She raised herself up in the bed, stretched out her arms to him, and said, "Friend, I have always loved you, and love you now more than ever. I see that on your account I shall go to hell, but I do not care; I am willing for the love of

you to be damned."* After these words she fell back on her bed and expired.

To remain free from sin in the proximate occasion of sin requires a miracle, a miracle far greater than to walk unhurt through the midst of a raging fire. But a miracle is a thing that cannot be performed without the special and extraordinary assistance of God. This assistance God will not and cannot give to those who remain wilfully in the proximate occasion of sin. We may say as often as we please, "Oh ! God is good, He will not suffer me to fall ; I will pray to Him, and he will assist me." God's assistance will not be given on such occasions. Listen to God's own words: "He that loves danger shall perish in it."†

For God to give us his assistance as long as we seek and love the proximate occasion of sin, would be to go against his own sanctity and justice. One day Satan took our blessed Lord up and placed Him upon the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem, and tempted Him to cast himself down, saying that the angels would bear Him up ; but Jesus, our Divine Saviour, answered : "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Whoever exposes himself wilfully to the proximate occasion of sin tempts God ; he is guilty of the sin of presumption.

Moreover, it is the teaching of all theologians that as often as we expose ourselves wilfully to the proximate occasion of sin, even though we may not thereby commit any other sin, we still become guilty of a mortal sin merely by so exposing ourselves. This is evident, for God forbids not only sin itself, but also everything that naturally and necessarily leads to sin. It is, therefore, absolutely certain that if we seek the danger, if we love the danger, we shall perish in it.

To say that in certain cases it is allowed to remain wilfully in the proximate occasion of sin is a proposition con-

* *Christian Instructed*, Part I., Reg. xxiv. n. 10

† *Eccclus.* iii.

demned by the Church, and consequently to believe such a thing is to be guilty of heresy. Let our determination to avoid the proximate occasion of sin be as great as that of a certain woman who was a great sinner. Passing a church one day to shorten her way, she saw a number of persons crowding in and appearing to expect something extraordinary. Curious to know what was going on, she took her place with the others ; and, the crowd increasing, she found herself so surrounded that it was impossible to think of retiring. A venerable missionary ascended the pulpit, and preached on the mercy of God to sinners. Amongst others, he several times repeated these words : “ My brethren, there is mercy for every sin, provided the sinner repents.” This woman, who had heard all very attentively, fixed her mind particularly on these words, which had struck her. As soon as the discourse was finished, she made her way through the crowd, and, approaching the preacher just as he went down from the pulpit, she pulled him by the sleeve and said with simplicity : “ Is it really true, father, that there is mercy for every sin ?” “ Nothing is more certain, madam ! God forgives all sinners if they truly repent.” “ But,” said the woman again, “ there are all sorts of sinners ; does God forgive all without distinction ?” “ Yes, certainly ; provided they detest their sins, God forgives them all without distinction.” “ Would He pardon me who for fifteen years have committed the greatest crimes ?” “ Undoubtedly,” answered the missionary, “ He will pardon your sins if you only detest and cease to commit them.” “ If that be so, father, I pray you tell me at what hour you will hear my confession.” “ I can hear you immediately, madam ; prepare yourself, and I will be back in a moment.” The missionary pointed out his confessional, and returned some time after to hear her. Before retiring, she said to her confessor : “ Father, I cannot return to my dwelling without exposing myself to the danger of falling again into sin ;

could you not procure me a shelter for the night ?” The missionary having explained to her that he could not do it without great difficulty, the woman resolved to remain in the church all night. Next morning, when the doors were opened, she was found lifeless in a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin; she was kneeling, with her face prostrate on the ground, and the pavement was seen wet with the tears she had shed. She had lamented her sins so bitterly that she died of grief. The missionary being apprised of what had happened, went to the place, recognized her as the person whose confession he had heard on the previous night, and admired the greatness of God’s mercy.*

* Noel. *Cat. de Rodez*, III. 237.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BAD BOOKS.

THE foregoing chapter has been devoted to showing the necessity of avoiding the proximate occasion of sin. There is one special occasion of sin which must be dwelt upon more at length. It is the reading of bad books. Bad books are, 1, idle, useless books which do no good, but distract the mind from what is good; 2. Many novels and romances which do not appear to be so bad, but often are bad; 3. Books which treat professedly of bad subjects; 4. Bad newspapers, journals, miscellanies, sensational magazines, weeklies, illustrated papers, medical works; 5. Superstitious books, books of fate, etc.; 6. Protestant and infidel books and tracts.

There are certain idle, useless books which, though not bad in themselves, are pernicious because they cause the reader to lose the time which he might and ought to spend in occupations more beneficial to his soul. He who has spent much time in reading such books, and then goes to prayer, to Mass, and to Holy Communion, instead of thinking of God and of making acts of love and confidence, will be constantly troubled with distractions; for the representations of all the vanities he has read will be constantly present to his mind.

The mill grinds the corn which it receives. If the wheat be bad, how can the mill turn out good flour? How is it possible to think often of God, and offer to Him frequent acts of love, of oblation, of petition, and the like, if the mind is constantly filled with the trash read in idle, useless books? In a letter to his disciple Eustochium, St. Jerome

stated for her instruction that in his solitude at Bethlehem he was attached to, and frequently read, the works of Cicero, and that he felt a certain disgust for pious books because their style was not polished. Almighty God, foreseeing the harm of this profane reading, and that without the aid of holy books the saint would never reach that height of sanctity for which he was destined, administered a remedy very harsh, no doubt, but well calculated to make him alive to his fault. He sent a grievous sickness on him, which soon brought the solitary to the brink of the grave. As he was lying at the point of death, God called him in spirit before His tribunal. The saint, being there, heard the Judge ask him who he was. He answered unhesitatingly, "I am a Christian; I hold no other faith than Thine, my Lord, my Judge." "Thou liest," said the Judge; "thou art a Ciceronian, for where thy treasure is, there thy heart is also." He then ordered him to be severely scourged. The servant of God shrieked with pain as he felt the blows, and begged for mercy, repeating in a loud voice, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord! have mercy upon me." Meanwhile, they who stood round the throne of that angry Judge, falling on their faces before Him, began to plead in behalf of the culprit, implored mercy for him, and promised in his name that his fault should be corrected. Then St. Jerome, who, smarting with pain from the hard strokes he had received, would gladly have promised much greater things, began to promise and to swear, with all the ardor of his soul, that never again would he open profane and worldly works, but that he would read pious, edifying books. As he uttered these words he returned to his senses, to the amazement of the bystanders, who had believed him to be already dead. St. Jerome concludes the narration of this sad history with these words: "Let no one fancy that it was an idle dream, like to those which come to deceive our minds in the dead of night. I call to witness the dread tribunal before which

I lay prostrate, that it was no dream, but a true representation of a real occurrence; for when I returned to myself, I found my eyes swimming with tears, and my shoulders livid and bruised with those cruel blows." He tells us, finally, that after this warning he devoted himself to the reading of pious books with the same diligence and zeal that he had before bestowed upon the works of profane writers. It was thus that Almighty God induced him to that study of divine things which was so essential to his own progress in perfection, and destined to do so much good to the whole Christian world.

It is true that in works like those of Cicero we sometimes find useful sentiments; but the same St. Jerome wisely said in a letter to another disciple: "What need have you of seeking for a little gold in the midst of so much dross, when you can read pious books in which you shall find all gold without any dross?"*

As to novels, they are, in general, pictures, and usually very highly wrought pictures, of human passions. Passion is represented as working out its ends successfully, and attaining its objects even by the sacrifice of duty. These books, as a class, present false views of life; and as it is the error of the young to mistake these for realities, they become the dupes of their own ardent and enthusiastic imaginations, which, instead of trying to control, they actually nourish with the poisonous food of phantoms and chimeras.

When the thirst for novel-reading has become insatiable—as with indulgence it is sure to do—they come at last to live in an unreal fairy-land, amidst absurd heroes and heroines of their own creation, thus unfitting themselves for the discharge of the common duties of this every-day world, and for association with every-day mortals. The more strongly works of fiction appeal to the imagination, and

* *Epis. ad Furian.*

the wider the field they afford for its exercise, the greater in general are their perilous attractions; and it is but too true that they cast, at last, a sort of spell over the mind, so completely fascinating the attention that duty is forgotten and positive obligation laid aside to gratify the desire of unravelling, to its last intricacy, the finely-spun web of some airy creation of fancy. Fictitious feelings are excited, unreal sympathies aroused, unmeaning sensibilities evoked. The mind is weakened; it has lost that laudable thirst after truth which God has imprinted on it; filled with a baneful love of trifles, vanity, and folly, it has no taste for serious reading and profitable occupations; all relish for prayer, for the Word of God, for the reception of the sacraments, is lost; and, at last, conscience and common sense give place to the dominion of unchecked imagination. Such reading, instead of forming the heart, depraves it. It poisons the morals and excites the passions; it changes all the good inclinations a person has received from nature and a virtuous education; it chills by little and little pious desires, and in a short time banishes out of the soul all that was there of solidity and virtue. By such reading, young girls on a sudden lose a habit of reservedness and modesty, take an air of vanity and frivolity, and make show of no other ardor than for those things which the world esteems and which God abominates. They espouse the maxims, spirit, conduct, and language of the passions which are there under various disguises artfully instilled into their minds; and, what is most dangerous, they cloak all this irregularity with the appearances of civility and an easy, complying, gay humor and disposition.

St. Teresa, who fell into this dangerous snare of reading idle books, writes thus of herself: "This fault failed not to cool my good desires, and was the cause of my falling insensibly into other defects. I was so enchanted with the extreme pleasure I took herein that I thought I could not

be content if I had not some new romance in my hands. I began to imitate the mode, to take delight in being well dressed, to take great care of my hands, to make use of perfumes, and to affect all the vain trimmings which my condition admitted. Indeed, my intention was not bad, for I would not for the world, in the immoderate passion which I had to be decent, give any one an occasion of offending God; but I now acknowledge how far these things, which for several years appeared to me innocent, are effectually and really criminal."

Criminal and dangerous, therefore, is the disposition of those who fritter away their time in reading such books as fill the mind with a worldly spirit, with a love of vanity, pleasure, idleness, and trifling; which destroy and lay waste all the generous sentiments of virtue in the heart, and sow there the seeds of every vice. Who seeks nourishment from poisons? Our thoughts and reflections are to the mind what food is to the body; for by them the affections of the soul are nourished. The chameleon changes its color as it is affected by pain, anger, or pleasure, or by the color upon which it sits; and we see an insect borrow its lustre and hue from the plant or leaf upon which it feeds. In like manner, what our meditations and affections are, such will our souls become—either holy and spiritual or earthly and carnal.

In addition to their other dangers, many of these books unfortunately teem with maxims subversive of faith in the truths of religion. The current popular literature in our day is penetrated with the spirit of licentiousness, from the pretentious quarterly to the arrogant and flippant daily newspaper, and the weekly and monthly publications are mostly heathen or maudlin. They express and inculcate, on the one hand, stoical, cold, and polished pride of mere intellect, or, on the other, empty and wretched sentimentality. Some employ the skill of the engraver to caricature

the institutions and offices of the Christian religion, and others to exhibit the grossest forms of vice and the most distressing scenes of crime and suffering. The illustrated press has become to us what the amphitheatre was to the Romans when men were slain, women were outraged, and Christians given to the lions to please a degenerate populace. "The slime of the serpent is over it all." It instils the deadly poison of irreligion and immorality through every pore of the reader. The fatal miasma floats in the whole literary atmosphere, is drawn in with every literary breath, corrupting the very life-blood of religion in the mind and soul. Thus it frequently happens that the habitual perusal of such books soon banishes faith from the soul, and in its stead introduces infidelity. He who often reads bad books will soon be filled with the spirit of the author who wrote them. The first author of pious books is the Spirit of God; but the author of bad books is the devil, who artfully conceals from certain persons the poison which such works contain. Written, as they generally are, in a most attractive, flowery style, the reader becomes enchanted, as it were, by their perusal, not suspecting the poison that lies hidden under that beautiful style, and which he drinks as he reads on.

But it is objected the book is not so bad. Of what do bad books treat? What religion do they teach? Many of them teach either deism, atheism, or pantheism? Others ridicule our holy religion and everything that is sacred. What morals do these books teach? The most lewd. Vice and crime are deified; monsters of humanity are held out as true heroes. Some of these books speak openly and shamelessly of the most obscene things, whilst others do so secretly, hiding their poison under a flowery style. They are only the more dangerous because their poisonous contents enter the heart unawares.

A person was very sorry to see that a certain bad book was

going so much harm. He thought he would read it, that he might be better able to speak against it. With this object in view he read the book. The end of it was that instead of helping others he ruined himself.

Some say, "I read bad books on account of the style. I wish to improve my own style. I wish to learn something of the world." This is no sufficient reason for reading such books. The good style of a book does not make its poisonous contents harmless. A fine dress may cover a deformed body, but it cannot take away its deformity. Poisonous serpents and flowers may be very beautiful, but for all that they are not the less poisonous. To say that such books are read purely because of their style is not true, because those who allege this as an excuse sometimes read novels which are written in a bad style. There are plenty of good books, written in excellent style, which are sadly neglected by these lovers of pure English.

To consult those books for a knowledge of the world is another common excuse for their perusal. Well, where shall we find an example of one who became a deeper thinker, a more eloquent speaker, a more expert business man, by reading novels and bad books? They only teach how to sin, as Satan taught Adam and Eve to eat of the forbidden tree, under the pretence of attaining real knowledge; and the result was loss of innocence, peace, and Paradise, and the punishment of the human race through all time.

Some profess to skip the bad portions and read only the good. But how are they to know which are the bad portions unless they read them? The pretext is a false one. He only will leave the bad who hates it. But he who hates the bad things will not read the books at all, unless he be obliged to do so; and no one is obliged to read them, for there are plenty of good, profitable, and entertaining books which can be read without danger.

There is a class of readers who flatter themselves that bad books may hurt others, but not them; they make no impression on them. Happy and superior mortals! Are they gifted with hearts of stone, or of flesh and blood? Have they no passions? Why should these books hurt others and not them? Is it because they are more virtuous than others? Is it not true that the bad, obscene parts of the story remain more vividly and deeply impressed upon their minds than those which are more or less harmless? Did not the perusal of these books sometimes cause those imaginations and desires forbidden by Christian modesty? Did they not sometimes accuse themselves in confession of having read them? If not, they ought to have done so. Who would like to die with such a book in their hand? Readers of bad books who say such reading does not affect them should examine themselves and see whether they are not blinded by their passions, or so far gone in crime that, like an addled egg, they cannot become more corrupt than they already are.

See that infamous young man, that corrupter of innocence. What is the first step often of a young reprobate who wishes to corrupt some poor, innocent girl? He first lends her a bad book. He believes that if she reads that book she is lost. A bad book, as he knows, is an agreeable corrupter; for it veils vice under a veil of flowers. It is a shameless corrupter. The most licentious would blush, would hesitate to speak the language that their eyes feed on. But a bad book does not blush, feels no shame, no hesitation. Itself unmoved and silent, it places before the heart and imagination the most shameful obscenities.

A bad book is a corrupter to whom the reader listens without shame, because it can be read alone and taken up when one pleases.

Go to the hospitals and brothels; ask that young man who is dying of a shameful disease; ask that young woman

who has lost her honor and her happiness; go to the dark grave of the suicide; ask them what was the first step in their downward career, and they will answer, the reading of bad books.

Not long ago a young lady from Poughkeepsie, N. Y., who was once a good Catholic, began to read novels. Not long after she wished to imitate what she read, and to become a great lady. So she left her comfortable home, and ran away with another young lady to New York. There she changed her name, became a drunkard and a harlot, and even went so far in her wickedness as to kill a policeman. Here is the story, told in the woman's own words as given in the public press:

Fanny Wright, the woman who killed police officer McChesney, in New York, on the night of November 2, has been removed to the Tombs, and now occupies a cell in the upper tier of the female prison. The clothing stained with blood of her victim, which she has worn since her arrest, has been changed. In reply to interrogations she made the following statements respecting her life:

“About ten years ago I was living happily with my parents at Poughkeepsie, in this State. Nothing that I wished for was withheld. I was trained in the Roman Catholic faith, and attended to my religious duties with carefulness and pleasure until I was corrupted by a young girl of the same age, who was my school-fellow. She had been reading novels to such an extent that her head had become fairly upset, and nothing would do her but to travel and see the world. The dull life of a small country place like Poughkeepsie would not suit her tastes and inclinations, and from repeatedly whispering into my ears and persuading me that we would be great ladies, have horses, carriages, diamonds, and servants of our own, I finally reluctantly consented to flee from home, and we started together one beautiful night for the city of New York. [Here the poor woman gave way

to tears, and sobbed hysterically.] On our arrival in this city we took up our quarters with Mrs. Adams, at No. 87 Leonard Street, and this was the place where I lost my virtue and commenced to lead a life of bitter, bitter shame. My family ultimately succeeded in finding out my whereabouts and took me home, but I could not listen to the voice of reason. I felt that I had selected my mode of life, and was determined at all hazards to follow it out. I escaped a second time, and went back to Mrs. Adams's, where I was confined of a sweet little girl shortly afterwards. I used to keep myself very clean, and dressed with great care and tastefulness. From Mrs. Adams's I moved to Mrs. Wiloughby's, at No. 101 Mercer Street, and lived there until the death of my little girl, three years ago; that had an awful effect upon me; I could not help taking to drink to drown my sorrow. From this period I date the commencement of my real hardships. My father emigrated to California, and I had no one left but a young brother; he tried to reform me, and also his poor wife; God bless her! she used to cry herself sick at my disgrace. Previous to this the young girl who accompanied me from home in the first instance fell out lucky, and got married. Drinking was the only pleasure of my life, and it was not long until it began to have its results; I was arrested and committed to the Island for six months; I got down before my time was up, and again took to liquor and street-walking. I used to walk all the time between Greene, Wooster, and Mercer Streets, in the Eighth Ward. I was soon arrested the second time, and sent up again for six months. During the last three years of my life, I have been sent on the Island six times altogether for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. On the night the officer was killed [here she gave way again to tears, and rocked herself around on the bed in a fearful manner], I was walking through the street, going home with message, and picking the kernels out of a hickory-nut

with a small knife, when the officer came up to me ; I was almost drunk at the time, and much excited ; I did not know what I was doing, when on the impulse of the moment I struck him with the knife and killed him." On Tuesday the brother of Fanny, a respectable young man, residing in the neighborhood of Poughkeepsie, called at the prison and had an interview with his sister.

A more affecting scene, says the *Express*, it has seldom been our lot to witness. Although a strong, robust man, he fairly shook with emotion from a keen sense of grief and shame. He remained with her for nearly an hour. She was almost frantic with violent outbursts of grief, and after his departure became insensible.

Another young lady of the State of New York was sent to a convent school, where she received a brilliant education. She spoke seven languages. She wished to enter a convent, but was prevented by her parents. Her parents died, and after their death the young lady took to novel-reading. She soon wished to imitate what she had read ; she wished to become a heroine. So she went upon the stage and danced in the "Black Crook." At last she fell one day on Second Avenue, in New York, and broke her leg in six places. She was taken to a hospital, where a good lady gave her a prayer-book. But she flung it away and asked for a novel. She would not listen to the priest encouraging her to make her confession and be reconciled to God. She died repentent, with a novel in her hand.

Assuredly, if we are bound by every principle of our religion to avoid bad company, we are equally bound to avoid bad books ; for of all evil, corrupting company, the worst is a bad book. There can be no doubt that the most pernicious influences at work in the world at this moment come from bad books and bad newspapers. The yellow-covered literature, as it is called, is a pestilence compared with which the yellow fever, and cholera, and small-pox are as nothing.

and yet there is no quarantine against it. Never take a book into your hands which you would not be seen reading. Avoid not only notoriously immoral books and papers, but avoid also all those miserable sensational magazines and novels and illustrated papers which are so profusely scattered around on every side. The demand which exists for such garbage speaks badly for the moral sense and intellectual training of those who read them. If you wish to keep your mind pure and your soul in the grace of God, you must make it a firm and steady principle of conduct never to touch them.

Would you be willing to pay a man for poisoning your food? And why should you be fool enough to pay the authors and publishers of bad books and pamphlets, magazines, and the editors of irreligious newspapers for poisoning your soul with their impious principles and their shameful stories and pictures?

Go, then, and burn all bad books in your possession, even if they do not belong to you, even if they are costly. Two boys in New York bought a bad picture with their pocket-money, and burned it. A young man in Augusta, Ga., spent twenty dollars in buying up bad books and papers to burn them all. A modern traveller tells us that when he came to Evora, he there on Sunday morning conversed with a girl in the kitchen of the inn. He examined some of her books which she showed him, and told her that one of them was written by an infidel, whose sole aim was to bring all religion into contempt. She made no reply to this, but, going into another room, returned with her apron full of dry sticks, all of which she piled upon the fire and produced a blaze. She then took that bad book and placed it upon the flaming pile; then, sitting down, she took her rosary out of her pocket, and told her beads until the book was entirely burnt up.*

* *Compitum*, book ii. p. 239.

In the Acts of the Apostles we read that when St. Paul preached at Ephesus, many of the Jews and Gentiles were converted to the faith. "And many of them that believed came confessing and declaring their deeds. And many of those who had followed curious arts brought together their books and burnt them before all. And counting the price of them, they found the money to be fifty thousand pieces of silver."*

A young nobleman who was on a sea voyage began to read an obscene book in which he took much pleasure. A religious priest, on noticing it, said to him: "Are you disposed to make a present to Our Blessed Lady?" The young man replied that he was. "Well," said the priest, "I wish that, for the love of the most holy Virgin, you would give up that book and throw it into the sea." "Here it is, father," answered the young man. "No," replied the priest, "you must yourself make this present to Mary." He did so at once. Mary was not slow in rewarding the nobleman for the great promptness with which he cast the bad book into the sea; for no sooner had he returned to Genoa, his native place, than the Mother of God so inflamed his heart with divine love that he entered a religious order.†

* Acts xix. 18-20.

† Nadasi, *Ann. Mar. S. J.*, 1606.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT INCREASED THE PRODIGAL'S SORROW — GENERAL CONFESSION.

ONE day the Countess de Joigny sent for St. Vincent de Paul to prepare one of her servants for death. The saint went immediately. His great charity induced the sick man to make a general confession. And, indeed, nothing but a general confession could have saved the dying man ; for he publicly declared that he had never confessed certain mortal sins. The sincerity with which he declared his secret miseries was followed by an inexpressible consolation. The sinner felt that an enormous weight, which had for many years oppressed him, was at length taken off. The most remarkable circumstance was that he passed from one extreme to another. During the three days of life that were still left him, he made several public confessions of the faults which a false shame had always prevented him from confessing hitherto. “ Ah ! madam,” he exclaimed on beholding the countess enter his room, “ I should have been damned on account of several mortal sins which I always concealed in confession ; but Father Vincent has, by his charity, induced me to make all my confessions over again. I am very grateful to Father Vincent, and to you for having sent him to me to prepare me for a happy death.” Upon hearing this unexpected confession of her servant, the countess exclaimed : “ Alas ! Father Vincent, what must I hear ? How great is my surprise ! What happened to this servant of mine happens, no doubt, to many other people. If this man, who was

considered a pious Christian by every one who knew him, could live so long in the state of mortal sin, how great must be the spiritual misery of those whose life is much looser ! Alas ! my dear father, how many souls are lost ! What is to be done ? What remedy must be applied to prevent the ruin of so many souls ?”

“ Ah !” exclaimed St. Vincent, “ false shame prevents a great many persons from confessing all their grievous sins. This is the reason why they live constantly in a state of damnation. O my God ! how important is it often to inculcate the necessity of a general confession. Persons who have concealed grievous sins in their confession have no other remedy left to recover the grace of God. This farmer himself avowed publicly that he would have been damned had it not been for his general confession. A soul, penetrated with the spirit of true repentance, is filled with so great a hatred for sin that she is ready to confess her sins, not only to the priest, but to every one else whom she meets. I have met with persons who, after a good general confession, wished to make known their sins to the whole world, and I had the greatest difficulty to prevent them from doing so. Although I had strictly forbidden them not to speak to any one of their crimes, yet some would tell me : ‘ No, father, I will not be silent ; I will tell the people how great a sinner I am ; I am the most wicked man in the world ; I deserve death.’ See, then, what the grace of God can do ; see the great sorrow it can produce in the soul ! This was the way in which the greatest saints acted. Witness St. Augustine, who made a public confession of his sins in a book which he wrote to that effect ; witness also the great Apostle St. Paul, who tells us, in his Epistles, what sins he committed against God and the Church. These saints made this public confession of their sins in order to make known to the whole world the great mercy which God had exercised in their

regard. The grace of God has also produced a similar effect in the soul of this farmer. O my God! how important is it to inculcate the necessity of general confession." *

To many persons a general confession is absolutely necessary for salvation. It is necessary, 1st, to all those who, in any of their former confessions, have wilfully concealed a mortal sin; 2. To those who have confessed their sins without sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment.

But who are those that confess without true sorrow for their sins? They are—

1. All who do not intend to keep the promise to avoid mortal sin which they made in confession.

2. All who are not willing to forgive their enemies.

3. All who have no intention to restore ill-gotten goods, or the good name of their neighbor after having taken it away by slander or detraction.

4. All who are not fully determined to keep away from taverns, grog-shops, and such places as have always proved occasions of sin to them; and

5. All who do not break off sinful company.

Now, the reason why these persons must make a general confession is because their confessions were bad; instead of obtaining forgiveness by them, they only increase their guilt before God. In order to be forgiven they must, 1, confess over again all those mortal sins which they have committed from the time they began to make bad confessions; 2. They must tell in confession how many times they received the sacraments unworthily; and, 3. They must be very sorry for all those sins, and firmly resolve never to commit them again.

There are, however, others to whom a general confession would be hurtful. There are certain scrupulous souls who have already made a general confession, who have confessed even more than was necessary, and yet they cannot

* *Abelly, Vie de St. Vincent de Paul.*

rest. They wish to be always employed in making general confessions, with the hope of thus removing their fears and troubles. But what is the result? Their perplexities are always increased, because new apprehensions and scruples of having omitted or of not having sufficiently explained their sins, are continually excited in their minds. Hence, the more they repeat confessions, the more they are stirring up, as it were, a hornet's nest—being stung more than ever with thousands of scruples, and wounded all over with fears and troubles of spirit. The reason of this is that the alarms and terrors which agitate these scrupulous souls are grounded, not on solid reasons, but on baseless apprehensions, which the remembrance of past sins can serve only to encourage and to quicken, so as to double the disturbance in the mind.

But a person may say: "If the sin be really a mortal sin, and if I have not confessed it, shall I be saved?" "Yes, you will be saved," says St. Alphonsus, St. Thomas Aquinas, and all divines; "for if, after a careful examination of conscience, a mortal sin has not been told through forgetfulness, it is indirectly forgiven by the sacramental absolution; because when God forgives one mortal sin, He at the same time forgives all others of which the soul may be guilty."

He who makes as good a confession of his sins as he can obtain, by the sacrament of penance, the forgiveness not only of those sins which he confesses, but also of those which, through forgetfulness, he does not confess. In spite of this failing of the memory, the penitent is in God's grace and in the path of salvation. He should therefore be at peace and never more mention his past sins. He should understand that a general confession is useful for a certain class of persons, but very dangerous and injurious to a person that is always agitated by scruples; for the repetition of past sins may be productive of grievous

detriment to such a soul, and may drive her to despair. Hence good confessors do not permit scrupulous persons to speak of past sins. The remedy for them is not to explain their doubts, but to be silent and obey, believing for certain that God will never ask of them an account of what they have done in obedience to their confessors.

Lastly, there are persons for whom a general confession is most useful ; for those who never made a general confession at all. A general confession gives our confessor a better knowledge of the state of our conscience, of the virtues in which we stand most in need, and of the passions and vices to which we are most inclined ; and he is thus better able to apply proper remedies and give good advice.

A general confession also contributes greatly to humble our soul, to increase the sorrow we feel for our ingratitude towards God, and to make us adopt holy resolutions for the future.

Whilst the prodigal was feeding the swine, he could not help reflecting on the happiness of his brother, and even of his father's servants. He compared his life of degradation with the life he might have enjoyed had he stayed with his father. The grief which he had caused to his father, his ingratitude towards him, his bodily and spiritual misery—all the crimes of his life were before his mind. He could no longer endure this horrible prospect nor the bitter remorse of his conscience. He hastened to make a public confession to his father of all his crimes, with tears in his eyes saying : " Make me as one of thy hired servants."

We too, on looking back at all the faults into which we have fallen during our whole life, cannot fail to be stirred up to a more lively contrition than can be excited by the recollection of those ordinary failings which usually form the matter of the confessions which are called " particular " as distinct from general confessions. Far different, indeed, is the confession and humility which fills the mind at the

sight of a whole legion of sins from that which is occasioned by the consciousness of some single fault into which we have but recently been betrayed. One or two regiments cannot have that power against the enemy which is possessed by the vast, serried mass of the battalions of an army. So the one or two faults of which we accuse ourselves in our ordinary confessions cannot have the force which the whole host of our failings possesses to subdue our hearts, to soften them into perfect contrition, and to bring them to a deep sense of humility and inward self-abasement.

