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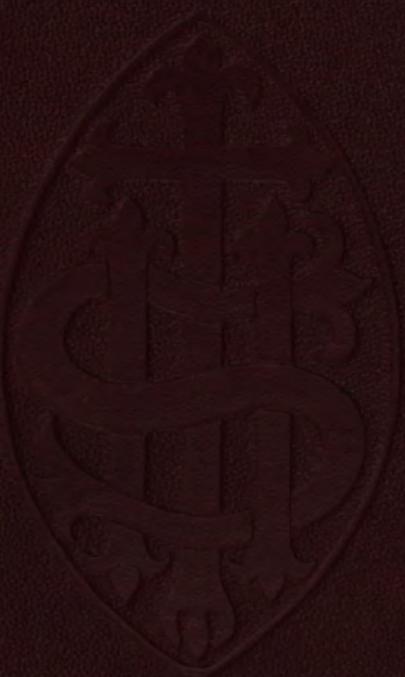
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Spiritual Exercises



Readings
for a Retreat



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SPIRITUAL EXERCISES.

Spiritual Exercises:

READINGS FOR A RETREAT OF SEVEN DAYS.

Translated and Abridged from the French of Bourdaloue.

EDITED BY THE
REV. ORBY SHIPLEY, M.A.



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SPIRITUAL EXERCISES.

INTRODUCTION.

MEDITATION FOR THE EVE OF A RETREAT.

“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.”—Hosea ii. 14.

First Consideration.

IT is GOD Who has called me to this Retreat. He it is Who has inspired me with the design: and the resolution which I have formed to withdraw myself for a time from all distractions, and to remain in solitude, can only be an effect of His Grace. I ought, then, to obey the impulse of this Grace, and to apply all the means which it is GOD’s Will that I should use to my conversion.

This is a special Grace granted on my behalf; for GOD does not bestow it upon every one. How many worldly men and women are living in the whirl of dissipation, and in profound forgetfulness of GOD, without a thought of ever seriously examining themselves: yet, this act of self-examination would nevertheless be a sovereign remedy for all their evils, and perhaps their only chance for safety! GOD, in my case, makes a special application of His bounty. With what care, then, and attention should I avail myself of a Grace so precious!

This Retreat, which I am about to enter upon, may be the last which it will be permitted to me to make. Ah,

if I were certain of this, with what zeal, with what fervour should I apply myself! How many have I passed which have been useless and unproductive of any change in myself. But this one must supply the deficiencies of all the others, and must be the means of my fulfilling all GOD's designs for the good of my soul. It is GOD Himself, then, Who leads me, and offers to be my Guide. JESUS CHRIST, the King of Saints, was led by the SPIRIT of GOD into the Wilderness. Here is the model that I must propose to myself for imitation during this Retreat, if I would that it should be in my case efficacious, and one the success of which will correspond to my necessities, and to what GOD expects of me. I have more than once made a Retreat merely following custom; and because, in the age in which I live, to do so is a duty which I do not care to forego. I must enter on this one inspired by and under the influence of the same HOLY SPIRIT that led our SAVIOUR into the Wilderness.

Second Consideration.

God, Who desires to sanctify me, calls me to an inward or spiritual Retirement, and not to a mere renouncing of external affairs. For the outward or bodily Retreat is of no avail unless it leads the soul to retire within itself. I ought therefore, during this holy season, to withdraw myself entirely in heart and soul from all that can distract my attention or can keep me from God. I must behave as if alone with God in the world, in order that He alone may occupy my thoughts, and that I may be able to exclaim with the Bride in Solomon's Song, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." Far from me be all other considerations; those in themselves otherwise advantageous, and those which in my own estima-

tion may have seemed to be so. Whatsoever separates me from God, even though good in itself, is not for my good.

God desires to be alone with me, that He may speak to my heart; and therefore my heart should be weaned from the world. So long as the world occupies my thoughts, God will not address Himself to me, nor shall I be in a disposition to listen to His voice. Unfortunate, if I take with me to my solitary sanctuary worldly thoughts; if I enter upon this Retreat with a distraught mind and an undisciplined heart, or even with any vain desire, disappointment, secret jealousy, or too worldly affection. Unfortunate, if I render myself incapable of holding conference with my Divine Master. For should this be the case, however edifying my Retreat might prove, I should fail of finding God, because God would not find in me that state of abstraction in which the soul should be which desires conference with Him. Since then He is willing to hold converse with me, I, on my part, should dispose myself to say with David, "I will hearken"—but with earnestness and submission—"to what the **LORD** God will say unto me," to His inspirations and to His reproaches; or with Samuel, "Speak, **LORD**, for Thy servant heareth." I ought, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, to recollect and keep in my heart every word by means of which He will make me to apprehend His Divine Will.

Third Consideration.

The chief object of my Retreat should not be to experience the calm afforded by solitude. This is indeed a holy calm; but of itself it is not sufficient, and there are more solid advantages to be gained which I must seek

for. I may exclaim with the Royal Psalmist, "O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest;" but I may not make that Rest the limit to my designs and aspirations. I must, during this Rest, keep in view something more precious and essential than rest itself. Neither should the object of my Retreat be to spend more time in acts of devotion, in more frequent Communions, in more constant devotional reading, or in practising more rigid abstinence. All these are so many means which I can, and which I ought to employ; but they do not constitute the sole end which I must keep in view. My error has been too often to confound the means with the end, and to imagine that my Retreat has been beneficial if I have been regular in observing all its functions.

But the object of my Retreat should be to reform my mode of life, and to gain greater knowledge both of myself and of God's designs; to discover once and for all the root of my motives, my imperfections, my evil habits; in a word, to change myself, and to become, in the words of S. Paul, "a new creature in JESUS CHRIST." For if the Retreat that I am entering upon ends here, and if I leave it without having corrected any of my besetting sins, it will be of no avail that I possess all the sentiments of a most pure devotion, for this would be simply an illusion. I must effect my conversion, and not spend my time in discussion and meditation. Notwithstanding the object, taken from this point of view, is still too general and vague. It must, to be as efficacious as possible, be determined by some particular character; and it is for me to inquire from God what my particular intention in this Retreat should be, as, for instance, whether I require reformation in regard to charity, humility, self-denial, and the like.

Affections.

Enlighten me, O God, in the choice of an intention which I ought to make for this Retreat; and grant me all the necessary assistance to arrive at a decision. For since it is Thou Who hast moved me to withdraw into solitude, grant me then to understand that perfection which Thou callest me to strive after, and the paths which I have taken to reach it. Grant that this Retreat, which has been to so many sinners a means of their conversion, may not, as it will if I fail to reap fruit from it, become a cause of condemnation. What shall I do, O my God, for it is Thou Who must apportion out for me my special work and duty during this Retreat, and it is for me, at any sacrifice, to sweep away every obstacle that can prevent my following Thy precepts, and accomplishing Thy adorable designs. I feel, O Lord, that my heart is surrendered, and that in beginning this Retreat, I can with humble confidence bear testimony before Thee as did Thy Prophet of old, "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready." But possibly I flatter myself, and there are yet in my heart secret springs of self-love and esteem. Help me, O Lord, to discover them. Complete the preparation of this heart, which wishes to submit itself to Thee; and which now separates itself from human concerns, only that it may the better receive the impressions of Thy Grace and of Thy HOLY SPIRIT.

FIRST MEDITATION.

OF THE END OF MAN.

"**L**ORD, let me know mine end."—Psalm xxxix. 5.

First Point.

WHAT has been the object of GOD in creating me? To know Him, to love and glorify Him in this life, and to possess Him in the next—this is my end. I have not been placed in this world to acquire riches, neither have I been placed in it to obtain renown or esteem, nor to live pleasantly and at ease. All this is not my end, neither can it be. I am here to search after GOD, to serve GOD, to do the Will of GOD. "In this," says a holy Man, "does man consist." A great truth is this, a corner stone of all other truths; and yet, it is this truth which as yet I have not known, or rather that I have never fathomed, inasmuch as I have lived as if I did not know it, for by the great abuse of my reason I have lived for self, though created for GOD. I have thought of and been occupied only with self, referring all things to myself; in a word, I have looked upon self as my own end. Am I not obliged to confess, that such is the state of dreadful blindness in which I have passed my life or the greater portion of it? Had I known my end or kept it ever in my sight, my life would have been a holy one. From whence come my wanderings, my luke-warmness, my indifference? From forgetting what my end is. From neglecting on important occasions to make this solemn reflection—What is my end? In momen-

tous affairs, where Christian wisdom should have guided me, I have not realized my end. This it is which has lost me.

Not only is God the end of my creation and of my whole being, but of every special act; for there is not one which having been created for God, should not also have been offered to Him. S. Paul did not even except the most common and most unimportant, for he said, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God." What follows from this, but that everything which I have done in my life which had not God for its end, to say nothing of the sinfulness to be found in my deeds, is for me, in the sight of God of nothing worth. Had I performed the greatest actions, had I even worked Miracles which had not God for their end, all would have been but vanity of vanities. "They have turned every one to their own way," saith the Prophet; and through that, all has become worthless. This is my state; can I sufficiently deplore it?

Second Point.

The fact of the end for which I was created being the very best, should prove a powerful attraction to draw me ever towards it. God has Himself no better, being His Own End. From all Eternity, He has been known to Himself. He loves and forms designs whereby to increase His Glory; and these purposes He wills in time to carry out. For this cause, He has made me in His Own Image and Likeness; for He has bestowed upon me an understanding whereby I may know Him, and a body and soul to glorify Him. I have, then, in virtue of my creation, as perfect an end as God Himself. "O Lord," exclaimed a Holy Man of old, "what is man, that Thou hast

"...and to exalt him after this manner?" Realize, O my soul, realize thine own dignity; not that thou mayest boast thyself, but to give God the glory of devout adoration, and to offer Him the just tribute of thy praises. On the other hand, when I have any end out of God, I ~~want~~ and disgrace myself. I forego the dignity which ~~want~~ in being made for God and for Him alone. ~~W~~ant to myself, through the just anger of my God, I ~~want~~ my own nothingness. Man in his forgetfulness ~~of this~~ becomes "like unto the beasts that perish," but ~~is even~~ in a worse condition than theirs; for the brutes, ~~although~~ not gifted with reasoning powers, ever act in ~~even~~ity to the end for which God created them. ~~Such~~ is not my case, for I am sufficiently foolish and ~~want~~ to make for myself an end out of Him.

There is, however, no more needful end both as regards God and myself; necessary with respect to God, for God would not be God had He given me any end out of Himself. He would cease to be God did He permit me to entertain a thought, speak a word, perform the smallest action irrespective of Himself. But it does not suffice Him to be my end through necessity; He wills to be so also by my own free choice. This is His Glory. Would I doubt it, it is of necessity as regards myself, for it is God alone Who can make me happy, and consequently Who can be my end. "Thou hast created us for Thyself, O LORD," said S. Augustine, "and our hearts can never be at rest until they repose in Thee." All that this world can do for me can never content me. Of this I have too full experience not to be entirely convinced; it needs something beyond this world, and never can my soul be satisfied until it can rest in the possession of its God.

Third Point.

Everything, sin only excepted, should draw me towards my true end. There exists not a creature in the world which may not help me to know God, to discern His perfections, and to fill me with love to God. There is therefore not one which may not be a means of raising me upwards towards God—the heavens, the stars, the elements—all speak to me of God. I am therefore without excuse if, knowing Him, I do not correspond to the obligation laid upon me of glorifying Him as God. Is it possible, O **LORD**, that there have been such unbelievers, who refused to listen to the voice of Nature? The Apostle, however, teaches me that there have been, and that by Thy just judgments Thou hast delivered them over to a reprobate mind. What would become of me if ever Thou didst so forsake me, and leave me to myself?

Whatever happens to me in the ordering of His Providence I should look upon as a means which God would have me use for attaining to the end He designs for me, whether it be prosperity, adversity, health, sickness, poverty, comfort, reproach, honour, joy, affliction, “for,” says S. Paul, “we know that all things work together for good to those that love God.” Most true it is, that if I am faithful to His Grace, it will lead and draw me to God, to submit myself to Him, and to seek His help. God has ever led His elect by different ways; and all these various paths as used by the Saints have equally served to perfect them, and in all circumstances, however adverse, they have found the Kingdom of God, and in it their end.

This is what I have never sufficiently realized—the use of all things, and God’s purposes in all things. Though

I have known this, my knowledge has been worthless, for I have not used it in my practice. For, notwithstanding the gracious designs of my God, I have misused all His gifts; that of health, to lead a life of self-indulgence; of human infirmity, to live a life of ease; of afflictions, to murmur and complain under them; of joys, to make me forget Him; of prosperity, to become proud thereby; of sorrow, to be cast down. What a contradiction is all this to the intention and ordering of God; what faithlessness in His Providence; what forgetfulness of my own true interests. I should then make use of all creatures only to arrive at my true end. I should neither desire, esteem, nor seek them, but in so far as they help me to draw near to God, and to keep me united to Him. If I look upon them in any other light, they will turn against me, and at my cost avenge the God Who created them; and far from being useful or profitable to me, they will become evil and dangerous.

Affections.

It is Thy Grace alone, O my God, which can draw me from the fatal state of blindness in which I have lived so many years. Make me to know what I am, and for what I live. Grant me a true knowledge of the end which I should seek to attain; a consciousness which will make me act, and which will animate and support me; that its effects should be seen in my life; that I may be not only persuaded of, but touched by the knowledge of my one true end; that my sole care may be to seek it everywhere, and in all things to renew daily the intention and desire of its attainment, and constantly to reproach myself, as my LORD reproved His servant Martha, "Thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is

needful," and that one thing is the end for which GOD created me.

As to the means of attaining it, O LORD, I beseech of Thee that holy indifference which Thou wouldest I should feel respecting everything in this world, either good or evil, greatness or humiliation, joy or sorrow. What does it matter to me if I am rich or poor, in health or bearing sickness, despised or highly thought of? If I am Thine and Thou for ever mine, of what importance will the way and means be whereby I gain my end, if only I do attain unto it? Holy indifference, which would deliver me out of all my troubles, all my anxieties, all my fears, of which my clinging to this world is the root. Holy indifference, which would banish from my heart all the passions with which it is continually disturbed. Holy indifference, which would speak peace to my soul, and would be a foretaste of Eternal Blessedness.

Vouchsafe, O LORD, to add to this spirit of indifference a still holier temper of mind, to choose between the things of earth, such as I shall recognize as great helps towards the attainment of my true end, and such as would be less useful to me. Although all things may be means whereby to arrive at Thee, there are some which lead more surely and certainly than others; and whatsoever shrinking I may naturally feel towards them, I should not hesitate to prefer them to others which I might like better, but which might be more easily abused by me. Especially vouchsafe to help, establish, and strengthen me in the holy resolution which I should make of embracing unreservedly every means by which Thou wouldest that I should gain the one thing needful, the end for which Thou didst create me; for should I neglect a single means and use all others, I should, in doing so, no longer earnestly and truly consider my end; and the will which

I should have towards seeking it, would be nothing more than a snare and a delusion. May I place neither limit nor exception, O God, when the question is one of such importance as my salvation. I should examine my heart on these three points:—Am I in a state of perfect and sincere indifference for all things out of God? Am I resolved to make choice at any cost of the best and surest means to lead me to God? Am I determined rightly to use them all?

SECOND MEDITATION.

OF THE CHRISTIAN'S END.

"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself."—S.
Matth. xvi. 24.

First Point.

WHEREFORE am I a Christian, but to serve and honour GOD, not only with the plain instincts of my reason, because that gift being so weak and limited, and so clouded through sin, it would not raise me to sufficiently high views of GOD; not only through the general precepts of Religion, for GOD demands something more perfect of me as a Christian than what Religion expects of all who acknowledge the existence of a GOD, and have only faith in a Divine Being; but I, as a Christian, am called upon to serve and glorify Him by following special rules and living according to the Spirit of the Commandments of the LORD JESUS CHRIST. GOD wills that these alone should be laws to me; for all that is not in conformity with them, does not accord with the desires of the Divine Will of GOD.

Indeed, the LORD JESUS CHRIST came into this world to make GOD known and to teach me to honour and serve Him acceptably; therefore He said, "I have manifested Thy Name to the men which Thou gavest Me." Moses had taught the Jews to honour GOD with sacrifices and victims; but these sacrifices in which were offered animals, were but types and figures of the worship and offering which GOD demands of me, and were

infinitely unworthy of His acceptance. The **LORD JESUS CHRIST** came, therefore, to teach me to worship **GOD** in spirit by the sacrifice and renunciation of myself, and by the offering of my whole being.