This truth of the Catholic faith is wondrously illustrated by what may be read in the fourth step of the well-known *Ladder of Perfection*, by St. John Climacus. A most abandoned youth, touched by the grace of God, and sincerely repenting of his disorderly life, went to one of the monasteries most famous for the holiness of its inmates, and, falling at the feet of the superior, asked permission to be admitted into the community, in order to do penance for his sins. The young man was received. He declared himself ready to make a public confession of his sins in presence of all the monks of the monastery. The following Sunday the monks, two hundred and thirty in number, were gathered together in church. The abbot brought in the young man, who was visibly touched with the deepest compunction. Prostrate in the church, the penitent began, with a flood of tears, to make public confession of all his crimes, distinguishing both their number and kind. Whilst he went on accusing himself of all the murders he had committed, of his many robberies, and repeated sacrileges, the monks were wondrously edified at the sight of a penitence so rarely witnessed. Meanwhile a holy monk saw some one, of majestic and awful appearance, standing with a large roll and a bottle of ink in one hand, and in the other hand a pen. He observed, too, that as each sin was confessed the man crossed it out with his pen; so that, when the confession

was ended, all the sins were cancelled from the paper and from the soul of the young man at the same time.

Now, what was thus visibly shown in the case of that repentant youth happens, in an invisible manner, to all who make a good general confession. All their sins are blotted out at once from the book in which our life is written by God, and from the book of our soul, which then regains its former unsullied purity. In the little book *Triumph of the Blessed Sacrament over Beelzebub; or, History of Nicola Aubry*, who was possessed by Beelzebub and several other evil spirits, we read the following :

One day, during one of the exorcisms in church, the evil spirit was chattering and uttering all kinds of nonsense. Suddenly he stopped short and gazed fixedly at a young man who was eagerly forcing his way through the crowd in order to have a nearer view of the possessed woman. The devil saluted him in a mocking tone: "Good-morning, Peter," said he, calling him also by his family name. "Come here and take a good view of me. Ah! Peter, I know that you are a free-thinker; but, tell me, where were you last night?" And then the devil related, in presence of every one in church, a shameful sin that Peter had committed the preceding night. He described all the circumstances with such precision that Peter was overwhelmed with confusion, and could not utter a word. "Yes," cried the devil in a mocking tone, "You have done it; you dare not deny it."

Peter hurried away as fast as he could, muttering to himself: "The devil tells the truth this time. I thought that no one knew it but I myself and God."

Peter seemed to have forgotten that the devil is the witness of our evil actions, that he remembers them all well, and that, at the hour of death, he will bring them all against us, as he himself declared. "For it is thus," he added in a rage, "that I take revenge on sinners." Peter

had not been to confession for many years, and, as a natural consequence, his morals were not exactly of the purest order. He had been guilty of gross sins which, in the fashionable world, go by the name of "pardonable weaknesses," "slight indiscretions," etc. The public accusation of the devil filled him with wholesome confusion. He rushed into the confessional, cast himself at the feet of the priest, confessed all his sins with true contrition, and received absolution. After having finished his confession, Peter had the boldness to press through the crowd once more; but this time he kept at a respectful distance from his infernal accuser. The exorcist saw Peter, and, knowing that he had been at confession, he told him to draw near. Then, pointing to him, the priest said to the devil: "See here, do you know this man?"

The devil raised his eyes, and leisurely surveyed Peter from head to foot, and from right to left. At last he said: "Why, really, it is Peter."

"Well!" said the priest, "do you know anything else about him?"

"No," answered the devil, "nothing else."

The devil then had no longer any knowledge of Peter's sins, because they had been entirely blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ in the holy sacrament of confession.

We read of the holy Bishop Eligius that, desirous of attaining to a more exact purity of conscience, he made a general confession to a priest of all the sins he had committed from his earliest childhood, after which he began to advance with greater earnestness and fervor of spirit in the way of perfection.*

It is related in the life of St. Engelbert that, having retired to his private oratory in company with another bishop, he accused himself of all the sins he had committed with such a profusion of tears that they flowed down copiously over his breast, so that his confessor was no less edified than

* *Surius in Vita S. Eligii.*

astonished at the heartiness and intensity of his repentance. The next morning he resumed the confession of certain other of his failings, with a like abundance of tears.*

It is plain that this more lively repentance, this deeper, inward, and most real humility, must have more power to cleanse the soul, and help it to attain more speedily to purity of heart, especially as the purpose of amendment is commonly the more efficacious the greater our sorrow is for having offended Almighty God. St. Paul teaches that the supernatural sorrow works lasting fruits of salvation.† The apostle means to say that penance, when duly performed, produces a lasting amendment. Various reasons can be given for this. In the first place, the very disowning our faults and the good purposes of serious amendment which accompany a well-made general confession detach the soul from all affection for its past sins, and render it careful not to fall into them again. Then, again, the special grace bestowed in this sacrament strengthens the will in its conflict with our own disordered inclinations and the deceitful suggestions of our eternal foes. So that a general confession not only cleanses us from past failings, but makes us more watchful and careful not to commit them again.

St. Bernard, in his history of St. Malachy, relates that there was a woman so subject to fits of anger, rage, and fury that she seemed herself like a fury from the bottomless pit sent to torment every one who came in contact with her. Wherever she stayed her venomous tongue stirred up hatred and quarrelling, brawls and strife; so that she became unbearable, not only to her own kindred and more immediate neighbors, but even to her very children, who, unable to live with her, had purposed to leave her and to go elsewhere. But, as a last endeavor, they took her to the holy Bishop Malachy, to see whether he would be able to tame the ungovernable temper of their mother. St. Malachy confined

* Surius in *Vita S. Engelberti*

† 2 Cor. vii. 10

himself to the enquiry whether she had ever confessed all her outbursts of passion, all her many outrageous words, and the numberless brawls she had provoked with her unruly tongue. She replied that she had not. "Well, then," continued the holy bishop, "confess them now to me." She did so, and after her confession he gave her some loving counsel, pointing out suitable remedies, and, having imposed a penance, absolved her from her sins. After this confession the woman, to the astonishment of all who knew her, appeared changed from the fierce lioness she had been into a meek lamb. St. Bernard concludes his narration by saying that "the woman was still living when he wrote, and that she, whose tongue had up to that time outraged and exasperated everybody, now seemed to be unable to resent the injuries, the insults, the mishaps, which daily fell to her lot." Behold, then, how a good general confession has power to cleanse the soul from past defilement, and to preserve it from falling again into grievous sin. In such a confession the source of sin is greatly weakened; temptation ceases, or is altogether tempered; grace is considerably increased; the mind is unusually strengthened; and the demon is enervated and confounded. Oh! what consolation of mind results from this practice, what peace of conscience, what reformation of life, what confidence of pardon from God, what lightness of heart, what a change of person, what a facility in good works, what an increase in devotion, in tenderness of spirit, in vivacity of intelligence, in purity of conscience, and in all spiritual gifts which conduce to eternal salvation!

Christ Himself has been pleased to give us a striking illustration of this doctrine in the instance of that well-known penitent, Blessed Margaret of Cortona. Beholding the fervent conversion of this once sinful woman, our Lord began to instruct and encourage her in divers ways, showing Himself to her overflowing with love and tender compas-

sion, and often addressing her as His “*poor little one!*” One day the holy penitent, in a transport of that confidence which is the natural fruit of filial love, said to Him, “O my Lord! Thou always callest me Thy ‘poor little one.’ Am I ever to have the happiness of hearing Thy divine lips call me by the sweet name of ‘my daughter’?” “Thou art not yet worthy of it,” replied our dear Lord. “Before thou canst receive the treatment and the name of daughter, thou must more thoroughly cleanse thy soul by a general accusation of all thy faults.” On hearing this Margaret applied herself to searching into her conscience, and during eight successive days disclosed her sins to a priest, shedding a torrent of tears at the same time. After her confession she went to receive, in a most humble manner, the most holy Body of our Lord. Scarce had she received it when she heard most clearly in her inmost soul the words “My daughter.” At this most sweet name, to hear which she had longed so ardently, she was rapt at once into an ecstasy, and remained immersed, as it were, in an ocean of gladness and delight. On recovering from her trance she began to exclaim, as one beside herself, “O sweet word, ‘My daughter’! O loving name! O word full of joy! O sound replete with assurance, ‘My daughter’!”* From this we may see how much a general confession, and the preparation it implies, avail to cleanse, purify, and beautify the soul; since by means of it this holy woman rose from the pitiable condition of a servant, in which she was at the beginning of her conversion, to the honorable rank of a well-beloved daughter. So that she who was at first gazed upon by the Redeemer’s pitying glances, was afterwards contemplated by Him with love and most tender complacency.

A Dominican novice, having one night fallen asleep near the altar, heard a voice calling to him, “Go and have thy

* Francesco Marchese, *Vita di S. Margaretha da Cortona*, c. vii

tonsure renewed." On awaking the youth understood how God, by that voice, would have him confess his sins again. He went directly to cast himself at the feet of St. Dominic, and repeated his last confession with greater care and with more searching accuracy and diligence. Shortly after he retired to rest. In the midst of his slumbers he beheld an angel coming down from heaven, bearing in his hands a golden crown all set with priceless gems; and the angel, winging his flight towards him, placed this crown upon his head as an ornament to his brows. Let him who never made a general confession consider the above warning as made to himself. Let him take occasion of the approach of some special day or great festival, and say to himself, "Renew thy tonsure"; prepare for a general confession, which may cleanse thy soul, and render it wholly fair, bright, and pure in the sight of the Lord. Then he may confidently hope for the day when he will see himself crowned, not indeed in this life, but in the next, with a crown of resplendent stars.

Now, in order to preserve and increase the purity of soul, acquired by a good general confession, we ought to have frequent recourse to the sacrament of penance.

Blosius tells us how our dear Saviour said one day to St. Bridget that in order to acquire His Spirit, and preserve the same when acquired, she should often confess her sins and imperfections to the priest.*

The greatest gift God can bestow upon a soul is the gift of divine love. This gift of perfect charity He bestows on the souls that are spotless and pure in His sight. He imparts this gift to the soul in proportion to her purity. It is certain that frequent confession is one of the most effectual means of speedily attaining to purity of soul, since, of its very nature, it helps us to acquire that clean-

* *Monit. Spirit.*, c. v.

ness of heart which is the crowning disposition for receiving the gift of divine love.

“Blessed are the clean of heart.”* Some have imagined that cleanness of heart consists in an entire freedom from all sin and all imperfections whatsoever. But such cleanness of heart has been the privilege only of Jesus Christ and His ever-blessed Mother Mary. No one else can be said to have led so spotless a life in this polluted world as not to have contracted some stain. St. Thomas Aquinas says that a man can avoid each particular venial sin, but not all in general. And St. Leo the Great says of persons wholly devoted to God’s service, that, owing to the frailty of our nature, not even such pious persons are free from the dust of trivial transgressions.†

Since, then, cleanness of heart cannot mean an entire freedom from sin, it must imply two things: First, an exact custody of our hearts, and a strict watchfulness over our outward actions, in order to avoid, as far as possible, the committing of a single wilful fault. The stricter the watch which a person keeps over his actions, and the more successful he is in diminishing the number of his failings, the more unblemished will be his purity.

Secondly, as, in spite of all the caution we can take, we shall ever be contracting some slight defilement of soul, it will be necessary to be constantly careful to cleanse our hearts from the impurities which accumulate through the more trivial faults into which we so frequently fall.

The cleanliness of a fine hall does not imply that no grain of dust shall ever fall upon the floor, walls, paintings, and furniture. Such cleanliness as this may not be looked for even in royal residences. It supposes only that the palace and its precincts be kept free from all accumulations of dirt, that all be often swept and dusted, and that everything opposed to cleanliness be removed. A lady, however

* *Matt. v.*

† *Serm. iv. De Quadr.*

particular on the point of cleanliness, does not require that her garments should preserve their first whiteness, for that, she knows, is impossible ; but she is careful to keep them from all stain, and to have them frequently washed and cleansed from such stains as they may have contracted. The same holds good of purity of heart, which cannot, of course, consist in entire freedom from faults of every kind, but in carefully watching over self, in guarding against any wilful defilement, and in frequently purifying the conscience.

Now, these are precisely the two effects which frequent confession produces in the soul. Hence we attain, by its means, more speedily than by any other, to that purity of soul which is the crowning disposition for receiving divine love. Nothing in the world can cleanse our garments so completely from soil and spot as sacramental confession can purify our souls from every stain. In this sacrament the soul is all plunged into a bath of Christ's blood, which has a boundless efficacy for taking from it all that makes it hideous, and for rendering it whiter than the lily, purer than the driven snow. This is what the Apostle St. John assures us when he says, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity.*"

Bodily medicine, if very sparingly used, gives relief, it is true, while, if frequently applied, it restores or preserves health ; thus too confession, if made even but seldom, produces saving effects in the soul, while, if made frequently, it begets in it the fulness of perfection.

To this may be added another most important reflection : it is that confession, made frequently, is a most effectual means of disarming our ghostly enemy, and thus disabling him from doing us injury and hindering our spiritual progress. It is easy to account for this, since all the power which the enemy has over us comes from the sins that we

* 1 John i. 9

commit. If these be mortal, they put him in full possession of our souls ; if venial, though they do not confer a dominion on him, yet they embolden him to attack us with greater violence. It thence follows that if we confess duly and frequently, the soul will be habitually free from sin ; and thus the devil will be deprived of all dominion over us, and will have no courage or power to harm us ; so that we shall be more free and unshackled in our pilgrimage towards heaven.

Cæsarius relates * that a theologian of blameless life, being about to die, beheld the devil lurking in a corner of his room ; and he addressed the fiend in the words of St. Martin : “ What art thou doing here, thou cruel beast ? ” He then, by virtue of his priestly power, commanded the devil to declare what it was that most injured him and his fellows in this world. Though thus adjured, the devil remained silent. Not allowing himself to be baffled, the priest conjured the demon, in the name of God, to answer him, and answer him with truth. The evil spirit thereupon made this reply : “ There is nothing in the Church which does us so much harm, which so unnerves our power, as frequent confession.” Hence whoever aspires to cleanness of heart, and to perseverance in it, should make a general confession, and then confess often and see that his confessions are good.

* *Mirac.*, lib. ii. c. xxxviii.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GREAT BANQUET—HOLY COMMUNION.

WE read in Holy Scripture that the prophets besought God again and again to show Himself : “ Show us Thy face, O Lord ! and we shall be saved.” This, too, was the ardent prayer of Moses : “ O Lord ! show me Thy glory.” * The existence of God among men in some sensible form is a want of the human heart. Here on earth we are never satisfied ; we always crave for something more, something higher, something better. Whence comes this continual restlessness that haunts us through life, and pursues us even to the grave ? It is the home-sickness of the soul, its craving after God. All things were created for man ; but man was created to live with God, and to be united with God. Therefore the idea, the essence, of all true happiness may be expressed in one word : “ Emmanuel —God with us.”

To satisfy the craving of the human heart after the Real Presence of God, Jesus Christ instituted the Blessed Sacrament at the Last Supper. At that time He thought : “ I have already given men so many proofs of my love towards them. Ah ! I can make them one more present ; I will give them a most precious gift ; I will give them all that I have and am. I will give them myself as a legacy ; I will give them my Divinity and Humanity, my Body and my Soul, myself entire and without reserve. I will make them this present at the very moment when the Pharisees and Jews are planning to remove me out of the world. At this

* Exod. xxxiii. 18.

moment I will give myself to men, to be their food and drink ; to abide with them in the Blessed Sacrament in a wonderful manner ; to be always in their midst by dwelling in their churches. Instead of withdrawing myself from them on account of their ingratitude, I will manifest my love to them the more by staying with them day and night in the Blessed Eucharist." The institution of the Blessed Sacrament is the great banquet of which Jesus speaks in the parable of the prodigal : " Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and make merry." *

This banquet is great in its origin ; it was instituted by God Himself, who prepared it at infinite cost ; it is God who entertains us therein like a God—that is to say, with infinite magnificence. He is all-wise ; but in His wisdom He has nothing better to bestow upon us. He is the source of all riches and splendor ; but He has nothing equal in value to this banquet. He is all-powerful ; but He can give us nothing greater.

This banquet is great on account of the food that is there ; for it is the Body and Blood, Soul, Divinity, and Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all His merits, all His graces, and His works, which are served, so to speak, at this banquet.

This banquet is great on account of its extent, for this heavenly banquet is spread everywhere on earth ; there is no part of the universe where these sacred mysteries are not celebrated, where this divine Lamb is not sacrificed, where the faithful cannot partake of the Bread of angels.

This banquet is great on account of its duration ; it has lasted for more than eighteen hundred years, and it will continue as long as there shall be a man on earth. The feast of Assuerus lasted only one hundred and six days ; but this shall continue until the end of the world. **JESUS**

* Luke xv. 23.

will give us Himself, in Holy Communion, until He comes to judge the living and dead.

This banquet is great on account of the multitudes who attend it; all men are invited hither, the great and the small, the rich and the poor, men and women, the strong and the weak, the just and penitent sinners.

This banquet is especially great on account of the effects which it produces.

During His life the body of Jesus Christ had a peculiar healing, life-giving power. A virtue went forth from His body to heal all those that came near Him, and to expel demons from the possessed. He touched the blind, and they saw; He touched the deaf, and they heard; He touched the dumb, and they spoke; He touched the sick, and they were healed; He touched the dead, and they were restored to life. Even before His passion and resurrection, before His body was glorified, Jesus made His body invisible, as we see in various parts of the Gospel.*

The Nazarenes once tried to cast Him down a hill.† The Jews wished to stone Him,‡ but in vain. He walked on the waves of the sea. On Mount Thabor Jesus showed His body to His disciples, as it would have always appeared had He not chosen to hide His glory. And then His face shone as the sun, and His garments were whiter than snow. After His resurrection, His body became glorified and assumed the qualities of a spirit. He could pass through a wall without breaking it, as a sunbeam passes through glass. He passed through the tomb, though it was sealed; He entered the supper-room, though the windows and doors were barred. He became visible and invisible at will. He appeared under different forms. To St. Magdalen He appeared as a gardener; to the disciples going to Emmaus He appeared as a stranger and traveller. Now, it is this wonderful Body, this glorified Body, this life-giving, divine

* Luke iv. 30.

† John viii. 59.

‡ John x. 30.

Body, this Body possessing the qualities of a spirit, that Jesus Christ gives us when He says, "Eat my flesh, drink my blood."

By original sin—the sin of our first parents—man was injured in body and soul. After the fall reason grew darkened, will weakened, the heart of man became more inclined to evil than to good. Now, as body and soul were both injured by sin, so there must be a medicine for both the body and soul. This medicine for body and soul is the sacred Body and Soul of Jesus Christ. It is His Flesh and Blood, united with His Soul and Divinity. Great and admirable are the effects which this heavenly Medicine, this Bread of the strong, produces in the soul.

First, it confers an increase of sanctifying grace. The life of the soul consists in its being in a state of acceptance or friendship with God, and that which renders it acceptable to God is sanctifying grace. This grace, which was merited for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, is infused into the soul by the Holy Ghost through the sacraments; but each sacrament does not confer it in the same manner. Baptism and penance bestow it upon those who are entirely out of the grace of God, or, in other words, are spiritually dead; baptism being the means appointed for those who have never been in the grace of God, and penance for those who have lost it. These sacraments are, therefore, called *sacraments of the dead*, as being instituted for the benefit of those who are in mortal sin or dead to grace. When these sacraments are received with the right dispositions, they truly reconcile the sinner with God, so that, from being an enemy of God, he becomes His friend and an object of His complacency. But this acceptance, though true and real, is not in the highest degree; it admits of an increase, as the Holy Scripture says: "Let him that is just be justified still; and let him that is holy be sanctified still"; and, therefore, God appointed the other sacraments, *the sacra-*

ments of the living, not only to convey special graces peculiar to each, but to impart an *increase of sanctifying grace* to those who are already in His favor. A rich man, when he has taken possession of a field which he wishes to convert into a garden, is not content with putting a wall around it, and clearing it of the most noxious weeds, and setting it in good order, but he continues to cultivate it assiduously, to fill it with the most beautiful plants, and to embellish it with new and choice ornaments. Thus Almighty God, in His love and goodness, has multiplied means by which the soul may be enriched with the graces and merits of Jesus Christ, and become more and more agreeable and beautiful in His eyes.

Now, among all these means, there is none greater or more powerful than the Blessed Eucharist. Each time that we receive our Saviour in Holy Communion we participate anew in all the merits of His Redemption, of His poverty, His hidden life, His scourging, and His crowning with thorns. The Holy Eucharist, then, differs from the other sacraments in this : that while the other sacraments bestow upon us one or another of the fruits of Christ's merits, this gives us the grace and merits of our Saviour in their source. The soul, therefore, receives an immense increase of sanctifying grace at each communion.

Let us reflect upon this for a moment. It is no slight thing for a soul to be beautiful in the sight of God. That must needs be something great and precious which can render us, sinful creatures as we are, truly amiable before God. What must be the value of sanctifying grace which can work such a transformation ? What is it ? And who can declare its price ? St. Thomas tells us that the lowest degree of sanctifying grace is worth more than all the riches of the world. Think, then, of all the riches of this world ! The mines of gold, of precious stones, the forests of costly wood, and all the hidden stores of wealth, for the

least of which treasures the children of this world are willing to toil, and struggle, and sin for a whole lifetime. Again, consider that the lowest grace which an humble Catholic Christian receives at the rails of the sanctuary at dawn of day, before the great world is astir, outweighs all those riches.

But why do I draw my comparison from the things of this world? St. Teresa, after her death, appeared to one of her sisters in religion, and told her that all the saints in heaven, without exception, would be willing to come back to this world and to remain here till the end of time, suffering all the miseries to which our mortal state is subject, only to gain one more degree of sanctifying grace and the eternal glory corresponding to it. Nay, I even assert that all the devils in hell would consider all the torments of their dark abode, endured for millions upon millions of ages, largely recompensed by the least degree of that grace which they have once rejected. These thoughts give us a grand and sublime idea of the value of grace; but there is another consideration that ought to raise our estimate of it still higher, namely, that God Himself, the Eternal Son of the Father, came down upon earth, was made man, suffered and died the death of the cross in order to purchase it for us. His life is in some way the measure of its value.

Now, this sanctifying grace is poured upon us, in Holy Communion, in floods! The King of heaven is then present in our souls, scattering profusely His benedictions, and making us taste of the powers of the world to come. Oh! if any one of us were to see his own soul immediately after communion, how amazed and confounded would he not be at the sight of it! He would take it for an angel.

St. Catherine of Sienna, having been asked by her confessor to describe to him the beauty of a soul in a state of grace, as it had been revealed to her, replied: "The beauty and lustre of such a soul is so great that if you were to

behold it, you would be willing to endure all possible pains and sufferings for its sake." Need we wonder, then, that the angels loved to keep company with those saints on earth who every day, with great devotion, received Holy Communion; and that even the *faces* of those who have been ardent lovers of the Blessed Sacrament have sometimes shone with the glory with which they were filled? Does not Christ say of such a soul: "How beautiful art thou, my beloved! how beautiful art thou"? What great value should we, then, not set on this divine sacrament! At each communion we gain more and more upon what is bad in our hearts; we bring God more and more into them; and we come nearer to that heavenly state in which they shall be altogether "without spot or wrinkle," holy and without blemish. Should we not, then, esteem this wonder-working sacrament more than anything else in this world? Ought we not continually to give thanks to God for so great a blessing, and, above all, show our thankfulness by receiving it frequently and devoutly? I leave it to you, O Christian soul! to answer what I have said. I will not dwell longer on this point; reflect and act accordingly. I must pass on to explain some of the other wonderful effects of this precious sacrament.

The benefit to be derived from Holy Communion, which I will notice in the second place, consists in this: that we are thereby preserved from mortal sin. In like manner, as the body is continually in danger of death by reason of the law of decay which works unceasingly within us, so, in like manner, the life of the soul is constantly in jeopardy from that fearful proneness to sin which belongs to our fallen nature. Accordingly, as Almighty God, in His wisdom, has ordained natural food as the means of repairing the decay of the body and of warding off death, so has He seen fit to give us a spiritual and heavenly food to keep us from falling into mortal sin, which causes the death of the

soul. This food is the Holy Eucharist, as the Council of Trent teaches us, saying that the sacrament of Eucharist is "the antidote by which we are freed from daily faults and preserved from mortal sins." And hence St. Francis de Sales compares Holy Communion to the Tree of Life which grew in the midst of the garden of Paradise, saying that, "as our first parents, by eating of that tree, might have avoided the death of the body, so we, by feeding on this sacrament of life, may avoid the death of the soul."

Do you ask how the Blessed Sacrament preserves us from mortal sin? I reply, In two ways: by weakening our passions, and by protecting us against the assaults of the devil. Every one has some besetting sin, some passion which is excited in his heart more easily and more frequently than any other, and which is the cause of the greater part of his faults. In some, it is anger; in others, envy; in others, pride; in others, sensuality and impurity. Now, however weak one may be, and by whatsoever passion he may be agitated, let him frequently receive the Body of Christ, and his soul will become tranquil and strong. The saints would express this by saying that, as the waters of the Jordan stood back when the Ark of the Covenant came into the river, so our passions and evil inclinations are repelled when Jesus Christ enters into our hearts in Holy Communion. St. Bernard says: "If we do not experience so frequent and violent attacks of anger, envy, and concupiscence as formerly, let us give thanks to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, who has produced these effects in us." Accordingly, in the Thanksgiving which the Church has provided to be used by the priest after the celebration of Mass, there is a prayer for imploring God that, in like manner as the holy martyr St. Lawrence overcame the torments of fire, the soul which has been fed with this Bread of Heaven may be enabled to extinguish the flames of sin.

There are thousands of cases which attest the efficacy of the Blessed Sacrament in this respect.

In Ferrara there lived a man who, in his youth, was very much molested with temptations of the flesh, to which he often gave consent, and thus committed many mortal sins. To free himself from this miserable state he determined to marry; but his wife died very soon, and he was again in danger. He was not disposed to marry again; but to remain a widower was, he thought, to expose himself anew to his former temptations. In this emergency he consulted a good friend, and received the advice to go frequently to confession and Holy Communion. He followed this advice, and experienced in himself such extraordinary effects of the sacrament that he could not help exclaiming: "Oh! why did I not sooner meet with such a friend? Most certainly I would not have committed so many abominable sins of impurity had I more frequently received this sacrament which *maketh virgins.*"*

In the life of St. Philip Neri we read that one day a young man who was leading a very impure life came to the saint to confession. St. Philip, knowing that there was no better remedy against concupiscence than the most sacred Body of Jesus Christ, counselled him to frequent the sacraments. By this means he was, in a short time, entirely freed from his vicious habits, and became pure like an angel. Oh! how many souls have made the same experience! Ask any Christian who has once lived in sin, and afterwards truly amended, from what moment he began to get the better of his passions, and he will answer, from the moment that he began to frequent the sacraments. How should it be otherwise? Jesus calms the winds and seas by a single word. What storm will be able to resist his power? What gust of passion will not subside when, on entering the soul, He says: "Peace be with thee; be not afraid; it

* Baldesanus in *Stim. Virt. i. c. 8.*

is I!" The danger of mortal sin, however, arises not only from the strength of our passions, but also from the violence of the temptations with which the devil assails us; and against these, too, the Blessed Sacrament protects us.

When Ramirus, King of Spain, had been fighting a long time against the Saracens, he retired with his soldiers to a mountain to implore the assistance of Almighty God. Whilst at prayer, St. James the Apostle appeared to him and commanded him to make all his soldiers go to confession and communion the day following, and then to lead them out against their enemies. After all had been done that the saint commanded, they again had an engagement with the Saracens, and gained a complete and brilliant victory.*

How much more, in our conflict with the devil, shall we not be enabled, by means of Holy Communion, to put him to flight and cover him with shame and confusion! St. Thomas says: "Hell was subdued by the death of our Saviour; and the Blessed Sacrament of the altar being a mystical renewal of the death of Jesus Christ, the devils no sooner behold His body and blood in us than they immediately take to flight, giving place to the angels, who draw nigh and assist us." St. John Chrysostom says: "As the angel of destruction passed by all the houses of the Israelites without doing them any harm, because he found them sprinkled with the blood of the lamb, so the devil passes by us when he beholds within us the Blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God." And St. Ambrose says: "When thy adversary shall see thy habitation taken up with the brightness of the presence of God in thy soul, he departs and flies away, perceiving that no room is left for his temptations."

Oh! how often has it happened that souls were so dreadfully tormented by the evil representations, suggestions, and temptations of the devil as not to know what to do! But

* *Chron. Gen. Alphon. Reg.*

no sooner had they received Holy Communion than they became at once quite calm and peaceful! Read the life of any of the saints, and you will find instances of this; or ask any devout Catholic, and he will tell you that what I have asserted is but reality. Nay, the devil himself must confess, and has often confessed, this truth. If he were forced to say why it is that he cannot tempt such and such a soul oftener and more violently; why it is that, to his own shame and confusion, he is forced to withdraw so often from a soul which once he held in his power, what do you think he would answer? Hear what he once answered.

A person whom, by a special permission of God, he was allowed to harass very much, and even drag about on the ground, was exorcised by a priest of our congregation, and the devil was commanded to say whether or not Holy Communion was very useful and profitable to the soul. At the first and second interrogatory he would not answer, but the third time, being commanded in the name of the blessed Trinity, he replied with a howl: "Profitable! Know that if this person had not received Holy Communion so many times, we should have had her completely in our power." Behold, then, our great weapon against the devil! "Yes," says the great St. John Chrysostom, "after receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist, we become as terrible to the devil as a furious lion is to man."

When the King of Syria went out to take the prophet Eliseus captive, the servant of the man of God was very much afraid at seeing the great army and the horses and chariots, and he said: "Alas! alas! alas! my lord, what shall we do?" But the prophet said: "Fear not; for there are more with us than with them"; and then he showed the trembling servant how the whole mountain was full of angels ready to defend them. So, however weak we may be, and however powerful our enemies, fortified with the Bread of Heaven, we have no reason to fear: we are

stronger than hell, for God is with us. "The Lord ruleth me; I shall want nothing. Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I fear no evils, for thou art with me. Thou hast prepared a *table* before me against them that afflict me."

With what justice does not St. Francis de Sales appeal to us, saying: "O Philothea! what reply shall reprobate Christians be able to make to the reproaches of the just Judge for having lost His grace, when it was so easy to have preserved it?" If the means of avoiding sin had been very difficult, the case of the reprobate might seem hard; but who can pity him who has but to obey the easy command: "Take and eat; if any man shall eat of this bread he shall live for ever"? For a Catholic to fall into mortal sin is as if one should starve at a splendid banquet; and for a Christian to die in the power of the devil is to be in love with death.

But there are other riches in this Blessed Sacrament which remain to be unfolded. It not only increases in us sanctifying grace and preserves us from mortal sin, but it truly unites us to God; and this is the third effect of this Holy Sacrament. God, wishing to establish an intimate union between the soul and Himself, wishing to unite His divine nature to our human nature, took upon Himself human nature, and commands us to receive His humanity, that we may become partakers of His divinity. His human nature, His human Flesh and Blood, are the means which God has chosen from all eternity for the purpose of uniting us to Himself. By partaking of His human nature, by partaking of His sacred Flesh and Blood, we become, as St. Peter says, partakers of the divine nature. We bear about God Himself in our bodies, as St. Paul forcibly expresses it.

The most obvious sense in which this sacrament is said to unite us to God is that which is suggested by the doctrine of the Real Presence itself. In the Holy Eucharist we receive the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ; and as mem-

bers of the same family are united together by the ties of the common blood which flows in their veins, so we become truly kinsmen of Christ; by participation of the blood which He received from His most Holy Mother, and shed on the cross for us. Hence, St. Alphonsus says "that as the food we take is changed into our blood, so, in Holy Communion, God becomes one with us; with this difference, however, that whereas earthly food is changed into our substance, we assume, as it were, the nature of Jesus Christ," as He Himself declared to St. Augustine, saying, "It is not I that shall be changed into you, but you shall be changed into me." "Yes," says St. Cyril of Alexandria, "he who communicates unites himself as closely to Jesus Christ as two pieces of wax, when melted, become one." And the saints have always been so penetrated with this belief that, after Holy Communion, they would exclaim: "O Jesus! now Thou art mine and I am Thine! Thou art in me, and I am in Thee! Now Thou belongest entirely to me, and I belong entirely to Thee. Thy soul is mine, and my soul is Thine! Thy life is mine, and my life is Thine!"

But this is not all. We are united to our Lord's sacred Humanity in order that we may be made conformable to His image in will and affections; accordingly, in the Eucharist we receive from Him infused virtues, especially faith, hope, and charity, the three distinguishing characteristics of the children of God.

As to faith, it is so much increased by communion that this sacrament might be called *the Sacrament of Faith*, not only because it makes as large a demand on our faith as any mystery of our holy religion, but also because it more than any other increases and confirms it. It seems as if God, in reward of the generous faith with which we believe this doctrine, often gives an inward light, which enables the soul in some way to comprehend it, and with it the other truths of faith. So the Council of Trent says "that the mode

of Christ's presence in the Eucharist can hardly be expressed in words, but the pious mind, illuminated by faith, can conceive of it." The reception of this sacrament is the best explanation of the difficulties which sense opposes to it. It was in the *breaking of bread* at Emmaus that the two disciples recognized Jesus. He himself gives us evidence of the reality of the divine Presence in this heavenly food, and makes us *taste* what we do not understand. One day a holy soul said to Father Surin, of the Society of Jesus: "I would not exchange a single one of the divine communications which I receive in Holy Communion for anything whatever men or angels might present to me."

Sometimes God adds to these favors the gift of a spiritual joy and delight, intense and indescribable. St. Thomas says "that Holy Communion is a spiritual eating, which communicates an actual delight to such souls as receive it devoutly and with due preparation." And the effect of this delight, according to St. Cyprian, is that it detaches the heart from all worldly pleasures, and makes it die to everything perishable. Nay, this joy is sometimes even communicated to the exterior senses, penetrating them with a sweetness so great that nothing in the world can be compared to it. St. Francis, St. Monica, St. Agnes, and many others are witnesses of this, who, intoxicated with celestial sweetness in Holy Communion, exulted for joy and exclaimed with the Psalmist: "My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God. For what have I in heaven? and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth? Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever. My Jesus, my Love, my God, my All." Oh! what a firm faith men would have in this mystery, did they communicate often and devoutly! One single communion is better than all the arguments of the schools. We have not a lively faith, we think little of heaven, of hell, of the evil of sin, of the goodness of our Lord, and the duty of loving Him, because

we stay away from communion ; let us eat, and our eyes shall be opened. “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet.”

Hope, also, receives a great increase from this sacrament, for it is the pledge of our inheritance, and has the promise of eternal life attached to it. By sin our body has been doomed to death and corruption ; but by eating the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ the seed of immortality is implanted in it. Our flesh and blood, mingling with the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ, are fitted for a glorious resurrection. Leaven or yeast, when mixed with dough, soon penetrates the entire mass, and imparts new qualities to it. In like manner the glorified Body of Jesus Christ penetrates through our entire being, and endows it with new qualities—the qualities of glory and immortality. Our divine Saviour Himself assures us of this ; for He says : “He that eateth my Flesh and drinketh my Blood abideth in me and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, the same also shall live by me, and I will raise him up in the last day.”* St. Paul argues that “if we are sons, then we are heirs, heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ” ; and elsewhere he says “that we glory in hope of the glory of God.” It is true that in this life we never can have an infallible assurance of our salvation, but Holy Communion most powerfully confirms and strengthens our hope of obtaining heaven and the graces necessary for living and dying holily. However great the fear and diffidence may be with which our sins inspire us, what soul is not comforted when our Saviour Himself enters the heart and seems to say : “Ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you” ? “Can I refuse the less, who have given the greater ? Can I withhold any necessary graces, who have given myself ? Shall I refuse to bring you to reign with me in heaven, who am come down on earth to dwell with you ?”

* John vi.

Charity, however, is the virtue which is more especially nourished by the Holy Eucharist. This may be called, by eminence, the proper effect of this sacrament, as indeed it is of the Incarnation itself. "I am come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?"* And St. Dionysius the Areopagite says that "Jesus Christ in the most Holy Eucharist is a fire of charity." It could not be otherwise. As a burning house sets the adjacent ones on fire, so the Heart of Jesus Christ, which is always burning with love, communicates the flames of charity to those who receive Him in Holy Communion; accordingly, St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Teresa, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis Xavier, and thousands of others, by their frequent communions, became, as it were, furnaces of divine love. "Do you not feel," said St. Vincent of Paul to his brothers in religion, "do you not become sensible of the divine fire in your hearts, after having received the adorable Body of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist?" In proof of the strength of love which souls derive from Holy Communion, I might appeal to the ecstasies and raptures which so many souls have experienced at the reception of the most Holy Eucharist. What were all these favors but flames of divine love, enkindled by this heavenly fire, which, as it were, destroyed in them themselves, and conformed them to the image of their Saviour? Or I might take my proof from those sweet tears which flow from the eyes of so many servants of God when at the communion-rail they receive the Bread of Heaven. But I have a better proof than these transports of devotion: I mean suffering. This the true test of love. St. Paul says that the Christian glories in tribulation, because the charity of God is poured out into his heart; and so the Holy Eucharist, by infusing love into our hearts, gives us strength to suffer for Christ.

In the life of St. Ludwina, who was sick for thirty-eight

*St. Luke xii. 49.

years uninterruptedly, we read that, in the beginning of her sickness, she shrank from suffering. By a particular disposition of Providence, however, a celebrated servant of God, John Por, went to see her, and, perceiving that she was not quite resigned to the will of God, he exhorted her to meditate frequently on the sufferings of Jesus Christ, that by the remembrance of His Passion she might gain courage to suffer more willingly. She promised to do so, and fulfilled her promise; but she could not find any relief for her soul. Every meditation was disgusting and unpleasant, and she began again to break out into her usual complaints. After a while her director returned to her, and asked her how she had succeeded in meditating upon our Lord's Passion, and what profit she had derived from it. "O my father!" she answered, "your counsel was very good indeed, but the greatness of my suffering does not allow me to find any consolation in meditating on my Saviour's sorrows." He exhorted her for some time to continue this exercise, no matter how insipid soever it might be to her; but perceiving at last that she drew no fruit from it, his zeal suggested another means. He gave her Holy Communion, and afterwards whispered in her ear: "Till now *I* have exhorted you to the continual remembrance of Christ's sufferings as a remedy for your pains, but now let Jesus Christ Himself exhort you." Behold! no sooner had she swallowed the sacred Host than she felt such a great love for Jesus, and such an ardent desire to become like unto Him in His sufferings, that she broke out into sobs and sighs, and for two weeks was hardly able to stop her tears. From that moment the pains and sufferings of her Saviour remained so deeply impressed upon her mind that she thought of them all the time, and thus was enabled patiently to suffer for Him who, for the love of her, had endured so many and so great pains and torments. Her disease at last grew so violent that her flesh began to corrupt and to be filled with worms, and the

putrefaction extended even internally, so that she had to suffer the most excruciating pains. But, comforted by the example of Jesus Christ, she not only praised God and gave thanks to Him for all her sufferings, but even vehemently desired to suffer still more; nay, by meditating on the Passion of Jesus Christ, she was so much inflamed with love that she used to say "it was not she who suffered, but her Lord Jesus Christ who suffered in her."*

Thus, by Holy Communion, this saint received a grace by which she has merited to be numbered among the most patient of saints. Nor is this a single case. Animated by this heavenly food, St. Lawrence braved the flames, St. Vincent the rack, St. Sebastian the shower of arrows, St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, the fury of lions, and many other martyrs every kind of torture which the malice of the devil could invent, content if they could but return their Saviour love for love, life for life, death for death. They embraced the very instruments of their tortures; yea, they even exulted and gloried in them. Now, this was the effect of the Holy Eucharist; this life-giving bread imparted to them courage and joy in every pain and trial. For this very reason, in the early times of the persecutions, all Christians, in order to be prepared for martyrdom, received the Blessed Sacrament every day; and when the danger was too pressing for them to assemble together, they even carried the sacred Host to their own homes, that they might communicate themselves early in the morning.† It was for the same reason that Christ instituted the Holy Eucharist just before His Passion, that He might thereby fortify His apostles for the trials that were coming on them. It is true we have not so fierce a conflict to endure as the early Christians had, nor has any one such a dreadful sickness as St.

* Surius, 14 April, in *Vita S. Ludwinæ*, part i. c. 14.

† The same was done by Mary, Queen of Scots, during her captivity in England, when she was deprived of the ministry of a priest.

Ludwina had ; but, in our lighter trials, we have also need of this fortitude of love, nor is it refused to us. Multitudes of pious souls confess that it is the Holy Communion alone which keeps them steady in the practice of virtue, and cheerful amid all the vicissitudes of life. How often do we hear such souls declaring that on the days they do not receive communion they seem to themselves lame and miserable ; everything goes wrong with them, and all their crosses seem tenfold heavier than usual. But when, in the morning, they have had the happiness of partaking of the Body of Christ, everything seems to go well ; the daily annoyances of their state seem to disappear ; they are happy and joyous ; words of kindness seem to come naturally in their mouths, and life is no longer the burden which once it seemed to be. O truly wonder-working sacrament ! Marvellous invention of divine Love ! surpassing all power of speech to describe or thought to fathom. When the children of Israel found in the fields the bread from heaven which God gave them in the wilderness, they called it “Manhu” — “What is it?” — because they did not know what it was. So, after all that we have said of the true Manna, the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, we must confess that we are unable to comprehend it. “Man does not live on bread alone.” He has a higher life than that which is nourished by the fruits of the ground—a spiritual and divine life ; and this life is nourished by the body of Christ. Hidden under the sacramental form, our divine Saviour comes down to make us more and more acceptable to Him ; to preserve us, in this dangerous world, from mortal sin ; to make us true children of God ; to console us in our exile ; to give us a pledge of our eternal happiness ; to shed abroad in our hearts the love of God. And as if this was not enough, and as if to set the seal on the rest, He is sometimes pleased to make His own most sacred body supply the place of all other nourishment and miraculously to sustain even the na-

tural life of His servants by this sacramental food. St. Catherine of Sienna, from Ash Wednesday to Ascension day, took no other food than Holy Communion.* A certain holy virgin of Rome spent five whole Lents without tasting anything else than the Bread of Angels.†

Nicolas de Flüe, for fifteen successive years, lived without other nourishment than the sacred Body of our Lord.‡ And St. Liberalis, Bishop of Athens, fasted every day in the week, taking nothing whatever, not even the Blessed Sacrament, and on Sunday his only nourishment consisted of this heavenly food; yet he was always strong and vigorous.§ We can but repeat, O wonder-working sacrament! We are at a loss what to say.

No wonder that the apostles and the Fathers of the Church taught the Christians to communicate every day. "Continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they took their meat with gladness and simplicity of heart." || The best interpreters understand this of daily communion. St. Jerome and the earliest writers testify to this fact, and hence St. Thomas says: "It is certain that in the early ages all who assisted at Mass received Holy Communion." St. Ambrose says: ¶ "Receive the Holy Eucharist every day, if permitted, so that each day it may become useful to you." St. Basil says: ** "It is useful to communicate every day, to partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ." "The Holy Eucharist," says St. Augustine, "is your daily bread, necessary for this life." †† The Council of Trent taught the same doctrine to her children: "The sacred and holy synod would fain indeed that at each Mass the faithful who are present should communicate, not only by spiritual desire, but

* Surius, 29 April.

† Cacciaguerra.

‡ Simon Majolus Canicular. Collet iv.

§ P. Nat. L. IV., *Collat. Sanct.* c. xciii.

|| Lib. v. de Sacr. c. 4.

¶ Acts ii. 46.

** Epist. ad Cæsar.

†† Homil. xliii. in Quingua.

also by the sacramental participation of the Eucharist." * And the holy council, † in the most touching appeal, exhorts the faithful to frequent communion: "The holy synod, with true fatherly affection, admonishes, exhorts, begs, and beseeches, through the mercy of our Lord, that all mindful of the exceeding love of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His own soul as the price of our salvation, and gave us His own flesh to eat, would believe and venerate those sacred mysteries of His Body and Blood with such constancy and firmness of faith, with such devotion of soul, with such piety and worship, as to be able frequently to receive that superstantial bread, that it may be to them truly the life of the soul and the perpetual health of their mind, and that, being invigorated by the strength thereof, they may, after the journeying of this miserable pilgrimage, be able to arrive at their heavenly country, there to eat, without the veil, that same Bread of Angels which they now eat under the sacred veils." Pope Benedict XIV. ‡ expresses the ardent desire of seeing renewed in the Church the fervor and daily communion of the first centuries. St. Thomas says: "The virtue of the sacrament of the Eucharist is to give to man salvation; therefore it is useful that we should participate in it every day, so as to partake each day of its fruits." § St. Charles Borromeo says: "Let the pastors and preachers frequently exhort the faithful to the salutary practice of frequent communion, by the example and practice of the primitive Church, by the words and testimonies of the Fathers of the Church, and, finally, by the sentiments of the Council of Trent, which wishes us to communicate each time that we assist at Mass." || After these exhortations of the Fathers of the Church frequently to receive Holy Communion; after these reflections on the great benefit which we reap from the frequent reception of the Bread of Angels,

* Sess. xxii. c. vi.

† Sess. xiii. c. viii.

‡ Bullar. tom. i. page 440.

§ Pars iii. quest. 80, art. 81.

¶ Council iii. p. 74.

we might naturally expect to find men eager often to avail themselves of a means of grace so rich and so powerful. But our greatest misery is that we are blind to our true happiness. Such is the deceitfulness of sin and the subtlety of the devil that almost every one has some reason to give why he at least should not receive communion frequently.*

* By frequent communion the approved writers of the Church understand communion every day several days in the week, or at least oftener than once a week. St. Alphonsus Liguori, the learned bishop and doctor of the Church, repeats again and again that communion once a week is not frequent communion. The holy doctor says: "Monthly or weekly communion cannot be called frequent, on account of the great coldness of these miserable times; for, according to the ancient discipline of the Church, it should be called rare rather than frequent. To receive Holy Communion every day, or several times a week, we must be free, not only from mortal sin, but also from every affection for or attachment to deliberate venial sin." Pope Benedict XIV.* says: "Confessors should not allow frequent communion to those who, avoiding mortal sin, yet retain an affection for venial faults, of which they do not wish to correct themselves." St. Alphonsus says: "It is an error to grant frequent communion—that is, several times in the week—to those who commit venial faults, for which they retain an affection, and of which they do not wish to rid themselves. Hence a person who commits deliberate venial sins by telling wilful lies, by vanity of dress, by wilful feelings of dislike, by inordinate attachments, or is guilty of other similar faults which he knows to be an obstacle to his advancement in perfection, and who does not endeavor to correct these defects, especially if these defects were against humility or obedience, that person cannot be permitted to communicate oftener than once a week."† From this, however, it does not follow that the frequent communicant must avoid all venial sins. To be exempt from venial sin is one thing, and to be exempt from an affection to venial sin is another. The Council of Trent teaches ‡ that it is impossible, without a special privilege of grace, to avoid all venial sin. That privilege belonged to the Immaculate Mother of God alone. A holy soul may and will sometimes fall into venial faults, but she retains no affection for them as long as she hates and detests them, and endeavors to avoid them for the time to come. On the other hand, the soul has an affection for those venial faults, which she continues to commit, into which she easily and frequently falls, without making any effort to avoid or correct them. St. Francis de Sales says: "We can

* De Syn. lib. vii. c. 12, n. 9.

† Sess. vi. c. xxiii.

† Praxis clxix., and *Spouse of Christ*, p. 635.

In former times Christians were accustomed to communicate every day, and then their lives were holy, and edifying, and chaste, and humble; and infidels and heretics, struck by the purity of their manners, were converted in crowds to the faith. But, in after-ages, luxury crept in, and the world and the flesh had sway, and too many grew cold in love and lost their relish for this heavenly food. And now what can the Church do to cure the evil? If she were to make it *obligatory* to receive Holy Communion frequently,

never be perfectly exempt from venial sins, but we can very well avoid all affection to venial sin. Truly it is one thing to tell a lie once or twice, with full deliberation, in a matter of little importance, and another thing to take pleasure in lying, and to be addicted to that kind of sin. Affection to venial sin is contrary to devotion; it weakens the strength of the soul, prevents divine consolations, opens the door to temptations, and, if it does not kill the soul, it renders it extremely weak, and it is in this that it differs from venial sins; these last happening to a soul, and not there continuing long, do not injure it much; but should the same venial sins remain in the soul by the affection it feels for them, they cause it to lose the grace of devotion."

St. Alphonsus allows one exception to this general rule. He says: * "It is sometimes good and desirable to allow frequent communion to those who are in danger of falling into mortal sin, that they may receive grace and strength to resist the temptations." And the holy doctor of the Church relates "that a certain nobleman was so habitually addicted to a certain grievous and sensual sin that he despaired of overcoming his bad habit. Having communicated every day for several weeks, according to the advice of his confessor, he was at last entirely delivered from the vice which had tyrannized over him so long, and never afterwards committed sin against the holy virtue of purity."

A person, then, who endeavors to avoid and rid himself of venial faults, performs mental prayer according to the capacity and state of his life, says the beads and hears Mass on week-days, makes daily his spiritual reading, performs all his actions with the intention to please God, practises little acts of humility, self-denial, and mortification of the senses, watches and obeys the inspirations of God, pays a visit to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and to the Blessed Virgin, is a very fit subject for frequent communion. "If any one finds by experience," says St. Thomas, "that by daily communion the fervor of his love is increased, and his reverence not diminished, such a person ought to communicate every day." *

* Praxis, Num. 149

* In 4 Sent., 2, 9, 8, Art. 1

she would run the risk of multiplying mortal sins, and of plunging her imperfect members more deeply into guilt. She uses, therefore, a wise and loving moderation, and, as a tender mother, when every other expedient fails, speaks sternly to her sick child, and forces it to take the food or medicine which is absolutely necessary to life; she enjoins, under pain of mortal sin, a single communion in the year, *as the least which can be required of a Christian*. But is this all that she wishes us to do? Oh! no. She desires that we should continually nourish ourselves with the Bread of Life. In the Council of Trent she bewails the disuse of daily communion, and earnestly exhorts all the faithful to a frequent use of this sanctifying food.

Why do you communicate so seldom?

2. But you may say, I do not see any necessity for it! There are many others who do not receive oftener than I do, that is—once or twice a year—and yet they are good Christians; yea, as good as those who receive very often.

I will not dispute your assertion. No one knows the heart of another, and I rather wish that you should form as charitable a judgment as you can of your neighbors who do not receive often. Neither will I say of all those who go often to communion that they are exactly what they ought to be.

But scarcely any one will affirm that persons who communicate but once or twice a year are, generally speaking, as exemplary in their conduct as those who communicate frequently. Point out to me those whom you consider the most pious; who live in the world without following its manners or adopting its principles; who, when adversity overtakes them, are calm and resigned to the will of God, and, when it overtakes their neighbor, are ready for every act of charity; who are meek and kind, rich in good works and fond of prayer; who are constant in their attendance at Mass, diligent in seeking spiritual instruction, faithful in their duties, and edifying in their conversation—and I will

show you these same persons regularly at the altar every month, fortnight, or week ; yes, even oftener. Grant that, among these frequent communicants, there is but one who lives a truly devout life, you have sufficient evidence of the fruit of this sacrament ; for you know that no one can live holily without the grace of God, and that this sacrament was instituted to impart grace to us in an abundant measure. “I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”* But, after all, is this the proper way to reason ? Do not ask whether others are good Christians, but whether you yourself are. You know a *good Christian* means something more than one who does not rob or commit murder, or such like crimes. A good Christian means a person who endeavors to keep his heart pure in the sight of God, and to overcome pride, envy, avarice, unchasteness, and gluttony, to which his lower nature is so prone. Now, do *you* find *within* you no sting of the flesh ? no movements of hatred or desires of revenge ? no rebellion of pride ? Palladius tells the story of a young man who, after endeavoring for a long time to corrupt a virtuous married woman, and finding her chastity proof against all his assaults, sought to revenge himself upon her through the intervention of the devil. By the permission of God, the evil one caused her to assume the appearance of a wild beast, and her husband, greatly distressed at so horrible a transformation, took her to St. Macarius, that by his prayers and blessing she might be delivered from the malice of the devil. The saint easily effected this by his power with God ; and after the good woman was restored to her natural appearance, he gave her this advice : “ In future go oftener to communion than you have hitherto done ; for know that the reason why God permitted you to appear in such a form is your negligence in not having received communion for five successive weeks. So it has been revealed

* John x. 10.

to me from on high: remember it, and take it to heart." Five weeks! and you stay away for five months, yea, for an entire year, and find no necessity for receiving oftener? And do you think the devil has been idle, and that no hideous transformation has taken place in your soul in the eyes of the angels? Has not your soul become a sow in impurity? or a tiger in rage? or a viper in treachery? or a filthy creeping worm in its low and grovelling affections? I leave it to yourself to answer. God grant that it may not be so. I know that it is the testimony and experience of the saints that, with all their efforts and continual use of the sacraments, they found it a hard thing to keep their hearts clean; and if for a short time they were prevented from receiving the Bread of Heaven, their hearts became withered and dry, and they exclaimed: "I am smitten as grass, and my heart is withered, because I forgot to eat my Bread."* I also know that Holy Scripture says: "They that go far from Thee shall perish."†

And now, dear reader, I think you have come to the same conclusion, that there is no valid excuse for not communicating frequently, and that, for the most part, they who excuse themselves are influenced by a secret unwillingness to lead a Christian life in good earnest. Their desires are low and grovelling; they have more relish for the food of the body than for the food of the soul. With the Israelites in the desert, they prefer the good things of Egypt to the manna that comes from heaven; and their taste is so corrupted by the impure pleasures of the world that they can find no delight in the sweet fountains that flow from the Saviour's side. They are unwilling to practise retirement, detachment from creatures, and self-denial. They stay away from communion as long as they can, in order to avoid the rebuke of Jesus Christ for their sensuality, pride, vanity, uncharitableness, and sloth. Miserable are the con-

* Ps. c. 5.

† Ps. lxxii. 27.

sequences of such a course of conduct. Not being able to find true peace of heart in religion, such men seek their consolation in exterior things, and multiply faults and imperfections in proportion as they withdraw from God. And what is most lamentable is that not unfrequently their venial sins lead them into mortal sins, and that they live in such a state for months, remaining in constant danger of being overtaken by a sudden and unprovided death, the just punishment of their ingratitude and indifference towards Jesus Christ.

I have said "*for the most part,*" for I know there are cases in which reluctance to receive this sacrament proceeds from a vain fear of irreverence inspired by the teaching of misguided men. St. Vincent of Paul, when speaking of this subject, used to relate the following story: "A noble and pious lady, who had long been in the habit of communicating several times a week, was so unhappy as to choose for her confessor a priest who was imbued with the principles of the Jansenistic heresy. Her new director at first allowed her to go to Holy Communion once a week; but, after a while, he would not permit her to go oftener than once a fortnight, and at last he limited her to once a month. The lady went on in this way for eight months, when, wishing to know the state of her soul, she made a careful self-examination; but, alas! she found her heart so full of irregular appetites, passions, and imperfections, that she was actually afraid of herself. Horror-struck at her deterioration, she exclaimed: 'Miserable creature that I am! how deeply have I fallen! How wretchedly am I living! Where will all this end? What is the cause of this lamentable state of mine? I see! I see! It is for no other reason than for my having followed these new teachers, and for having abandoned the practice of frequent communion.' Then, giving thanks to God, who had enlightened her to see her error, she renounced her false guide and resumed her former

practice. Soon after she was enabled to get the better of her faults and passions, and to regain tranquillity of heart." Oh ! how effectually do such men perform the work of the devil. The great adversary of mankind has nothing so much at heart as to keep men back from the means of grace, especially the Blessed Eucharist. In his warfare against the faithful, he acts as the nations bordering upon Abyssinia are said to do in their conflicts with the inhabitants of that country. The Abyssinians are known to observe a strict fast of forty days at a certain period of the year, and it is the cruel custom of their enemies to wait until they are weakened by this long abstinence, and then to rush upon them and gain an easy victory. Thus, I say, it is with the devil ; a forty days' fast from the Blessed Sacrament is a rich conquest for him. It is his greatest delight to keep men away from the altar. Every excuse for staying away from Holy Communion is legitimate in his eyes ; every doctrine which teaches that it is useless or hurtful to frequent the Holy Eucharist is stamped with his approval ; every taunt with which a tepid Catholic upbraids his more fervent brother for nourishing his soul often with the Bread of Life is music in his ears. And he is in the right ; for let men but once be persuaded to deprive themselves of the strengthening Body of Jesus Christ, and the work of Satan is no longer difficult. When the soul is weak in grace, by reason of long abstinence from the Flesh of Jesus Christ, then the evil one comes down upon it with his strong temptations, and, almost without resistance, makes it his slave. Once more, those who discountenance frequent communion do the devil's work. They give hell much pleasure, and deprive our Lord of great delight. It is on this account that our Lord so often visits with severe punishments those who dissuade others from receiving Him. A woman who mocked St. Catherine of Sienna for going so often to Holy Communion, on her return home, fell down to the ground and died

instantly without being able to receive the last sacraments. Another woman, who had committed the same offence, became crazy all at once. Nay, even where the fault was much slighter, God has shown His displeasure. St. Ludgardis was in the habit of receiving Holy Communion very often, but her superioress, disapproving, forbade her doing so in future. The saint obeyed, but, at that very moment, her superioress fell sick, and had to suffer the most acute pains. At last, suspecting that her sickness was a punishment for having interdicted frequent communion to Ludgardis, she withdrew the prohibition, when, lo! her pains immediately left her, and she began to feel better. Come, then, O Christian! to the heavenly banquet which your divine Saviour has prepared for you. "All things are ready." Jesus Christ desires to unite Himself to you. "Behold," He says, "I stand at the door and knock. Open to me, my sister, my beloved, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is full of dew, and my locks of the drops of the night." He has waited for you through a long night of sin, and now that He has restored you to the state of grace by the sacrament of penance, He wishes to take up His abode in your heart, and to enrich you with His graces. Let no temptation whatever keep you from so great a good. With St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi say: "I would rather die than omit a communion permitted by obedience." As often as your director advises you, go forward to receive your Lord with confidence and simplicity of heart; and reply to those who blame you for communicating so often as St. Francis de Sales advises you to do. "If," says he, "they ask you why you communicate so often, tell them that two classes of persons should communicate frequently: the perfect to persevere in perfection, and the imperfect to attain perfection; the strong not to become weak, and the weak to grow strong; the sick to be cured, and the healthy to prevent sickness. And as to

yourself, tell them that, because you are imperfect, weak, and infirm, you stand in need of communion.* Tell them you wish to become patient, and therefore you must receive your patient Saviour; that you wish to become meek, and therefore you must receive your meek Saviour; that you wish to love contempt, and therefore you must receive your despised Saviour; that you wish to love crosses, and therefore you must receive your suffering Saviour; that you wish to love poverty, and therefore you must receive your poor Saviour; that you wish to become strong against the temptations of the devil, the flesh, and the world, and therefore you stand in need of your comforting and strengthening Saviour. Tell them He has said: "He that eateth my flesh shall live by me." I wish to live, and therefore I receive Jesus, my life, "that He may live in me and I in Him!" He, in whose words you put your trust, will justify you; your soul will continually grow stronger in virtue; your heart will become more and more pure; your passions will become weaker, your faith more lively, your hope more firm, your charity more ardent; you will receive grace to live in the world as an heir of heaven; and when at your last hour the priest comes to administer the Holy Viaticum, you will be able to say with a great saint:

Food of the hungry,
 Hope of the sad,
 Rest of the weary,
 Bliss of the glad;
 Stay of the helpless,
 Strength of the weak,
 Life of the lifeless,
 Joy of the joyless,
 Crown of the meek;
 Nurture of angels,
 Manna from heaven,
 Comfort of mortals,
 Quickening leaven;

Pardon of sinners
 Contrite become,
 Guide to all wanderers
 Seeking their home;
 Pledge of salvation:
 Refuge in death,
 Sacred oblation,
 Seal of our faith;
 Peace to the troubled,
 Tempest-tossed mind,
 Balm to the wounded,
 Eyes to the blind;
 Hail! Son of Mary,

* *Introduction to a Devout Life*, c. 21.