What a Divine lesson has this **GOD-MAN** taught me in His Own Person, both as **Lawgiver** and as **King**. "When He cometh into the world, He saith, **Sacrifice** and **Offering** Thou wouldest not, but a **Body** hast Thou prepared Me; in **Burnt-offerings** and **Sacrifices** for **sin** Thou hast had no **pleasure**." Then said I, "Lo, I come to do Thy **Will**, O **God**." In a word He offered and sacrificed Himself for the **Glory** of **GOD**, and at the same time to claim the right of commanding me to observe this precept: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself."

Herein is the object of my being a **Christian**; and it is solely by this that I can be in a state to offer to **GOD** the worship He demands of me. I must, therefore, be persuaded that if I do not deny myself, I am a **Christian** only in name. If I do not deny myself, I only bear the name of **Christian** to my condemnation; that whatever else I may be without self-denial, I can neither know nor love **GOD**, and am incapable of giving glory to Him. It is in the denial and the sacrifice of self that true Religion consists for me as a **Christian**. The **Jews** were ignorant of this; but after the express **Revelation** which it has pleased **GOD** to make to the world in the Person of **JESUS CHRIST**, my ignorance of this would rise up and condemn me. This renunciation of self is difficult, but it is necessary. To forsake and renounce self is a hard saying, according to the feelings and inclinations of the natural man; but it is nevertheless a saving truth, a word of life, and of **Life Eternal**.

Second Point.

As a Christian I ought to be conformed to the LORD JESUS CHRIST, for says S. Paul, this was the intention of GOD in making choice of His Elect. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the Image of His SON." Does there then exist any likeness between me and my Blessed LORD, that I may hope in God and trust in His mercies? But if no likeness exists, had I otherwise all the perfections of the holy Angels, God would not own me, neither would He count me among the number of His Elect. This, therefore, is my end, and the object after which I should labour as a Christian, to conform myself to the Image of JESUS CHRIST, to behold in Him the all-perfect model to which I should strive to liken myself, and to repeat constantly in beholding Him the words which GOD spake to Moses, "See, that thou make according to the pattern showed thee."

As a Christian I should have "put on" the LORD JESUS CHRIST, for it is the expression of which the Apostle S. Paul makes use; "For as many of you as have been baptized into CHRIST, have put on CHRIST." How great an honour to have been permitted in casting off the old nature to put on the new in the person of the MAN CHRIST JESUS; but also how great my shame if this renewing is but outward, and if in professing to be a Christian I am one only outwardly. How sad a contradiction if in bearing the sign and mark of union with JESUS CHRIST, I have none of His Holiness; and if in my practice I separate the one from the other. What fearful hypocrisy to be a Christian only in name, and in the sight of God, to retain the heart and mind of a heathen.

As a Christian I should be so united to the LORD JESUS CHRIST as one of His members, for says again the Apostle S. Paul, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of CHRIST?" There should, therefore, exist conformity between the Head and the members; and if this cannot be found between myself and my Blessed LORD, I am cut off from union with Him, which is alone my happiness and my glory; or if, as a Christian, I retain membership with Him, it is but as an unworthy one, a dead member, a dishonour to His mystical Body.

As a Christian I am bound to follow the blessed steps of the LORD JESUS, "that the life of JESUS might be made manifest;" and that it should appear that in my degree, "the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the SON of GOD;" for as a Christian I ought to be able to say, "I live, yet not I, but CHRIST liveth in me," and consequently it is He Who thinks, Who speaks, and Who acts in me. Does my conscience in God's presence bear me witness of the truth of this in myself? It is nevertheless to this state of perfection that God has called me in CHRIST JESUS.

8

Third Point.

To have attained to a state of holy indifference to all things which do not belong to God, is not enough to make up the entire character of a Christian. To attain to this it is also necessary that I should strive to avail myself wholly and with resolution of every means which the LORD JESUS CHRIST has sanctioned as the best and the purest for such an end. Therefore the choice which He has made is the most indispensable, and the alone sufficient one for acquiring at all that degree of perfection

to which the profession of a Christian pledges me, and in which is contained my true end. Following this great principle, I must, without wavering, prefer poverty, poverty of spirit respecting this world's possessions ; that is to say, I must feel myself happy either to be free from the possessions of this world, or to have them ; happier to despise than to enjoy them, because separation from, and contempt for, what this earth can offer me, is the first step which JESUS CHRIST proposes to me, whereby to glorify His FATHER.

Secondly, following this principle, I ought to prefer a hard and self-denying life to a soft, and easy, and self-pleasing one ; for so judged our Blessed LORD Himself in that He practised it, " Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross." For He came, as a SAVIOUR, to establish a Religion for sinners for whom penitence was necessary as an acceptable offering to the offended justice of Almighty GOD. He came to reform the world, to correct all its evils ; and He knew that a self-indulgent life is the poisoned source from which spring all its corruptions, and that a severe and penitent life was for all the one sovereign remedy.

Thirdly, following out this principle, I must be convinced of the truth of those maxims so frequently met with in the Holy Gospel, and so familiar to the Apostles, that it is not enough to carry my cross, but that I must take it up myself and bear it ; that it is not enough for me to submit to its weight, but that I must love it and glory in it ; that without doing this, I cannot honour GOD, as our LORD JESUS CHRIST has taught me that He must be honoured. As S. Paul teaches, " They that are CHRIST's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts ;" unless I, therefore, endeavour to do this, I can neither belong to GOD, nor to our LORD JESUS CHRIST ;

and consequently to "have put on CHRIST," I must also have "put on" His Spirit of mortification.

Fourthly, continuing to work out this principle, instead of shrinking from whatever humbles me, I must accept it far more eagerly than any worldly greatness or dignity; for it is the great means which the LORD JESUS CHRIST has used to restore to GOD the Glory of which men by sin had deprived Him. For as it was by pride that Adam fell, and placed the human race in opposition to its Maker; so is it only through humility that he can be permitted to repair his offences committed towards GOD. Blessed means! one and only way whereby to find favour with GOD.

Affections.

These truths, LORD, the world knows nothing of, neither do the wise and learned understand them; but everlasting praises be offered to Thee for having vouchsafed to teach me these great and all-important verities; thereby Thou hast taught me true wisdom, and dispelled the erroneous views entertained by the world respecting its mistaken blessings. Thou hast also banished the illusions with which my mind was unhappily possessed regarding them. By this means Thou hast permitted me to taste true peace, and hast made me feel the truth of Thy promise, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Thou hast also, O LORD, specially taught me to honour my Heavenly FATHER, to offer to Him the best and the most acceptable service, and that most conducive to the sanctification of myself.

May I ever bless and thank Thee, O Holy and Adorable Master, for having thus made known to me what it is

to be a Christian ; for having taught me the end for which I was created ; for having made plain to me the means whereby to attain this end ; and for having made all this not only clear, but visible in Thy sacred Humanity. For great was my need, both of Thy authority and of Thine example. It required as perfect a model as Thyself to animate and encourage me in a course so opposed to my own inclinations, and in the use of means so contrary to every feeling of my nature.

Have I been up to this time fully convinced of the importance of all this, the absolute need to aim at this end, and to adopt these means ? Although I am a Christian, have I lived renouncing self, which is the epitome of the Law of JESUS CHRIST ? In examining myself on these three points, without which our Blessed LORD says there can be no salvation, what shall I find ? Am I poor in spirit ? Am I humble of heart ? Am I mortified and self-denying in heart and mind ? If not, what am I in the sight of GOD ? What is my life, but a vain shadow of Christianity, which GOD will disown ? I cannot plead ignorance as my excuse. I cannot ask of GOD to reveal to me the certain knowledge of JESUS CHRIST. He has been fully manifested. To do this is the object of His Gospel. O my GOD, what answer shall I give Thee when Thou wilt accuse me out of Thy Word ? What answer can I give Thee this day, when Thy Word and my life have so little likeness to one another ! Thy Word will never change ; it rests, therefore, with me to change my heart and to reform my life.

THIRD MEDITATION.

ON THE PERFECTION OF OUR DAILY LIFE.

“ Whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.”—1 Cor. x. 31.

First Point.

ACCORDING to the mind of GOD our perfection does not depend upon doing much. This was Martha’s error, which the LORD JESUS CHRIST rebuked. Neither does it consist in doing anything exceptional ; for there are great Saints in the sight of GOD who have done no great deeds for their LORD, whose life was lowly and hidden, whose acts had nothing in them either striking or brilliant, of whom the world never made mention. They were great in their holiness ; but that holiness was made up of little things, and GOD rewarded their faithfulness in small things by causing them to find therein abundant treasures of His Grace.

Their greatness was contained in their great humility. In fact our perfection requires of us neither singular nor great deeds. For an exceptional and special act is one of rare occurrence, and one for which the occasion seldom presents itself ; whereas our perfection should lie in all that is most habitual to us, in what we continually do, in all we take in hand, in what occupies the days and the years of our life.

It follows therefore from this, that the manner of performing our most ordinary duties is that upon which depends our attaining the degree of perfection to which

it has pleased GOD to call us, our state of life and calling ; the living in it up to the high standard to which we are called ; for it is very certain that this makes up our holiness. It is the Will of GOD, and that Will it is which is the prize of all we do ; for without this Will of GOD our greatest acts are nothing worth, whereas if agreeable to it they become acceptable in His sight.

I must, therefore, be convinced that the right performance of my daily duties will alone make me holy in God's sight. What did our Blessed LORD, during the thirty-three years of His sojourn here on earth ? Nothing great, in the opinion of the world ; nothing that was highly esteemed by men. But because He did the Will of His FATHER, and in all things, as He Himself said, "I do always those things that please Him," those actions, little thought of by men, were well-pleasing in the sight of GOD.

What a subject of comfort to us : we have no need to seek afar off for what will help us to become holy—the means are ever about, ever around us. I shall find mine in the fulfilling of my every-day duties. A perfection beyond this, and which would not enable me to perform them, would be for me full of peril and danger. GOD would not accept it ; the world even would condemn it. It would fill me with pride and vanity, and expose me to many sins ; instead of which holiness in common life is approved both by GOD and man. It edifies, it brings virtue into good repute, it maintains order, it is not liable to pride, nor subject to vanity. It is imagined to be easy and it is so in thought ; but to persevere and be constant in this practice there will be found many difficulties to be overcome, and much self-denial required, but also many blessings to be reaped.

Second Point.

Our degree of perfection must not stop here; but to those common actions which make up its foundation, must be added certain circumstances, and certain necessary conditions, inasmuch as it is not enough to fulfil the duties of our state of life, calling, or vocation, but we are required to do them so perfectly that to us, in our degree, may be applied the words said of the Son of God, "He hath done all things well."

To perform all our duties perfectly, is to do them with punctuality, fervour, and perseverance. Firstly, with punctuality, not wilfully to omit one, or to take from one aught that belongs to it. This punctuality regards the hour, the place, the manner. For, not to perform a duty at the proper time, in the place suited to it, and in the way enjoined, are so many indulged imperfections, which diminish the acceptableness of the prescribed duty, for they are contrary to the Will of God, Who orders all things, and has regard even to the least, and does not forget the smallest. Secondly, with fervour, that is to say with zeal, warmth, and pleasure. Still, although fervour is usually accompanied both by zeal, warmth, and pleasure, yet it is not always inseparable from these feelings. It is possible to have a very fervent spirit, and yet to have a repugnance to what one does; to feel disinclination; and only to find coldness and dryness. But it is then that fervour is the most real and valuable when it forces us to act resolutely and deliberately, notwithstanding these feelings of repugnance and distaste, this coldness and dryness. Thirdly, with perseverance. Above all else, this spirit of perseverance is what costs us a great effort, and it was this which made S. Bernard say, speaking of the Religious

Life, that looking singly at each particular duty was nothing so very difficult ; but to gather them all together, and to consider their duration was a thing well-nigh insupportable to human nature. Therefore we see many persons, who are faithful in the performance of their religious practices and their duties at certain times, and on special days when they feel drawn to God. But to find those who ever go on calmly and evenly, who have not their seasons of variableness and want of regularity, who do their duties with equal attention and care one day as the other, neither relaxing nor foregoing any to the last day of their life, is the result of a very special and uncommon Grace.

Here, then, are three ends which I should take as guides in the path of perfection, and for the sanctification of my actions, punctuality, fervour, perseverance. But at the same time are they three great virtues, for the neglect of which I have to humble myself, and to deplore my past unfaithfulness. It is needful for my sanctification that I should be obedient to my rules. But of how many omissions am I not guilty ? What want of courage, faithfulness, and consistency ? Should it not be a matter of surprise to me, that with so many means wherewith to press forward I have made so little progress ? Or rather ought I not to fear and tremble, that with such abundant means for my perfection I have advanced so little ?

Third Point.

There remains still one, and that a higher step in attaining to our full measure of perfection, viz. the motive which we should give to all our acts, which are their spirit and their life. It is this, to throw an interior

spirit and a religious principle into all. Other things are the body of holiness ; but this it is which gives them life, animates and sanctifies them—the motive which leads us, and the intention which we put before ourselves. To do things from fancy, caprice, inclination, custom, for applause, vain-glory and interest, is not to do them for God and in His Presence ; and when once God has no part in them, what value can He have for them, or how can He accept them ? For by the grace of God all the worth of the King's daughter consisted in this, that she is “ all glorious within.” Therefore if I performed great deeds which had not God for their end, if I did not do them to please Him, as they therefore would not do Him honour, He would not vouchsafe to look favourably upon them, and they would be profitless to myself.

A solemn truth, if I consider it well ! For, if I look back on all my actions, and examine them by this standard, shall I find aught on which to rest my hope ? It is true I act outwardly as do others. I go to prayer, to my work, and to my various occupations. I take part in all, and satisfy all appearances : but also without thought of the Presence of God ; without turning to Him for help and guidance ; often in a spirit of forgetfulness, which deprives me of all good thoughts and motives ; often from habit, or from entirely human inclination and a blind regard to custom ; perhaps even in many instances from a wish to be well thought of. What is all this in the sight of God ? This is, nevertheless, what makes up my life ; that is to say, I behave myself as if I were not responsible for my actions, and they no more helped forward my perfection than if I did nothing.

I am, therefore, all the more unhappy and deserving of blame, as there is not the very smallest action which I might not offer to God, and which done for His Glory

would not be accepted by Him. For what God looks for in our actions is not the matter, but the spirit in which they are performed ; and in this shines forth His Wisdom and His tender Mercy. He has not placed each one in the position to fulfil the same employment ; but He has willed, that in all we do there should be nothing so low or so humble, which could not be raised by the purity of our motives, and which in some way could not help to draw us upward. Deeply should I deplore to see myself so devoid of spiritual gifts, when it would have been easy for me to enrich myself with them, and to grow in virtue and holiness. Every step of my life might have been a help to me ; but can I hope that there has been one which God has found worthy of His acceptance, and which has furthered my soul's progress ? What loss have I not to mourn over. But it should incite me to redouble my endeavours, to renew my zeal, and to strive to repair the past.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

OF MORTAL SIN.

"Know, therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God."—Jer. ii. 19.

First Consideration.

It is absolutely necessary that I should perfectly understand the nature of mortal sin. Now, it is not merely the greatest of all evils, but, in point of fact, it is the one sole evil; it is the supreme evil; and, to fill up the measure of iniquity, it is the supreme evil in the sight of God. It is the sole evil, because all other evils, except sin, are not wholly evil. Sickness, poverty, misfortunes, all these things happen in God's good providence, and if I turn them to account in the way which He intends, they are rather to be looked upon as blessings. Sin alone is an evil which God neither has nor could have created, because it is absolutely and entirely evil. It is the supreme evil, as God Himself is the Supreme Good; and for this reason it ought to be hated with a perfect hatred, as God should be loved with a perfect love. Such is the depth of the abhorrence which I ought to feel for mortal sin; an abhorrence of it equal to my love of God. If there were anything in the world for which I could feel a love equal to my love of God, from that moment I should cease to love Him as God: and if I feared any other evil as much as or more than mortal sin, thenceforth I should neither hate it, nor avoid it as much as I am bound to do. But the point which it is

above all necessary for me to understand is, that mortal sin is the supreme evil in the sight of God, because it shows a positive contempt of God, an actual and declared preference of the creature to the Creator; a preference which is shown in this wise, that the sinner, finding he must choose between the renunciation of his own pleasure and the loss of God's grace, would rather lose the Divine Grace, than deny himself the sinful pleasures to which his inclination leads him. In theory, he is well aware that God is infinitely above all created beings: but this knowledge in itself does but increase his guilt; because, knowing this, he offers a still greater insult to God, by practically preferring His unworthy creatures to Him.