Sacrifice pure ;
Hail ! I adore Thee,
Hail ! I implore Thee,
Keep me secure ;
Bound by Thy love,
Bound till in heaven

With Thee in light,
Reigning in glory,
Filled with Thy mercy,
I shall for ever
In Thine own sight
Banquet above.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NECESSITY OF PRAYER.

THERE was a certain man who for years had been trying to lead a life of perfection. Although a hard-working man, and obliged to rise between three and four o'clock every morning, he gave a good deal of time to prayer. He was devout to the Blessed Virgin, and said his beads every day. He kept the fasts of the Church most scrupulously, and imposed on himself the penance of abstaining from meat every Wednesday and Saturday. He went to Holy Communion every Sunday. He was fully impressed with the conviction that his life was given him to serve God and save his soul. One day the tempter put intoxicating liquor in the way of this man. He drank and drank again, and became a drunkard, and finally ended his life by cutting his throat in a fit of drunken madness. Almost saved, almost at the door of the kingdom of heaven, almost in possession of a glorious eternal crown, and yet all lost forever. All his fasts, his prayers, his communions, his labors, his sufferings, his merits, lost for ever through drunken despair. Had he only persevered a little longer, had he only struggled on a little more, at his death the priest would have sung the Requiem Mass over his body as over that of a saint. Now no holy Mass is sung, no prayer of the Church is offered up for him. His corpse cannot be brought to the church; it cannot be buried in consecrated ground. It is carried by frightened relatives past the closed doors of the church, and cast into unhallowed ground.

This melancholy example shows us how necessary it is to persevere in the grace of God till death, if we would obtain

eternal life. Our divine Saviour taught us this great truth when He said: "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved."* St. Paul the Apostle tells us the same truth in other words: "He that striveth for the mastery is not crowned except he strive lawfully."† By this he means that no one shall be crowned with life everlasting unless he fight manfully until death against his enemies, the devil, the world, and his own corrupt nature.

Ever since the fall of our first parents, every man, the moment he arrives at the use of reason, engages in a warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil—three powerful enemies, who are actively employed, every instant of our life, in laying snares for the destruction of our souls.

St. Peter says that "the devil goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."‡ It was this arch-enemy who persuaded Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit; who prevailed on Cain to slay his innocent brother Abel; who tempted Saul to pierce David with a lance. It was he who stirred up the Jews to deny and crucify Jesus Christ our Lord; who induced Ananias and Saphira to lie to the Holy Ghost; who urged Nero, Decius, Diocletian, Julian, and other heathen tyrants to put the Christians to a most cruel death. He it was who inspired the authors of heresies, such as Arius, Martin Luther, and others, to reject the authority of the one, true, Catholic Church.

In like manner the devil, at the present day, still tempts all men, especially the just, and endeavors to make them lose the grace of God. He tempts numberless souls to indifference towards God and their own salvation; he deceives many by representing to them in glowing colors the false, degrading pleasures of this world; he suggests to others the desire of joining bad secret societies; he tempts many even to conceal their sins in confession, and to receive Holy Communion unworthily; others, again, he urges to cheat

* Matt. x. 22.

+ 2 Tim. ii. 5.

‡ 1 Peter v. 8.

their neighbor ; he allures some to blind their reason by excess in drinking ; some he tempts to despair ; in a word, the devil leaves nothing untried which may cause the just to fall into sin. He finds the weak point of every man, and knows that this weak point is for many—very many—a strong inclination to the vice of impurity. The wicked spirit knows how to excite in them this degrading passion to such a degree that they forget their good resolutions, nay, even make little account of the eternal truths, and lose all fear of hell and the divine judgment. It is the universal opinion of all theologians that there are more souls condemned to hell on account of this sin alone than on account of any other which men commit.

But the just must not only wage war against their arch-enemy, the devil ; they must also fight manfully against the seductive examples of the world. Were all those who have lost their baptismal innocence to tell us how they came to lose it, they would all answer : “ It was by that corrupt companion, by that false friend, that by wicked relative. Had I never seen that person, I would still be innocent.” One unsound apple is sufficient to infect all the others near it. In like manner one corrupt person can ruin all those with whom he associates. Indeed, the bad example of one wicked man can do more harm to a community than all the devils in hell united. Small indeed is the number of those who manfully resist bad example.

The just must fight not only against the devil and the world, but also against their own corrupt nature. Had they not this enemy to contend with, the devil and the world would not so easily overcome them. Corrupt nature plays the traitor, and very often gains the victory, even when the other enemies have failed. This dangerous foe is always near, within their very hearts ; and his influence is the more fatal because the greater number of the just themselves do not seem to be fully aware of his existence ; hence it is that

they are so little on their guard against his wiles, and fall a prey to his evil suggestions.

Ever since the fall of our first parents we are all naturally inclined to evil. Before Adam had committed sin, he was naturally inclined to good; he knew nothing of indifference in the service of God, nothing of anger, hatred, cursing, impurity, vain ambition, and the like; but no sooner had he committed sin than God permitted his inclination to good to be changed into an inclination to evil. Man, of his own free-will, forfeited the kingdom of heaven; he exchanged heaven for hell, God for the devil, good for evil, the state of grace for the state of sin. It was, then, but just and right that he should not only acknowledge his guilt, repent sincerely of his great crime, but that he should also, as long as he lived, fight against his evil inclinations, and, by this lifelong warfare, declare himself sincerely for God.

When we consider seriously the continual war we have to wage against these three powerful enemies; when we consider our extreme weakness and the sad fact that the greater part of mankind do not overcome even one of their enemies, we see clearly how terribly true are the words of our Lord: "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life; and few there are that find it."* Ah! who shall find this strait way? Who will be able to conquer these three enemies of our salvation? Whence shall we obtain strength and courage to struggle bravely against them until death? Truly must we exclaim with King Josaphat: "As for us, we have not strength enough to be able to resist this multitude, which cometh violently upon us. But as we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to thee, our God."

* Matt. vii. 14.

By our own efforts alone we shall never be able to overcome even one of our enemies.

This great truth is taught by St. Paul. In his Second Epistle to the Corinthians he writes thus: "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God."* The apostle means to say that of ourselves we are not even able to think of any good or meritorious thing. Now, if we are not able to think of anything good, how much less able are we to wish for anything good! "It is God," he writes in his Epistle to the Philippians, "who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will." †

The same thing had been declared by God long before through the mouth of the Prophet Ezechiel: "*I will cause you to walk in my commandments, and keep my judgments, and do them.*" ‡

Consequently, according to the teachings of St. Leo, man works only so much good as God, in His grace, enables him to do. Hence, it is an article of our holy faith that no one can do the least meritorious work without God's particular assistance. "Without me you can do nothing," says Jesus Christ.§

God has surrounded us with striking proofs of our weakness; He has permitted the most illustrious men to fall, that we might live in fear. The first man and woman, Adam and Evé; the most pious of kings, David; the most renowned of sages, Solomon; the Prince of the Apostles and the Vicar of Christ, St. Peter, all fell.

Among the great falls recorded in ecclesiastical history stand the names of Tertullian and Origen, names once so honorable. St. Macarius tells us || that a certain monk, after having been favored with a wonderful rapture and many great graces, fell, by pride, into several grievous sins.

* Chap. iii. 5.

+ Phil. ii. 13.

‡ Ezech. xxxvi. 27

§ John xv. 5.

|| Hom. 17.

A certain rich nobleman gave his estate to the poor, and set his slaves at liberty; yet afterwards fell into pride and many enormous sins. Another, who, in the persecution, had suffered torments with great constancy for the faith, afterward, intoxicated with self-conceit, gave great scandal by his disorders. This saint mentions one who had formerly lived a long time with him in the desert, prayed often with him, and was favored with an extraordinary gift of compunction and a miraculous power of curing many sick persons, was at last delighted with the applause of men, and drawn into the sin of pride, and died an apostate.

Now, when we see Adam in paradise, in a state of innocence, sustained by great grace, endowed with an excellent mind, with perfect knowledge of natural and divine things, at the mere word of a woman whom he fears to displease, offend his God and Creator, from whose hands he had just issued, and drag down the whole human race in his fall, what ought we, the children of such a father, corrupted as we are by the world, the flesh, and the devil, to fear?

When we see David, the man according to God's own heart, fall at a single thoughtless glance at a woman into the commission of two enormous sins, in which he remained for a whole year without realizing their heinousness; when we think of St. Peter, 'the Prince of the Apostles, after having promised so solemnly rather to die than abandon his Lord, abandoning and denying Him thrice, with oaths and imprecations, at the simple word of a mean servant; when we see how Tertullian, Origen, Osius, the great Bishop of Cordova, and other pillars of the Church were vanquished and overcome, though they seemed immovably fixed in faith and all virtues—with such striking examples before us of deplorable weakness among the greatest and best, what are we to think of our own weakness in face of the very same enemies who overcame them, unless we are sustained by that all-powerful aid which can come from God alone?

Now, the Lord of mercy gives this strength to all who ask for it. To those who pray the Lord has promised to give not only one, two, or a hundred, or a thousand graces, but all the lights and graces, without a single exception, which are necessary to bring us and to lead us up to eternal glory. "All things whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you."* The Son of God was not content with saying, "All things" or "whatsoever"; but, to exclude the possibility of a single grace being excepted, He said: "All things whatsoever you ask when you pray . . . shall come unto you."

And lest any one should suppose that this promise applied only to the just, He has added: "Every one who asks shall receive" † Every one, without exception, whether he be a just man or a sinner, shall receive what he asks; but ask he must.

Prayer, therefore, is a universal means by which every single grace necessary to lead us to eternal life may be obtained with infallible certainty, since the Son of God has so promised. In this respect prayer differs from the sacraments, from penitential works, and the other means which God has given us to obtain eternal life. These are particular means, each producing or procuring particular graces. But to none of these, nor to all of them put together, without prayer, has God promised all the graces necessary for eternal life. Prayer is the only means to which He has promised all the *efficacious* helps and graces necessary for our salvation. It is a means given to all, without exception; for God gives the grace of prayer to the most hardened sinners as well as to the most holy of the just; and He has given it to every adult that ever lived, from the time of Adam to the present day. By making a good use of this grace of prayer the worst sinner may obtain, as *infallibly* as the greatest saint, every efficacious grace neces-

* Mark xi. 24.

† Matt. vii. 7.

sary for his salvation, and may thus secure everlasting glory.

Prayer is that powerful aid which God has given to every one to preserve His grace and friendship. "God, in the natural order," says St. Alphonsus, "has ordained that man should be born naked and in want of many of the necessities of life ; but as He has given him hands and understanding to provide for all his wants, so also in the supernatural order man is born incapable of remaining good and obtaining salvation by his own strength ; but God, in His infinite goodness, grants to every one the grace of prayer, and wishes that all should make constant use of this grace, in order thereby to obtain all other necessary graces."

Even though it should seem that all is lost, that we cannot overcome the temptations of the devil, that we cannot avoid the bad example of the world, that we cannot resist the revolts of corrupt nature, let us remember that, as St. Paul assures us, God is faithful, and will never suffer us to be tempted beyond our strength, but will make issue, also, with the temptation, that we may be able to bear it.* But we must also remember that God will give us strength in the hour of temptation, *only on condition that we pray for it ; that we pray for it earnestly, perseveringly.* "God," says St. Augustine, "does not command what is impossible ; if He commands you to do something, He admonishes you at the same time to do what you can, and to ask Him for His assistance whenever anything is above your strength, and He promises to assist you to do that which otherwise would naturally be impossible for you to do."

God does not give to the saints even grace to fulfil difficult precepts or duties, unless they pray for it. God, without our asking it, gives us all grace to do what is easy, but not what is difficult. The saints are only promised grace to

* Cor. x. 13.

pray for strength to do what is difficult, and to overcome violent temptations.

Father Segneri relates that a young man named Paccus retired into a wilderness in order to do penance for his sins. After some years of penance he was so violently assaulted by temptations that he thought it impossible to resist them any longer. As he was often overcome by them, he began to despair of his salvation; he even thought of taking away his life. He said to himself that if he must go to hell, it were better to go instantly than to live on thus in sin, and thereby only increase his torments. One day he took a poisonous viper in his hand, and in every possible manner urged it to bite him; but the reptile did not hurt him in the least. "O God!" cried Paccus, "there are so many who do not wish to die, and I, who wish so much for death, cannot die." At this moment he heard a voice saying to him: "Poor wretch! do you suppose you can overcome temptations by your own strength? Pray to God for assistance, and He will help you to overcome them." Encouraged by these words, he began to pray most fervently, and soon lost all his fear. He ever after led a very edifying life. "For him, then," says St. Isidore, "who is assailed with temptation, there is no other remedy left than prayer, to which he must have recourse as often as he is tempted. Frequent recourse to prayer subdues all temptation to sin."*

After St. Theodore had been cruelly tortured in many different ways, he was at last commanded by the tyrant to stand on red-hot tiles. Finding this kind of torture almost too great to endure, he prayed to the Lord to alleviate his sufferings, and the Lord granted him courage and fortitude to endure these torments until death. † St. Perpetua was a lady of noble family, brought up in the greatest luxury, and married to a man of high rank. She had everything to

* *Lib. III. de Summo Bono*, chap. viii.

† *Triumphs of the Martyrs*. By St. Alphonsus.

make her cling to this world ; for she had not only her husband, but also a father, a mother, and two brothers, of whom she was very fond, and a little babe whom she was nursing. She was only twenty-two years of age, and was of an affectionate and timid disposition, so that she did not seem naturally well fitted to endure martyrdom with courage, or to bear the separation from her babe and her aged parents, whom she loved so much. Although Perpetua loved Jesus, yet she could not help trembling at the thought of the tortures which she would have to suffer. When she was first thrown into prison, she was very much frightened at the darkness of the dungeon ; she was half-suffocated with the heat and bad air, and she was shocked at the rudeness of the soldiers, who pushed her and the other prisoners about ; for she had always lived in a splendid palace, surrounded with every luxury, and had been accustomed from her childhood to be treated with respect. If, then, she shrank from these little trials, what should she do when she was put to the torture, or when she had to face wild beasts in the amphitheatre ? She was conscious of her own weakness, and at first trembled ; but she knew that the heroic virtue of the martyrs did not depend on natural courage and strength ; she knew that if she prayed to Jesus, He would give her strength to bear everything, so that the grace of God would shine out most brightly in the midst of her natural weakness. A few days after she was put in prison she was baptized ; and as she came out of the water, the Holy Ghost inspired her *to ask for patience* in all the bodily sufferings which she might be called on to endure ; so she began to pray very fervently, and from that time she became so calm and so joyful that in spite of all her sufferings she was able to cheer and comfort her fellow-sufferers.

It was by prayer that the saints were enabled to overcome all their temptations, and to suffer patiently all their crosses and persecutions until death ; the more they suffered, the

more they prayed, and the Lord came to their assistance. "He shall cry to me," says the Lord, "and I will hear him; I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him, and will glorify him."*

This truth we learn especially from the angel who descended with the three children into the fiery furnace. "The angel of the Lord went down with Azarius and his companions into the furnace."† The angel of the Lord had descended into the flames before them, otherwise they would have been immediately consumed; but they did not see him until they prayed to God. After having prayed, they saw how the angel of the Lord drove the flame of the fire out of the furnace, and made the midst of the furnace like the blowing of a wind bringing dew. "Thus the angel of the Lord," says Cornelius à Lapide, "gives to understand that in persecutions and tribulations prayer is the only means of salvation. Those who pray are always victorious; those who neglect to pray give way to temptations, and are lost."

"I have known many," says St. Cyprian, "and have shed tears over them, who seemed to possess great courage and fortitude of soul, and yet, when on the point of receiving the crown of life everlasting, they fell away and became apostates. Now, what was the cause of this? They turned away their eyes from Him who alone is able to give strength to the weak. They had given up prayer, and commenced to look for aid and protection from man. They considered their own natural weakness; they looked at the red-hot gridirons, and at all the other frightful instruments of torture; they compared the acuteness of the pain with their own strength; but as soon as one thinks within himself, I can suffer this, but not that, his martyrdom will never be crowned with a glorious end. It was thus that they lost the victory. He alone who

*Ps. xc. 15.

† Dan. iii. 49.

abandons himself entirely to the divine will, and who looks for help from God alone, will remain firm and immovable, and persevere to the end. But this can be expected only from him who is gifted with a lively faith, and who does not tremble, or consider how great is the tyrant's cruelty, or how weak is human nature, but who considers only the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, who fights and conquers in His members. No one should lose courage when he has to endure some great bodily or spiritual affliction. Let him trust in the Lord, whose battles he fights. He will not permit any one 'to be tempted beyond his strength, but will grant a happy issue to all his sufferings.'"

"Christians, then," says Cornelius à Lapide, "cannot make a better use of their leisure time than to spend it in prayer." The saints knew well that prayer was the powerful means to escape the snares of the devil, and therefore they loved and practised nothing so much as this holy exercise.

King David often prayed to the Lord: "Lord, look upon me, and have mercy on me; for I am alone and poor."* "I cried with all my whole heart: Hear me, O Lord; let thy hand be with me to save me." † He assures us that he prayed without ceasing. "My eyes," said he, "are ever towards the Lord; for He shall pluck my feet out of the snare." ‡ "Daniel," says St. John Chrysostom, "preferred to die rather than to give up prayer." St. Philip Neri, being one day commanded to pray a little less than usual, said to one of his fathers: "I begin to feel like a brute." Blessed Leonard of Port-Maurice used to say a Christian should not let a moment pass by without saying, "My Jesus, have mercy on me!" "As a city fortified by strong walls," says St. John Chrysostom, "cannot be easily taken, so also a soul fortified by prayer cannot be overcome by the devil. The devil is afraid of approaching a soul that

* Ps. xxiv. 16

† Ps. cxviii.

‡ Ps. cxviii.

prays ; he fears the courage and strength that she obtains in prayer ; prayer gives more strength to the soul than food does to the body. The more the soul practises prayer, the more will she be nourished and strengthened ; and the less she practises prayer, the more keenly will she feel her own natural weakness. As plants cannot remain fresh and green without moisture, air, and light, so the soul cannot preserve the grace of God without prayer.”

A plant usually prospers only in its native clime. The same is true of the soul. The true home of the soul is God ; transplant it, and it will not live. Now, prayer is the means by which the soul is preserved in this its true home. Prayer keeps the soul united to God, and God to the soul, and thus it lives a perfect life. This is most emphatically expressed by St. John Chrysostom. “ Every one,” he says, “ who does not pray, and who does not wish to keep in continual communion with God, is dead ; he has lost his life, nay, he has even lost his reason. He must be insane, for he does not understand what a great honor it is to pray ; and he is not convinced of the important truth that not to pray is to bring death upon his soul, as it is impossible for him to lead a virtuous life without the aid of prayer. For how can he be able to practise virtue without throwing himself unceasingly at the feet of Him from whom alone comes all strength and courage ? ” *

“ Which of the just,” asks this great saint, “ did ever fight valiantly without prayer ? Which of them ever conquered without prayer ? ” † Neither any of the apostles, nor any of the martyrs, nor any of the confessors, nor any of the holy virgins and widows, nor any of the just in heaven or on earth. Hence all theologians teach that prayer is as necessary for the salvation of adults as baptism is for that of infants. As no infant can enter the kingdom of heaven without baptism, so no adult shall obtain eternal

* *Lib. de Orando Deum.*

† *Sermo de Mose.*

life without asking of God the graces necessary for salvation. Because of this strict and indispensable necessity of asking God's graces, St. Alphonsus tells us that he made it a rule of his order that in every mission conducted by the Redemptorist Fathers there should be a sermon on prayer. He says that every preacher should, in almost all his sermons, exhort his hearers to the practice of prayer, and should admonish them never to cease to call for aid in all their temptations, at least by invoking the holy names of Jesus and Mary as long as the temptation continues. He cautions every confessor not to be content with endeavoring to excite his penitents to sorrow for their sins and to a firm purpose of amendment; but to be careful also to impress upon them the necessity of praying for grace to be faithful to their resolutions, and of asking the divine aid as often as they are tempted to offend God. He concludes his book on prayer in the following words: "I say, and I repeat, and I shall repeat while I live, that our salvation depends altogether on prayer, and that on that account all writers in their books, all preachers in their sermons, and all confessors in the tribunal of penance should continually exclaim and repeat: 'Pray, pray, and never cease to pray; for if you continue to pray your salvation is secure; if you give up prayer, your perdition is inevitable.'"

We must pray for all the graces of which we stand in need, but we must be careful to pray for three graces in particular: First, for the pardon of all our past sins; secondly, for the gift of the love of God; and, thirdly, for the gift of final perseverance, and for the grace to persevere till death in praying for this great gift. We should ask these three graces not only in our meditations, but also at Mass, after communion, and in all our spiritual exercises. We ought first to pray for the pardon of all our past sins; because we do not know, and shall not know till death, whether they have been pardoned or not. The Scripture tells us that we

know not whether we are worthy of love or hatred.* And though God had revealed to us that our sins were forgiven, we should still continue till death to beg of Him “to wash us still more from our sins, and to cleanse us from our iniquities”; for, after the guilt of sin has been remitted, the temporal punishment due to it frequently and generally remains. Among the temporal punishments due to sin after the remission of its guilt, the saints count the withholding of many of God’s graces. From eternity God prepared for us all abundant graces to work out our salvation. Some of these graces were necessary to lead us to a high degree of perfection, and to make us saints; others were so necessary for our salvation that without them we should not be saved. In punishment of sin, even after its guilt has been remitted, God sometimes withholds both these classes of graces; and, therefore, our past sins, after they have been forgiven, may be the cause of our damnation by preventing God from bestowing upon us certain graces without which we shall be certainly lost. Hence the Holy Ghost tells us not to be without fear about sin forgiven. “*De propitiato peccato noli esse sine timore.*” † In order, then, to secure not only the pardon of all our past sins, but also the graces which may be withheld in punishment of them, and particularly the graces without which we should be lost, we must pray frequently and fervently in our meditations for the complete and entire remission of all our sins, and of all the penalties due to them. By frequent and fervent petitions for these objects, every one, even the most abandoned sinner, however enormous his crimes may have been, can easily and infallibly avert the chastisement of sin, which consists in the withholding of God’s graces, and may thus infallibly prevent the danger of his past sins being the cause of his damnation after their guilt had been remitted.

* Eccles. ix. 1.

† Eccles. v. 5.

Secondly, we must ask with fervor the gift of God's love. St. Francis de Sales says that the gift of divine love should be the object of all our prayers, because it brings with it all the other good gifts of God. Love is the golden chain by which the soul is united and bound to her God. "Charity," says St. Paul, "is the bond of perfection." Every act of love is a treasure which secures to us the friendship of God. "I love them that love me."* "He that loveth me shall be loved by my Father."† "Charity covereth a multitude of sins."‡ St. Thomas teaches that every act of love merits a degree of eternal glory. Acts of love may be made, first, in the following manner: "My God, I love Thee with my heart. I desire to see Thee loved by all men as much as Thou deservest to be loved. I desire to love Thee as much as the angels love Thee in heaven, and as much as Thou wishest me to love Thee. I offer all I am and have to Thy love and glory for time and eternity; and I ask Thee, O my God! to help me to love Thee. I ask Thee to take away from my heart the love of myself and the love of the world, and to fill my soul with Thy pure and holy love, that I may seek nothing but Thy love and glory and my own salvation." Secondly, acts of love may be made by resigning ourselves in all things to the divine will, saying: "Lord, make known to me what is pleasing to Thee; I am ready to do it, whatever it may be." Thirdly, by offering ourselves to God without reserve, saying: "O my God! do what Thou pleasest with me, and with all that belongs to me." Such offerings of ourselves to God are acts of love, very pleasing in His eyes; hence, St. Teresa used to offer herself to Him fifty times in the day. To rejoice in the infinite happiness of God is also a most perfect act of love. In begging the grace of God's love we ought to ask the gift of perfect resignation and conformity to the divine will in all things, particularly in all crosses and afflictions. Thirdly, we

* Prov. viii. 17.

† John xiv. 21.

‡ 1 Peter iv. 8.

must, above all, pray with great fervor in our meditations for the grace of final perseverance. This is, according to Blessed Leonard, the grace of graces; this is the grace on which our salvation depends. If God gives it to us, we shall be saved; if not, we shall be lost. This is the gift which distinguishes the elect in heaven from the reprobate in hell; if the elect had not got it, they should be lost; and if the damned had received it, they should now be in glory. It crowns all the other gifts of God; without it they shall be a source of greater damnation. This gift God gives to infants without any co-operation on their part, by taking them out of life before they lose their baptismal innocence. But St. Augustine teaches that God never gives it to any adult that does not pray for it. The grace of final perseverance is a special gift, which we cannot merit, as the Council of Trent teaches in these words: "*Aliunde haberi non potest, nisi ab eo qui potens est, eum qui stat, statuere ut perseverantur stet.*"* We cannot merit it by the sacraments, nor by penitential austerities, nor by alms-deeds. God has given us only one means of infallibly obtaining it, and that is by praying for it continually till our last breath. It is not enough to ask this gift once, nor twice, nor for a year, nor for ten years; our petitions for it must cease only with our life, and must be frequently offered in meditation, which is the fittest time for asking God's graces. Whoever asks it to-day obtains it for to-day; but he who does not pray for it till to-morrow may fall on to-morrow, and be lost. In the preface to his book on the victories of the martyrs, St. Liguori says that in the *History of the Martyrs of Japan* it is related that an old man, condemned to a slow and painful death, remained for a long time firm under his torments, but when he was on the point of breathing his last he ceased to recommend himself to God, denied the

* Sess. 6, c. xiii.

faith, and instantly expired. Hence, in his treatise on prayer, the holy author says that “to obtain perseverance, we must recommend ourselves continually to God, morning and evening, in our meditations, at Mass, communion, and all times, but particularly in the time of temptations, saying, and repeating continually: Assist me, O Lord! assist me; keep Thy hand upon me; do not abandon me; have mercy on me.” In order, then, to secure the grace of final perseverance, we must not cease till death to pray continually for it. And in order to persevere to the end in praying for this great gift, we must unceasingly ask of God the grace that we may continue till our last breath to implore it of Him.

“If,” says St. Liguori in his book on prayer, “we wish not to be forsaken by God, we must never cease to pray that He may not abandon us. If we continually beg His aid, He will most certainly assist us always, and will never permit us to lose Him or to be separated from His love. And to secure this constant aid and protection from heaven, let us be careful to ask without ceasing, not only the gift of final perseverance and the graces necessary to obtain it, but also to beg, by anticipation, of the Lord that great gift which He promised to His elect by the mouth of the prophet—the grace to persevere in prayer: ‘And I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and prayer.’* Oh! how great a gift is the spirit of prayer or the grace to pray always! Let us, then, never cease to ask from God this grace and spirit of continual prayer. If we persevere to the end in prayer, we shall certainly obtain the gift of perseverance and every grace we stand in need of; for God cannot violate his promise to hear all who may invoke His aid.” This grace and gift of perseverance in prayer is most necessary for all Christians, but particularly for those who are exposed to great

* Zach. xii. 10.

dangers, and who are at the same time bound by difficult obligations. Now, all Christians, and particularly parents, whose obligations to their children are all very difficult, have frequently to discharge duties which are painful and very difficult to flesh and blood, and to combat with violent temptations to neglect these duties and to offend God. The duties of parents to their children are exceedingly difficult. They are bound, first, to instruct their children, or to take care to have them instructed in all those things which are necessary to salvation ; to train them from their infancy to habits of virtue ; to make them frequent the sacraments ; to make them observe the commandments of God and of the Church ; and to make them abstain from vice. Secondly, they are bound to give their children good example. Thirdly, they are bound to correct and, when necessary, to chastise their children for their faults, particularly as often as they hear them utter blasphemies or obscene words, or find them guilty of theft. Fourthly, they are bound to keep their children away from the occasion of sin. "Hence," says St. Liguori in his sermon on the education of children, "parents must, in the first place, forbid their children to go out at night, or to go to any house in which their virtue should be exposed to danger, or to keep bad company. 'Cast out,' said Sara to Abraham, 'this bondswoman and her son.' Sara wished to have Ishmael, the son of Agar, banished from her house, lest Isaac should learn his vicious habits." Bad companions are the ruin of young persons. Parents should not only remove the evil occasions which they witness, but are also bound to enquire after the conduct of their children, and to seek information from domestics and from externs regarding the places which their children frequent when they leave home, regarding their occupations and companions. Secondly, parents should take from their children every musical instrument which to them is an occasion of going out at night, and all forbidden weapons

which may lead them into quarrels or disputes. Thirdly, they should dismiss all immoral servants; and if their sons be grown up, they should not keep in the house any young female servant. Some parents pay little attention to this, and when evil happens they complain of their children, as if they expected that tow thrown into the fire should not burn. Fourthly, parents should forbid their children to bring into the house stolen goods, such as fowl, fruit, and the like. When Tobias heard the bleating of a goat in his house, he said: "Take heed lest perhaps it be stolen; restore ye it to its owners."* How often does it happen that when a child steals something the mother says: "Bring it to me, my son." Parents should prohibit to their children all games which bring destruction on their families and on their own souls, and also masks, scandalous comedies, certain dangerous conversations, and parties of pleasure. Fifthly, parents should remove from the house romances which pervert young persons, and all bad books which contain pernicious maxims, tales of obscenity or profane love. Sixthly, they ought not to allow their children to sleep in their own bed, nor the males and females to sleep together. Seventhly, they should not permit their daughters to be alone with men, whether young or old. Some will say: "Such a man teaches my daughters to read and write, etc.; he is a saint." The saints are in heaven; but the saints on earth are flesh, and by proximate occasions they may become devils. Eighthly, if they have daughters, parents should not permit young men to frequent the house. To get their daughters married, some mothers invite young men to their houses. They are anxious to see their daughters married; but they do not care to see them in sin. These are the mothers who, as David says, immolate their daughters to the devil. "They sacrifice their sons and daughters to

*Tob. ii. 21.

devils.”* And to excuse themselves they will say: “Father, there is no harm in what I do.” There is no harm! Oh! how many mothers shall we see condemned on the day of judgment on account of their daughters! O fathers and mothers! confess all the sins you have committed in this respect before the day on which you shall be judged arrives. What a multitude of graces are necessary to enable a parent to fulfil these duties! All Christians have difficult duties to perform, but the obligations of parents are peculiarly difficult. St. Augustine, as has already been said, teaches that God does not ordinarily give grace even to the saints to do what is difficult unless they pray for it. If, then, all Christians, but particularly fathers and mothers, do not send up frequent petitions for it, God will not give them the grace to fulfil the difficult duties of their state.

St. Augustine assures us that he “who does not know how to pray well will not know how to live well.” † “Nay,” says St. Francis of Assisium, “never expect anything good from a soul that is not addicted to prayer.” St. Bernard was wont to say: “If I see a man who is not very fond of prayer, I say to myself, That man cannot be virtuous.” St. Charles Borromeo says, in one of his pastoral letters: “Of all means that Jesus Christ has left for our salvation, prayer is the most important.” ‡ “Indeed,” says St. Alphonsus, “in the ordinary course of Providence, our meditations, resolutions, and promises will all be fruitless without prayer, because we will be unfaithful to the divine inspiration if we do not pray; in order to be able to overcome temptations, to practise virtue, to keep the commandments of God, we need, besides divine light, meditations, and good resolutions, the *actual assistance* of God. Now, this divine assistance is given to those only who pray for it, and who pray for it unceasingly.”

The governor Paschasius commanded the holy virgin

* Psalm cv. 37.

† Homil. 43.

‡ Act. Eccl. Med. p. 1005.

Lucy to be exposed to prostitution in a brothel-house ; but God rendered her immovable, so that the guards were not able to carry her thither. He also made her an over-match for the cruelty of the persecutors in overcoming fire and other torments. It is only the Lord who can make us immovable in all our good resolutions ; it is only His grace that can prevent us from being carried by temptation into the abyss of hell. “ Unless the Lord had been my helper,” says David, “ my soul had almost dwelt in hell.”* And, “ Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.” † Unless the Lord preserve the soul from sin, all her endeavors to avoid it will be fruitless. “ Lord,” exclaimed St. Philip Neri, “ keep Thy hand over me this day ; otherwise Thou wilt be betrayed by Philip.”

Father Hunolt, S.J., says that to hope to remain free from sin, and persevere in virtue, and be saved without prayer, is to tempt God, to require of Him a miracle ; it is just as absurd as to imagine that you can see without eyes, hear without ears, and walk without feet. Of this we should be firmly convinced. Let us, then, as St. Bernard admonishes us, always have recourse to prayer as to the surest weapon of defence. Let prayer be our first act in the morning. Let us have recourse to prayer whenever we feel tempted to lukewarmness, to impatience, to impurity, or to any other sin. Let us arm ourselves with prayer when we have to mingle with the wicked world, or when we have to fight against our corrupt nature. Let prayer never leave our hearts ; let it never desert our lips ; let it be our constant companion on all our journeys ; let it close our eyes at night ; let it be our exercise of predilection. Every other loss may be repaired, but the loss of prayer never. If, on account of a delicate constitution, we cannot fast, we may give alms ; if we have no opportunity to confess our sins, we may obtain the forgiveness of them by an act of perfect

* Ps. xciii.

† Ps. exxvii. 1.

contrition ; nay, even baptism itself may sometimes be supplied by an earnest desire for this sacrament, accompanied by an ardent love for God. But as for him who neglects to practise prayer, there is no other means of salvation left. Let us give up every other occupation rather than neglect prayer. Let us persevere in prayer, as all the saints have done ; let us follow the example of our divine Saviour, who prayed even to the very last moment of His life ; let us leave this world with prayer upon our lips. Thus prayer will conduct us to heaven, there to reign eternally with our Lord Jesus Christ and all the just in everlasting joy and glory.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE POWER AND MERCY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

A FATHER had in store costly presents of gold and jewels which he intended to give his children as a token of his love for them. The time chosen by the father for the bestowal of his gifts, as being best calculated to make a deep impression on the minds of his children, was when he lay on his death-bed. Thus the gifts became the last memorials of his love.

Our divine Saviour thought and acted in the same manner when hanging on the cross. We can imagine Him to say : "I have already given men so many proofs of my love towards them. I have created them. I preserve their lives. I have become man for their sake. I have lived among them for more than thirty years. I have given them my own flesh and blood as food and drink for their souls. I am yet to suffer and die for them on this cross, that I may reopen heaven to them. What more can I do for them? I can make them one more present. I will give them a most precious gift: the only gift that is still left, so that they may not be able to charge me with having done less for them than I might have done. I have kept this gift to the last, because it is my desire that they should ever remember it; because it is so precious in my sight, so dear to my heart, so necessary for all those who will believe in me: and because it is to be the means of preserving all the other gifts. This last gift, this keepsake of my most tender love for men, is my own most pure Virgin Mother."

God alone knows the inmost yearnings of the human heart. God alone can fully understand and compassionate

our weakness. At our birth to this natural life God gave each of us a father and a mother, to be our guide and support, our refuge and consolation ; and when, in the holy sacrament of baptism, we were come again to the true life of grace, God gave us also a Father and a Mother. He taught us to call Him "Our Father, who art in heaven." He gave us His own blessed Virgin Mother to be our true and loving Mother. That Mary is our Mother we were told by Jesus Himself when hanging on the cross: "Behold thy Mother."* By His all-powerful word God created the heavens and the earth ; by His word He changed water into wine at the wedding-feast ; by His word He gave life to the dead ; by His word He changed bread and wine into His own body and blood ; and by the same word He made His own beloved Mother to be truly and really our Mother also. Mary, then, is our Mother, as Jesus willed and declared ; and Mary, our Mother, is an all-powerful Mother ; she is an all-merciful Mother.

God alone is all-powerful by nature, but Mary is all-powerful by her prayers. What more natural than this ?

Mary is made *Mater Dei*, the Mother of God. Behold two words, the full meaning of which can never be comprehended either by men or angels. To be Mother of God is, as it were, an infinite dignity ; for the dignity of that Mother is derived from the dignity of her Son. As there can be no son of greater excellence than the Son of God, so there can be no mother greater than the Mother of God. Hence St. Thomas asks whether God could make creatures nearer perfection than those already created, and he answers yes, He can, except three: *i.e.*, 1, The Incarnation of the Son of God ; 2, The maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary ; and 3, The everlasting beatitude ; in other words, God can create numberless worlds, all different from one another in beauty, but He cannot make anything greater

* John xix. 27.

than the Incarnation of Christ, the Mother of God, and the happiness of the blessed in heaven. And why can he not? Because God Himself is involved in and most intimately united to each of these works, and is their object. ("Haec tria Deum involvunt et pro objecto habent.") As there can be no man as perfect as Christ, because He is a Man-God, and as there can be no greater happiness than the beatific vision and enjoyment and possession of God in heaven, where the soul is, as it were, transformed into God and most inseparably united to His nature, so also no mother can be made as perfect as the Mother of God. These three works are of a certain infinite dignity on account of their intimate union with God, the infinite Good. There can then be nothing better, greater than, or as perfect as, these three works, because there can be nothing better than God Himself. The Blessed Virgin gave birth to Christ, who is the natural Son of God the Father, both as God and as man. Christ, then, as man, is the natural Son both of the Blessed Virgin and of God the Father. Behold in what intimate relation she stands with the Blessed Trinity, she having brought forth the same Son whom God the Father has generated from all eternity.

Moreover, the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God, who had no earthly father; she was both mother and father to Jesus Christ. Hence she is the Mother of God far more than others are the mothers of men; for Christ received of the Blessed Virgin alone his whole human nature, and is indebted to his Mother for all that he is as man. Hence Christ, by being conceived and born of the Blessed Virgin, became in a certain sense her debtor, and is under more obligations to her for being to Him both mother and father than other children are to their parents.

If Mary is the Mother of God, what wonder, then, that God has glorified and will glorify, through all ages, her power of intercession with Him and her mercy for all men?

The Eternal Father has chosen Mary to be the mother of His only Son ; the Holy Spirit chose her as His spouse. The Son, who has promised a throne in heaven to the apostles who preached His word, is bound in justice to do more for the Mother who bore Him, the eternal Word. If we believe in honoring our mother, surely He believes in honoring and glorifying His. Now, what honors, what prerogatives, should God bestow on her, whom he has so much favored, and who served Him so devotedly ! How should she be honored whom the King of Heaven deigns to honor !

A king was once in great danger of being assassinated, but a faithful subject discovered the plot, revealed it, and thus saved the monarch's life. The king was moved with gratitude, and asked his ministers, "How could he be honored whom the king desires to honor?" One of his ministers replied, "He whom the king desired to honor should be clad in kingly robes ; he should be crowned with a kingly diadem, and the first of the royal princes should go before him and cry aloud, 'Thus shall he be honored whom the king desires to honor.'" In this manner did an earthly king reward him who saved his life. And how should the King of heaven and earth reward her who gave Him His human life ? How should Jesus reward the loving Mother who bore Him, nursed Him, saved Him in his infancy from a most cruel death ? Is there any honor too high for her whom God Himself has so much honored ? Is there any glory too dazzling for her whom the God of glory has chosen for His dwelling-place ? No ; it is God's own decree : Let her be clad in royal robes. Let the fulness of the Godhead so invest her, so possess her, that she shall be a spotless image of the sanctity, the beauty, the glory of God Himself. Let her be crowned with a kingly diadem. Let her reign for ever as the peerless Queen of heaven, of earth, and of hell. Let her reign as the Mother of mercy, the Consoler of the afflicted, the Refuge of sinners. Let the first of the

royal princes walk before her. Let the angels, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, let all the saints, kiss the hem of her garment and rejoice in the honor of being the servants of the Mother of God.

No wonder, then, if we rarely hear of Mary but in connection with a miraculous demonstration of the power of God. She was conceived as no other human being ever was conceived. She again conceived her Son and God in a miraculous manner; miracles attended her visit to her cousin St. Elizabeth; the birth of her divine Child was accompanied by many striking prodigies. When she carried Him in her arms to present Him in the Temple, behold new miracles followed her steps. The first miracle of her divine Son was performed at her request. She took part in the awful mystery of the Passion. She shared in the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In a word, miracles seem to have been the order in her life, the absence of miracles the exception; so that we are as little surprised to find them attend her everywhere as we should be astonished to hear of them in connection with ourselves. Mary was a living miracle. All that we know of her miraculous power now is but little when compared with the prodigies which were effected through her agency during her earthly career. She saluted her cousin Elizabeth; and when that holy woman "heard her salutation, she was filled with the Holy Ghost." She addressed her divine Son at the marriage-feast, and said, "They have no more wine"; and immediately the filial charity which had bound Him to her for thirty years constrained Him to comply with her request. He whose meat and drink it was to do the will of His heavenly Father seemed to make the will of Mary the law of His action rather than His own. Again, there was a moment when the mystery of the Incarnation hung upon the word of her lips; the destiny of the world depended upon an act of her will. When God wished to create the world, "He spoke and it was

done"; when He wished to redeem the world, He left it to the consent of His creature, and that creature was Mary. She said, "Be it done to me according to Thy word," and the miracle of all miracles, the mystery of all mysteries, was consummated. "God was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us."

It cannot surprise us, then, that she should continue to be a centre of miraculous action. Her whole previous history prepares us for this. It seems to be the law of her being; she represents to us the most stupendous miracle that the world ever witnessed. It seems, therefore, almost natural that she should be able to suspend here and there the course of natural events by the power of her intercession. All that we know of her miraculous power now is as nothing when compared with the prodigies which were effected through her agency during her earthly career, and which we must believe, unless we would forfeit the very name of Christian. The apostles did not enter upon their office of intercession till the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; after that, whatever they should ask the Father in Christ's name they were certain to receive. Mary began her office of intercession at Cana. Its commencement was inaugurated by Christ's first miracle. It is true that His answer, in words at least, seemed at first unfavorable. But only observe how every circumstance of that event strengthens the Catholic view of our Lord's conduct. Mary's faith in her Son's power, and in His willingness to grant her request, never wavered, even when He seemed to make a difficulty. Whether His words had a meaning wholly different from that ordinarily attached to them now, or whether she, whose heart was as His own, read His consent in the tone of His voice or in the glance of His eye, her only answer was the words addressed to the servants: "Whatever He shall say to you, do it," evidently proving that she never for an instant doubted the favorable issue of her request. Now,

if what appeared to be an unseasonable exercise of Mary's influence resulted in a miracle, and the first of the public miracles of our Lord; and if He predicted the coming of an hour when the exercise of her influence should no longer be unseasonable, as His words clearly imply, what prodigies must not her intercession effect at the present time! If she could thus prevail with God in her lowliness, what can she not obtain now in her exalted state! Number, if you can, those who, through the intercession of Mary, have been restored to life; how many sick have been cured; how many captives have been set at liberty; how many have been delivered by Mary who were in danger of perishing by fire, in danger of shipwreck, in danger of war and pestilence! Number all the kingdoms which she has founded; all the empires which she has preserved; to how many armies that put themselves under her protection has she not given victory over their enemies! Call to mind Narses, the general of the Emperor Justinian. Was it not through Mary that he gained the victory over the Goths? And was not the victory of Heraclius over the Persians due to Mary? Pelagius I. sought her aid, and slew 80,000 Saracens. Basil the Emperor defeated the Saracens by her assistance. By the same assistance Godfrey de Bouillon defeated the Saracens and regained Jerusalem. Through her Alfonsus VIII., King of Castile, slew 200,000 Moors, with the loss of scarcely twenty or thirty Christians. Pius V. obtained through her intercession the celebrated victory over the Turks at Lepanto. How many heresies has she not crushed! It was she who animated St. Athanasius and St. Gregory Thaumaturgus to defend the Church against the Arians. It was she who animated St. Cyrillus to defend the doctrine of the Church against the Nestorians. It was she who inspired St. Augustine to raise his voice against the Pelagians. It was she who encouraged St. John Damascene to attack the fierce heresy of the Iconoclasts. It was she who animated

St. Dominic to defend the doctrines of the Church against the Albigenses. It was she who filled St. Ignatius Loyola with undaunted courage to battle against the baneful heresy of Luther. It was she who inspired St. Alphonsus de Liguori to take up arms against the poisonous serpents of Jansenism and Gallicanism. It is she who has inspired so many persons to consecrate themselves to the service of God in the religious and apostolic life.

These public manifestations of her power recorded in the history of the Church are indeed wonderful ; but her secret influence—the influence which she exerts over the hearts of men, over human passions and motives of action, over the invisible enemies of our salvation—is even more wonderful, more comprehensive still. This influence is felt through the whole Church ; it is of hourly occurrence. Those who have felt its gentle operation can bear witness to the truth of its existence. How many of the just have become perfect through Mary ; how many there are who have received the grace of purity through her ; how many there are who have obtained through her the grace to overcome their passions ; how many who have already obtained through her the crown of life everlasting ! Behold a St. Augustine, a St. John Damascene, a St. Germanus, a St. Anselm, a St. Bonaventure, a St. Bernard, a St. Dominic, a St. Vincent Ferrer, a St. Xavier, a St. Alphonsus ; behold the countless multitude of saints who for their sanctity have shone like suns in the heavens. Was it not through Mary that they became holy ? Have they passed through any other gate than through that opened by Mary ? Think of all the sinners who have been converted through Mary. The hourly conversions of such numbers are the hourly triumphs of Mary's power ; they are the secret but most conclusive evidence of the queenly authority with which she is invested for the welfare of all men.

Some years ago a mission was given in a certain town.

The people took great interest in the exercises, and approached the sacraments with great fervor. There was one, however, who took no part in the mission. He had not been to confession for over twenty years. He led a very immoral life, and, as a natural consequence, had become an infidel. Not satisfied with being corrupt himself, he tried to ruin all around him. He even spent large sums of money in buying bad books, which he distributed freely amongst the young people of his neighborhood. He spared no means which wealth and cunning could devise to ruin pure and innocent souls. On the last day of the mission, whilst the missionaries were all busily engaged in hearing confessions, this unhappy man came to church also, and entered one of the confessionals. He began to tell his sins one after the other. He accused himself of the most enormous crimes, but he told them without the least sign of sorrow—nay, he even gloried in his wickedness; especially when he had related how cunningly he had devised his plans, how well he had succeeded in destroying innocent souls, he would pause for a moment and look at the priest with an air of triumph, as if to say: “Now, was not that well done?” He went on thus relating his sins for about three-quarters of an hour; at last he stopped and said: “Now, sir, I suppose I have told you enough for the present!” The poor missionary had listened patiently to the wretched man without even once interrupting him, and now he was in the greatest strait, as he did not know what to do with him. Should he give this hardened sinner absolution, and thereby load his soul with another mortal sin—the sin of sacrilege—or should he send him away with that frightful load of sin still weighing upon his soul? What was to be done? At last the priest began to exhort him to repentance. He spoke to him of the enormity of sin, the terrors of judgment, the torments of hell; but the man interrupted him, and said in an insolent tone: “Oh! let all that go for the present. That

may do very well to frighten old women. I know it is a part of your trade to talk thus, but you see such things do not affect me." The priest continued, however, to exhort him, but the man interrupted him again, and said: "My good sir, you are only wasting words. I do not even ask for absolution. If you wish to absolve me, very good; if not, I am quite satisfied. It matters little to me whether you absolve me or not." The priest reflected and prayed for a moment, and then said to the hardened sinner: "Well, my good friend, at least one thing you will grant: that I have listened to you very patiently." "Yes, that is true," answered the man. "In fact, I was astonished, and I must say even disappointed, at it myself. I expected that you would scold me and fly into a passion; and, to tell the truth, that was just what I wanted." "Well, then," said the priest, "since I have done you the favor of listening to you so patiently, will you also do me a little favor?" "Well," said the man, "if it is not too much or too costly, perhaps I might do it." "No!" said the priest; "the favor I ask will cost you nothing. You have told me, among other things, that you often said publicly that the Blessed Virgin Mary is nothing more than any ordinary woman. Now go yonder to the Blessed Virgin's altar, and say slowly, three times, these words: 'O Mary! I believe that you have no more power than any ordinary woman; if you have, then prove it to me.'" With these words the priest sent him away, and continued to hear other confessions. About an hour after a man was seen drawing near the confessional with a slow, heavy tread. It was the same sinner again, but oh! how changed. He threw himself on his knees before the priest, but could not speak; his voice was choked by sobs and tears, his strong frame quivered with emotion. "O father!" cried he at last, "is there any hope for me? Oh! what a monster I have been! Father, forgive me for having insulted you awhile ago; for having dishonored the holy

sacrament of confession. Ah ! now I wish to make a good, sincere confession. I wish to change my life, and I wish to atone for all the evil I have ever done." You may imagine how great was the joy of the priest at witnessing this happy change. He enquired of the man the cause of his sudden conversion. "Father," said the now repentant sinner, "I did as you told me; I went to the Blessed Virgin's altar and said: 'O Mary! I believe . . .'" Father, I cannot say those wicked words again. Scarcely had I uttered them when a strange feeling came over me which I could not resist. All the sins of my whole life, my black ingratitude to God, appeared in an instant before me. My heart, my inmost soul, was wrung with poignant grief. I could not help it, I burst into tears—tears of true repentance; and now, father, I kneel here before you to obtain forgiveness for my enormous crimes." The missionary absolved him, and his heart was filled with joy as he received back the prodigal son who had been straying away for so many years. Next morning this man knelt at the communion-rail for the first time in twenty years. And when the good parish priest saw him there kneeling with the rest, he was so overcome with emotion that he had to turn away his face to hide his tears. The day after the mission all the clergy and the leading members of the congregation had assembled in the house of the parish priest. As they were speaking together, a knock was heard at the door; the door was opened, and in walked the convert. He fell on his knees before the parish priest; he kissed his hands, and even his feet, and said, with tears in his eyes: "Father, forgive me for having so often grieved your fatherly heart by my sinful conduct. Father, forgive me!" Then he turned to all those present, and, on his knees, begged their forgiveness for the bad example he had given; after which he arose, and, raising his right hand to heaven, cried: "I swear by the living God that I will consecrate the rest of my life to God's service. With God's as-

sistance I will repair, to the best of my power, all the evil I have done, all the scandal I have given." And this man kept his word. Long after, the parish priest wrote to one of the missionaries that this man, who had formerly led so scandalous a life, was now a source of edification to the whole community ; that he spared no pains and shunned no labor whenever anything was to be done for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Nothing is too great for Mary's power. And as there is nothing too great for her power, so there is nothing too insignificant for her notice. While she fights the battles of the universal Church, she cares for the salvation of the least of Christ's little ones. She is always ready to console and refresh their fainting spirits, to procure for them even the smallest actual grace. From the holy virgin martyr who in the first ages of the Church invoked the aid of Mary against the demon of impurity to the youth who kneels to-day before her altar, imploring the preservation of his innocence or the restoration of lost virtue, it has never been heard that any one who fled to her protection, implored her assistance, or asked her prayers was left unheeded. One, for instance, sets his heart upon obtaining from the Blessed Virgin the recovery or conversion of a dear friend ; another prays for the clear manifestation of the divine will in his regard at some critical period of his life ; another prays for some special favor ; they begin a novena to Mary, and ere it is ended their prayer is heard. In the daily strife with sin and temptation the name of Mary acts as a spell upon the spirits of evil. If men at times give way to pride and contempt of others, they invoke the aid of Mary, and their hearts become kind and humble. Does the thought of impurity cross their mind, they call upon her name ; they raise their eyes towards her throne, and the demon flies from them. Whilst Mary, this loving Mother, was yet on earth, her heart was always full of mercy and compas-

sion towards all men. Destined from all eternity to be the Mother of the God of mercy, Mary received a heart like unto the heart of her divine Son Jesus—a heart that was free from every stain of sin and overflowing with burning charity. Yes, Mary's mercy grew up with her from her tender childhood, and compassion became with her a second nature. See, she herself reveals the loving mercy that burns in her heart. In the little house at Nazareth, in her silent chamber, she is kneeling all alone. With more than seraphic ardor, she implores God to send speedily the long-wished-for Redeemer. The angel enters and salutes Mary: "Hail, full of grace." He announces the glad tidings that God Himself desires to call her "Mother," and waits for her answer. The whole human race, sinful and sorrowful, lies prostrate at her feet. God Himself, the Creator of all things, awaits the free consent of His own creature. And now Mary reveals all her virtues, displays her unbounded mercy. The decisive moment has come; Mary becomes a mother, and remains a spotless virgin. She becomes the Queen of Heaven, and remains the meek and lowly handmaid. She utters the merciful "*fiat*." It is for us that she utters it. "Be it done to me according to Thy word." By the divine "*fiat*" this world was called out of nothingness into existence, and by the "*fiat*" of Mary this same world, dead in sin, was recalled to the life of grace. Well does Mary know what this consent will cost her; but her great love for us, her great mercy towards us sinners, impels her, and she willingly offers herself to suffer sorrow and contempt, to endure every pang, for our sake.

Behold once more this holy Virgin, full of divine grace and mercy, going in haste over the mountains of Judea. See how she undertakes a long and tedious journey of several days—and all for what? Her compassionate heart knows that the infant John the Baptist lies bound by the chains of sin; she hastens to burst those fetters. No sooner has Mary

arrived at the house of Elizabeth than the infant is freed from sin, is sanctified, and the compassionate Virgin sings a sublime canticle of praise and gladness.

The evangelist tells us in a few words the entire fulness of the mercy of Mary: "Mary, of whom was born Jesus." These few words contain such a superabundance of graces for us that we can think of nothing better, we can think of nothing greater. For Jesus is our most merciful Redeemer. He is mercy itself, and Mary is the Mother of Jesus—the Mother of mercy. The shepherds of Bethlehem can tell, and the wise men of the East can bear witness to the fact, that when they found the Child and its Mother in the poor and lowly stable, their joy, their happiness, their consolation knew no bounds.

If we wish to see still more clearly how deeply the heart of Mary felt for our miseries, let us approach the Temple and see Mary offer up her dearly-beloved Son for us. Yes, so dearly has Mary loved the world that she has sacrificed her only-begotten Son for the life of the world. Only he who understands the boundless love that Mary bore to her divine Son can fully understand the love and mercy of Mary towards us, her erring children.

The love and solicitude with which Mary watched over the infant Jesus was also love and solicitude for us. It was for us that she nourished Jesus, in order that the blood which she gave Him might be shed for us and for our sins; it was for us that she nourished Jesus, in order that He might grow up and labor for our salvation; it was for us that she saved her divine Infant from the hands of the cruel Herod, in order that He might enrich us with His doctrine and example, and that He might finally lay down His life for us upon the cross.

"Beside the cross of Jesus stood his Mother." Only think, such a mother witnessing such a death—the death of her Only-Begotten! Christian mothers who have stood

by the bedside of a dying child may realize the anguish of such a scene. But it was even here that the greatest blessing was bestowed on us ; for it was here that Mary was first publicly proclaimed to be our Mother. “Woman, behold thy son !” “Dear Mother,” said her dying Son, “I am now about to die ; I am about to depart from thee, but I leave thee another son in my stead ; I leave thee my beloved disciple. Thou shalt now be his Mother ; thou shalt now be the Mother, the Refuge, of sinners. Woman, behold thy son !” Mark well those words ! Ye angels of heaven, bear witness to those words ! Jesus has provided for us in His testament. He has bequeathed to us a priceless treasure. He has given us His own pure Virgin Mother. And, indeed, Mary receives us as her children. Every word of her divine Son is sacred in her eyes. She knows that such is the will of her dying Son. The will is written in blood—in the blood of Jesus—and sealed by His death. Jesus finally returns to heaven, and Mary remains yet on earth to encourage and console His sorrowing disciples. And now that Mary also has ascended into heaven, has she forgotten those children of sorrow whom Jesus has confided to her care ? Oh ! no ; it is not in our Mother’s heart to forget her children. Never did any one ask a grace of Mary without being heard. In heaven her love and mercy towards us has only become more ardent, more efficacious. Every century, nay, every year, every day, every hour, especially the dying hour of so many sinners, bears witness to Mary’s undying love and inexhaustible mercy.

St. Teresa gives us an account of a merchant of Valladolid who did not live as a good Christian should live. However, he had some devotion to the Blessed Virgin. One day St. Teresa went to Valladolid to find a house for her nuns. The merchant, hearing that Teresa was seeking a house, went to her and offered to give her one of his houses, saying that he would give it in honor of the Blessed Virgin

Mary. St. Teresa thanked him and took the house. Two months after, the gentleman was suddenly taken so very ill that he was not able to speak or to make his confession. He could only show by signs that he wished to beg pardon of our Lord for his sins, and died soon after. "After his death," says St. Teresa, "I saw our Lord. He told me that this gentleman had been very near losing his soul. But He had mercy on him because of the service he did to His blessed Mother by giving the house in her honor. She obtained for him, in the hour of death, the grace of true contrition for his sins." "I was glad," says St. Teresa, "that this soul was saved; for I was very much afraid it would have been lost on account of his bad life."

Ah! how great is the power and mercy of Mary! How kind, how solicitous, how merciful, how careful and compassionate is the Mother of God! How often are we ignorant of the troubles that await us! Mary, however, knows them, and hastens to our assistance. How often are we unconscious of the dangers that surround us! Mary perceives them, and protects us from all harm. How often does this good Mother pray for us when we do not think of asking her prayers! Let us treasure up those words in our hearts: "Dear Son, they have no wine." They will console us in the hour of affliction. When a sense of utter loneliness oppresses us, when we seem abandoned by all the world, then is the time to remember that we have a Mother in heaven. The Blessed Virgin Mary has not forgotten us. How often has she already prayed for us to her divine Son: "My dear Son, see, my servant has no more wine. See, he stands sorely in need of the virtue of a lively faith, charity, and holy purity." How often has Mary changed the waters of pain and sorrow into the cheering wine of joy and gladness! When we stood on the brink of the precipice, and stretched forth our hands to sin, Mary, like a tender mother, stretched forth her arms to save us. When, by our sins, we cruelly

pierced the Sacred Heart of Jesus, then it was that Mary offered up for us the precious blood that gushed forth from the gaping wound.