Hence I must steadfastly contemplate four truths, as sure and certain according to faith, as they are fearful.

First, God, for the one sin of pride, cast down the noblest of His creatures, the Angels, from the highest Heaven to the lowest abyss of Hell. They have become evil spirits. Without having space granted them for repentance, they are given over for ever to the full measure of His justice. What an example! And from this example what conclusions should I draw?

Second, for a single act of disobedience, God drove the first man out of Eden. He deprived him of all the privileges of the state of innocence. He condemned him and all his seed to death. In punishment of this one sin we are all born the children of wrath; and by that sin alone, we are, as children of wrath, subject to all the calamities of this mortal life, and even shut out from the Kingdom of God. What a fearful avenging chastisement! Yet all the judgments of God are righteous, and all are perfectly just.

Third, to expiate this disobedience, it was necessary for the Eternal Son of God to take our flesh upon Him-

self, to humble Himself, and make Himself of no account; because nothing less than the humiliation of a God could re-establish His glory, nothing less could atone for the offence given Him by sin.

Fourth, God has prepared an eternity of suffering to chastise a sin which may be committed in a single moment; and yet these never-ending torments are in just proportion to the sin. Faith teaches me this. If, even in the Christian dispensation, there have been incredulous minds which have refused to acknowledge these truths, it is because they have not sufficiently realized the iniquity of mortal sin, nor have they fully recognized the fact that, in the sight of God, this sin is the supreme evil. Have I myself realized this fact as vividly as I should have done? And, had I done so, should I have been, till now, so quick to feel other evils, while yet, perhaps, so indifferent with respect to this one?

Second Consideration.

It is no less essential for me to understand, and carefully to consider that mortal sin is the supreme evil for man, because it deprives him of the friendship of God; because it places a gulf between God and man; because it breaks all the links which bind man to his Maker; because in separating man from God, it slays the most precious life—the life of grace, and causes the most fatal death—the death of the soul. It is for this reason, that it is called mortal. The Grace which the righteous man possesses is, in him, the well-spring of Eternal Life; and from the moment that he loses this grace, he is dead before God and in His sight. Hence I must, without faltering, contemplate two other truths, which are no less incontestable and fearful.

First. Mortal sin deprives the soul of all the virtues which it may have acquired whilst in a state of grace. Though I should have laid up for myself great treasures in Heaven, though I should be as holy as the Apostles themselves, yet I should be deprived of all, if I committed one mortal sin. These gifts may be restored, when I shall enter once more into the grace of God. Meanwhile, they are lost to me; and, should I die in a state of sin, God will take no account of them. And why is this? It is because I have become His enemy, and from an enemy nothing can be pleasing or acceptable to Him.

Second. Actions, in themselves the most virtuous and holy, if wrought by one in a state of mortal sin, are worthless in the sight of God, and are of no avail for eternity. Though I should spend all my days in prayer, though I should perform all the penances of the most rigid anchorites, though I should practise all the works of piety and Christian charity—these would yet be but dead works, because I myself am in a state of spiritual death; they are barren works from which I can reap no fruits. Though it may at last please God to grant me His infinite mercy, these dead works will not be amongst those to which He has promised the crown. Are these works, then, altogether useless? No. For they may help me to rise from my sinful state; they may prepare me to turn again to God; they may incline Him to grant me His saving grace. But still, as long as the stain of mortal sin is not washed away, my performance of these works avails me nothing, and brings me no nearer to the Heavenly inheritance. What poverty, what wretchedness! Have I not been reduced to this state at certain periods of my life, and even, perhaps, for a considerable time? May I not be in this state at the present moment? I know not; for "Man knoweth not whether

he be worthy of love or hatred," (Eccles. ix. 1.) This uncertainty is fearful! It is an abyss in which the mind is lost, and which, seen by the eye of faith, it is impossible to contemplate without a shudder. May I be led to take proper means for reassuring myself, as far as is possible, on this head, and for establishing myself, by a life of repentance and good works, in a firm and holy confidence.

Affections.

Accomplish in me, O my God, by Thy Grace, that which Thou hast begun by Thy mercy. Thou hast called me to Thee, to preserve from sin; let it not follow me even to Thy sanctuary, nor suffer me, sheltered by Thy arms, to yield to its assaults. How heavy a curse would fall upon me if "in the land of uprightness I should deal unjustly," (Isaiah xxvi. 10,) and if, amongst so many righteous souls, I should become a castaway. O LORD, Thou seest the very bottom of my heart, and as I cannot see it. Is there not some hidden venom there, which infects and corrupts it? Is there not some sin, which separates me from Thee? Vouchsafe, O my God, to show it unto me. There is nothing which I would not readily undergo in order to crush it. Even if up to the present moment I have been able to defend myself against the deadly assaults of this enemy, I still have to dread my own weakness; but, O LORD, with Thy help, my vigilance shall guard against this, and shall make me incessantly have recourse to Thee; it shall make me watch diligently over myself, and cause me to be circumspect in my behaviour, and quick to see the slightest danger, that so I may the more carefully guard myself against the risk of transgressing Thy Divine commands.

FIFTH MEDITATION.

OF VENIAL SIN.

"Grieve not the HOLY SPIRIT."—Ephes. iv. 30.

First Consideration.

LITTLE heed is generally paid to venial sin ; but if I had a just conception of its nature, my judgment of it would be very different, and my anxiety to avoid it would be far greater than it is. However venial I may consider it, it is an offence against GOD. That is sufficient, or ought to be sufficient for me. When I fall into it I displease GOD : not that it absolutely separates me from His communion ; but that in committing it, I know that I place myself at a distance from Him. I do not drive away the HOLY SPIRIT, but I grieve Him. Now, since it offends GOD, I ought to dread it more than any temporal evils, which only affect myself. For whatever in the smallest degree offends GOD, is a far more serious evil than that which only concerns created beings. However venial I may imagine it to be, under no conceivable circumstances can it possibly be permitted to me. For if it were permitted, it would at once cease to be sin. GOD would not suffer me to tell a lie, however trivial, though it were with the view of converting and saving the whole world ; even upon such a plea as this, it would offend Him. Though it were with the object of offering up to GOD, all the glory which is His due, He would have none of it upon such conditions. He would have

me renounce even my zeal for His glory, rather than that I should commit the least sin. However venial I may think it, faith teaches that it can never enter with me, nor I with it, into the Heavenly Kingdom, for "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth," (Rev. xxi. 27.) In vain should I be plentifully endowed with gifts, with all these gifts, and with all the holiness to which I might have attained; still, if my soul passed out of this life bearing the stain of a venial sin which had not been washed away by repentance, this in itself would be an obstacle to my happiness, and to the possession of God. And until this sin is forgiven, my soul, though it should be righteous, holy, chosen, and otherwise worthy of God's presence, must remain separated from Him. It must pass through the refining Fire, and be purified there, before it can be admitted to the Bosom of our LORD. And even in this world, how heavily has God visited venial sin. David's vaingloriousness brought destruction on the greater part of his people: and a Levite was struck dead at the foot of the Ark, for having touched it. It is strange, then, that I should so carelessly commit sins which expose me to so severe a chastisement. But what makes me a thousandfold more blameable and unworthy is this, that, owing as I do, everything to God, and having received all things from Him, I should so readily give way to a sin which grieves Him, and which is, in point of fact, an insult to His Divine Majesty.

Second Consideration.

Would that these venial sins which I commit were neither so often repeated, nor so many in number. But the multitude of them is infinite; and it was this which grieved David, and caused his deep dejection when he

thus addressed himself to God: "Innumerable troubles are come about me; my sins have taken such hold upon me that I am not able to look up: yea, they are more in number than the hairs of my head, and my heart hath failed me," (Ps. xl. 15.) Thus did the holy King express himself. Now if, in the midst of a life imperfect and self-indulgent as mine is, I were to attempt to number the sins which I almost unwittingly commit, and if God were to enlighten me on this point, how far would the list extend? I cannot discover them, but is it not enough for me, that they are known to God? I know them to be beyond number, and ought not that to be sufficient to fill me with inconsolable grief? How many sins of ignorance, caused by forgetfulness of my duties, by neglecting to be instructed in them, by want of meekness in receiving counsel from others, by presumption in relying on myself alone! How many sins of imprudence and carelessness, caused by my wandering thoughts, by levity of disposition, by the licence given to my tongue, by my rash judgments, by my uncharitable suspicions? How many sins of frailty and weakness, caused by my habit of denying myself in nothing, by my want of self-control, by following the bent of my own wishes, and by never fighting against my inclinations and passions? How many sins have I even committed intentionally, planning and carrying them out, in spite of the warnings of conscience, on the merest shadow of an opportunity or pretext, under the cloak of their being but venial offences, to which God has not annexed eternal punishment? Thus do I not only show my indifference towards God, but my insensibility to all, save my own personal interest. Yet, is not this the usual tenour of my life? It is true, that it is morally impossible for a man to keep himself perfectly pure from venial sins, and never to fall

into them. This was the sad necessity which made the Saints cry out and desire to depart ; which made S. Paul exclaim, " O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? " (Rom. vii. 24.) Still, there is not one of these sins which, taken in detail, I might not avoid, and from which it is not entirely in my power to preserve myself. If, then, I would keep a more careful watch over myself, could I not to a great extent diminish their number ? Alas, far from this, I do but add to them each day that I live.

Third Consideration.

What are the consequences of venial sin ? Doubtless they are far more serious than I have ever supposed them to be. Venial sin leads on to mortal sin, as sickness leads on to death. Consequently, if I have any care for my soul, I ought to feel the same anxiety with respect to venial sin, that I feel concerning any disease which threatens me, or by which I am suddenly attacked. What precautions do I not take to arrest its first inroads ? What am I not prepared to undergo to cure it, or to prevent its return ? It may cause death : and no more is needed to induce me to employ the promptest, the most efficacious, and even the severest remedies. Why do I not argue thus concerning sin, which is the most dangerous of spiritual diseases, and which leads to that second death, a thousand times more to be dreaded than the death of the body ? In truth, whoever is careless about venial sin, and, still more, whoever disdains all precautions against it, will infallibly fall into mortal sin. This is the teaching of the HOLY SPIRIT, the truth of which experience only too clearly proves. It is through heedlessness concerning venial sin, that we unconsciously lose

our horror of mortal sin. At first the very name makes us shudder; gradually we accustom ourselves to it, and become familiar with it. And this is not surprising, for mortal and venial sin are often near neighbours, and the boundary line which divides them can scarcely be traced: it is usually only a question of a little more, or a little less: and between this more and this less there is but a hair's breadth, separating life from death. Great therefore is the risk we run, standing, as it were, on the edge of a precipice. From this close connection between venial and mortal sin, it naturally follows that the one is at times mistaken for the other. How often have I thus deceived myself, thinking that to be unimportant which was, in reality, far otherwise! How often, self-blinded, and deciding in accordance with my own wishes, have I classed as a venial error that which, in the sight of God, was perhaps a serious and mortal transgression. It is difficult to distinguish: and, for this reason, my conscience, even as regards venial sin, ought to be more ready to take the alarm. I am not enlightened enough to judge with precision: therefore I should always be on my guard, and employ every precaution. But even if I had full confidence in my own discernment, can I ignore my weakness? And, since venial and mortal sin are so closely mingled together, can I be so presumptuous as to suppose that I should stop short exactly at the point where sin ceases to be venial, and should be sufficiently master of my own heart to say to it, "thus far shalt thou go and no farther;" especially in such and such sins to which my natural inclinations are so strong? To support me under these circumstances, the special grace of God would be necessary. But have I not often been warned, that one of the most usual punishments which God inflicts upon venial sin, is to withdraw some par-

ticular graces which He was about to grant us, and which would have carried us prosperously into the haven of salvation ; whereas, deprived of these graces, we stray into errors which place us amongst the reprobate ? In this way venial sin may become, and actually is to many souls, the cause of their condemnation.

Affections.

The cure for this, O my GOD, is not only to love Thy law, but to carry it out in its highest perfection. The more I strive to raise my moral standard, the less I shall be in danger of falling away from it. The more I endeavour to fulfil my duties holily, the less I shall be inclined to neglect them in essential points. In spite of the resolves which I make in Thy presence, and by Thy grace, I do not, O LORD, presume to think that I can keep myself perfectly spotless in Thy sight. As long as I am in this world, I shall always be liable to transgress : and as long as I am clothed with mortal flesh, I must be subjected to all the conditions of frail humanity. But, at all events, by aspiring to render more than my bounden tribute, I lessen the danger of being found wanting in essentials ; and in striving to sanctify myself, I am removed from the perilous opportunities of falling away. O my God, grant me, I beseech Thee, that tenderness and sensitiveness of conscience which shrinks from the approach of sin. Bestow upon me, or help me to attain, that rigorous uprightness of judgment, which accords neither indulgence nor forgiveness to its possessor. It is this unbending severity towards myself, which will be my safeguard. I shall find it hard : I must lay aside many things to which my inclinations lead me, and refuse myself many pleasures which appear harmless. I must pass

through many ordeals, bow down my intellect, crush my affections, bridle my tongue, keep a guard over my eyes, mortify my passions: but, O LORD, is there any price too great to pay for the double boon of offending Thee less, and of more perfectly ruling my spirit? The blessedness of doing Thy will, and the peace of my conscience, will fully indemnify me, O my God, and will add all other things to me.

SIXTH MEDITATION.

OF MENTAL PRAYER.

THE chief reflections on the subject of mental prayer, or the habit of meditation, may be classed under three heads, viz.: first, its incalculable advantages and importance; secondly, the failings which most usually diminish its good effects; and thirdly, the frivolous pretexts which we allow to give us a distaste for this holy practice, and which induce us to neglect it.

First Consideration.

OF THE ADVANTAGE AND IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL PRAYER.

The just man liveth by faith, and we can only sanctify ourselves in so far as we are impressed and filled with the precepts of the Gospel, and the great truths of Christianity. This principle is so universally recognized, that even worldly men acknowledge that, if they had more faith, or were more thoroughly penetrated by the lessons which faith teaches, their rule of life would be far different, and they would no longer give way to so many evil passions. Let us carefully examine this fact without disguise; and we shall see, that this absence of sincere and lively faith is the cause not only of the follies of worldlings, but of much falling away in the lives of devout persons. It is not that they do not believe, but they do not possess that real, ardent, faith which makes the unseen visible. By prayer we acquire the power of

realizing the truths of religion: of meditating on the perfection and greatness of GOD, His mercies and His judgments, His rewards and punishments: of carefully following out reflections upon all the mysteries of the doctrine, law, morality, and example of our LORD; and of deriving thence useful lessons and rules for our guidance. Thus do these thoughts become deeply impressed upon our souls; we bear them about with us, and they are ever present to the memory. Hence we learn our duties towards GOD, our neighbours, and ourselves. Our thoughts rise to a higher level than before, and we more readily detect our errors, illusions, and hasty judgments. In prayer, that which we but sketch out upon one day, we are enabled upon another to perfect and bring to completion. The grace which upholds all, sheds its light most abundantly where prayer is most frequent and constant: insomuch that truths which have hitherto appeared so shadowy that the mind could scarcely grasp them, are suddenly bodied forth with such clearness, that our conviction of their reality is as strong as if we had received them by a species of revelation. Nor is this all: for the heart and the mind are so closely linked together, that truth, or rather the conviction of truth, is conveyed by the one to the other. Our hearts burn within us, and, as the Kingly Prophet said of himself, "While I was thus musing, the fire kindled." (Psalm xxxix..4.) We raise our thoughts to GOD, our duties become dear to us, we lament our faithlessness, we make good resolutions for the future, and we rise from prayer, renewed, and, as it were, changed. In this way have the Saints reached so high a degree of perfection; and this is the path which they have pointed out to all the followers whom they instructed, and who aspired to holiness of life. For this reason all the

founders of Religious Orders have specially advocated, and expressly established the practice of mental prayer. Their aims were different, and they were diversely inspired to draw up those rules and observances, so admirable in their variety, which are amongst the most precious jewels of the Church ; but on the subject of prayer and its indispensability, they were all of one accord, and as if moved by the same SPIRIT. And, indeed, it may be said, that a soul devoted to prayer can never be led astray ; or if it should for a time be permitted to wander, prayer will prove a never-failing refuge. But how does it happen that many, even devout persons, are so far perverted as to fall into sad and shameful errors ? It is because they have lost the habit of prayer. They alienate themselves thus from GOD, and lose even the feeling of piety. They thus bring themselves to a state of dryness, coldness, and death-like indifference : thus do they cast away those inward consolations which are the surest comfort of all, and thus become discouraged with their spiritual state. Thus are they given over to their passions, and a prey to the assaults of the Evil one ; and we know by too sad proofs, whither all this tends, and to what unhappy end.