If God has endowed the Blessed Mother of His only-begotten Son with such power and dominion, and with such charity and mercy towards us, is it strange that we rejoice in the name, in the dignity, in the glory, in the power, and mercy of Mary? Would it not, on the contrary, be strange indeed, were we to be slow in proclaiming her praise, and power, and mercy? Her first and strongest title to our love, homage, and confidence in her is the indelible character of glory communicated to her by the miracle of the Incarnation, by which God became man of her substance, the Eternal became subject to the laws of time and space, the Infinite was comprehended in the form of an infant, the invisible Creator of the universe became visible to the eyes of His creatures. Her co-operation was necessary before that miracle could take place; a portion of its splendor, therefore, rests for ever on her royal head. She has earned for herself, through her correspondence with God's grace, new titles of honor and renown; but the mystery of the Incarnation lies at the foundation of her greatness. With that mystery, which is continued in a certain sense in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar, she too is intimately connected, inasmuch as the sacred humanity which we worship there, in union with the divinity of Jesus Christ, was assumed from her virginal flesh and blood.

St. Anselm, St. Francis, St. Bonaventure, St. Peter Damian, St. Bernard, and, in these latter days, St. Alphonsus, stand as witnesses to the great spiritual law that the love of the Virgin Mother of God is not a sentiment or a poetry in religion, which may or may not be encouraged by individuals at their will, but that love and veneration, second only to the love and veneration paid to her divine Son, is due to her by a law which springs from the very sub-

stance of the faith. It is impossible to realize the Incarnation as we ought, and not to love and venerate the Mother of God; it is impossible to love the Son without loving the Mother. In proportion to our love to the Son will be our love to the Mother who bore Him; in so far as we are conformed to the likeness of the Son we shall love the Mother, who, next to the Eternal Persons, the Father and the Holy Ghost, is the dearest object of the love of the Eternal Son. The love of the Mother of God is the overflow of the love we bear to her divine Son; it descends from Him to her, and we may measure our love to Him by our love to her. It is impossible to be cold, distant, dry, or reserved towards the Mother of our Redeemer, and to be fervent in our love to the Redeemer Himself. Such as we are to Him, such, in due measure, shall we be to her.

Not to love and honor Mary sincerely must proceed either from culpable neglect or from want of faith in the divine revelation and in the wise plans of Providence. "He that despiseth you despiseth me," said our Blessed Lord to His apostles. His words apply with greater force to His holy Mother; and, "He that despiseth me despiseth Him that sent me." Far from us be the unworthy fear that by having recourse to Mary we should disparage the honor of Christ. The more we look up to her, the higher must her divine Son rise in our regard; for His glory exceeds hers as the inherent splendor of the sun surpasses the borrowed light of the moon, as the divine Creator excels His most gifted creature. We cannot love, and honor, and pray to Mary without loving and honoring Him who has made her so worthy of love. And we cannot love Him as He ought to be loved without being especially drawn towards His Blessed Mother. If we love Him, we must imitate Him to the best of our power, especially in His filial love and reverence for His Blessed Mother.

The saints have always made Christ's love for His Blessed

Mother the model of their love for that most holy Virgin. To name the saints who were deeply devoted to Mary would be to name them all. The more they strove to love God, the more they felt drawn to love Mary; or, to speak more correctly, the more they increased in love of Mary, the more they increased also in love for God.

The Church has never grown weary of praising and honoring Mary. Consider the many days in the year that are consecrated to her honor; the solemnity and frequency of her feasts. The hymns composed in honor of her are numberless. She is extolled by the clergy, revered by all nations, esteemed and honored by all that are of good-will and truly sincere heart. But whoever would conceive a true idea of the power and mercy of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whoever would fairly estimate the heart-felt loyalty of Christians for their heavenly Queen and Mother, must pass into Catholic lands and observe the fervent multitudes that crowd the sanctuaries of Our Blessed Lady. Mindful of the many extraordinary favors received from Mary in some particular sanctuary of hers, the people call upon Our Lady of Loretto, Our Lady of Einsiedeln, Our Lady of Fourvière, Our Lady of Puy, Our Lady of La Salette, Our Lady of Lourdes, Maria Zell, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and a hundred others. All Europe is filled with sanctuaries of Our Blessed Lady. There sacred processions sweep through the streets; long trains of pilgrims wind by the banks of rivers or through the greenwood to a favored chapel of Our Lady. The sweet face of the Virgin Mother smiles upon them as they pass the wayside shrine; the hum of business is stilled, and the traveller bares his head for a moment's communion with God, as the angelus bell rings from the neighboring steeple; and the very milestones on the roadside become niches which speak to us of love and devotion to Mary.

It is impossible for those who have never visited the

towns and villages of a Catholic country to conceive the feeling of delight with which the pious traveller is affected at the sight of so many images of the Blessed Virgin placed at the corners of streets, in squares and public places, on bridges, fountains, and obelisks, or between the stalls of a village market or fair. Each statue or holy image has its lantern, and is decorated with flowers, which the people of the neighborhood renew every morning at daybreak. The sweet name of Mary is the most familiar of household words. The poet chants her praises; the painter and sculptor, the masters of art, love to reproduce her pure, maternal face; and even the Protestant has not yet learned to speak of her with disrespect nor utterly banish all love for her from his heart. It is on account of this great love for the Blessed Mother of God that there is not a province but has its own favorite image and sanctuary of Our Lady, and, linked with that image, some legend which marks the spot as a chosen abode, selected for the outpourings of her maternal favors.

From the firm belief that such spots are more highly favored than others, and that prayers offered there are more readily heard, the pious practice has risen of making public or private pilgrimages to these holy places, in order to obtain some particular favor, or to render thanks to God, through His Blessed Mother, for favors obtained. For if God sends us so many favors through Mary as their channel—the channel naturally the most agreeable to Him—we are impelled to return our thanks through the same blessed channel. When our hearts are filled with emotions of gratitude or veneration, we naturally seek to give vent to our feelings by some outward act of devotion; and hence the faithful have, in all ages, formed solemn processions, made long pilgrimages, to some favorite shrine of the Madonna, in order to express their love and devotion to their beloved Queen.

In these sanctuaries of Our Blessed Lady may be seen votive offerings, ornaments of gold and silver and precious stones, in commemoration of miraculous cures or other extraordinary favors obtained through the intercession of Mary by those who invoked her at her holy shrine. The blind are restored to sight, the lame walk, the dead are raised to life, demons are expelled from the bodies of men. These are authentic facts, attested not only by persons of note who have heard them from others, but by thousands of eye-witnesses whose sincerity we cannot doubt—facts so numerous that, if all were written, the world itself could scarcely contain the books; facts which plainly tell us that since God is pleased to assist us in all our necessities, spiritual and temporal, through Mary, it is also in Mary that we are to seek and to find our constant help or intercessor in the work of our sanctification and salvation. If we consider how the anti-Catholic pulpit and lecture-room, the press and every public resort, re-echo against the Catholic Church the false charges of idolatry, of taking from God the honor due to Him alone, and giving it to a creature; if we consider how even the most charitable of our enemies shake their heads and bewail what they call the unfortunate propensity of the Roman Catholics to give too much honor to Mary; if we consider how many temptations surround the Catholic here, how hard it is to bear contempt, misrepresentation, and wilful falsehood; how much easier it is to hide a delicate and beloved sentiment than to expose it to the risk of a sneer; how swift the pace of the money-hunter is here; how little the beautiful in life and faith is cultivated; and how devoted men are to what they are pleased to call the practical—which means simply more careful diligence for the body than for the soul, for time than for eternity—if we consider all this, the wonder is not that there is so much or so little devotion to Our Lady, but that there is any devotion at all. Yet it is safe to believe that notwithstand-

ing all these difficulties, there is no Catholic country in Europe, there never has been a country, in which reverent love and earnest, heart-felt devotion for the Blessed Mother of God are more deeply rooted, more ardently cherished, or more fervently practised than in this country of America. This devotion to Mary guides and influences the hearts of men, and it is found pure and glowing in the souls even of those who seem to be most engrossed in worldly affairs. It begins in earliest childhood, when the scapular and the medal are placed around the neck of the babe, to remain there even to the hour of death. As the child grows up, he associates himself with some sodality of the Blessed Virgin. As soon as he has grown up to manhood he joins some benevolent society which is placed under the special patronage of the Queen of Angels. The Daughters of Our Lady of the Visitation of Loretto and similar communities train up our young girls; the Brothers of Mary devote themselves to the education of our youth. The bishop labors patiently till his seminary of St. Mary is completed; the priest toils arduously until his parish of the Annunciation or of the Assumption is established; all join their prayers, their counsel, their wealth, their labor, their self-denial, until the cross peers through the greenwood from the convent of Mary's Help, till the church of the Immaculate crowns the summit of the hill.

In the council held in Baltimore, in 1846, the assembled fathers—twenty-two bishops with their theologians—solemnly chose the Blessed Virgin Immaculate as Patroness of the United States of America. These Fathers of the council had been trained to honor the Blessed Mother of God; they had labored in her service; they desired to add this crowning glory to all that they had done in her honor during a long life of labor and prayer; they wished at the same time to show their zeal for the true interests of this country by placing the entire United States under her pro-

tection in this solemn and public manner. In the following year this election was confirmed by the Sovereign Pontiff, and from that time, in all public sessions that close these august assemblies, after the "Te Deum" has been chanted, the cantors, richly vested, stand before the altar and intone their first acclamation to the Most High. As soon as that solemn hymn of praise is ended, they burst forth in the words "Beatissimæ Virgini Mariæ, sine labe originali conceptæ, harum Provinciarum Patronæ honor æternus." Translated: "To the most Blessed Virgin Mary, conceived without original sin, the patron of these provinces, be eternal honor." And in chorus the venerable bishops, the theologians and attendant priests, and the whole multitude of the people repeat the glad acclamation.

Ever since that solemn act Mary has gained vast possessions in this country; and we may confidently hope that she will conquer it all and annex it all to the kingdom of her divine Son. Love and devotion towards Mary are on the increase. This love for the Mother of God is a good omen; she will not fail to show openly that she is the Patroness of this country and the Perpetual Help of all who invoke her holy name. As she selected, in Europe, certain spots as resting-places for the outpourings of her maternal affection, so she will do the same in those cities and towns of these United States where the faithful truly love her and invoke her as the Perpetual Help in all temptations and troubles. In fact, in our own days, in these States, the Blessed Virgin has bestowed extraordinary favors; she has performed miracles in support of the truth, already so often repeated, that she is Our Lady of Perpetual Help here as well as in Europe.

This is the Mother whose equal is not to be found—the Blessed Mother of God, the Immaculate Virgin Mary. It is to this most loving Mother that Christian parents must commend their children if they would wish to preserve them

from the dangers that surround them. Oh! were God to lift the veil of futurity; could parents behold the lurking demons lying in wait to ruin their children, they would see the necessity of placing them under the special protection of the Blessed Mother of God. Teach the children to love Mary; teach them to be devout to Mary; teach them to pray to Mary, and to call upon her in every danger. Teach them expressly by word and example to love and to practise the holy devotion of the rosary and the scapular, which is so pleasing to Mary. Bequeath this devotion to them, and Mary will watch over them as a mother, and will guard them and guide them, until one day mother and child are united again in heaven.

St. Bridget had a son of the name of Charles, boyish alike in years and disposition. Having in his youth adopted the military profession, he soon met his death on the battlefield. The saint, reflecting on the dangerous time of life in which her son had died, the occasion, the place, and other circumstances of his death, was filled with great fear about his eternal lot. But God, who loved her tenderly, delayed not to comfort her by the following vision: She was led in spirit to the judgment-seat of the Eternal Judge, where she beheld, seated on a lofty throne, the Saviour Himself, with the Blessed Virgin, as Mother and Queen, at His side. No sooner had she appeared before the divine tribunal than Satan came forward, and, with a disappointed air, began boldly to speak as follows: "Thou, O Judge! art so righteous in Thy decrees that I trust I shall obtain all I ask of Thee, even though I be Thine enemy, and though Thy Mother plead against me. Thy Mother wronged me in two points on the occasion of the death of Charles. The first is this: On the last day of the life of the young man, she entered his chamber, and remained there until he expired, driving me away, and keeping me far off, so that I was unable to approach the bed and ply him with my temptations.

Now, this was a manifest injustice ; for I have received a grant of the right to tempt men, especially in their last moments, on which depends the loss or gain of the souls which I so much long to make my own. Give orders, then, O just Judge ! that this soul return to his body, that I may have yet an opportunity of doing what I can, and of tempting him at least for the space of one day before he dies. If he resist courageously, let him go free ; if he yield to my efforts, he must remain under my power.

“The other wrong which I have suffered from Thy Mother is that when the soul of Charles had quitted the body, she took it in her arms, and herself brought it before Thy tribunal ; nor would she allow me to enter and lay my charges before Thee, although it is my office to prove the guilt of departed souls. The judgment pronounced was therefore invalid, for one of the parties remained unheard ; and this is against all the laws of God, and even of men.”

The Blessed Virgin made reply to this complaint that, although Satan be the father of lies, yet on this occasion, speaking in presence of the Everlasting Truth, he had made a truthful statement, but that she had shown extraordinary favor to the soul of Charles because he had loved her tenderly, and had every day recommended himself to her protection ; because, too, he had always rejoiced when he thought of her greatness, and had ever been most ready to give his life for her honor.

In the end the divine Judge pronounced sentence as follows : “The Blessed Virgin rules in my kingdom, not as the other saints, but as my Mother, as Queen and Mistress ; and hence to her it is granted to dispense with general laws as often as there is a just cause. There was a most just reason for dispensing with the soul of Charles ; for it was right that one who had in his lifetime so honored and loved her should be honored and favored in his death.” Saying this, He imposed on the demon a perpetual silence

as to this case. From this St. Bridget understood that her son had attained the bliss of Paradise.

Ah ! how truly does St. Alphonsus de Liguori assert that “the salvation of all depends upon preaching Mary, and confidence in her intercession.” We know that St. Bernard of Sienna sanctified Italy ; St. Dominic converted many provinces ; St. Louis Bertrand, in all his sermons, never failed to exhort his hearers to practise devotion towards Mary ; and many others have done the same.

Father Paul Segneri, the younger, a celebrated missionary, in every mission in which he was engaged, preached a sermon on devotion to Mary, and this he called his favorite sermon. The Redemptorist Fathers also have an invariable rule not to omit in their missions the sermon on Our Lady ; and it is found that no discourse is so profitable to the people, or excites more compunction among them, than that on the power and mercy of Mary. To try to make the people good without inspiring them with love for the Blessed Virgin is to labor in vain. The better the people are made to understand what God has given us in Mary, the sooner they will lay aside their evil habits and practise virtue. For no sooner do they commence to love Mary and pray to her than they open their hearts to the largest channel of grace.

In the year 1835 the communions in a certain parish in the city of Paris, containing a population of twenty-seven thousand, did not exceed seven hundred. The good parish priest set to work to remedy this deplorable state of things ; he formally placed the charge committed to him under the protection of Mary, and instituted her confraternity among his people. In the year 1837 the communions amounted to nine thousand five hundred ; and each succeeding year they have become more numerous.

The spirit of infidelity and religious indifference is spreading rapidly in every direction. All the ills which an im-

coral and infidel press entails upon society, all the crimes arising from a godless education, menace the destruction of every vestige of Christian modesty, piety, and innocence. Nothing better can be opposed to this infernal serpent than love and devotion towards her whose office it is to crush the serpent's head whenever it makes itself visible.

Of all the sinners who, by favor of Our Lady, attained to an extraordinary degree of perfection, there was probably none more privileged than St. Mary of Egypt. It was through her devotion to Our Lady that she began, continued, and brought to a happy end the career of her perfection, and emerged from the abyss of degradation in which she lay to the sublimest heights of sanctity. Before her conversion she was a snare which entrapped every heart to enslave it to sin and to the devil; a net of which the devil made use to capture souls and to people hell. When the abbot St. Zosimus found her in the wilderness of Egypt, he requested her to give him an account of her life. This she gave in the following words:

“I ought to die with confusion and shame in telling you what I am; so horrible is the very mention of it that you will fly from me as from a serpent; your ears will not be able to bear the recital of the crimes of which I have been guilty. I will, however, relate to you my ignominy, begging of you to pray for me, that God may show me mercy in the day of His terrible judgment. My country is Egypt. When my father and mother were still living, at twelve years of age I went without their consent to Alexandria. I cannot think, without trembling, on the first steps by which I fell into sin, nor on my disorders which followed.” She then described how she lived a public prostitute seventeen years, not for interest, but to gratify an unbridled lust; she added: “I continued my wicked course till the twenty-ninth year of my age, when, perceiving several per-

sons making towards the sea, I enquired whither they were going, and I was told they were about to embark for the Holy Land, to celebrate at Jerusalem the feast of the Exaltation of the glorious Cross of our Saviour. I embarked with them, looking only for fresh opportunities to continue my debauches, which I repeated both during the voyage and after my arrival at Jerusalem. On the day appointed for the festival, all going to church, I mixed with the crowd to get into the church where the holy cross was shown and exposed to the veneration of the faithful, but found myself withheld from entering the place by some secret but invisible force. This happening to me three or four times, I retired into a corner of the court, and began to consider with myself what this might proceed from, and, seriously reflecting that my criminal life might be the cause, I melted into tears. Beating, therefore, my sinful breast, with sighs and groans, I perceived above me a picture of the Mother of God. Fixing my eyes upon it, I addressed myself to that holy Virgin, begging of her, by her incomparable purity, to succor me, defiled with such a load of abominations, and to render my repentance the more acceptable to God. I besought her that I might be suffered to enter the church doors to behold the sacred wood of my redemption; promising from that moment to consecrate myself to God by a life of penance, taking her for my surety in this change of my heart. After this ardent prayer, I perceived in my soul a secret consolation under my grief; and attempting again to enter the church, I went up with ease into the very middle of it, and had the comfort to venerate the precious wood of the glorious cross which brings life to man. Considering, therefore, the incomprehensible mercy of God, and His readiness to receive sinners to repentance, I cast myself on the ground, and, after having kissed the pavement with tears, I arose and went to the picture of the Mother of God, whom I had made the witness and surety of my engagements and reso-

lutions. Falling there on my knees before the image, I addressed my prayers to her, begging her intercession, and that she would be my guide. After my prayer I seemed to hear this voice : ‘ If thou goest beyond the Jordan, thou shalt there find rest and comfort.’ Then, weeping and looking on the image, I begged of the holy Queen of the world that she would never abandon me. After these words I went out in haste, bought three loaves, and, asking the baker which was the gate of the city which led to the Jordan, I immediately took that road, and walked all the rest of the day, and at night arrived at the Church of St. John Baptist, on the banks of the river. There I paid my devotions to God, and received the precious Body of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Having eaten the one-half of one of my loaves, I slept all night on the ground. Next morning, recommending myself to the holy Virgin, I passed the Jordan, and from that time I have carefully shunned the meeting of any human creature.”

Zosimus asked how long she had lived in that desert. “ It is,” said she, “ as near as I can judge, forty-seven years.” “ And what have you lived upon all that time ? ” replied Zosimus. “ The loaves I took with me,” answered she, “ lasted me some time ; since that I have had no other food but what this wild and uncultivated solitude afforded me. My clothes being worn out, I suffered severely from the heat and cold.” “ And have you passed so many years,” said the holy man, “ without suffering much in your soul ? ” She answered : “ Your question makes me tremble by the very remembrance of my past dangers and conflicts, through the perverseness of my heart. Seventeen years I passed in most violent temptations and almost perpetual conflicts with my inordinate desires. I was tempted to regret the flesh and fish of Egypt, and the wines which I drank in the world to excess ; whereas here I often could not have a drop of water to quench my thirst. Other desires made assaults

on my mind ; but, weeping and striking my breast on those occasions, I called to mind the vows I had made under the protection of the Blessed Virgin, and begged her to obtain my deliverance from the affliction and danger of such thoughts. After long weeping and bruising my body with blows, I found myself suddenly enlightened and my mind restored to a perfect calm. Often the tyranny of my old passions seemed ready to drag me out of my desert ; at those times I threw myself on the ground and watered it with my tears, raising my heart continually to the Blessed Virgin till she procured me comfort ; and she has never failed to show herself my faithful protectress." Zosimus taking notice that in her discourse with him she from time to time made use of Scripture phrases, asked her if she had ever applied herself to the study of the sacred books. Her answer was that she could not even read ; neither had she conversed nor seen any human creature since she came into the desert till that day that could teach her to read the Holy Scripture or read it to her ; but " it is God," said she, " that teacheth man knowledge. Thus have I given you a full account of myself ; keep what I have told you as an inviolable secret during my life, and allow me, the most miserable of sinners, a share in your prayers."

We can say that in the penitential life led by this saint in this solitude she had no other teacher, no other guide, than the all-holy, all-merciful Virgin, to whom she ever had recourse ; it was under Mary's guidance that she overcame the most fearful temptations and withstood the most violent assaults that hell could make against her ; faith in Mary triumphed over all feeling of weariness, trampled under foot the repugnance of poor weak nature, and enabled her to persevere constantly for forty-seven years, leaving to the world an ideal of perfect penance, a pattern of the most eminent sanctity, and a most convincing proof that there is no means more powerful than devotion to Mary to raise up

any soul, however fallen and weighed down by sin, to the height of perfection.

A great power is evidently within our reach, placed by the care of God at our disposal, to assist us in our struggles against sin, to raise us when we fall, to carry us on to eminent perfection. It is easy of access; it lies at our door; it is within the instantaneous reach of all, even of children. That power is the influence of Mary and its employment in the work of our salvation. We may not reject its powerful assistance; nothing can be safely neglected that God has designed to make so perilous a work more sure. We may not throw away the aid thus offered, nor think to fight our way through the ranks of our spiritual foes without obligations to her, nor to speed on in our heavenward course without her helping hand. The heat of the battle will overcome us, the length of the way will exhaust us, unless she buoy up our steps and refresh us when we are weary. God's grace is free and strong; but if she is the channel through which it must flow, it will not reach us but through her. We are not greater than Jesus, yet He made Himself her debtor; we are not stronger than He, and yet she was appointed to minister to His infantine weakness. Even if we could struggle through without her support, we should be outstripped in our course by many who started later and with many more disadvantages; our passage would be joyless; hope would shine dimly on the future.

What knowledge have we of the assaults of our spiritual enemies that may lie before us, perhaps in the hour of death. What security have we that if Mary does not assist us then, we shall not be lost? It is for this reason that devotion to Mary is declared by eminent theologians to be a great sign of predestination, on account of the manifold assistance which is thus secured in its attainment.

In the *Chronicles of the Friars Minor** we read that

* Lib. iv. cap. xvii.

Brother Leo, a familiar companion of St. Francis, had the following vision : The servant of God beheld himself placed on a sudden in the middle of a vast plain. There he beheld the judgment of Almighty God. Angels were flying to and fro, sounding their trumpets and gathering together countless multitudes of people. On this vast field he saw two high ladders, the one white, the other red, which reached from earth to the skies. At the top of the red ladder stood Jesus Christ with a countenance full of just indignation. On one of the steps, somewhat lower, stood the holy patriarch St. Francis, who cried aloud to his brethren on the plain below : “ Come hither, brethren ; come without fear ; hasten to Christ, who is calling you.” Encouraged by these words of their holy father, the religious crowded round the foot of the ladder, and began to mount. Some reached the third step, and others the tenth ; some advanced to the middle ; but all sooner or later lost their footing and fell wretchedly to the ground. St. Francis, beholding so deplorable a fall, turned to our Lord and earnestly besought Him to grant salvation to His children. But the Redeemer yielded not to the prayers of the saint. Then the holy patriarch went down to the bottom of the ladder, and said with great fervor, “ Do not despair, brethren of mine ; run to the white ladder, and mount it with great courage. Fear not ; by it you will enter into Paradise.” Whilst he was thus speaking, the Blessed Virgin appeared at the top of the white ladder, crowned with glory and beaming with gentleness. And the friars, mounting the ladder by favor of Mary, made their way, and all happily entered into the glories of Paradise. We may learn from this how true is the sentiment of St. Ignatius the Martyr : “ That the mercy of the Blessed Virgin Mary saves those whom God’s justice does not save.” Ah ! let us hearken to the words of this saint ; let us hearken to our Lord while He says to us from His throne in heaven : “ I am the eternal

Wisdom. I have come upon earth only through Mary ; through her I have effected the redemption of mankind. If thou desirest wisdom and sanctity, call on Mary ; for through her I will give it to thee." It was through her that Rupert the abbot, Albert the Great, Hermannus Contractus, and many others destitute of learning and talents became doctors in philosophy, theology, Holy Scripture, and other branches of science. "Thou art my child ; I, therefore, am thy Father, but Mary is thy Mother. Thou art weak ; I am the Lord, that giveth strength and help in all thy necessities.

"Thou art a sinful man, but I am thy God, full of love and mercy ; Mary is the refuge of sinners, through whose mediation thou wilt obtain mercy. Thou aspirest after heaven ; behold, I am the King of Heaven. Mary is the Queen of Heaven. In order to obtain for thee access to this heavenly kingdom, thou art bound to become holy. I am the living fountain of all grace, and holiness ; but it is Mary who has the office of dispensing my graces. If thou, then, my child, desirest to obtain graces and glory in heaven, what hast thou to do ? Call on Mary. Love and honor Mary. Through her I will listen to thy prayers and give ear to thy sighs. I will show her that I am her Son ; and she will show thee that she is thy Mother. My Mother is the gate of heaven ; through her all gifts and graces descend on earth ; through her all the saints ascend to me into heaven.

"Accomplish, then, my will by endeavoring with all thy power to promote the honor of my Mother. Extol her at all times and in all places, in season and out of season ; wherever thou art, praise and extol her, and cause others to do the same. Impossible for thee to give my Mother more honor, interior and exterior, than is her due. What is thy feeble love and honor compared to that which she receives from me ? As thy love for thy fellow-men is but a shadow of my love for men, so thy special love for Mary is but a

shadow, a faint, attenuated shadow, of my love for her ; for my sake, if thou wouldst please me, reverence her as much as thou canst. If thou hast hitherto served Mary, try to serve her still more fervently ; if thou hast loved her, endeavor to love her still more ardently. Happy that Christian who serves Mary and at the same time tries to make others serve her ! Happy that Christian family in which Mary is truly honored ; I will give it salvation and benediction. I will give it grace in the present life and glory in the life to come."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PRODIGAL'S BROTHER—HAPPINESS OF THE JUST.

LONG ago God uttered a remarkable prophecy: "I shall espouse thee for ever, saith the Lord. I shall espouse thee in justice; I shall espouse thee in mercy; I shall espouse thee in faith." This prophecy was not then understood; but when the Son of God came upon earth to reconcile poor sinners to His Heavenly Father, to establish a new race—a race of the just—then it was that this prophecy was not only understood but fulfilled, and its fulfilment continues, and will continue to the end of time.

In order to show us the reality of these spiritual espousals, our divine Redeemer has often appeared to holy souls in a visible form, and espoused them in a visible manner. One day, during the time of carnival, the pious virgin St. Catharine of Sienna was praying in her cell. Her relatives and neighbors were amusing themselves according to the custom of the season; but she sought her pleasure in God alone. On a sudden our Blessed Saviour appeared to her and said: "Because thou hast shunned the vanities and forbidden pleasures of the world, and hast fixed thy heart on Me alone, I shall now espouse thee in faith and unite thy soul to mine." Then St. Catharine looked up and saw beside our Saviour the Blessed Mother of God. She also saw there St. John the Evangelist, St. Paul the Apostle, and St. Dominic, the founder of her order. The Prophet David, too, was present at her espousals, and played on his harp with marvelous sweetness. The Blessed Virgin Mary now took the right hand of St. Catharine, and presented her to our Blessed Saviour. She besought her divine Son to accept this virgin

for His spouse. Then Jesus smiled graciously upon the saint. He drew forth a golden ring, set with four precious stones, in the centre of which blazed a magnificent diamond. He then placed this ring upon the finger of St. Catharine, and said : "I, thy Creator and Redeemer, espouse thee in faith. Be faithful until death, and we shall celebrate our nuptials in heaven." The vision disappeared, but the ring remained on the finger of St. Catharine. She could always see it ; but, by a special grace, it was invisible to others.

O pure and holy soul ! I speak now especially to you whose heart is yet gleaming with the glory of purity with which it was endowed in holy baptism—to you who can say with the good brother of the prodigal : "Father, I have never transgressed thy commandment" ; to you to whom your Heavenly Father says what the father of the prodigal said to his faithful son : "Son, thou art always with me, and all I have is thine."* And what I say to you who have always been pure and undefiled I wish also to say to him who lost his baptismal innocence by sin, but has recovered again the grace and friendship of Almighty God by a good confession. When you made that sincere, sorrowful confession of all your sins ; when the priest, in the name of Jesus Christ, pronounced the words of absolution over you, oh ! then it was that a touching scene between God and your soul was witnessed by the angels of heaven—a scene like that which was witnessed by the servants of the good father when he went to meet his prodigal son : "And when the prodigal was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and running to him"—O promptitude to pardon !—"fell upon his neck and kissed him"—O touching tenderness !—"and he said : Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet"—O fulness of grace ! --"and kill the fatted calf, and let us eat and make merry"

* Luke xv. 31.