Second Consideration.

OF THE DEFECTS WHICH USUALLY RENDER PRAYER UNPROFITABLE.

First, it is entered upon without preparation, contrary to the words of Holy Scripture, " Before prayer prepare thy soul ; and be not as a man that tempteth GOD," (Ecclus. xviii. 23.) To imagine that GOD will admit us to hold Communion with Him in Meditation, whilst we take no pains to prepare ourselves for it, is to require of Him to change in our behalf the order of His Provi-

dence, and to work a miracle in our favour. Now there are two methods of preparation, the one remote, the other nearer. The more remote preparation consists in an habitual withdrawing of our thoughts from worldly matters; and the cultivation of a spirit of devout retirement, as far as is compatible with the state of life in which we are placed. The nearer preparation is that which is undertaken some time before entering upon prayer, or at the moment of beginning it: for example; to consider beforehand the subject of our meditation; to arrange and divide it under different heads, then to place ourselves in the Presence of GOD, to invoke His HOLY SPIRIT, to collect ourselves, and drive away all wandering thoughts which might be liable to distract us. For this purpose, some repeat a few short prayers, and each person may follow whatever his particular devotion suggests; but in general, it may be said, that our prayers have no solid foundation if previously we are not careful to bring ourselves into a proper frame of mind.

Secondly, we pray without any fixed aim, or desire of deriving profit from our prayers. If we have observed the prescribed hours, if we have joined the assembly of the congregation, though possibly our presence there has been far more with the body than with the spirit; if we have carelessly made a few hasty reflections, and formed a few resolutions leading to nothing, we are perfectly satisfied; but Wisdom, that Heavenly Wisdom which sanctifies us, only protecteth them that seek after her, (Ecclus. iv. 12.)

Thirdly, we begin to pray without any definite object, and say that we follow whither the SPIRIT of GOD leads us. But this HOLY SPIRIT, Whose Divine operations follow a just rule and measure, does not work by chance. There may be some souls whom He fills at once with His

Grace ; but these are favours upon which we have no right to reckon. And these very souls may only have been thus gifted, after undergoing long discipline in the ordinary tasks of life. What, then, is the result ? Our thoughts, having nothing to steady them, are perpetually led astray, and the mind, attempting to grasp too much, is left as vacant as it was before.

In the fourth place, after choosing a subject for meditation, we are apt to fall into another snare ; that is to say, from the first we aim at too high a flight, fixing our thoughts on the sublimest and most exalted subjects. In this there is often much pride and presumption, or, at least, much self-deception. The mind is fed with beautiful theories, which produce no practical effect. Did it please God that, like S. Paul, we should be caught up to the third Heaven, we must follow the guidance of His Grace ; but when left to ourselves, we must advance step by step, and follow the beaten path, which is the safe one. The best prayer is, that which leaves him who utters it most dutiful, most humble, most loving, most patient, most self-denying.

Fifthly, though the subject chosen for meditation may be in all respects suitable and important, yet does reasoning often engage us to the exclusion of loving and feeling. It is especially necessary that the intellect should be convinced ; but it is of still greater importance that the heart should be touched and stirred. For in the heart resolves are sown, and thence bear fruit in deeds.

Sixthly, with respect to these self-same resolves, there is a fault to be avoided, which is all the more dangerous from its subtle speciousness : it is confining ourselves to vague and misty speculations, instead of examining minutely into the details of our lives, particularly on certain points which more especially concern us, and

which require our immediate attention. This examination is extremely useful; if we undertook it, we should not so soon find a dearth of subjects for prayer, and there would always be a vast field opened before us.

Seventhly and lastly, the chief fault which we are required to correct in the practice of mental prayer, and the principal obstacle to its salutary effects, is the deep-rooted indolence and indifference to which we are given up, and which we take no pains to overcome. Prayer requires an effort, and all effort is painful; this, therefore, is precisely what we object to. We should like without exertion, or struggles, or toil, to be able to collect and rouse ourselves, and to shake off the languid drowsiness that weighs us down. Jacob only obtained the ANGEL's Blessing after having wrestled with Him through the night; and in vain shall we hope for God's blessing on our prayers, whilst we remain voluntarily sunk in apathy and sloth.

Third Consideration.

OF THE FALSE PRETEXTS BY WHICH WE ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE DRAWN AWAY FROM THE HABIT OF PRAYER.

Some, by way of excusing themselves, allege that they are too much engrossed by business, and that they cannot spare sufficient time for prayer. Others, that their minds are not collected enough, and that they cannot control the wanderings of their imaginations. Others complain of a constant hard indifference, and an instantaneous drying up of the stream of thought. Many say that they grow quickly weary, and that this weariness gives them a distaste for prayer. Others, again, that prayer is too difficult, and that they do not think themselves capable of it. Thus do the greater number of

'worldlings talk ; and we may even hear the same sentiments uttered by devout persons. But if we did not juggle with our consciences and strive after self-deception, we should see how slender are those pretexts by which we seek to excuse ourselves from prayer. In the first place, the pressure of business, far from being a legitimate cause of exemption from this duty, makes it more absolutely necessary that we should, from time to time, withdraw into ourselves, and take refuge in prayer as the surest remedy against too complete an absorption in worldly matters. The more the Saints were weighed down with cares, and even with cares of a purely spiritual nature, the more they thought it their duty to devote themselves to prayer. They were able to find time for it : what is there to prevent us from doing so likewise ? Besides, there is no mind, however restless and excitable, which is not capable of following out a train of thought. We do so constantly on idle or hurtful topics, why should we not on such as are serious and improving ? It is true that some experience greater difficulty in this than others ; then all that is necessary is to be ready to fight against this difficulty, and to exercise a little self-control. Moreover, prayer will always be of service to us, in spite of these wandering thoughts, so long as we do not willingly give way to them, and if we try to overcome them. We shall then possess the merit in God's sight, of having struggled against them, and we shall always retain some reflected light of the holy truths which we have endeavoured to meditate upon. In the same way, with regard to dryness and hardness in prayer, let us not be found wanting in anything which depends upon ourselves, and let us put a firm trust in God. It is thus that He often tries our faith and endurance. If we are discouraged, we lose all ; but if we persevere in

prayer, He in His own time will hear and console us. Whatever may befall us, let us humble ourselves in the Presence of our LORD, and let us imitate that holy hermit of old, whose sole prayer was the incessant repetition of these words: "Thou Who hast redeemed me, have mercy upon me." Time thus spent will not be lost.

Let us add, that a work of mortification very acceptable to GOD, is to receive in the spirit of penitence the weariness and indifference which sometimes overcome us in prayer. Our Blessed SAVIOUR, on the eve of His Passion, prayed in utter desolation of heart: let us unite ourselves to Him; and although the result of our prayer should be but to form in us the habit of patience, and of all the other virtues which are included therein; this alone would be no small gain to us, and we ought to consider it as a most important benefit. Finally, we must not picture to ourselves an ideal of prayer so lofty as to be impossible of attainment. It is within the reach of all, and human knowledge is here of little avail. For it is not necessary to embrace a wide expanse, with but a limited range of thought, and that on no far-fetched theme, the simplest mind may raise itself to GOD, with the most fervent love. All the excellence and worth of prayer is concentrated in this inward union of the soul with GOD. All that is required of us is, to bring a willing heart to the foot of the Throne, and all will then be made easy and profitable to us.

SEVENTH MEDITATION.

OF LUKEWARMNESS IN SERVING GOD.

“ Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth.”—Rev. iii. 16.

First Point.

S. BERNARD draws a picture in few words of a state of lukewarmness: “ There are few religious communities,” he says, “ without some lukewarm souls, who carry the yoke of religion, but bear it reluctantly: who try as much as possible to shake it off or lessen its weight: who are ever in need of being urged to press forward, and who require corrections to spur them on: who give themselves up to vain satisfaction, who permit themselves to be cast down, whose contrition is short-lived, whose conversation is of worldly matters, whose thoughts are low and carnal:” that is to say, who think only of themselves and their own ease, of what can satisfy and give them pleasure; who obey grudgingly, who pray without attention, who speak unguardedly, who read without drawing forth aught wherewith they would be edified. Even in the days of S. Bernard there were such persons to be found; but how were they regarded? As merely religious in name, and not in heart, and this was the likeness S. Bernard drew of them. Have I no resemblance to it? It at least concerns me to consider well the features traced, and to examine if I do not recognise my own in them. The great danger of this state of spiritual lukewarmness con-

sists in the lukewarm themselves not being troubled about their condition, and not feeling that they are grievous sinners ; first, because instead of thinking of the evil they do, and of the good they are bound to do, and which they neglect to perform, they think rather of the sins which they do not commit, and of the small amount of good which they may do : secondly, because instead of comparing themselves with those who are more fervent, more devout than they are, they rather compare themselves with those who appear to be less so : thirdly, because in this comparison, which flatters and deceives, they say to themselves, with the vainglory of the Pharisee, that they thank God that they are not as others. From this it follows that, whilst serving their God in such a lukewarm manner, they bear flattering witness to themselves, as though they fulfilled all righteousness. Sad state, for, according to the word of the HOLY SPIRIT, even a worse state—one of sin—would nevertheless be preferable. It were indeed better for certain souls if they were to fall into sin than into this lukewarm and undisciplined life, for they would not long have endured the remorse of a mortal sin. This sin, in humbling and alarming them by its enormity, would speedily have forced conversion upon them ; instead of which, they do not reproach themselves, or suffer any scruple from their state of lukewarmness. Hence all masters in the spiritual life have concluded that it was more difficult to shake off the bondage of lukewarmness than that of sin ; and amongst others, Cassian testifies that he had seen many worldly people become through their conversion, fervent and spiritual ; but that he had never seen the same change in the lukewarm. Should not this experience fill me with fear ? This state is even more to be regretted, in that it makes the yoke of the SAVIOUR heavier to us :

whereas a fervent soul bears it with holy eagerness, for Divine Grace makes all light and easy: the lukewarm soul, on the contrary, feels the full weight, and finds only labour. Plain chastisement of God, Who in this world makes lukewarmness its own punishment: but He does not stop there, for He tells us in the Revelation how hateful lukewarmness is to Him, under a figure expressive of the utmost abhorrence. He does not yet finally cast off a lukewarm soul; but He begins to do so, by withdrawing Himself from her. This lukewarmness is the beginning of a state of reprobation; what stronger incentive can I have for endeavouring to overcome it? Should I wait to be finally condemned by God?

Second Point.

After having considered the misery and wretchedness of a state of lukewarmness, I must, if I wish to know its origin, look into myself; for this evil could not have become rooted in me unless I had at the first given it free entrance. For this I alone am answerable, and to ascribe it to the Divine Will would be false and unjust in the extreme. It is true, that God sometimes permits a soul to fall into a state of spiritual dryness: but in His wisdom He makes this dryness a means of purifying the soul, and of perfecting it in love by accustoming it to the deprivation of sensible graces and consolations. Dryness, therefore must never be confounded with lukewarmness. The holy and fervent soul laments her dryness: but the slothful and lukewarm soul does not mourn her own laxity. The first is in an abnormal state, for which she is not responsible: the other has fallen into a condition which has become habitual, and this by her own act. To explain: one cause of lukewarmness is the

readiness with which we omit our usual practices of devotion—prayer, spiritual reading, examination of conscience, Holy Communion, works of mortification and self-denial, all these on the most frivolous pretexts, are laid aside or put off till a more convenient season, which, in all probability, never arrives. How often has it been thus with me? How often have I neglected the service of GOD for worldly matters? And how often for trifling reasons, or for none at all, have I given up devotional habits? How then can I be otherwise than lukewarm? When worldlings complain that they have but little faith, we reply: "How should you have any? You do not take the requisite means for acquiring and preserving a faithful spirit." In the same way I may say: "How can I but lose all devotional fervour, since I submit to none of the restraints which would sustain it?" We do not all at once omit our religious exercises and duties; but we fulfil them carelessly, and therefore coldly. The mind has a natural propensity to be distracted by outward objects; and when once it is filled with these, the desire of perfection becomes gradually weaker, thus causing us to fall away. My own example proves this but too clearly. But it is not here that the evil takes its rise: we must seek farther for the source. The chief cause of lukewarmness—though not, perhaps, the most immediate—is a contempt for little things. Here begins our spiritual decline. We forget that nothing is to be called little which concerns the Glory of GOD, and our duty to Him: and that perfection is more frequently attained in small things than in great. For we are plainly told how blessed it is to be faithful over a few things, and that by small means great ends are accomplished. Instead of reflecting thus, we are apt to be weary of our daily duties, to think that these things are well enough for beginners in spiritual

life, and thus by degrees we become entirely indifferent. Ah, if I had always carefully watched and diligently checked the first symptoms of unfaithfulness to duty, what progress towards sanctity I might have made! Whereas, instead of having advanced, it would, alas, be well for me if I were even as I was in the first stages of temptation and trial which I had to pass through.

Third Point.

Lukewarmness, nevertheless, is not incurable: it is difficult, but, by the Divine Grace, not impossible to correct it. Of such reformation there are not many examples; but still there are some; and God perhaps wills that I should be one of them. Two remedies may be employed: the one, is meditating upon my duties; the other, is practically fulfilling them. As regards meditation, let me first reflect upon the greatness of the God Whom I serve, and upon all which He is to me, and upon what I am to Him. To me, He is my King, my Judge, my Creator. What service do I then owe Him? To Him, I am His subject, His servant, His creature. What service does He then claim from me? It was thus that S. Paul exhorted the first Christians, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord." (Col. i. 10.) Here we have an admirable rule, an infallible remedy for lukewarmness—always to think, pray, speak, work, and live "worthy of the Lord." In the second place, let me think of the service given to the great ones of the earth; for here the children of this world afford an instructive lesson. I may well blush when I observe the behaviour of those whose interest or ambition leads them to serve great potentates; for whilst they display so much warmth and zeal in their attendance upon mere mortals, I show but little of either to-

wards God. Thirdly, in every action I should consider the importance which it may possess with respect to my eternal happiness: it is God's work, and according as it is performed more or less holily, so will my reward be more or less abundant. Of the practical part of the remedy, the most effectual method of rousing myself from my torpor is, to destroy the cause, and replace it by the contrary principle, for sins must be driven out by the opposite virtues. For example: I must resume those devotional exercises, the omission of which has proved so hurtful to me, and I must perform them regularly and assiduously: I must resolve not to slur over, in future, the smallest duty, the most trifling observance: I must overcome all reluctance, I must rise above all difficulties: I must be willing to serve God, if such be His pleasure, without once experiencing the sweetness of His consolations: too happy shall I be if even at this price, He deigns to receive me!

Affections.

Penetrated by these feelings, O **LORD**, and with my heart thus prepared, I fly to Thee, confiding wholly in Thy goodness. In spite of my negligence and luke-warmness, I still trust that Thy mercies are not withdrawn. I have deserved, indeed, to be deprived of them, but hitherto, my **God**, Thy threats have been only held out as warnings to me: and since Thou hast this day called me anew, I may hope that Thou willest me to be once again of the number of Thy faithful servants, and once more to be filled with that holy fervour which I had lost. Let it be, O my **God**, as Thou commandest; may Thy will be mine, and may Thy designs be accomplished in me. It is not the first time, O **LORD**, that I

have formed these resolutions, and made promises ; shall they always be equally ineffectual ? My miserable weakness in the past makes me tremble for the future. Let me then, O GOD, hesitate no longer. Is it not time that I should give myself to Thee ? Have I not already defrauded Thee of many years of my existence ? Nay, have I not defrauded myself, by refusing to devote those years to the work of my salvation ? Must I continue in this state of imperfection, sloth, irregularity, and unprofitableness ? I hear Thy voice, O LORD, and the reproaches of my conscience : what will become of me if I refuse to listen ? I may sink into that state of complete lukewarmness and indifference which too closely resembles the blindness and hardness of heart into which sinners are permitted to fall. Grant, O most merciful GOD, that it may not be thus with me ! May Thy hand raise me up, and guide me back to the right path. It is through Thy Grace that I am about to enter upon a new life, and by Thy Grace I shall be enabled to continue therein.

EIGHTH MEDITATION.

OF ABUSING DIVINE GRACE.

“ We then beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”—2 Cor. vi. 1.

First Point.