—O banquet of joy and gladness ! Ah ! dear Christian soul, when your Heavenly Father dissembled, as it were, your sins to draw you to virtue and penance ; when, in His mercy, He recalled you from the country of spiritual famine and misery ; when He received you in confession and embraced you in Holy Communion with unspeakable tenderness, ah ! then it was that He clothed your soul with the first robe—the robe of divine grace ; then it was that He put on your hand a precious ring—the ring of your birth-right to heaven ; then it was that He put shoes on your feet—the merits of your good works and the liberty of the children of God, which you had lost by your folly ; then it was that He gave you the kiss of peace—the consoling assurance of your heavy debts being cancelled and forgiven ; ah ! then it was that the angels sounded, as it were, the jubilee trumpet ; you heard its joyous notes proclaiming rest to your wearied heart, redemption to your spiritual captivity, grace and salvation to your erring soul. Ah ! then your soul was the joyful guest of a great banquet ; then you celebrated the year of the jubilee. Mark that year ; mark the month of that year ; never forget the day, the hour, of that month when you were permitted “to go back to your family”—to the number of the elect ; when you were permitted “to return to your former possession”—to the ownership of all the rights and privileges of the children of God. Oh ! for the love of your Heavenly Father be now mindful of your dignity. You are a child of God, heir of heaven, a spouse of Jesus Christ, a temple of the Holy Ghost. Yes, this is the dignity to which God has restored you. I have said, in a foregoing chapter, that there is, in God the Father, an infinite desire of communicating Himself and all His goods. I have said that in this love He generated, from all eternity, His only-begotten Son. This is undoubtedly the greatest act of His infinite charity.

But this Heavenly Father still continues to beget, in time, children who are by grace what the Son of God is by nature ; so that our sonship bears the greatest resemblance to the divine Sonship. Hence St. Paul writes : “ Whom He foreknew He also predestined to be made conformable to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born amongst many brethren.”*

Behold the great things which divine love effects ! We are the sons of God, as the Holy Scripture says : “ Ye are the sons of the living God.” † In this divine adoption there are infused into the soul, not only the grace, the charity, and other gifts of the Holy Ghost, but the Holy Ghost Himself, who is the first and uncreated gift that God gives to Christians.

In justifying and sanctifying us God might infuse into our souls His grace and charity to such a degree only as would render us simply just and holy, without adopting us as His children. This grace of simple justification would no doubt be, in itself, a very great gift, it being a participation in the divine nature in a very high degree ; so that, in all truth, we could exclaim with the Blessed Virgin : “ *Fecit mihi magna, qui potens est*—He that is mighty has done great things to me.” ‡

But to give us only such a degree of grace and participation in His divine nature is not enough for the love of God. The grace of adoption is bestowed upon us in so high a degree as to make us really children of God.

But even this measure of the grace of adoption might be bestowed upon us by God in such a manner only as to give by it no more than His charity, grace, and created gifts. This latter grace of adoption would certainly surpass the former of simple justification ; so that, in all truth, we might again exclaim with the Mother of God : “ *Fecit potentiam in brachio suo*—He hath showed might in His arm.” §

* Rom. viii. 29. † Osee i. 10. ‡ Luke i. 49. § Luke i. 51.

But neither is this gift, great though it be, great enough for the charity which God bears us. God, in His immense charity for us, wishes to bestow greater things upon us, in order to raise us still higher in grace and in the participation in His divine nature. Hence He goes so far as to give *Himself* to us, so that He might sanctify and adopt us in person.

The Holy Ghost unites Himself to his gifts, his grace, and his charity, so that, when infusing these gifts into our souls, He infuses, together with them, Himself really in person. On this account St. Paul writes: "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, *who is given to us.*"* On this very account the same Apostle calls the Holy Ghost the *Spirit of adoption*. "For you have not received," says he, "the spirit of bondage again in fear: but you have received the *Spirit of adoption of children*, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the *children of God*; and if children, heirs also: heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."† And: "Whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God."‡

This divine charity and grace is, no doubt, the height of God's charity for us, and is also, at the same time, the height of our dignity and exaltation; because, on receiving these divine gifts, we receive at the same time the person of the Holy Ghost, who unites Himself to these gifts, as I have said, and by them lives in us, adopts us, deifies us, and urges us on to the performance of every good work.

Truly, the love and liberality of God effect great things! But even this is not all; we receive still greater favors. In coming personally into the soul the Holy Ghost is accompanied by the other divine Persons also—the Father and the Son, from whom He cannot be separated. Therefore, in the **act** of justification, the three divine Persons come person-

* Rom. v. 5.

† Rom. viii. 15.

‡ Galat. iv. 6.

ally and really into the soul, as into their temple, living and dwelling therein as long as the soul perseveres in the grace of God. For this reason St. John writes: "He that abideth in *charity* abideth in God, and God in him." St. Paul writes the same thing: "He who is joined to God is one spirit."*

Our blessed Lord Himself assures us that "the kingdom of God is within us." Now, what do we mean by a kingdom? Look for a moment at the kingdoms of Europe, with their vast dominions, their great power and wealth. Among the cities of these kingdoms, there is usually one more populous than the rest, where the streets are laid out, and the public buildings and the private houses erected in a most magnificent manner. It is generally in this city that the royal palace is built. The exterior of the palace is adorned in a manner befitting the king, and the interior is enriched with gold and silver, polished wood, rich silks and tapestry, rare statues and paintings, the choicest works of art. Now, the soul of the just man is something far more noble, far more beautiful, than this royal palace. The soul, when in the state of grace, is the palace of the King of kings; it is the dwelling-place of the God of heaven and earth. Holy angels are there in attendance upon Him, and it is there He manifests Himself to the soul, and hears her prayers, and holds sweet communion with her.

Jesus Christ obtained for us this grace when He prayed on the eve of His Passion: "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us."† Jesus Christ asks of His Father that all His followers might participate in the one and in the same Holy Ghost, so that, in Him and through Him, they might be united to the other divine Persons. St. Bonaventure says that the just not only receive the gifts but also the Person of the

* 1 Cor. vi. 17.

† John xvi. 11, 20.

Holy Ghost.* The same is taught by the renowned Master of Sentences,† who quotes St. Augustine and others in support of this doctrine. St. Thomas Aquinas asserts the same thing, ‡ and proves that the grace of the Holy Ghost is a peculiar gift, because it is given to all the just. “Grace,” says Suarez, “establishes a most perfect friendship between God and man ; and such a friendship requires the presence of the friend—that is, the Holy Ghost, who stays in the soul of His friend, in order to unite Himself most intimately with him, and reside in his soul, as in His temple, there to be honored, worshipped, and loved.”

From what has been said it follows—

1. That the grace of adoption, or the grace of justification, by which we are sanctified and adopted as the children of God, is something more than a simple quality ; it implies several things : the forgiveness of sins, faith, hope, charity, and other gifts, and even the Holy Ghost Himself, the Author of all gifts, and, as a necessary consequence, the whole Blessed Trinity. All this is infused into the soul in the act of justification, as the Holy Church teaches. §

2. It follows that, by this grace of adoption, we are raised to the highest dignity—namely, to the dignity of divine sonship—so that, in reality, we are the children of God ; yea, even Gods, as it were, not only accidentally by grace, but also really by participation in the divine nature. Men consider it a great honor to have been adopted by some noble family ; but our adoption by God is far nobler, far more honorable. Adopted children receive nothing of the nature of their adoptive father. They inherit only his name and his temporal goods ; but we receive from God His grace, and with His grace His nature. For this reason God is called the Father, not only of Christ, but also of us ; be-

* 1 Sent d. 14, a. 2, 9, 1.

† Lib. i. dist. 14, 15.

‡ I. p. 9, 43, a. 3, and 6 and 9, 38 art. 8.

§ Concil. Trid., Sess. 6, c. 7.

cause, through grace, He communicates to us His nature, which He has communicated to Christ by hypostatic union, thus making us the brethren of His divine Son. St. Paul writes: "Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be made conformable to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born amongst *many brethren.*"* And St. John says in his Gospel: "He gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name, who are born not of blood, . . . but of God."†

3. By this grace of adoption we receive an undisputed title to the possession of heaven.

4. From this grace of adoption all our works and merits derive their admirable dignity. This adoption of children of God confers upon all our works the greatest dignity and value, making them truly deserving of eternal reward; since they proceed, as it were, from God Himself and from His divine Spirit, who lives in us, and urges us on to the performance of good works.

5. By this grace of adoption the soul is most intimately united to the Holy Ghost, and thereby elevated far above herself, and, as it were, deified. By thus communicating Himself, God raises the just man, as it were, to a level with Himself, transforming him into Himself, thus making him, as it were, divine. Love enraptures the loving soul, raises her above her, unites her to the Beloved, and transforms her unto Him, so that being, as it were, embodied in Him, she lives, feels, and rejoices in Him alone.

6. This adoption, which commences here below by grace, will be rendered most perfect in heaven, where we enter upon the possession of God, who will communicate Himself really to our souls in a manner most intimate and ineffable. On this account St. John says: "Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and He will dwell with them. And they shall be His people; and God Himself with them shall be

* Rom. viii. 29

† John i. 12.

their God. He that shall overcome shall possess these things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.*

Who can, after these reflections, refrain from exclaiming: Truly, the charity of God is most wonderful! Who can comprehend its width, its height, its depth? It is fathomless like the Divinity itself!

There are very few who know it to be as great as it has been explained. The holy apostles and fathers of the Church never ceased to inculcate it upon the hearts of the Christians. "Behold," exclaims St. John the Apostle, "what manner of charity the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be, the sons of God! Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God. . . . We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is." † "Know you not," says St. Paul, "that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body." ‡

"Our first nativity," says St. Augustine, § "is derived from men; our second from God and the Church. Behold, they are born of God. Hence it is that He lives in us. Wonderful change! Admirable charity! For your sake, beloved brethren, the Word was made flesh; for your sake He who is the Son of God has become the Son of man, in order that you, from being the children of men, might become the children of God. For out of the children of men He makes the children of God, because, though He was the Son of God, He became the Son of man. Behold how you partake of the Divinity! For the Son of God assumed our human nature, that we might become partakers of His divine nature. By making you participate in His Divinity He has shown you His charity."

* Apoc. xxi. 8.

† 1 John iii. 1, 2.

‡ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

§ Serm. 24, De Tempore, tom. 10.

Oh ! how beautiful is a soul in the state of grace ! Indeed, such a soul is purer than silver and brighter than the finest gold. She is a lovely and radiant star in the hand of the Most High. Bring together all that is beautiful in nature, and you will find that such a soul is more beautiful than all. How beautiful is the sweet light of morning, how beautiful are the varied tints of the rainbow ; but such a soul is far more beautiful. The dazzling beams of the noon-day sun are bright indeed, but the light that beams from a pure soul is far brighter. The silvery stars glitter brightly in the dark-blue sky, but a holy soul glitters far more brightly. The spring-lily and the fresh-fallen snow look white and pure, but the purity of a holy soul is far whiter ; for it is white with the purity of heaven.

There is a sublime and awful beauty in the rolling thunder and in the vivid lightning, as it flashes through the dark clouds, but there is something far more sublime and awful in the beauty of a holy soul. There is in her a majesty on which even angels gaze with fear and delight. So marvellously beautiful is such a soul in the light of grace and glory that could we but gaze on her, we would die of joy ; for such a soul is the living image of the living God.

Such, then, is the dignity, the happiness, of the children of God. What happiness on earth can be compared to it ? As for myself, I know of no greater comfort nor of any more ravishing delight than that of being in the grace of God. Oh ! what sweet comfort, what rapture, in this thought !—a comfort, a rapturous happiness, not transitory, like the pleasures of the senses, but a life-long comfort, increasing in intensity in proportion to its duration.

But the just man is not only a child of God ; he is also a brother to Jesus Christ. Our divine Saviour Himself has assured us of this. “Whoever,” He says, “shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and

sister, and mother.”* And who is Jesus, who calls you His brother, His sister, and even His mother? Ah! you know it already; He is the glorious Son of the Virgin Mary, conceived in her chaste womb by the power and operation of the Holy Ghost. He is beautiful—the most beautiful of the children of men. He is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands. His is a beauty that never wearies, a beauty which age can never alter, that never fades. His beauty is the joy of the blessed in heaven; it is a beauty on which the angels gaze with ever-flowing delight. All the beauty of earth and heaven is but a feeble ray of His unutterable beauty.

Jesus is loving. Oh! how faithful, how ardent is the love of Jesus Christ! He has loved you from all eternity. He has made every sacrifice to win your love. He has loved you unto death—to the death of the cross. He will never abandon you, unless you yourself cast Him from you; and when, at the hour of death, the nearest and dearest forsake you, then will Jesus stand at your side; He will console you and deliver your soul from the hands of your enemies.

And Jesus is powerful. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Judge of the living and the dead. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible. He is God. At His name every knee must bend, in heaven, on earth, and in hell. The heavens above are His throne; the earth beneath His footstool. At His touch the sick are healed and the dead restored to life. He speaks, and the wild winds grow calm; the foaming waves subside at His voice. He calls the stars by name, and they answer to His call. Thousands of angels minister unto Him, and a thousand times ten thousand angels surround Him and await His bidding in trembling awe.

And Jesus is rich. All the gold of the mountains, all

* *Matt. xii. 50.*

the pearls of the ocean, are His. His are all the treasures of earth, and sea, and sky. He opens His hand, and all creatures are filled with His blessings.

The holy virgin martyr St. Agnes was sought in marriage by a rich and powerful youth of Rome. When she heard his proposal, she answered: "Begone from me, food of death! My heart already belongs to Another." Then the young nobleman, who loved her passionately, offered her countless treasures. He offered her gold, and pearls, and precious stones, and costly garments. He offered her all the honors, all the wealth, he had inherited from his ancestors. The virgin smiled in pity at such an offer. "You offer me riches," she answered, "and my Bridegroom possesses all the treasures of earth and heaven. He has placed on my finger the bridal ring. He has given me the bridal robe more costly than the queens of earth can wear. He has adorned my ears with glittering jewels, and my neck with costly pearls. He has placed on my brow a bridal crown, whose glory shall never fade, and His blood is upon my cheek." When at length the holy virgin was condemned to die because she would not renounce her heavenly bridegroom Jesus, she went with joy to the place of death like a bride hastening to the marriage-feast. All who saw her wept; but Agnes did not weep. The hands of the executioner trembled, his face grew pale, and the tears started unbidden to his eyes; but Agnes smiled, for she feared not death. "Why do you wait?" she cried. "Strike! and let me die for Him who has died for me. Strike! and let this body perish, which can be loved by another than Him whom I love." Then the virgin raised her eyes and hands to heaven and said: "O Jesus! I have yearned for thee; now I behold Thee. I have hoped in Thee; now I possess Thee. I have loved Thee on earth; now I shall love Thee for ever in heaven." Then the youthful virgin knelt down and bowed her head. With her own tiny hands she

turned aside her long, golden hair and bared her neck to the blow, and Agnes remained a virgin—a sister of Jesus Christ—and received the martyr's crown.

Oh! who is there that would not love such a brother, such a bridegroom, as Jesus? Well might even the angels envy the happiness that is granted to us frail and sinful mortals. The angels are but the ministers of Jesus; just souls are His spouses, His brothers, and His sisters.

Our divine Redeemer assures us that in heaven there shall be no marriage; the blessed in heaven shall not marry or be given in marriage, but they shall be like the angels of God. Now, the just soul anticipates here on earth the life of heaven, and lives as an angel amid the dangers and corruption of this world. It is true there is a difference between an angel and a just soul, but they differ in happiness only, and not in virtue. The holiness of the angel is more happy, but the holiness of a just soul is more heroic. Yes, I repeat it: though the holiness of the angels is happier, yet the holiness of a just soul is more virtuous, more heroic. I know full well that the angels are most holy and sinless, but it is their nature to be so. The angels are holy spirits. They are free from all the restraints of matter; they are free from the miseries of this life; they live in heaven. They stand not in need of food, or drink, or sleep. They have not to wage continual war against wild, unruly passions—against the world, the flesh, and the devil. The sweetest songs, the most ravishing melodies, cannot charm them. The fairest forms of earthly beauty cannot allure them. If, then, they are holy, they are so without struggling, without suffering. But when weak man, sinful by nature, subject to a thousand wants, condemned to live in the midst of a corrupt world, with dangers within and dangers without, dangers on every side—when weak man struggles bravely against his very self, against the pleasures of the senses, against the charms of the world, against the allurements of

the demons; when weak man struggles untiringly against his most deadly enemies, who cease not to tempt him day or night, waking or sleeping, at work as in prayer, in the solitude of his chamber as on the busy street; and when, with the grace of God, man triumphs over all—triumphs through a long, weary life of ceaseless warfare—and lives as an angel, ah! that is noble, that is heroic, that is sublime, that is God-like.

Martina was a young, beautiful, rich, and noble lady. She was seized because she was a Christian. The judge, touched by her youth and beauty, was resolved to save her. "My daughter," said he, "you are young; perhaps you did not know the law!" "Yes," replied Martina, "I knew it well—heard it proclaimed. I know the punishment. God's will be done. I must obey God rather than man." "Recall what you have said, or prison and death," said the judge. "God's will be done. I am ready," replied Martina. She went courageously, joyfully, to prison, her face beaming with hope, her eyes raised to heaven. The judge often sent for Martina, but always found her firm as a rock. He told her to prepare for the torture. The cruel executioners tore off the nails one by one from her delicate fingers. Not a tear did she shed, not a moan did she utter, but raised her eyes and bleeding hands to heaven. "O Mary!" she cried, "Mother of my God, give me strength to suffer for thee and thy dear Son!" The judge was furious. Martina was tormented anew. One by one the nails were now torn from her tender feet! But Martina still prayed. The executioners then made deep gashes in her tender, virginal body, and in the gaping, bleeding wounds they poured boiling oil. What terrible torment! But Martina remained calm, immovable. At last the judge in a rage ordered her to be beheaded, and then her pure soul ascended to heaven, surrounded by choirs of angels.

Now, who gives to the soul of the just man such light

and grace, such unconquerable courage and endurance? It is the Holy Ghost, who lives in the soul as in a beautiful temple, who, on beholding such a soul, exclaims, "Oh! how beautiful art thou; thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse."*

We know how easily our imagination wanders among frivolous objects. We know how difficult it is for our understanding to comprehend the truths of salvation in a salutary manner. We know that it is still more difficult for our will to embrace the good which the understanding presents to it. But the Holy Ghost removes these obstacles to the practice of good works. By the strength of His grace He arrests the wanderings of the imagination, fixes its levity, and attaches it to good objects. He fills the memory with wholesome thoughts, gives the understanding salutary knowledge, capable of moving the will to follow His holy inspiration.

The Holy Ghost shields the soul from all that can injure her salvation, and bestows on her all that can promote it. He holds the demon in check, that he may not tempt the soul above her strength; and it is well to remark that the power of the devil is so great, his artifices so subtle, his experience so vast, his will so malicious, that if God did not restrain him he would pervert even the holiest of men. There is no man so humble that the devil would not render proud, so chaste that he would not render unchaste, so charitable that he would not render cruel, so temperate that he would not render intemperate. If he could, the devil would exterminate everywhere the worship of the true God, root out all sentiments of religion, fill cities, kingdoms, provinces, and families with the most horrible confusion; but God restrains Satan from doing all the evil he wishes to do. He allows him to go only the length of his chain. God holds him back as lions or mad dogs are kept back by their

* Cant. iv. 9.

keepers. These animals cannot injure those who look at them unless the keeper loosens their chains. The Holy Ghost moderates and governs, in regard to the just, the envy with which the demon burns for their ruin. He weakens the force of Satan's arm when he attacks them. He wards off the arrows of the arch-enemy of souls in counteracting the fury of his strokes, so that he cannot injure the just more than they allow him to injure them.

Moreover, the Holy Ghost turns from the just many temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, to which, on account of their weakness and the strength of their enemies, they should infallibly yield if God permitted them to be attacked by these enemies. Hence, by the secret design of the Holy Ghost, and with hands full of mercy, He wards off these temptations; or, if He permits them to assail the just, He renders their minds, as it were, incapable of perceiving them, or turns them to some other object, that they may forget the temptation, which soon vanishes. The Holy Ghost leads them, as it were, by the hand in the way of salvation, sweetens the fatigues of their pilgrimage, consoles them in their sorrows, removes obstacles from their path, gives them occasions of practising virtue, and light and strength to practise it.

It is true the life of the just man is a life of constant trials and crosses. It is the yoke of Jesus Christ; but though a yoke, yet it is sweet; though a burden, it is light. Without a yoke, without a burden, no man can come to joy everlasting; "for the way is narrow which leadeth to it," and it behooved Jesus Christ, the King of glory, to suffer, and so to enter into His glory. The world has also its yoke, and not only one, but many rough and heavy ones. The yoke of Jesus Christ, or the service of God, is true freedom, and full of delights and comforts. By taking upon himself the sweet yoke of Christ, the just man receives a crown for ashes; the oil of joy for mourning; the cloak of praise for

the spirit of sorrow ; and his heart rejoices, and his joy no man shall take from him.

No wonder, therefore, that the soul of the just man only cares to please her divine Master, Jesus Christ ; to make herself beautiful in His eyes. She only thinks of His beauty, His mercy, His love. Jesus is her joy, her peace, her paradise. You would wish me to describe to you the pleasures of the just, but I would ask you : Can you describe the sweetness of honey to one who has never tasted it ? No ; and neither can I describe to you the sweet pleasures of the just, unless you yourself have tasted these pleasures. Language has no words to describe them to one who has never experienced them. But, believe me, the joys of the just far surpass all the pleasures of the senses, all the joys of earth. If you wish to be convinced of what I say, then go stand beside the death-bed of a just man ; behold the calm joy that beams on his face ; listen to the sweet song of gladness that flows from his lips.

When the Blessed Mary of Oignies was about to die, her soul was filled with such heavenly joy that she could no longer contain it within her breast. She burst forth into a melodious hymn of praise and gladness. For three days and three nights she continued to sing, and her voice only grew louder and stronger as she drew near her end, and it was sweet and clear as the voice of an angel. She continued thus to sing until her pure soul went forth to join in the melodious choirs of the blessed in heaven. Thus died this holy virgin, and thus, too, have thousands died who served God in holiness of life.

Now, I ask you : Can that soul have been sad and unhappy during life who can sing and rejoice at the hour of death ? Can he have feared pain or sorrow who smiles and exults in the very face of death ? Ah ! no ; to the just soul death is a welcome messenger, who tells her that the Bridegroom calls, that the marriage-feast is ready. And

blessed, ah ! thrice blessed, is he who is called to the marriage-feast of the Lamb.

If, then, the dignity and happiness of your soul as a child of your Heavenly Father, and as a brother of Jesus Christ, and as a spouse of the Holy Ghost, are dear to you, oh ! for the love of Jesus engrave these two words deeply in your heart : Watch and pray ! Watch over your soul, that no sinful thought may enter there ; and should it enter unawares, cast it out instantly, as you would a disgusting insect or a spark of fire. Watch over your heart, that no sinful affection may possess it. Watch over your eyes, that they may not gaze on any pictures or books or other objects that could soil the lustre of your soul. Watch over your ears, that they may not listen to any immodest words or words of double meaning. Watch over your tongue, and remember that your tongue has been sanctified in Holy Communion by touching the virginal flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Watch over your whole body ; for your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, consecrated in baptism, and he who pollutes a consecrated temple is accursed of God and His holy angels. Be watchful day and night, and avoid the occasion of sin. Avoid those persons and those places which are to you an occasion of sin. Flee from them as you would from a serpent ; for he who loves danger shall perish in it. “ If your eye be to you an occasion of sin, pluck it out and cast it from you ; for it is better to go blind into the kingdom of heaven, than with both eyes to be cast into the pit of hell. And if your hands or your feet be to you an occasion of sin, cut them off and cast them from you ; for it is better to go lame and maimed into the kingdom of God, than to have two hands and two feet, and to be cast into hell-fire.” These are the words of Jesus Christ, my dear reader ; He certainly knew what He was saying. You must watch and pray. You must pray to Jesus. Jesus is a jealous God, and He commands you to call upon

Him in the hour of temptation. You must hasten to the altar, and receive often into your heart the virginal flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. You must partake of the "wheat of the elect and of the wine that maketh virgins; for unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall have no life in you." You must pray to Mary, the Mother of the just, the lovely standard-bearer of all the elect. The very name of Mary is a sweet balm which heals and fortifies the soul. The very thought of Mary's immaculate purity is a check upon the passions. The love of Mary is a fragrant rose which puts to flight the foul spirit of uncleanness.

A young man who was very much addicted to the sin of impurity came once to confession to a certain priest. The good priest was very greatly afflicted on learning that the young man had always fallen again into this sin after every confession. He advised the young man to place himself entirely under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He told him to say a Hail Mary every morning and evening in honor of her immaculate purity, to kiss the ground three times, and to say: "O Mary, my Mother! I give myself entirely to thee this day; I consecrate to thee my eyes, my ears, my tongue, my heart, and my whole body and soul. Oh! protect me, for I am thine." And whenever he was tempted, he should say: "O Mary! help me, for I am thine." The young man followed this advice, and in a short time he was entirely delivered from this accursed sin. Now, this same priest related this fact one day from the pulpit. In the audience there was an officer who kept up a criminal intercourse with a certain person. As soon as he heard this fact, he also made the resolution to practise this devotion, in order to free himself from the shameful slavery in which he was bound. In a short time he too was entirely freed from the degrading vice of uncleanness. Some months after, however, he had the imprudence to go again to the house of

his companion in sin, as he wished to see whether she too had changed her life ; but no sooner did he come before the door of the house than a strange feeling of terror seized upon him, and he cried out : “ O Mary ! help me ; I am thine ! ” That very instant he felt himself thrust back by an invisible hand, and found himself at a distance from the house. He immediately recognized the danger in which he had been, and returned his most heartfelt thanks to God and to His holy Mother for having preserved him. Remember, then, to watch and to pray. Repeat again and again with the holy Church : “ Inflame, O Lord, our reins and hearts with the fire of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may serve Thee with a chaste body, and please Thee with a clean heart.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FATHER'S HOUSE—HEAVEN.

ST. BERNARDIN of Sienna tells of a gentleman, well known for his fervor and piety, who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He longed to visit every spot that had received the impress of our Lord's sufferings; and after going to confession and making his communion with great devotion, he set out on his travels. He first stopped at Nazareth, where the great mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished. He then proceeded to Bethlehem to kneel at the spot in which our Lord first deigned to visit this earth as a suffering infant. He walked by the banks of the Jordan, the scene of our Lord's baptism; and went to the desert which had witnessed that wonderful forty days' fast; to the mountain where Jesus was transfigured; to the house at Jerusalem consecrated by the institution of the Holy Eucharist; to the garden of Olives; to the pretorium; and to Calvary, where the awful sacrifice was consummated. He visited the scene of our Lord's burial and resurrection; and finally ascended Mount Olivet, fondly recalling the blessing which Christ gave to the apostles before his ascension. After visiting every place which was in any way connected with our Lord's life or death, with a heart glowing with love, he exclaimed: "O Jesus, Jesus, my much-loved Saviour! since I can no longer follow Thy footsteps on earth, call me to Thyself in heaven." And his prayer was immediately heard; for it was no sooner uttered than he expired. The intensity of his love for Jesus had broken his heart; and after death these words were found engraven on his breast: "Jesus, my love."

O happy death ! Would that our death might be like his ! It will be so if we, like him, often visit, at least in spirit, those places where Jesus lived, suffered, and died for us. The frequent remembrance of what our dear Saviour has done for us will not fail to enkindle in our hearts a great love for Him, as also a great desire to be where He is. Like travellers at a distance from home, we ought often to turr to the anticipation of our happy return to God. We should look forward to the object of our love, to our dear Lord Jesus Christ awaiting us, bearing the crown in His hand, and pointing to the throne where the victor is to live and reign for ever.

We have seen what spiritual happiness the just enjoy even in this world. Let us now see what happiness is prepared for them in the world to come, in their Father's house in heaven.

The kings of this world possess palaces from which their power goes forth ; they ennoble their palaces and the palaces ennoble them ; they ennoble their palaces by raising the cities in which they reside to be the metropolis of their kingdoms, and their palaces ennoble them because the magnificence of the buildings, the splendor of the court and of the guards, are signs of their power and grandeur.

Almighty God is the King of heaven and earth. Although it be true of Him that He is everywhere, yet it is also true that there is a place which in a certain sense is His particular dwelling-place. This place is called heaven. " You shall not swear by heaven, for it is the throne of God " * said our divine Saviour. It is also said in the Gospel that whenever our Saviour prayed or blessed His followers, He raised his eyes towards heaven. He also often said : " My Father and your Father, who is in heaven," and He commands us to pray : Our Father " who art in heaven." Again, in the Acts of the Apostles we read that

* Matt. v. 34.

when our Lord Jesus Christ returned to heaven, He ascended beyond the clouds. He declared that "in His Father's house there were many mansions"; in a word, faith and revelation assure us that the kingdom of heaven is a real place of boundless extent, and that it lies far beyond the starry firmament.

No one can speak worthily of heaven but he that has seen it. It would require an angel to describe its beauties. St. Paul was taken up in spirit to the third heaven, and he there beheld a faint glimpse of its unutterable beauty. He declares that no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive the sweetness of its joys and the greatness of its beauty. How beautiful must heaven be! What beautiful sights do we not behold in this world, and yet we have never seen anything like the beauties of heaven! What sweet sounds, what delicious harmonies, do we not sometimes hear in this life, and yet we have never heard anything like the harmonies of the blessed in heaven! How great, how manifold, how boundless, are our desires; and yet it has never, never entered our hearts to desire anything like the beauties, the joys, of heaven! Holy Church exhorts us every day in the Mass, "Sursum corda." Let us follow the flight of one of those happy souls that have been freed from purgatory this day, and that are now winging their way to heaven.