FAITH teaches that GOD will expect from me a strict account of all the Graces which He constantly bestows on me. These Graces are talents which GOD entrusts to me, and which He desires me to return to Him with interest: they are, therefore, not alms, but a loan, for which I am answerable to Him; and such is the case with all graces, of whatsoever nature they may be. Faith also teaches, that the more I have received the more will be required of me: for I ought so to employ each grace that it may fructify in me, and add to the glory of GOD. “ *LORD, Thou deliveredst unto me five talents,*” said the good servant to his master, “ *behold, I have gained beside them five talents more,*” (S. Matth. xxv. 20.) Hence it follows, that the more GOD vouchsafes His Grace to me, the more humble and zealous should I be in His service. Humble—for they are His gifts, and to Him I must account for them: can I then glory in that which is not mine own? Zealous—for it is thus alone that I can discharge my enormous debt to Him. At times I fear for those on whom GOD has bestowed great temporal gifts of rank and wealth; but ought I not to fear much more for myself, since He has given me spiritual gifts

far more precious and excellent than any earthly treasure? Our LORD wept over Jerusalem, not at the thought of the sufferings which He was there to endure, but on account of the many graces which had been lavished upon that faithless nation, and by her abused. It was this which touched Him with compassion, because He foresaw all the woe and misery which would result from this rejection of grace. Have I not given Him yet greater cause to weep over me? The condemned mourn eternally the graces which they have lost: they for ever yearn to recall the past, and, feeling that it is irrevocable, they are filled with despair. I must take warning by them, and their despair must rekindle my hope. Whilst time is still granted me to atone for my abuse of former graces by the proper employment of those now given me, hope united with repentance shall be my support before GOD.

Second Point.

Divine Graces are of two kinds—there are outward, and interior graces. Not to speak of natural gifts, outward graces are the means of salvation which GOD bestows upon us: these have never been wanting to me, nay, rather, they have been given in profusion. Yet I have abused them all, and they have profited me nothing: perhaps they may even turn to my condemnation. I cannot sufficiently lament this before GOD in the bitterness of my soul. How fruitless have been these precious means of sanctification! The Gospel records what was said of the barren fig-tree: “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” (S. Luke xiii. 7.) Is not the fig-tree a type of myself, and may I not learn from this parable that a similar fate awaits me, if I continue as unprofitable as a withered

tree? These means of salvation have sanctified millions of devout souls: yet I, possessing the same privileges for so many years, have become neither more diligent nor more watchful, more self-denying, nor more weaned from the things of this world: and what would have sufficed to convert whole nations of idolaters, has not made me reform one fault, or acquire a single virtue. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes," (S. Matth. xi. 21.) Let me take this denunciation to heart: the application is both natural and just. God will rebuke me not only for having profited little by the means of grace, but for having wilfully abused them, thus by my negligence making them a ground of sin. If measured by my deserts, how great a weight of wrath must be stored up against me! and, alas, instead of striving to diminish it, I do but give fresh cause for it each day that I live.

Third Point.

Over and above these outward manifestations of Divine grace, we have the inward gifts of the HOLY SPIRIT Who worketh in us to show us the Will of God and teach us to love It; by Whom we are enlightened, instructed in our duties, and inspired with good counsels; Who awakens our consciences, and urges us on to lead more regular and devoted lives. In resisting these graces I have striven against the HOLY SPIRIT Himself, Who is the source of grace; I have trampled under foot the price of my redemption; and I have renounced all participation in the merits of the cross which purchased every grace for me. God punishes me by withdrawing the graces which I

have despised. In this He shows Himself to be, as ever, the All-just: my punishment will be without mitigation, since I shall be deprived of all grace. I may indeed be already experiencing this chastisement. It may be for this reason that I no longer feel sentiments of the love of God, and that my conscience is no longer uneasy. I am in a state of entire lukewarmness, yet I am perfectly tranquil and unconcerned. This is a treacherous peace, far more deadly than any tumult. To this penalty are we more particularly exposed by the abuse of those special graces which are sent, from time to time, to produce in the soul a crisis, as it were, similar to those which occur in bodily diseases: for there are days in which God vouchsafes extraordinary blessings: and such may be these days of retirement and meditation to me.

Affections.

Thou speakest unto me again, O LORD, and the feelings which awaken in my heart are the work of Thy grace. Happy am I that Thou hast not forsaken me, or withdrawn Thy mercies from me. Can it be possible that I should be obstinately bent on my own ruin, when Thou dost so unceasingly labour for my salvation? Blessed be Thou, O my God, for all the gifts which Thy bounty has bestowed upon me to make me live holily in my calling. Never can I praise Thee as I ought, or prove the sincerity of my thankfulness as I fain would do. But so much the more I am bound to glorify Thee and give Thee thanks for those graces, so much the greater is my shame for having misused them. May Thy infinite mercy grant that they do not bear witness against me to my eternal confusion and remorse! I thought, O LORD, that it was my sins alone which gave me cause to tremble before

Thee: but I now see that Thy graces are a far stronger ground for fear than my sins; or, rather, it is Thy graces which make my sins terrible to me. If I had received no graces, my sins would be less grievous in Thy sight, and I should be shielded from Thy wrath. Must I then ask Thee to withdraw Thy graces? Alas! What, O my God, should I be without them? No, do Thou, I pray Thee, redouble them, for therein lie all my hopes. Henceforth may it be my sole care to make them fructify in me, as far as can be done by a complete singleheartedness, and an entire correspondence with Thy Divine Will. May I no longer strive against their Heavenly influence, nor check the holy aspirations which they kindle; let my service during the remainder of my life be hearty, and proportioned to the means of grace which Thou hast so lavishly given, and so graciously continuest to bestow. These hopes I will endeavour to realize: and, filled with the firm resolve to do so, I make my vow, O LORD, and record it in Thy presence.

NINTH MEDITATION.

OF WASTING TIME.

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men.”
—Gal. vi. 10.

First Point.

NOTHING is more precious than time, since it is the purchase-money of eternity. I shall be punished or rewarded in a future state, according to the good or evil use which I shall have made of the time which God has given me: for every one shall “receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done.” (2 Cor. v. 10.) Thus does eternity depend on time, and as God, in placing us in this world, strictly enforces upon us the necessity of working out our salvation, we are consequently bound to employ time properly whilst we yet possess it. Time has been given us in order that we may use it in God’s service, and for His Glory: and so to use it should be our first object: else do we act like servants who should refuse to devote their days to the fulfilment of their master’s behests. Am I less culpable when I fritter away the time which I owe to God, and to myself? Shall I indulge in false security because I have avoided great sins? Is not the waste of time evil enough, even if it includes no other transgressions? And time, once wasted, is irrevocably lost. What have past years done for me? Each day, each hour, might have brought fresh graces, and multiplied them a hundredfold: yet what

trace do I retain of them ? If those years which may yet remain to me are equally barren of virtues, I shall stand empty-handed at the last day. I shall then realize both the immensity of the treasure which I might have amassed, and the actual greatness of my loss: but it will be too late to make reparation for my shortcomings. Why cannot I now picture to myself the fearful despair comprised in the words, "too late!" I will turn to God, and beseech Him to grant me yet a little time, every moment of which shall be carefully husbanded. Let my endeavour be to carry out this resolution for my soul's health, whilst I have still the opportunity of putting it in practice.

Second Point.

Time may be wasted by the religiously disposed, as well as by the worldly minded: and, indeed, devout persons often run the greatest risk of committing this sin, because they are more detached from temporal cares and the business of life, than those who are given up to the world. Many, after having fulfilled those religious duties which are absolutely indispensable, pass the remainder of their time in mere gossip, useless visits, and collecting and retailing news. Others are constantly busy, undertaking far more than is required of them: but this proceeds from a natural restlessness and self-seeking, for did their duty exact as much from them they would find it unendurable; in short, they prefer any work to that which is appointed for them. Is not their time, thus spent, wasted ? Others, again, have their time well portioned out between religious observances and active duties: nevertheless it is utterly thrown away because they go about their work carelessly, or in a worldly

spirit. Time is only well spent when we use it in accordance with God's holy Will ; and thus alone can we derive any spiritual benefit from it. If what we do is negligently done it cannot be pleasing to God, how then can it profit us ? I must, therefore, remember that no portion of time is so absolutely my own as to make it lawful to be wasted ; though there is no special law prescribing the exact employment of every moment, there is a general law which commands that it should be well spent. A life well and fully occupied cannot be wholly without fruit, especially if our work be undertaken willingly, and in a right spirit. But though our employment may be in the main good and holy, we do but waste our time if we work with a divided heart, observing the letter of duty but neglecting the spirit. With true sorrow I acknowledge how much time has been already squandered by me : hardly is there a single day which I can recall with any real ground of confidence.

Third Point.

Although in one sense it is true that time once past cannot be recalled, it is not so in another : its redemption depends upon ourselves, as S. Paul expressly tells us : " See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time." (Eph. v. 15, 16.) The labourers in the Gospel who came at the eleventh hour, received as much as those who had toiled all day : why was this ? Because, though they had come late into the vineyard, and their time was short, they worked diligently and accomplished their due share of labour. It is therefore possible for me to make up now, by zeal and energy, for the many lost days in which I have done nothing for God, and have made no progress on my heavenward

path. Those days are not lost in which I have had crosses to bear, and sufferings to endure: on the contrary, such days of trial, painful as they may be to the bodily senses, are, to the truly devout and Christian soul, seasons of happiness. The days which I have really cause to regret are those passed in sloth and apathy, without serious reflection, without the exercise of self-denial. Happily, God yet grants me time, but in order fully to profit by this precious grace, I must take advantage of it without delay, since I know not how long it may be mine: let me then make the most of it. Even if I could count with certainty on the future, I should be bound to devote it to God, for it would be all too short to make amends for my past negligence. "Walk while ye have the light," said our Blessed LORD, "the night cometh, when no man can work." (S. John xii. 35; ix. 4.)

Affections.

O God of Mercy, Thou seest me at Thy feet, prostrate and humbled like the insolvent debtor whose petition touched the heart of his lord. My fate is in Thy hand: Thou hast numbered my days and Thou canst cut me off if it be Thy pleasure: but, O LORD, "have patience with me and I will pay Thee all." Yet a little while, and I will do my utmost to satisfy Thee. If time be not granted me, in what poverty and wretchedness shall I appear before Thee? The Saints earnestly desired that time might end for them, and they yearned for eternity: their years were full years, and having finished their work on earth, it only remained to them to enjoy the reward of their labours in Heaven. But I, alas! have great cause to dread the end of time. I fear to lose one of those days in which I might atone for the past. Thy provi-

dence, O **LORD**, in which alone I trust, will not forsake me: confiding in Thee I will begin the work without a moment's delay. I will not put it off till the morrow: this very day, this very hour shall see my purpose fulfilled. It is late, but there is yet time. All times are not seasonable for worldly business; but at all times it is fitting, O **God**, that I should love and serve Thee, and thus work out my own salvation, with fear and trembling.

TENTH MEDITATION.

OF DEATH.

“It is appointed unto men once to die.”—Heb. ix. 27.

NOTHING is more certain, more inevitable than death. To this chastisement has the Divine Justice condemned all men, and I, with the rest of mankind, must submit to the universal law. Yes, we must die: a fearful sentence: and yet it is not the mere act of dying which is so terrible: it is what follows after. Death in itself completely separates us from all the things of this world; from wealth, rank, pleasures, duties, and employments, from relations and friends, from public affairs, from business, from the interchange of ideas, from all, in short, which makes up our life here below. Humanly speaking, it is a complete blotting out: the departed have no share in any of the concerns of this earth; we no longer see them or hear them, and perhaps we soon cease even to think of them. All this, considered according to the flesh, terrifies us: nature shrinks from the idea, and strives to the utmost to repel it. But still, contemplated apart from any after terrors, this is not so fearful as nature and the flesh have pictured it to us. The pang of separation, however great, is soon over: in one moment all the pain which it has cost the dying man, has passed away, leaving no trace. But the awe inspired by the contemplation of our lot after death is caused by the certainty that this lot is eternal. The second of time

which terminates my mortal life, will be for me the beginning of endless happiness or misery. "Where the tree falleth, there it shall be," (Eccles. ii. 3;) and at the moment when it shall be said of me, "he is dead," as surely may it also be said, "his sentence has now been pronounced by GOD; he is for ever with the elect or the condemned." We die but once, and after death there is neither grace nor good works. Consequently, the state in which we are found at our death can know no change; and should it be a state of reprobation, it is irretrievable. This reflection becomes more fearful when we consider that we know not when our eternal destiny will be decided for good or evil, because we are ignorant of the time of our death. Nothing is so certain as death: nothing so uncertain as the hour thereof. Each day may be my last, and therefore I may at any moment receive my sentence, and be saved or lost to all eternity. These serious thoughts should constantly occupy my mind, and cannot be too vividly impressed there. What have I hitherto done, and what am I doing now, to bring them before me? Am I in a proper disposition for death, and should I be willing to die in my present frame of mind? I have but to put these questions honestly to my conscience. What are the dictates of this conscience? What her reproofs? What does she command me to set in order before my death? On this point I must fix my mind, and I must instantly begin all the requisite preparations. I know the infinite importance of a holy death; I know, too, that death may claim me at any moment, and I feel that I am not in the state of mind in which I should wish to die: this should suffice to make me ready to undertake the great work, and that without the smallest delay.

Can I then, O LORD, hesitate, and refrain from making

my most fervent aspirations for a holy death? But so unreasonable are we all, (as am I myself in particular,) that, although we ask God to grant us the grace of a holy death, we will not lead the holy life which He requires of us. Alas, LORD! I have never really endeavoured to do so: yet I ought to strive after both: for Thy Divine Providence rarely grants the one, except as a sequel to the other: and to flatter myself that I shall die the death of Thy most faithful servants, without having served Thee as they did, is but a vain and foolish self-deception. What risks have I then run during so many years, and what dangers am I still exposed to from my indifference and carelessness in Thy service! Give me to understand this, O my God! Grant me to feel the sorrows of death in my life, rather than that I should experience them at my last hour. But, Lord, I am in error: we fear death too much, but we do not fear it as we ought: do Thou teach me a holy fear. We dread death because we love life: this is a human, not a Christian fear. The consequence of this human fear is, that we either banish altogether the thought of death, or we try to lose sight of it as much as possible, in order not to excite any uneasy feeling: or if we think of it, it is only to shield ourselves from it, to keep it far from us, and to take all the precautions against it which flatter our self-love, and foster our self-indulgence. Such fear, far from being salutary to us, is most injurious, as it tends to encourage and confirm remissness. Not thus, O God, did Thy Saints fear death, nor ought we thus to fear it. Life in itself is but of small account; but it is of the last importance that I should spend it in a godly, devout, and holy manner, that so my death may be in like wise. I must therefore dread, not death, but the here-

after, and strive to avert its terrors: and chiefly I must dread the fearful danger of a sudden and unprepared death. Happy is the soul which is kept by this fear constantly alert and watchful. May Thy mercy, O LORD, grant that I may also derive from it the fruits of grace and sanctification.

ELEVENTH MEDITATION.

OF THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.

“ It is appointed unto men once to die : but after this the judgment.”—Heb. ix. 27.

First Consideration.

AFTER death follows the judgment of God : that is to say, that the very moment the soul quits the body, it appears before the Throne of God, there to be judged by Him. It is true, that at the last day there will be a general judgment, where we shall all be assembled together to receive our final award : but before this great day, to the coming of which it is necessary that all the times shall be accomplished, faith teaches me this fundamental truth, that, immediately after death, there is a preliminary judgment, which each man must undergo separately, and which is known only to God and the departed soul. Nor need the soul take its flight through distant regions, or through boundless space, to appear in the presence of God. Wheresoever a man dies, God is there to fulfil His Divine justice : for He is Omnipresent, and His power is in all places equally displayed. Therefore, in whatever spot I may chance to breathe my last sigh, the moment that breath ceases I shall be, as it were, swallowed up in the majesty of God. I may not behold Him ; but though He should not be visible to my eyes, I shall feel His Presence, and be awestruck by the greatness of His glory. So shall I fulfil the words of Job :

“I have always feared God as waves swelling over me, and His weight I was not able to bear.” (Job xxxi. 23, Vulg.) Thus will God surround me, so to speak, on all sides, and thus will He vindicate His power over me. What shall I then do, and to what shall I have recourse? Vainly shall I hope to flee from before the face of the LORD, for I shall be in His hands, and there is no escape for one who falleth into the hands of the Living God. Vain, too, would be the help of man: could I call all created beings to my aid, what would their efforts avail against Him Who created them and me? In this awful moment I shall then find myself left alone with God; upon Whom depends my destiny for all eternity, and Who will then be about to decide it; and I, deprived of all, and in the most utter poverty, shall bring nothing with me but my works, which will be my sole support. What shall I do if this support fails me? and what substitute can I find? If in the whole of my past life I can find nothing to uphold me and reassure me; if, beholding myself in the power of One Who will judge me according as my past years have been well or ill spent, I can recall in those past years nothing but coldness, negligence, and an utterly unproductive, not to say criminal, blank; then into what a state of dread and despair shall I fall! Horror will seize upon me, as the wise king saith in speaking of sinners, “They shall come with fear.” (Wisd. iv. 20.) It will not be granted to these sinners to retrace their steps, and return to earth in order to lead better lives; and to appear before God, and approach His Throne to render an account of their wasted time, overwhelms them with fear. Ah, why did they not think of this, and take heed to their ways whilst the day was still their own? The day is still mine, but perhaps it may soon be so no longer. Let me not neglect

it, for there is no time to lose; and the misery which I would fain shun is so great that I shall have need of all the care and watchfulness in my power to ensure my safety.