No sooner is the soul entirely cleansed by the fires of purgatory than she is clothed by her angel guardian with the bright light of glory. Her robe is whiter than snow, and on her head she wears a glittering crown. Oh! how beautiful is such a soul! So marvellously beautiful is the soul clothed with the light of glory that, could we but gaze on her, we should die of joy; for she is now indeed the image and likeness of the living God. Let us follow this pure soul as she rises from the earth, and passes through the countless myriads of stars and planets that light up her pathway to heaven.

Oh ! how new and wonderful is the delight which the soul experiences as she rises from the earth ! How great and overflowing, then, must be her joy as she beholds at one glance, not only the whole earth, but all the mysteries of the universe, which were never yet revealed to mortal man ! In the fulness of her joy she bursts forth into a canticle of praise and gladness ; and her song, like that of the lark, rings louder and more gladsome the higher she ascends ; for all she sees is hers, and shall be hers for ever.

As the soul draws nigh to the glittering portals of the heavenly city, the gates are thrown open, and all heaven rejoices at her coming. "Who is this ?" the angels ask— "who is this that cometh up from the earth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun ?" The guardian angel answers : "This is the bride of the Lamb." Then all heaven resounds with the sweetest melody, and all the angels sing : "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage of the Lamb."

There is a solemn beauty in a vast forest, with its lofty trees and its cool shade, where all is calm and peaceful. In that deep solitude naught is heard save the warbling of birds, or the gentle murmur of the brook mingling with the distant roar of the waterfall, and the whisper of the wind as it ruffles the forest leaves.

There is a beauty in the boundless ocean. Sometimes it is lashed into fury by the storm, and its surging waves, as they glitter in the sunlight, look like mountains of crystal whose summits sparkle with showers of pearls. Then again the ocean sleeps as calmly and gently as an infant. The whole earth is beautiful. There is a beauty in its snow-capped mountains which tower above the clouds in solemn grandeur. There is a beauty in the widespread, sloping valleys that bloom with thousands of flowers or smile with a golden harvest. There is a beauty in the dawn, as it paints the eastern sky with the richest hues.

There is a beauty in the brightness of the noonday sun. There is a touching beauty in the summer sunset, when the clouds are fringed with gold and purple, whilst the pale moon rises in calm majesty above the horizon, and the twinkling stars appear one by one, like silvery lamps hung out on the dark-blue vault of heaven.

If, then, this earth, even now in its fallen state, is still so marvellously beautiful, what must the beauty of heaven be ! If there is so much beauty in this prison of death, what must there be in the land of the living ! If this place of banishment is so admirable, how admirable must be our heavenly home ! If this valley of tears, this abode of sin and sorrow and malediction, has yet so many beauties, oh ! how exceedingly beautiful must be that paradise of delights where sin and pain and sorrow are never known !

The Queen of Saba quitted her native land, and travelled for many long, weary days to gaze upon the splendors of Solomon's court. She entered the royal halls ; she admired the beauty of the palace, the costly magnificence of the furniture, and the unwonted splendor, the perfect harmony, of all around her. She listened entranced to the sublime wisdom of the august monarch of that court, and she was so overcome with joy and wonder at all she saw and heard that she could not speak, she could not move, she could not breathe ; she swooned away in an ecstasy of delight. At length, in coming to herself again, she exclaimed : " O glorious monarch ! I have heard great things of thy magnificence, thy wisdom—so great that I could not believe them ; but now that I have seen with my own eyes, that I have heard with my own ears, now I confess to you, I assure you, that all that I have heard is far below the reality."

Such, too, will be the language of a soul on her first entrance into heaven ; such, and far greater, will be her joy, her surprise, her ecstatic delight, in entering the abode of the

blessed. "O sweet Jesus!" she will exclaim, "I have heard wonderful things of Thy kingdom, Thy glory, Thy beauty; I could scarcely believe, or rather I could not understand, them all; but, oh! now I can see how infinitely below the truth was all that I have heard!"

Oh! how beautiful, how wonderful, must be the beauty of heaven, since it is the special work of the wisdom, of the power, of the loving magnificence, of God!

But what of the music of heaven, of that melody that ravishes the soul on her entrance into Paradise? Even here on earth music has such wondrous power that it can melt the sternest hearts and calm the wildest passions. The celebrated Italian musician Alexandro Stradella had the misfortune to give offence to a whole family of Rome. The nobles determined to have revenge. They hired a band of assassins to waylay the musician on his return from church, and to murder him. On the appointed evening they came to the church. Alexandro, little dreaming of any danger, entered the choir, and began to play and sing a most sweet and touching melody. He had just composed the piece, and he was now playing it for the first time: "Pieta Signore, di me dolente." "Have mercy on me, O Lord! have mercy on me; look on me in my sadness; condemn me not in justice, but pardon me in mercy." These were the words he sang. And as the touching melody rose and swelled, filling the whole church with its melancholy strains, and then sank and died away like the sad wailing of a broken heart, there was not one there who could repress his tears. Even the hardened assassins, those men of blood, who without a shudder could murder the innocent virgin and the helpless babe, were moved. They sheathed their poniards, and they vowed a vow that they never would strike at the heart of him who could sing so sweetly.

Even here on earth music has power to raise the drooping

spirits and to soothe the troubled soul. The Holy Scriptures tell us that when King Saul saw that God had abandoned him on account of his sins, a deep melancholy settled on him, and his soul was harassed by an evil spirit; and when these fits of sadness came on him, his face looked dark and scowling, like one in despair. Messengers were sent all over the land to find a good musician who would play to the king and charm away his grief. They found the youthful David, who was renowned for his skill in playing on the harp. And whenever the evil spirit came upon Saul, and his face grew dark with the gloom of despair, the youthful David stood before him, and sang and touched his harp with such marvellous sweetness that the evil spirit was forced to flee away, and hope and joy revived again in the bosom of the unhappy king. If, then, music has such charms here on earth, what must be the power, the sweetness, of that music which delights and ravishes the blessed in heaven!

St. Francis of Assisi heard but a single strain of this heavenly melody, and, though sick and dying, the unearthly sweetness of this music made him forget every pain and charmed away his illness, and from that moment he rose from his bed in perfect health.

When the pious virgin St. Catherine of Bologna was about to die, she was shown a wonderful vision. She was taken in spirit to a vast and beautiful plain, where she beheld a gorgeous throne, upon which was seated a Prince of unsurpassed grace and majesty. It was our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Beside Him sat His ever-blessed Mother, full of beauty and sweetness. While St. Catherine was gazing with joy and love upon the blessed countenance of her divine Saviour and His holy Mother, she heard the sound of song blended with strains of sweetest harmony. The words that were sung were few, but they were repeated again and again with ever-varying melody. "*Et gloria ejus in te videbitur*"—And His glory shall appear

in thee. This was the burden of the heavenly song. The vision passed away, and St. Catherine came to herself again, but the sweet strains of that heavenly music were still lingering in her ear. She arose from her sick-bed and called for a harp. The nuns who stood round, and who had thought her already dead, were greatly surprised at her miraculous recovery, and still more so at her strange request; for they knew that she had never learned to play on the harp. St. Catherine took the harp, and played and sang so sweetly as never did mortal sing before. Then, whilst all the nuns stood there around her, entranced by this wondrous song, the holy virgin paused for a moment, and, raising her streaming eyes to heaven, listened as if to catch the sounds of that unearthly harmony. Again she burst forth in a pure, rich flood of sweetest melody, and the sweet sounds of the harp, blending with the still sweeter tones of her voice, affected them all so much that they shed tears of mingled joy and sadness. St. Catherine never played again, but the harp was carefully preserved by the pious nuns as a most precious relic.

There lived many years ago a pious monk named Thomas, who loved Our Lady with all his heart. Day after day he besought his blessed Queen to deign to visit him during his mortal pilgrimage. One night he went out into the convent garden, and, looking up to heaven, he implored Our Lady anew, with sighs and tears, to grant his prayer. On a sudden he saw a brilliant light shoot down from heaven, like a falling star, and a beautiful and radiant virgin stood before him. The virgin called him by his name, and said, "Thomas, do you wish to hear me sing?" "Oh! most certainly," replied the religious. Then the virgin sang, and sang so sweetly that Thomas thought he was in Paradise; but suddenly she ceased to sing, and disappeared. The heart of the good monk was burning with desire to hear more of this heavenly song when another beautiful virgin

appeared, and sang to him with the same heavenly sweetness. When the virgin had ended her heavenly strain, she said to the pious monk : “ The virgin whom you saw a little while ago was St. Catherine, and I am Agnes ; we have been sent by Our Lady to console you. Give thanks, then, to Jesus and Mary, and prepare for a greater favor.” She vanished, and the heart of the good monk beat high with hope and love, for he was now to behold at last the object of all his desires—the Immaculate Mother of God ; and, looking up, he beheld a brilliant light, and his heart was filled with unspeakable joy. There, in the midst of the dazzling light, he beheld the Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Blessed Mother of God. She was surrounded by a multitude of angels, and she was radiant with celestial beauty. She smiled upon the happy religious. “ My dear son,” said she, “ your devotion is pleasing to me ; you have desired to see me ; look on me now, and I too will sing to you.”

And now the Blessed Virgin sang. Never before did such entrancing melody charm a mortal ear. The pious monk was ravished out of his senses, and sank on the ground as dead ; and, in truth, he would have died had not God given him strength to bear that excessive joy. After remaining long in this trance he came to himself again, but he could never forget the sweetness of that heavenly song. He slowly pined away, and soon died of sheer desire to hear, in the kingdom of heaven, the rapturous canticles of the blessed.

For ear has not heard, nor the senses of mortals

E'er caught the ineffable music below

Of those harmonies full which through heaven's bright portals,

With tide ever rising, unceasingly flow.

There voices seraphic in concord are vying,

And golden the strings of each well-tuned lyre ;

Heart vibrates to heart, as, for ever replying,

Unwearied they chant in antiphonal choir.

The heart of man craves sympathy. Our sorrows are lessened and our joys increased a hundredfold if we find a loving heart with whom we can share them. All the pleasures that heart can desire grow cold and wearisome if partaken of alone. When Adam was created, he was placed in the garden of Paradise ; he had there every pleasure that heart and soul could wish, and yet he was not fully happy until God gave him a companion with whom he could share his happiness.

In heaven our joys will be shared by companions adorned with ravishing beauty, resplendent with living light, each one of whom is king or queen of a never-ending kingdom. In heaven each one of the blessed helps to increase the unutterable happiness of all the others. If a light be placed in the midst of several mirrors, it will be reflected and increased by each mirror. So in heaven the happiness of each of the blessed is reflected and increased by the joys of the others. How great, then, must be the happiness of the blessed, since their own endless joy is increased as many times as there are blessed in heaven ! And the number of the blessed is so immensely great that no human mind can grasp it. The number of the angels alone is all but infinite. The prophet Daniel was shown a vision of God seated upon a throne of majesty, and he says that thousands of thousands ministered unto Him, and that ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before Him.* St. John, too, beheld the countless multitude of the blessed, and he says : " Behold I saw a vast multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and tribes and tongues, standing before the throne, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands. These are they who have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They shall not hunger or thirst any more, neither shall the sun scorch them, nor any

* Dan. vii. 10.

heat. For the Lamb shall lead them to the fountains of the waters of life, and God shall wipe away the tears from their eyes.”

How inconceivable, then, must be the joy of the blessed, since their own happiness is increased as many times as there are angels and saints in heaven ! But how to express the joy which the blessed soul experiences when she meets once more those beloved ones from whom she parted with such sad regret.

A vessel was returning home after a cruise of many years. As soon as it neared the coast, not only the passengers but even the sailors on board were filled with unutterable joy. They had been absent for many long years, and as soon as they caught the first glimpse of their native land they became incapable of doing any more work. The nearer they drew, the more excited they became. Some stood all alone, talking to themselves ; others laughed, others wept for very joy. They stood gazing at the land, unable to turn away their eyes. They seemed never weary of looking up, over the verdure of the hills, the foliage of the trees, the rocks on the shore covered with moss and sea-weed. All these objects were dear and sacred in their eyes. It was home—their native land. They saw the steeples of the villages in which they were born ; they knew them, though at a distance, and the sight filled them with unbounded joy. At length, when the ship entered the harbor, when they saw on shore their fathers, their mothers, their wives and children, their brothers and sisters, their friends, stretching out their hands to them, laughing and weeping for joy, and calling them by name, it was impossible to keep a single man on board. They all leaped on shore, and the crew of another ship had to be employed to do the work of the vessel.

If the joy of these poor men was so great on returning to their native land, how unutterably great will be the joy of the soul when she enters her true home for ever ! How un-

utterably great will be her joy when she meets again those beloved ones from whom she has been parted through so many weary years of grief and pain! Persons have been known to die of joy; and in truth, if ever the soul could die, she would die then of excessive joy.

Some years ago a young man was forced to quit his native land and his beloved parents to seek his fortune in this country. He loved his parents and he loved his home dearly, and indeed the parting was a sad one. But his was not that weak love which dies away as soon as it is borne to a foreign clime. Every wave of the ocean, every hour of time that widened the separation between him and his parents, only increased and strengthened his love. After many years of patient toil he succeeded in amassing considerable wealth. His first care now was to send for his aged father, who was yet living, and whom he had never forgotten. The money was sent and the answer came. The day and the vessel were named on which the father was to embark. At last the glad tidings came—the ship had arrived. His aged father was on board. The son hastened to the vessel. One moment more, and father and son were locked in each other's arms. What a moment of wild joy for the son! All the sad and joyous memories of the past—his father's love, the farewell kiss, the parting tear, the long, weary years of separation—came rushing into his soul and choked his voice. But, alas! the joy was too great; his loving heart broke, and he died of excessive joy in his father's arms.

He who has loved dearly and in truth, and lost the object of his affections, alone can understand the joy of such a meeting. There we shall meet again a loving mother, whom we have learned to love and esteem in truth only when we have lost her. There we shall meet again a fond father, a loving brother or sister. There we shall meet again those beloved ones whose absence we have mourned

t'rough years of pain and sorrow. We shall meet them again, we shall embrace them, we shall press them to our hearts, and God shall wipe away every tear and heal every broken heart. And we shall love them without fear of separation—we shall love and possess them for ever and ever.

There we shall see, for the first time, that most loving Mother who has loved us with undying love, in spite of all our ingratitude. We shall kiss those blessed hands that have been so often stretched out to save us whilst we were straying on the brink of the precipice. There we shall gaze on those loving eyes that wept for us at the foot of the cross, that smiled with joy when we returned to the path of innocence and virtue. There we shall gaze upon that blessed face which is the delight of Jesus and of the blessed in heaven. We shall listen to the loving voice of our holy Mother Mary, and hear from her lips the sweet words: “Welcome, my child, welcome home at last!”

And there we shall see Jesus, our Saviour and our God, in all His glory. We shall look upon that blessed face on which the angels long to gaze; we shall see His sacred heart, burning with unutterable love; and His blessed wounds, shining with dazzling brightness.

Oh! if heaven, if the angels and saints, are so beautiful, how beautiful must be Jesus Himself, the King, the Creator of heaven! St. Peter was one day taken up to the summit of Mount Thabor, and he there beheld a faint glimpse of our dear Lord's unutterable beauty. Jesus was transfigured before him, and His face shone more brightly than the sun, and His garments were whiter than snow. St. Peter was so overjoyed at the sight of this ravishing beauty that he cried aloud, in a rapturous transport: “O Lord! it is good for us to be here!” And he wished forthwith to dwell upon Mount Thabor for ever.

How shall we cry aloud for joy when we behold the unveiled beauty of Jesus in all His ravishing splendor! “O

Lord ! it is good for us to be here. Let us dwell here for ever."

How often during holy Mass have we not longed to see Jesus face to face, and when we pressed Him to our heart in Holy Communion ! How often have we not yearned to behold Him in the innocent beauty of childhood, as He appeared to the shepherds of Bethlehem ! How often have we not wished that we had seen Him in the bloom of boyhood, as He swept the cottage floor and drew water for His mother, or as He confounded the proud wisdom of the doctors in the Temple ! Who is there that has not wished to have seen Him in the vigor of manhood, as He walked on the sea of Galilee, or ascended the mountain to teach the eager crowds that followed Him, thirsting after the Word of Life ? Who would not wish to have seen our dear and compassionate Redeemer as He stood beside that tomb in Bethany and wept, and then, with the almighty voice of a God, commanded the dead Lazarus to arise and come forth ?

And oh ! how often have we not yearned to have seen Him on that blessed farewell night, when He instituted the sacrifice of the New Covenant, and left us His virgin flesh to be our food and His loving heart's blood to be our drink ! How often have we not wished to have stood beneath Him whilst He hung on the cross for our sins, that we might gather every drop of His precious blood, and hear from His own lips those loving words : " Son, behold thy mother ! " How great would be our joy could we have seen our Lord Jesus as He arose from the sealed tomb, triumphant over death and hell ; and finally, could we have seen Him as He ascended to His throne of majesty in heaven ! Truly, on that day, as the prophet had foretold, " the moon did shine as the sun, and the sun shone with sevenfold brightness, like the brightness of seven days." And now in heaven all these wishes shall be gratified. We shall see Jesus face to

face. We shall see our Father, our blessed Redeemer, our divine Spouse. We shall hear from His blessed lips those words of joy: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." "Arise, my love, my dove, my beautiful one. The winter is now passed. The summer has come; arise, my love, receive thy crown. Thou shalt sit with me now upon my throne, for thou hast conquered."

And there in heaven not only our souls but our bodies also will be perfect in beauty and in happiness. Our bodies shall resemble the glorified body of Jesus Christ Himself. We may now pass unnoticed and despised, because we are not gifted with beauty; but have patience. Only a few years more of sorrow and trial, only a few years more of humiliation and generous self-denial, and our body shall be bright and beautiful as an angel of God.

The body now is heavy and wearisome, and needs rest; it can move only slowly from place to place; but in heaven it will be glorified like the body of Jesus; it shall pass from place to place more swiftly than the wind, more suddenly than the lightning; from star to star, through the wide expanse of the boundless universe.

Our body now is composed of gross, impenetrable matter; but in heaven it will become refined, subtile, gifted with the qualities of a spirit. It will be able to pass through the wall, through the hardest stone, as a sunbeam passes through glass.

Now we suffer from heat and cold, from hunger and thirst, from weariness and pain, from sickness, from sadness of heart, from all the ills of this weary life, which will only end with the agonies of death. But in heaven there will be no more pain, no more sadness; we shall never again endure the bitter pangs of death, but become beautiful, glorious, impassible, incorruptible.

Here on earth we are never satisfied; we always crave

for something more, something higher, something better; whence comes this continual restlessness which haunts us through life, and even pursues us to the grave? It is the homesickness of the soul, its craving after God. Our soul was created for God, and until we can see and enjoy God we can never find true rest and peace. But in heaven we shall be happy even to the fullest extent of our desires, for we shall possess the source of all happiness—God Himself.

Our Lord says in the Gospel: "Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."* Our Lord does not say that His joy and happiness is to enter into His servant, but that His faithful servant is to enter into His joy. Were we told to receive into ourselves all the water of the sea, we should say, "How can this be done? It is utterly impossible." But were we bade to plunge into the water of the sea, we should see no impossibility in this. Now, our Lord is an infinite ocean of joy and happiness. Impossible for the soul to receive this happiness all into herself, but most easy for her to enter into this ocean of happiness when our Lord tells her: "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter into the joy of the Lord." In the very instant that the soul hears these words, she sees, by the light of glory, the infinite beauty of God face to face; she is at once filled, and as it were all consumed, with love; she is lost and immersed in that boundless ocean of the goodness of God; she forgets herself, passing over into God and dissolving into Him; the Lord communicates Himself substantially to her, giving Himself up to her in a manner most sweet and intimate. On this account St. John says: "Behold the tabernacle of God with men; and He will dwell with them: and they shall be His people, and God Himself, with them, shall be their God."† "He that shall over-

* Matt. xxv. 23.

† Apoc. xxi. 3.

come shall possess these things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”*

As a king is always with his people, a father with his children, a teacher with his pupils, so God will always be with the elect in heaven, recreating and feeding them, and filling them with numberless delights and unspeakable happiness. They will constantly enjoy his presence, which was hidden from them here below; they will see God, and speak to Him face to face, and He will penetrate them with ineffable sweetness and consolation; for “He shall be their God,” their Father, their Protector, their Glorifier, their All.

“He will be their God”; that is, He will be all their joy, all their honor, all their wisdom, all their riches, all their good; so that the blessed exclaim, with the Psalmist, “For what have I in heaven, and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth?”† and with St. Francis, “My God, my love, and my all.” Each one will possess God whole and entire; for God will give Himself up to each one as much as He will give Himself to all together, so that every one will enjoy and possess God as completely as if God belonged to him alone. “I shall be thy exceedingly great reward,” said God to Abraham. “Thou, my Lord, art my portion in the land of the living.” If a king sits on an elevated throne, he is seen equally well by all; he is present to all at the same time, and each one enjoys his presence as much as the whole assembly does; so God is seen by the blessed as an immense sun, as it were, and enjoyed and possessed by each one in particular as well as by all together; and just as fine music fills the ear of every individual with as much delight as it does a large assembly, so God communicates Himself, and all He has and is, to every one just as much as He does to all. Thus all and each one will, like a fish in the water, swim in this ocean of God’s happiness

* Apoc. xxi. 7.

† Ps. lxxii. 25.

and delight; being made partakers of the divine nature, they enjoy true, solid, immense, and incomprehensible happiness. They will retain, it is true, their own nature, but they shall assume a certain admirable and almost divine form, so as to seem to be gods rather than men.

As a sponge thrown into water becomes quite penetrated and saturated with it, so do the blessed become penetrated with the divine essence when entering into the joy of the Lord. If an iron be placed in the fire, it soon looks like fire; it becomes fire itself, yet without losing its nature. In like manner the soul, transformed into God by the light of glory, though it retains its being, is like unto God.

In virtue of this union they become pure like God, holy like God, powerful, wise, and happy like God. He will transform them into Himself, not by the destruction of their being, but by uniting it to His. He will communicate to them His own nature, His greatness, His strength, His knowledge, His sanctity, His riches and felicity. In the plenitude of their joy the blessed will exclaim: "Oh! it is good for us to be here."

God, then, will fill the souls of the blessed with the plenitude of His light; He will fill their will with the abundance of His peace; He will fill their memory with the extent of His eternity; He will fill their essence with the purity of His being; and He will fill all their senses and the powers of their soul with the immensity of His benefits and the infinity of His riches. They see Him as He is; they love Him without defect; they behold Him, the Source of all beauty, and this sight ravishes their mind; they see Him, the Source of all goodness, and the contemplation thereof satiates their souls with enjoyment. O sweet occupation! O inestimable happiness!

But that which shall fill up the measure of the happiness of the saints is "that it will never end." Here on earth all our joys are fleeting, and even those pleasures that

remain soon become insipid and wearisome. We easily become accustomed even to the highest honors and to the sweetest pleasures. All the pleasures of this life are like the apples of Sodom, that grow near the Dead Sea—beautiful to the eye, but to the taste wormwood and gall.

How different are the joys of heaven! There our joy is ever new. We shall have all that heart can desire or soul conceive; and the more we taste of heaven's joys, the more we love and desire them.

Here on earth, no matter how great our joys, no matter how sweet our pleasures, they are always embittered by the thought of death. We may be rich, and are happy in our riches, but death comes and tears us away from all we covet; others shall spend what we have hoarded with so much care.

We are beautiful, perhaps, and vain of our beauty; but sickness comes, and all the beauty is faded. Death comes, and the fair form becomes a livid mass of corruption, to be hidden away in a dark, gloomy vault, lest its appearance fill our admirers with horror and disgust.

We are blessed with faithful friends and loving hearts, that sympathize with us, that rejoice in our joy, and weep in our sorrow; we have a faithful wife or fond husband, good, loving children, and are happy in their company; but death comes and tears away from our arms that friend, that loved one, and all our happiness is changed into mourning!

This earth is indeed a vale of tears! But let us lift up our hearts. Look up to heaven. In heaven our tears shall be dried. In heaven there shall be no death, no separation. In heaven our joys shall never end. In heaven we shall praise God for ever, love God for ever, possess God for ever.

O happiness that never ends! O holy Sion, where all remains, and nothing passes away; where all is found, and nothing is wanting; where all is sweet, and nothing bitter; where all is calm, and nothing is agitated! O

happy land, whose roses are without thorns ; where peace reigns without combats, and where health is found without sickness, and life without death ! O holy Thabor ! O palace of the living God ! O celestial Jerusalem, where the blessed sing eternally the beautiful canticles of Sion !

This happiness, even when enjoyed as many years as there are drops in the ocean, leaves in the forest, sands on the sea-shore, will be still just as new, just as great, just as delightful, just as incomprehensible, just as imperishable, as in the first moment when entering into the soul. At each moment God has ready new joys, new delights, new pleasures, new beauties, new sources of joy.

Truly, were the happiness of the blessed not so great as it is, the Son of God would not have paid so high a price to obtain it for us ; He would not have become man, and spent a life of thirty-three years in poverty, contradictions, and all sorts of sufferings. He would not have ended it on an infamous cross ; nor would He have given the great powers He has given to his ministers, such as to forgive sins, to change bread and wine into His Body and Blood. The true servants of God, of all ages, were deeply penetrated with this truth. Hence they were willing to undergo any kind of torment and pain, even the loss of their lives, under the most trying and acute sufferings, rather than forfeit everlasting happiness. Thousands of ways were found out by devilish malice to torture the followers of Christ. And the martyrs underwent all these sufferings for the sake of heaven.

Kings, queens, princes, emperors, have renounced the world and shut themselves up in convents and solitudes to make sure of heaven by a holy life. And heaven was worth all this, and more too ; for St. Paul has said with truth : “ I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us.”

St. Cyril, while yet a child, became a Christian, in con-

sequence of which he was maltreated, and finally turned out of doors by his idolatrous father. He was led before the judge, and accused of frequently invoking the name of Jesus. The judge promised the child to bring about a reconciliation with his father, on condition that he would never more pronounce that name. The holy child replied: "I am content to be turned out of my father's house, because I shall receive a more spacious mansion in heaven; nor do I fear death, because by it I shall acquire a better life." The judge, in order to frighten Cyril, caused him to be bound and led, as it were, to the place of execution, but gave private orders to the executioner not to hurt him. The holy child was accordingly brought before a great fire and threatened to be thrown in; but being most willing to lay down his life, he was brought back to the judge, who said to him: "My child, thou hast seen the fire; cease, then, to be a Christian, that thou mayest return to thy father's house and inherit thy estates." The saint replied: "I fear neither fire nor the sword, but I desire a dwelling more magnificent, and riches more lasting, than those of my father! God will receive me. Do thou hasten to put me to death, that I may quickly go to enjoy Him."

The bystanders wept to hear the child speak thus, but he observed: "You should not weep, but rather rejoice, and encourage me to suffer, in order that I may attain to the possession of that house which I so ardently desire." Remaining constant in these sentiments, he joyfully suffered death.

In all our joys or sorrows let us turn our eyes constantly towards our true home; let us look up to heaven, to the mansion of our Father, the palace of His glory, the temple of His holiness, and the throne of His grandeur and magnificence; the land of the living, the centre of our rest, the term of our movements, the end of our miseries, the place of the nuptials of the Lamb, the feast of God and His holy angels.

Are we poor? Let us think of the boundless riches that await us in heaven. Are we sickly and suffering? Let us think of the joys of a glorified body incapable of pain or weariness. Are we despised and down-trodden? Let us think of the glory of being honored by Jesus Christ in presence of the angels and men. Does our heart bleed because we have lost a dear friend, a beloved relative? Let us look up to heaven! We shall find the lost friend, the dear relative, among the angels and saints of God.

If the Israelites underwent so many labors and hardships for forty years in order to enter the Promised Land, with what untiring fervor should not we labor in order to gain heaven, that true Land of Promise, where we shall have in abundance everything we desire!

I know not what you may think; I know not what resolutions you may have taken in this consideration of heaven; but as for me, I am resolved, with the grace of God, to make every sacrifice, but I must gain heaven. Were I to lose my eyes, I am content, but I must open them one day in the light of glory; I must gaze on the beauties of heaven. Were I to lose my hearing, I shall not repine, but I must listen one day to the choirs of the angels; my ears must drink in the ravishing melody of heaven. Were I forced to remain silent all the days of my life I am willing to do so, but I must one day sing, with the blessed in heaven, the glorious canticle of praise and gladness. Were I to become lame and helpless for life, and were I doomed to drag out a long, weary existence in misery and pain, I shall not murmur; but I must one day arise with a glorified body, with a beautiful body gifted with swiftness and splendor and impassibility. And should I be hated and despised and down-trodden for God's sake, I shall bear it patiently, but I must one day be honored by Jesus, in presence of all men—in presence of the angels and saints—in presence of heaven and earth.

Though I am obliged to bid farewell to father and mother, and to brother and sister, and though I am forced to part from the nearest and dearest, with the grace of God I shall make the sacrifice, even though my poor heart should bleed ; but I must one day find a father and a mother, a brother and a sister, in the company of the angels and saints of God.

Whatever it may cost me, even had I to suffer all the torments of all the martyrs, I must one day see Mary in all her glory and beauty. I must love and live for ever with her who is the glorious Mother of God and my own Mother. Whatever it may cost me, even though I had to pass through all the torments of hell, I must one day see my God face to face. I must love Him, I must be transformed into Him by the power of His burning love, and say for all eternity . “ Our Father who art in heaven.”



MULLER, Michael.
The Prodigal Son.

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