Second Consideration.

When men sit in judgment on their fellow-creatures, the trial ought to be conducted in the most impartial manner, and, to avoid all errors, the judge should only pronounce sentence after a careful summing up of the facts which he has previously examined with the greatest carefulness. The prisoner is questioned, witnesses are confronted with him, his answers are listened to, and he is only condemned if the proofs of his guilt are indisputable, and his conviction is perfectly legal. GOD will judge me with the same equity; and I shall therefore undergo at His hands a thorough, and at the same time, prompt and overwhelming examination. A thorough examination—for in the whole course of my life, however long it may have been, and from the first moment in which reason began to operate in me, not a thought will have been entertained, nor a wish formed, nor a word uttered, no deed will have been done, no duty omitted by me, which will not be at once inquired into, and for these I must answer alone. And as the various circumstances accompanying each and all of these usually either add to or diminish the sin, it follows that, with respect to each, there will not be a motive, an intention, a feeling, in a word, nothing, however trivial, that will not be taken into account, and weighed in the balance. As a man enlightened by natural reason, as a Christian subject to the law of the Gospel, my duties are various: I am responsible for all. My best works, or such as appear to be so, will not be exempt from this scrutiny: the

smallest imperfection which has crept in unawares, will be discovered by the eye of the All-seeing: and as nothing escapes Him which may have rendered these works meritorious, so neither will He pass over anything which lowers their value and diminishes their holiness.

A prompt examination—for this questioning, if it depended on myself, would cost me infinite trouble; and in spite of all care and reflection, would yet be beyond my powers, since I should not have a sufficiently clear or comprehensive recollection of my whole life. If it were only required of me to retrace distinctly all that I have said, done, and thought during a single day, I should fail, so great would be the number of incidents of which I had taken no heed, or which had passed altogether from my mind. But it is not so with God, nor with a soul freed from the bonds of flesh, and thus enabled to see and know clearly. For God, Who since the first moment of my being has never lost sight of me, and to whom forgetfulness is impossible, will need no space of time to recall and place before me every particular of my conduct, and all my most hidden thoughts. With one ray of His Divine light the most distant objects will seem nigh; and without the smallest disorder, they will be brought together and presented to my memory, every separate fact standing out as distinctly as if I had that alone to consider. Thus shall I see the events of my life collectively, and, notwithstanding their number and variety, my soul (no longer fettered by my body, and thus possessing the full extent and activity of its powers) will at one glance discern each one individually.

Hence, then, this examination will be overwhelming: for it will consist neither in arguments nor in conjectures, but in a clear and simple statement of facts. There will be no possibility of remonstrance or equivocation in the

Presence of GOD. How many sins which I have ceased to think of, and which I can no longer remember, will start up again before me! How many others shall I discover of which I had hitherto been unconscious, and of which I should have supposed myself incapable! How deceptive will my plausible excuses and self-justifications then appear! How many perplexing questions, which I had always solved in my own favour, will now be decided against me! How many virtues, which shone so brightly in the eyes of men, will now lose all their lustre, and will plainly be seen to proceed from self-love, from vanity, from custom, from natural amiability, perhaps even from falsity and hypocrisy! What a fearful prospect for me, and what shall I be able to plead in my own behalf? For whatever I might be able to allege in my defence, my conscience would rise up in witness against me, and would concur with GOD to convict me, and to draw from me the short but mournful confession, "I have sinned." (2 Sam. xii. 18.)

Why do I not acknowledge this now, when I might profitably do so? Why do I not cast myself now at the feet of GOD in the spirit of humble repentance, that I may not be forced to make this avowal in shame and despair before His judgment-seat? Why do I not listen to the reproofs of conscience, and strive to appease her, and, in the words of our LORD, "agree quickly with (her) whilst (I am) in the way, lest (she) deliver me to the judge." (S. Matth. v. 25.) When she is once more at rest, she will become my advocate with GOD: she will represent to Him the sincerity of my repentance and reformation, my good resolutions, and their salutary results: she will blot out from the book of eternal justice all that is there written against me, and will obtain for me a full and entire act of oblivion.

Third Consideration.

In accordance with the result of the examination which God will make of me and my works, will be the sentence decreed, of punishment or of reward. And although this sentence will not be pronounced publicly, as at the last day, it will be none the less final and irrevocable. For that which God has once ordained, whether for my endless woe or eternal happiness, can never be changed: because I shall then be no longer journeying in the path where His grace may yet be lost or regained; but I shall have reached the goal where sin or repentance are no longer possible. It is therefore of the last necessity that this sentence should be favourable to me; else, what will become of me, and to what misery shall I be condemned? How terrible is this thought! How can it have been so long unheeded by me, when it should be, more than any other; deeply graven in my mind? In order to arouse this idea more vividly, I need only picture to myself that I am before the judgment-seat of God, and that, after having interrogated me, He overwhelms me with the dreaded sentence, "Depart from Me, ye cursed." (S. Matth. xxv. 41.) This falls upon me like a thunderbolt. Must I then depart from God? Must He smite me with His curse, and that so definitively that there no longer remains for me the hope of appeasing His wrath, or of regaining and possessing His favour? Let me anticipate this fearful moment, and in imagination placing myself in this fearful extremity, follow out the train of feeling which so awful a picture will excite. Happy am I that it is still but imaginary, and a thousand times happier shall I be if, reforming my conduct, I so live that it may never become a reality. By this renewal and reformation of my life, I may become worthy

to receive the blessing of eternal salvation; for this will be the lot of the righteous, and of those who have been truly devout. In place of the fatal sentence which I should receive, if my life continued sinful and ill-regulated to the end, how sweet will it be to hear from the lips of my LORD and Judge that blissful invitation, those consoling words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy LORD." (S. Matth. xxv. 28.) Filled with that pure and holy joy, the inexpressible sweetness of which I in that moment begin to taste, I shall then understand that GOD required but little of me during my mortal life, and that all which I undertook, or suffered, or forsook for His sake, was as nothing compared to the reward which He has prepared for me, and the glory which will be revealed to me. If any feeling of regret were still possible to me, it would be because my zeal had not carried me far enough, and because I had not sufficiently followed out the devout exercises which GOD Himself had put into my mind to advance me in the way of righteousness: it would be because I had measured my devotion with too niggardly a hand, and had not extended it as far as I might have done. Could I ever do too much for the Master Who will crown my faithfulness with a splendour proportioned to the severity of the punishment allotted to coldness and faint-heartedness?

Affections.

Great GOD, Who with a look dost shake the firmament, and make the foundations of the earth to tremble: O GOD of holiness, Who art Thyself All-holy, in Whose sight the heavens themselves are not pure, and Who

didst find sin even amidst Thine Angels: how, alas, can I, O LORD, weak and miserable as I am, endure Thy Presence? and how can a soul guilt-laden as mine dare to be judged by Thee? "How unhappy would be even that man who, in the opinion of his fellow-creatures, had led a perfectly devout and well-regulated life, if he were to be rigorously examined and judged without mercy," says S. Augustine; for Thy penetration is far beyond ours, and who can presume to think himself free from stain in Thy sight, and worthy of being loved by Thee? The Holy Scriptures teach me, O LORD, that Thy mercy, which is so essential to me, and upon which my chief reliance must be placed, will have no part in the judgment which I must undergo at the moment of my death, and in which Thy justice will alone be displayed. What favour ought I now to request, and what petition must I put up to Thee? O LORD, my prayer is that Thou wilt not await the hour of my death to judge me, but that I may be judged during my mortal life, for so will Thy chastisements be fatherly and healing. Yes, LORD, do Thou punish my faithlessness, and manifold offences. It is just that I should bear the penalty; but let it not be reserved for that day when Thou shalt "rebuke me in Thine anger, and chasten me in Thy hot displeasure." (Ps. vi. 1.) Thou dost more than this for me, O God of supreme goodness and bounty! Thou dost refrain from judging me, in order that I may sit in judgment on myself. Thou dost vouchsafe to place Thy goods in my hands, that I may guard them for Thee, and render a strict account of my stewardship. How deplorable, how inexcusable would be my blindness if I refused such easy conditions! With my whole heart, O LORD, do I accept them, and submit myself to them. I will appear at the bar of my own conscience: I will be my own accuser,

and bear witness against myself: I will thoroughly and rigorously examine the whole of my past life, and, in the humble hope of fulfilling Thy Will, my repentance shall be in full measure proportioned to my sins, as far as my weakness will endure. My work shall not end here, O my God: I will regulate and sanctify my future life: I will show neither forgiveness nor indulgence to myself, that so, when Thou shalt call me to Thyself, nothing may hold me back, and I may at once without delay or hindrance, enter into the possession of that eternal happiness which Thou hast promised.

TWELFTH MEDITATION.

OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

“Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.”—S. Matth. xxv. 41.

First Consideration.

THERE are circumstances to be considered in connection with eternal punishment, which appear very wonderful, and which may well fill us with terror. One is, that GOD will grant no pardon throughout eternity, although He is Himself All-merciful. This Being, Whose whole nature is perfect goodness; He Who, since the creation of the world, has made His sun to shine upon the just and the unjust; He Who, even for His enemies and for sinners, descended from His seat of glory, clothed Himself with our flesh, and vouchsafed to die upon the cross; He Who has bestowed upon us such benefits, such earnest proofs of His love, will yet turn no look of compassion upon the condemned, nor will He then suffer to fall upon them one drop of that Blood, which in His Passion He poured forth for them so abundantly. Thus then the Divine mercy which is showered so plenteously upon all, even the lowest of created beings, remains passive and gives no sign with regard to the condemned souls. During their mortal life they might have been cleansed from stain: by renouncing their sins they would have obtained pardon: for though these sins placed them in peril of condemna-

tion, the sentence was not yet passed. Death came, and at that fatal moment the sins which repentance might have washed away, became unpardonable, because atonement was no longer possible. That anticipated condemnation, which had but begun, became complete and final. That mercy, once so freely offered, was withdrawn for ever: for by the Divine decree, sin, when persisted in, becomes an insurmountable barrier. Hence, throughout eternity, justice alone will rule, will smite, will vindicate her rights. Oh, how blind am I if I do not now learn to dread the anger of God, and to tremble lest I should fall into His hands; to dread sin still more, since God's anger is to be feared only on account of sin, and not to cast away the mercies of the Lord, which He holds out so bountifully to us, but to have instant recourse to them, that so I may escape His vengeance.

Second Consideration.

Another circumstance equally amazing and terrifying is, that souls formed to love God, to see Him, to possess Him, and in that possession to be supremely happy, will in the state of eternal punishment neither love Him, nor see Him, nor possess Him; on the contrary, in spite of the natural attraction which draws them to that great Being Who should have been their aim and end, the foundation of their peace, in spite of this, they will feel hatred and repulsion, and in the knowledge of His perfection, and the image thereof which they retain, they will find their sharpest punishment, and the chief cause of their despair. For, on the one hand, being cut off from God, and, as it were, by a separation renewed every moment, torn from the bosom of their Creator; a total separation, which destroys all links between them and

GOD ; an eternal separation, depriving them of all prospect, all hope of pardon and reunion : and, on the other hand, being, although enemies of God, unceasingly absorbed in the remembrance of Him as the Centre of all good, the sole Good, whether absolutely in Himself or relatively to them ; as the Infinitely Good, Who would have fulfilled all their desires, and placed them in an abode of unalloyed happiness ; as a Possession destined for them, and to which they were legitimately entitled ; a Possession the deprivation of which will fill up the measure of their anguish, and which nevertheless they have cast away for temporary advantages ; a Possession which they will yearn for by an impulse inseparable from their being, yet which their irrevocable future forbids them to obtain. These are the pangs which will consume them unceasingly, and which will fill them with rage and despair. Thus, by a cruel inconsistency of feeling, they will abhor that very God Whom they vainly and sorrowfully long for, and they will not be able to cease from desiring Him Whom they hate. This sorrowful longing will be as fruitless as it is painful ; and the chief sharpness of the pain will spring from the thought that it is unavailing. For as S. Bernard says, “Can there be a misery greater than that of always desiring what can never be, and always wishing to escape from what must ever be ?” The condemned soul is always striving to raise herself to God, and this can never be : she cannot endure her banishment from Him, yet this must ever be. Thus is she every way unhappy ; unhappy, in that she is forsaken by God, and still more unhappy that, in this terrible abandonment, she is sensible of her loss, and feels how immeasurably great it is ; unhappy, for she has lost all claim to the kingdom and inheritance of God ; and more unhappy in this sad fall from her ardent aspirations

towards this blessed home ; unhappy, for in her delirium she utters a thousand imprecations against her Maker ; and yet more unhappy, from feeling in the midst of these impious utterances, that a strong attachment still draws her to the Great Being from Whom she received all, and upon Whom all her hopes should have been fixed. Ah, why cannot she find forgetfulness ? Why cannot she cast away that burden which oppresses her, and free herself from the tyranny under which she groans ? Could she do this, Hell would lose half its terrors.

Let this be as it may, my part must be to examine the disposition of my soul towards God. Have I ground for believing myself united to Him by grace ? If it is so, I cannot be sufficiently thankful to Him, nor can I be careful enough lest I should lose my treasure. Have I cause to fear that sin has separated me, or is about to separate me from Him ? If so, I must rouse myself, and strive promptly and earnestly to avert this fearful peril. To live apart from God, and under His frown, would be to risk an eternal severance from Him at my death. Those only lose Him for all eternity who in their lives have already rejected Him.

Affections.

O LORD, Thy mercies are without number, but Thy judgments are unsearchable, and Thy chastisements are terrible ! When I meditate upon them I am seized with terror ; yet as my fear increases, so does also my love for Thee : for I know, O LORD, what are my deserts, and into what an abyss Thou couldest at any moment have plunged me. I have sinned against Thee, but Thou hast suspended Thy judgments which rose up against me. From how many sins to which my rashness or levity ex-

posed me, has Thy grace preserved me ! So many times, O God, hast Thou drawn me out of the pit. Thou hast not dealt thus with many others. What had they done to render them more unworthy of Thy care ? What were the sins of so many devout persons who have fallen away, and having once entered the road of perdition, have never retraced their steps ? When I compare myself with them, I can but conclude that Thou hast been more long-suffering with me, and that if I have not been involved in a similar destruction, to Thee alone must be the glory. This it is, O my God, which softens my stubborn heart, and which demands my boundless gratitude to Thee. Let the thought of the penal fire kindle in me the sacred fire of Thy love. Let it reanimate my zeal, excite my watchfulness, support me in the performance of the severest austerities, and mitigate all their rigour. May it make me patient in all the sorrows of my life, diligent in the fulfilment of the duties of my station, ardent and untiring in all which concerns Thy service and the salvation of my soul. This, Lord, is the fruit which I must gather from the contemplation of that eternal punishment from which it has pleased Thee hitherto to preserve me, yet to which I may still be condemned, and which I shall only finally escape by clinging to Thee with unalterable faith, and by persevering in the practice of all holy and Christian virtues.

THIRTEENTH MEDITATION.

ON THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL CHILD TO HIS FATHER, AND OF THE SOUL TO HER GOD.

“ He arose, and came to his father.”—S. Luke xv. 20.

First Consideration.

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST’s purpose in the parable of the prodigal son, was to put before us in it the thought of a real turning back to GOD, and a sincere repentance. This young man, carried away by the impetuosity of youth, had left his father’s house, and gone away into a strange country, to live after his own fancy, and to enjoy his freedom. The time soon came for him to perceive his blindness, and to think of returning to his father’s home. Three things decided him to do so—feeling the wretched state into which a short time had reduced him ; the reproaches of his conscience, and his sorrow for the sin he had committed ; and above all his confidence in the goodness of the best of fathers, from whom he had separated himself, and by whom he yet felt that he would be welcomed back again.

Who is the prodigal ? Is it not I myself ? And can there be a greater prodigal than a soul who has lived as I have done, so many years in a state of lukewarmness ? What graces, what heavenly blessings and spiritual gifts have I not wasted ? But do I mean to persist in my state of estrangement from GOD, and should I put off

returning to the way of righteousness, and making reparation, as far as I can, for my past wanderings? The motives which inspired the prodigal son with such a passionate and firm resolve to act respecting his father, are they not powerful enough to prompt me to action with regard to my God?

What first touched the prodigal was the sight of his own misery. In the vicious and self-indulgent life which he had led, a few months sufficed to exhaust all his resources. Is there any state of poverty equal to that in which Holy Scripture shows him to us? Rich as he had been, he is now in extreme want, and deprived of all. The freedom of which he had been so jealous, he is obliged to forego. And under the yoke of a hard and pitiless master, he even needs bread to eat, and would have counted himself happy to appease his hunger with the food of the vilest animals; but it is denied him. Then it is that he comes to himself: for there is nothing better than adversity to open our eyes and to bring us back to reason. He compares his present condition with what it was in his father's home: he says, "How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger." Impressed by this reflection, which, without allowing him longer time to deliberate, obliges him to come to a decision, he returns to his home, and in it to his duties.

It can in truth be said—and do I not myself feel its truth?—that no wretchedness can equal the prodigal's; in other words, can exceed my own, since I have gone far away from God, and have lost my first fervour in the practices of religion. My heart is dried up: all the spirit suitable for retreat, meditation, mortification, and piety, is extinguished within me. Where is that recollectedness, that modesty, that watchfulness, that tender

conscience which was once mine ? Nothing remains to me of it all ; and above all, I find myself in a state of deplorable destitution.

To what masters have I not become a slave in giving way to my desires and my passions ? Instead of dwelling in the House of God, being fed with the Bread of Angels, and enjoying the inner sweetness of a holy life, I have sought, like this prodigal, to satisfy myself with the husks which the swine do eat ; that is to say, I have only sought earthly consolations, and the fleeting pleasures which I have been able to find in the world and among my fellow-creatures.

What then remains to me, and where am I ? Ah, how many hirelings, how many Christians in the world, in the midst of the world, lift themselves up to God, taste of His sweetness, and enjoy the choicest of blessings—communion with Him : and I, of all that has reference to God, feel nothing, am touched by nothing, and profit by nothing. Happy am I, after all, if I retain some conception of this miserable state of mind, and see its wretchedness ; happy, that at least I am not altogether insensible to it. Shall I always continue in it, and never make any effort to arise from it ? Shall I be slower in forming my resolution than the prodigal son was ? I have wandered as he did, and herein lies the misery of my life : but what would ensure my ruin and complete my loss, would be to allow of any delay in my turning back to God.

Second Consideration.

After having considered his misery, and mourned over it, compassionating himself, this prodigal came to a more generous, a wiser, and a better conclusion, because a

less selfish one. He called to mind all his father's goodness, and this remembrance filled him with confusion, and overwhelmed him with grief. He realised the consciousness of his unworthy conduct, and did not conceal from himself the extent and greatness of the fault he had committed towards a father so worthy of his love and gratitude. He brought against himself all the accusations which a true sorrow never fails to cause a heart alive to and touched by feelings of repentance. For although Holy Scripture gives us no details, it nevertheless makes this fact plain to us by the three things which the prodigal decided upon doing when he drew nigh to his father.

Before setting out on his journey he thought over what he should say, and settled what his conduct should be on his return. First, he resolved to throw himself at his father's feet, not to attempt any self-justification, but on the contrary, to acknowledge himself guilty and without excuse, and thereby to prove his sincere sorrow, and in that manner to place himself in a state in which to obtain pardon: "I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee." Against Heaven, which commands me to submit myself to thee, to perform every duty with childlike obedience; against thee, in acting so ungratefully and so often neglecting thy wise counsels and precepts. Secondly, not content with this, he now so thoroughly despised himself that he resolved on a still further humiliation, and would no longer stand before his father in the light of a son, that being a privilege he felt he had forfeited: "And am no more worthy to be called thy son:" thou must no longer look upon me as one; I have not behaved towards thee as a son, and I have no longer the right to regard thee as a father.

Thirdly. Indeed he did not stop at humiliation, or consenting to be degraded from and deprived of the title of son, but he went even on to consider the austerity of his life and the greatness of his penitence in asking to have no other place and treatment in his father's house than that of a hired servant: "Make me as one of thy hired servants." It will be much for me to be permitted to return to thee even on such terms, and it will be much for thee to consent to them. What words on the part of this young man, who had before been so insubmissive and so presumptuous, had cared so much for self, and had been so given up to pleasure! What a change: what a conversion!

This is what takes place in a penitent soul who has been touched by the spirit of contrition; and this is what should take place within myself. What had the prodigal's father ever done for his son which could in any degree equal that which I owe to the mercy and loving-kindness of my God? Can I think of this without feelings of the deepest and most tender affection; or rather can I fail to call these things to mind without being the most ungrateful and unthankful of mankind? This thought of so good a God, and especially of a God Who has been so good to me, is one which if I in any degree try to follow it up, will, by the help of His grace, undoubtedly touch my heart; and if my contrition is what it should be, it will not fail to produce the three effects which are essential to repentance.

Firstly. To return without delay to God, to prostrate myself before Him, to make confession to Him of all the shortcomings of my life, truly to hate my sins, and at His feet to mourn over them in bitterness of heart. I have sinned, O my God, I have sinned against Thee, not once, as did the prodigal child against his father, but

nearly as many times as there have been moments in my life. I will not attempt to justify myself before Thee, or to make vain excuses; my heart would condemn me, and the light of Thy wisdom would confound me. Alas, my SAVIOUR, I have sinned even beyond my knowledge. I confess all before Thee, to incline Thy mercy towards me. I have nothing to offer Thee but my tears and this my sincere confession.

Secondly. To despise myself and to feel the extent of my unworthiness, especially through being dedicated to GOD in Holy Baptism. Alas, GOD would have me to become a Christian indeed. Am I one truly? I bear the name and the appearance of one before men; but am I one at heart? The name of "Christian" which I bear should be to me a matter of glory, and it is to me a subject of humiliation; for what cause have I not to blush to be thought what in truth I am not? Can I wonder after this that Thou, O LORD, dost not vouchsafe to grant me special graces and those Divine inspirations which Thou givest to such as are really Thy true children, and honour and serve Thee as a FATHER? It is for the children only that the children's bread is reserved. I can neither ask for, nor expect it.

Thirdly. To condemn myself to things most severe and trying in a devoted life; to submit myself to it, not either desiring or seeking to spare myself in anything; accepting all I may encounter which I have a shrinking from and dislike to in my way back to GOD; thanking Him for letting me feel the weight of my burden without lightening it to me. Is it not enough, O my GOD, that I am not for ever cast out of my FATHER's house for not having lived in it as Thy loving and obedient child? Is it not just that I should be treated as a slave and hireling? So thinks and acts a contrite soul;

so should I feel and act, and such should be my thoughts of self.

Third Consideration.

Notwithstanding the plans which the prodigal had made of what he would say to his father and how he would act in his presence, he might well fear lest he should not obtain a hearing. The more guilty he felt himself to be, the less reason had he to hope for a welcome, and his wicked conduct naturally filled him with doubts. But he remembered that he was returning to a father; that a father ever remains a parent, and can never forget that he is one. Also, in the determination he made to return, he did not say, I will go back to my master or my judge, but to "my father." This title of father reassured him, and as trust regained its supremacy she banished all fear from his heart, and would allow of no further deliberation.

Upheld by such firm and deeply rooted trust, he starts, he goes on his way, he arrives, and draws near to his father, who at once proves to him that his hopes had not deceived him; for no sooner does the father perceive his son's approach, than he goes towards him, embraces him, gives him the kiss of peace, takes him home, and instead of reproaching him with the past, calls together his friends and his neighbours that they may witness and share in his rejoicings. But even all this is not enough. Far from treating the prodigal either as a slave or hireling who had reduced himself to a state of poverty and wretchedness, the good father desires his servants to "bring forth the best robe, and put it on him," "to bring hither the fatted calf," to prepare a supper which should be accompanied by music, that nothing should be wanting to the greatness of the feast. And wherefore

all this ? Ah, exclaims this kind and loving father, "because this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found."

This is also the case of a sinner who returns to his God, and whom God receives again. So also will it be with me, and no sooner shall I approach God with feelings of sincere contrition, and humble myself before Him, acknowledging all my unfaithfulness and ingratitude, but I shall find Him even more favourably inclined towards me than the prodigal's father was to him. It is true indeed that according to the rules of His justice He could cast me off for ever, and that if I had no other grounds on which to place my trust but the works of my own life, He would have every right to reject me for ever. But I have His never-failing goodness as a pledge for my trust, and at the same time that I desire to make satisfaction to His justice, I can promise myself that mercy which has no measure, and which ever longs to pour itself forth abundantly.

I should then beware of listening to such natural doubts and fears wherewith the enemies of my salvation and my perfection seek to hold me back. I am not to be surprised at all the difficulties which I foresee, and all the reluctance which I feel about combating and overcoming them. Were they a thousand times greater, true repentance should make me resolve to endure all ; for no sooner shall I be firmly possessed by this spirit and enabled to advance the first few steps towards God, than repentance will have dispelled all the mistaken ideas which troubled me, and the false alarms which the sight of my sins and follies caused me. Instead of finding a severe and unrelenting God, I shall find One full of tender compassion and goodness towards me, Who does not even forget those who fly from Him :

“ Of penitents sole hope and stay ;
 To wandering sinners kind ;
 To those that seek Thou art the way,
 But what to those that find ? ”

Thus although my GOD may be most justly offended with me, and have every reason to banish me from His Presence, I can nevertheless promise myself three things : first, that He will Himself come towards me, and make the way less difficult by which I purpose to return to Him ; secondly, that He will not delay to forgive me all my sins, and that He will entirely remit the satisfaction which is due to Him ; thirdly, that He will assist by His grace every effort which I have to make, either to raise myself again, to press forward, or to persevere : fourthly, not contented to see my return to the path of duty, He will help me to make progress towards perfection in such wise that it will be my own fault if I fail to regain what I have lost and do not attain a place among the most perfect—others like me having lived in neglect of duty, have afterwards become examples of holiness and sanctity ; fifthly, and in the midst of all, without my seeking from Him spiritual consolations or aspiring to them, He will pour them forth abundantly upon me, and will made good to me the victories which I shall obtain for Him, and the sacrifices which I shall offer Him. What need I more ? Can I hesitate one moment upon what course I should pursue ?

Affections.

FATHER of Mercies, GOD of Peace and Hope, vouchsafe, O my SAVIOUR, to bless the good resolve with which Thy grace has inspired me, and grant me this same grace

to strengthen and confirm it. I return to Thee. I am here beneath Thy footstool humbled and confounded, but reassured by Thee, and depending upon Thy Fatherly goodness; for it is Thou Thyself, O my God, Who hast made me hear Thy voice calling me back to Thee: can I fear that Thou wilt close Thy sacred Heart, and refuse to receive me again?

How shall I address Thee, O LORD? rather how shall I begin again to serve Thee? It is deeds more than words that Thou requirest of me. But after all, O LORD, whatever I may do will be of no avail if Thou dost punish me according to the severity of Thy judgments. "He is not a man, as I am, that I should answer Him, and we should come together in judgment." (Job ix. 32.) O my God, my one and only refuge is Thy Sacred Heart, that FATHER's Heart. Miserable should I be did I lose my confidence in it; it would for ever separate me from Thee. I will therefore always treasure this confidence most preciously, and give myself up to its guidance. How many souls has it not brought back to Thee. And far from making me less attentive and watchful, in the performance of my duties, it will cause me to practise them with much greater fervour, for I shall perform them out of love and gratitude. Far from giving way to my weakness, or allowing it to be a reason for sparing myself the strictness of a penitent life, it will make me realize how good and merciful is God. The more deeply I shall feel my ingratitude and the offences I have committed against Him, the greater incentive shall I have to quicken my desire to repair them, and to punish myself for them by strictness and a mortified life. Thou, O my SAVIOUR, wilt approve of these my feeble efforts, and Thou wilt assist them. Thou wilt accept my

good will and the uprightness of my intentions. Thou wilt come towards me as I endeavour to return to Thee. Nothing will be wanting to the completeness of my reconciliation, and, with Thy all-powerful assistance, it will endure for ever.

FOURTEENTH MEDITATION.

THE KINGDOM OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE CHRISTIAN SOUL.

"Take My yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."—S. Matth. xi. 29.

First Consideration.

IN returning to GOD it is not enough for me to strive to overcome my self-indulgence and self-love, which have been the cause of my fall; but I must establish the kingdom of my LORD JESUS CHRIST, or rather it is by restoring this kingdom within my heart that I shall destroy the dominion of my senses and self-love within myself.

This kingdom of JESUS CHRIST is wholly within the soul, and it consists in expelling from the mind every other spirit but that of JESUS; in judging of nothing but according to His words; in loving nothing which does not harmonize with the mind that is in CHRIST JESUS; and in creating within myself by daily and constantly practising them all the virtues of JESUS CHRIST in such wise that it may be JESUS CHRIST Who governs me in whatsoever I do, Who rules over me in everything, and Who makes me undertake and accomplish all things.

This kingdom of JESUS CHRIST is not of this world. In it our LORD does not reign as earthly sovereigns reign, displaying pomp and splendour; neither by force does He seek to conquer or to multiply His subjects. On

the contrary, He makes Himself alone visible in the most hidden, poorest, and humblest positions ; and if He gains victories, it is by the charm He gives to those conditions in which He willed to humble Himself. A soul touched by the sight of her **LORD** going before her as her leader and guide, and seeing Him choosing the narrowest and most thorny way, feels herself constrained to follow Him, gives herself up wholly to Him, and surrenders herself unreservedly to His guidance. Along whatsoever path He wills her to tread, she follows valiantly, binds herself to it for ever, and persevering along it, makes constant progress. His precepts are commands to her ; and she would be ashamed to allow any difficulty to check her, when her Divine Master was pleased to endure them, and teaches her to overcome them. Using the words of S. Thomas, she says, "Let us also go that we may die with Him." "The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his **LORD**." He Who spake these words is He Who leads her, and Who gives shape and impulse to every step she takes ; He Who strengthens, Who encourages, and Who sustains her. It is an unreserved submission, and the dependence is perfect.

It is to this that our **SAVIOUR** invites us when He says, "Take My yoke upon you." To this He invites all Christians, but more especially those who have devoted their lives to His service ; for His yoke presses not equally upon all, although all, in their measure, are required to bear it, yet only according to the letter of God's laws and precepts ; whereas those who seek to attain to a devoted life must follow on to the counsels of perfection.

He moreover requires us to place ourselves under the burden of **CHRIST**'s yoke ; and in giving to some the

grace of a religious vocation, He did not say, Accept the yoke which I lay upon you ; but, Take My yoke, and place yourselves under it. It would neither honour nor glorify Him to drag us unwillingly after Him : He wills to reign within us through love and not by power and by might.

Is it in this manner that He reigns over and within me ? Do I really desire henceforward to be guided only by Him, and according to His will ? Is it, I repeat, my real longing ; for till now I have only seemed to wish it ? What has led me for so many years past, has been the desire of my own heart, which I have never had the courage to deny, which, on the contrary, I have striven to satisfy ; my natural inclinations, which I have never been able to make up my mind to struggle against, rather according to whose tastes I have ever lived ; my senses, which I have flattered and listened to, without ever mortifying or going against them in the smallest matters ; the world, which I have never left in heart, however much I may outwardly have given it up, and of which I may even have kept under an outward semblance of religion, many sinful thoughts and affections ; and my special views and opinions, either of vain-glory or ambition, of self-interest or self-seeking. For all this is but too common even in devout persons ; and although its aims may be different, the same impulses will exist. Here is the state of slavery in which I have passed a great part of my life. Here are the masters I have obeyed. Need I be surprised, then, that in such a service I have been guilty of such sad wanderings ?

Is it not high time that I should give place to the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and establish Him within my heart as in a kingdom to possess Him, and that He may reign within it ? Can I have a better Master, or a holier and

more enlightened one? He is "the Wisdom of God," (1 Cor. i. 24,) and has the "words of eternal life," (S. John vi. 68.) What does He require of me that is not good and holy, in accordance with the most perfect justice and equity, and useful and saving for me? Nay, more; what does He ask of me that He has not already practised? Should I not be too unworthy, if I allowed anything to appear too hard to me in following my SAVIOUR, uniting myself to Him, acting with and under Him, endeavouring to love what He loves, and to do what He requires?

Second Consideration.

It is the less allowable in me to withdraw myself from the dominion of JESUS CHRIST, which is the most firmly and the best established in the world. Christianity alone places us under the yoke of this God-Man, our Ruler and our Master. To be a Christian, or rather to bear the name of Christian, and to be unwilling to be led by CHRIST, to enter upon the way He has marked out for us, to receive His commands, which should guide all our actions, and regulate our every step, is indeed a contradiction.

In our baptism did we not renounce the world with its pomps and vanities, the flesh, and the devil? Was it not to make known that we would not be enslaved by them, nor submit ourselves to so shameful a dominion? Why were we then marked with the seal and sign of JESUS CHRIST? Why was it, that by bearing His mark we should acknowledge before His Altar by this solemn profession that we belong to Him, and have been specially dedicated to His service? What is His Holy Gospel? Does it not contain His laws? If we acknowledge their

authority, is it not to own allegiance to our SAVIOUR and our King, Who bids us obey the word they contain? and if we own allegiance to that law, is it not to rely upon our SAVIOUR and our King, Who has imposed it upon us? In fact it is this faith which teaches us that we are members of JESUS CHRIST; that He is our leader; that we are His flock, and He our Shepherd; that we are His Church, and He our Head; that we are His people, His victory, the price of His Blood; and that He has an indisputable right over us. If I only regard these general and common reasons, I can never depart from the loyal adherence and perfect obedience which I owe to this Divine SAVIOUR without serious wrong-doing. It is for Him to speak, and for me to listen; and He does both speak and command; for the Holy Gospel which He preached to us exists for ever and ever, and it is His Word, His Commandment, His Ordinance. To refuse to conform myself to it, would it not be to rebel against Him? in some degree to deny my baptism, and to relapse into a state of apostasy? This would be even more so in my case, having formed spiritual ties which bind me more closely to JESUS CHRIST, and give Him a greater claim over me. For I have distinctly and specially pronounced myself to be His disciple, to imitate and be subject to Him, to be ready to renounce everything, to do and suffer all things in His service: and I look upon my life in the light of a sacred army into which I enrolled myself, to fight under the banner of JESUS CHRIST, and to act under His orders, as a soldier does under those of his general.

In whatever manner He disposes of me, whether He exalts or humbles me, raises me up or casts me down, whether He comforts or afflicts me; if He wills me to fill this place or that, even as regards my soul and the inner

life ; if He wills me to walk in darkness or in light, in suffering and desolation or in the fulness of spiritual consolation, what have I to say to all this but, that He is my Master, and that I am in His hand ? Yes, He is the Good Master, He is mine, and I desire none other ; I have chosen Him, and God grant that I may never separate myself from Him. If up to this present time He has not had the entire possession of my heart, which was His right, I now wholly offer it to Him, desiring that He may have entire dominion over it and alone reign within it. I will no longer regard anything but as He esteems it, wish for nothing but according to His Will, and seek to obtain nothing that He has not Himself sought after. Everything that He despised, that do I despise ; and all that He condemned do I also condemn. In this manner shall I preserve the faith which I have promised Him, which ought to be everlasting.

Third Consideration.

The kingdom of JESUS CHRIST within the religious soul is not as the world imagines, a heavy burden and one difficult to bear. To judge only by outward appearances it may appear to be a hard service, but no sooner has a trial of it been made than the most happy liberty is enjoyed, which is that of children of God, and we find in it an unchangeable repose : not but that it ever remains a burden and a yoke, but it is our SAVIOUR's yoke to which we have dedicated ourselves ; it is His burden, and according to His own witness concerning Himself, " His yoke is easy and His burden is light."

This Good Master has also promised us a double blessing, that is to say, a twofold happiness, the one to be enjoyed even in this life ; the other reserved for a blissful

eternity. For it is this which He has most distinctly declared, "There is no man that hath left home, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold, now in this time, and in the world to come, eternal life." He does not say that we shall receive this hundredfold after our death, but that it shall be ours even in this present time. The freedom of heart, the release from all the cares of this life, the witness of a good conscience, inward peace, and communion with the HOLY SPIRIT of God, Who bestows Himself upon the religious soul and fills her with pure and heavenly delight; all this is of greater value than anything we may have forsaken, or whatever we could have possessed in this world.

I am able to judge of this myself, however imperfect I may be. I have from time to time enjoyed feelings of fervour, and a measure of Divine grace has been granted to me. When I have been more faithful in the discharge of my duties and religious observances I have lived more according to rule, and performed the duties of my station with greater zeal and earnestness. At such times was I not much happier? Did I then find the yoke of JESUS CHRIST too heavy for me to bear? Did I not rather enjoy a certain sweetness in bearing it which fully recompensed me for any effort I might have had to make? I esteemed myself happy, and was so in truth. When did I cease to be such, but when I became lukewarm, when I gave way to my natural indolence, and when I withdrew myself in some degree from my governing Master's influence? My passions revived within me, my natural inclinations overcame me, I followed them, and have I not often found by experience how much better and happier it would have been for me perseveringly and constantly to have followed

my SAVIOUR's footsteps, and never to have departed from the holy Commandments He imposed upon me, and the examples which He has given me? If then I would find once more this hundredfold promised in this present life, or this happiness which, through my own fault I have lost, I must seek it in JESUS CHRIST, that is, I must renew the dedication of myself to Him. I must submit to Him all my powers, all my desires, and all my actions, that He may once again reign within my heart, that I may live by Him, in Him, and for Him. My life will thus be all the more precious through being the pledge of another life, the other hundredfold which shall be its eternal recompence; for if JESUS CHRIST calls me to His Service, and if He wills even now to reign within my heart, it is to the end that I may one day reign with Him and be a partaker of His glory. Kings of the earth exalt favourites and reward the faithfulness of their subjects, but not so far as to share with them their kingdom. It is only by serving this LORD of Lords and this King of Heaven that a crown is gained, and *that* a crown of immortality. If I had nothing to expect from Him in this life, would not this immortal crown be a sufficient recompence for my service?

Conclusion.

Come, O LORD, come and take possession of the soul which is Thine Own and which Thou hast purchased, and which is more than ever Thine through the offering of herself to Thee. Come into that heart in which Thou shouldest reign alone, and expel from it everything which separates me from Thee and keeps Thee far from me. Thou art a jealous God and Thou wilt not accept a divided heart, and Thou hast made known to me in the Holy Gospel

that I cannot serve two masters. Of whom but Thee can I make choice, and whose service should I not renounce to belong to Thee ?

This was my resolve, O **LORD**, when I determined to withdraw from the world to serve Thee more closely in Thy Church, which is in truth Thy kingdom upon earth. Would that this feeling had been more deep and lasting, but there is yet time for me to renew it. “Thou art my **LORD** and my **GOD** ;” this is the homage offered to Thee by Thine Apostle after his unbelief, and it is the same which I desire to offer to Thee, humbly confessing and sincerely repenting all my past unfaithfulness. Vouchsafe to manifest Thyself to me, O my **SAVIOUR**, either in the Majesty of Thy glory or in the humiliation of the Cross, and I am ready to obey Thy will in all things, and to follow Thee along whatever path Thou desirest that I should follow after Thee with entire submission. Thou wilt call and I will answer Thee ; Thou wilt draw me and I will act upon Thy inspirations ; Thou wilt make Thy Divine will known to me, and I will conform myself to it : and all this through love, for Thou art a God of Love, and it is by love that Thou reignest in the hearts of Thy faithful ones, exerting Thy sovereignty within them.

FIFTEENTH MEDITATION.

THE HUMILITY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN THE INCARNATION.

"He humbled Himself."—Phil. ii. 8.

First Consideration.

THE Mystery of the Incarnation is one which is incomprehensible to the earthly mind; and the Spirit of God alone can convey a just idea of it or explain it aright. He has indeed done so in these few words which comprise the ground of all marvels contained in this adorable mystery, "God humbled Himself." Herein is the great secret hid with God from all eternity, and revealed by Him in His own time. What is the Incarnation of the WORD? It is the Self-humiliation of a God, this says all. This God of Majesty humbled Himself; for being God, He became MAN.

After this there is nothing which surprises me in the other mysteries in the Life of JESUS CHRIST, for that a God made MAN should embrace poverty, humiliation, and suffering, and the Cross, is the result, and as it were the issue of the Humanity which He willed to take, but that a God in all His Godhead willed to become MAN, could but have been through an excess of love to which only a boundless charity could have inclined Him. If man reduced himself to the level of an insect or of a worm, it would be considered that he had destroyed himself and placed himself in a state of nothingness; but

nevertheless, what would this be in comparison to an Incarnate God? For between a man and the tiniest insect there is always some proportion; instead of which there never was, and never could be any proportion between man and God.

Furthermore; Holy Scripture does not satisfy itself by telling us that this Only Son of God made Himself Man, but it makes use of an expression which tells us that He chose in man what was most earthly and low, which is the "flesh." "The WORD was made Flesh." This flesh of so little worth—this flesh subject to so many miseries—this flesh which belongs equally to the brute creation and to mankind He took upon Himself and willed to make it His own as it is ours. But should He not at least in making Himself Man have taken a perfect Humanity, spared Himself all the weaknesses of Infancy, and come into the world as did the first man? No; He willed to be born of a pure Virgin, to be born as all other children are, and to subject Himself to all the humiliations and infirmities of that tender age.

But this is not all; for although He became a Child, He might have made Himself a supreme and independent Monarch. He could have done so; but He willed to be dependent; and what is more, He would make Himself a slave. It is true, according to the words and testimony of the Apostle, that He only took upon Himself the "form," and that under this outward form of a slave He was indeed King and Ruler of the universe; but it is this very thing which should fill us with surprise, that He Who was indeed the Master and LORD of the whole world so humbled Himself even to the form of a slave to make Himself of no reputation. Oh, inconceivable and incomprehensible is the humility of my LORD and my God.

But must I not acknowledge, and do so to my own confusion, what is almost as difficult to believe and to conceive, that after beholding the unfathomable depth to which GOD humbled HIMSELF, I should still nourish pride within my own heart, and allow myself not only to feel this, but let others be aware of it in my intercourse with them? Can I endure the smallest matter which humbles me? Can I bear the least word which wounds me? Can I receive meekly and without bitterness the counsels of those set over me in the LORD? How sensitive I am to the slightest rebuke. How jealous of any distinction or preferences shown to others, and how alive I am as to whether they are granted or denied to me. Far from wishing to humble myself, as did my SAVIOUR, I desire always to be exalted, and from step to step there is no height to which I do not seek to ascend. "Why is earth and ashes proud?"

This reproach of the HOLY SPIRIT is applicable to all men, for all men are of themselves only to be despised. It is even more so to a Christian, for every Christian by virtue of his faith adores a GOD, Who humbled HIMSELF. How much more even does it therefore become me, who, by my profession of religion, proclaim my adherence to the precepts of JESUS CHRIST. Alas! that under profession of saintliness and an exterior garb of humility, I may possibly retain more pride and envy than I might without them. Is not this being untrue to my profession and to myself?

Second Consideration.

At the same time that the Divine WORD humbled HIMSELF so deeply, even to nothingness, this very nothingness to which humility brought HIM down, became the channel

through which GOD was most perfectly glorified, and it is through it that the Only SON of GOD in restoring His FATHER's glory achieved man's salvation. What value and what marvellous fruits of grace and holiness did not this humility bring forth? For it is on this that our justification rests, and it is that which has enriched us with all heavenly gifts and all the treasures of our SAVIOUR's mercy. In a word, this annihilation is more for GOD's glory and for man's salvation, abounds more in its sacred fruits and is more to be admired in its operation than any of the other conditions of majesty and glory in which the SAVIOUR has appeared or could have manifested Himself.

O infinite power of the Most High; O depth of Wisdom. How unsearchable art Thou, O LORD, in Thy counsels, and how adorable art Thou therein. Upon astonishing humility Thou hast established Thy most sublime and perfect greatness, and through Thy boundless lowliness Thou hast found the way to exalt Thyself, and in it to save and sanctify us.

Hence I may learn, in due proportion as regards myself, the virtue and power of humility. Whatever may be GOD's purpose for me I may be quite sure that He will work nothing great in me, save what is founded on my conviction of my own utter worthlessness. As soon as I seek to be something I am nothing, but from the moment that I will to be nothing I shall become in GOD's sight capable of all things. "It is certain that when, for the love of GOD, we empty our souls of all affection for creatures, that Great GOD immediately fills them with Himself." This is the way by which the Saints have attained to such great perfection, and this must also be my way if I would follow after them.

Without humility no true virtue can flourish—no

really good works can be performed. For in all our works and in all our virtues we must be careful to separate body and spirit; the body, which is the substance of our acts, and the spirit, which is the interior motive which prompts our performance of them. It is, therefore, this mind which gives life to our actions and animates our virtues. But no sooner does it lack humility or become infected with vain-glory than it is thereby spoilt; our best actions are but dead works, and our most precious virtues only shine with a false lustre with which our eyes become dazzled, but which disappears and becomes darkness before the eye of God.

In truth then, what value can anything that I do have in His sight, if it be not done for Him, but rather to gratify my vanity, or to attract the praise of others, or to obtain the approbation of the society to which I belong? And, if even I am not wholly seeking myself, or rather if I believe I am truly seeking after God, it would not only lower and diminish, but entirely destroy all the value of my offering, to offer to Him only a part, in stopping short at any praises which may flatter my vanity, at any kindnesses which may become all the more dangerous for me, in having over them the external covering of humility. The eye of God pierces this veil, and He sees the bottom of our hearts; moreover, He is jealous of His glory, and forbids us to attempt to touch or take aught from it. He deserves an all-pure glory, and to mix with it aught of our own, is to alloy it.

Thus, we see that He has ever chosen the humblest souls, either to lead them to extraordinary degrees of holiness, or to make use of them in His greatest works. It was the lowliest of Virgins whom He exalted to become the Mother of God. It was by means of poor fishermen that He converted the world, and diffused through it

His Church, for as S. Paul says, " Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called;" for they are usually proud, and filled with thoughts of self, " but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." And for what reason has He done this? " That no flesh should glory in His presence."

On the other hand, with what judgments has He visited proud souls, which have allowed themselves to be filled with their own pretended merits? We have but too many examples of this in religious persons who were thought to be Saints, and who may indeed have been so, only He permitted them to fall in order to punish their vain-glory. If God has not as yet so signally corrected me, nor dealt so severely with me, should I not regret this, as may it not be that everything which I may yet have done in my religious life, and my best deeds, and things in themselves good, may yet all be lost from my having permitted some taint of envy and of pride to share in them? What will it be at the end of my days, if full of years and worn out with labour, my hands are yet empty, and I have but the unhappiness of being deprived of all, through vain-glory and pride?

Third Consideration.

In this mystery of an Incarnate God, we have been permitted to contract an intimate and special union, a union in virtue of which we are made members of CHRIST and He becomes our elder Brother. Not only are we

made His brethren through this union, but so closely are we united to this God-Man as to become His body. The bond which forms this perfect union between Him and us, is the depth of humility to which He would descend for our sakes. If He had never stript Himself of all His glory, and taken upon Himself our nature, He would still ever be our God, and we His creatures, but we should never have had the inestimable benefit of being made one with Him as His brethren, and members of His body. We then belong so closely to Him only because He has come down to us, and humbled Himself to our level.

How greatly, therefore, should we value these humiliations, since they are means of raising us, and are of such great benefit to us. Is it not strange that we are nevertheless so opposed to them, and reluctant to take any part in the practice of this virtue? When it is only a question of adoring lowliness and humility in the person of JESUS CHRIST, and of speaking of His humiliation in terms and with feelings of admiration, I am able to make use of the most thrilling and touching expressions. When again it is only a question of meditating upon them, and of treating of them inwardly and in prayer, I am full of feeling and even affected to tears. But when once an occasion presents itself of imitating and practising them, then at once all my zeal vanishes, and all the ardour which I felt is extinguished. A slight, be it even the smallest, and as is often the case, an imaginary one, suffices to fill my heart with sorrow and wretchedness. I either give way to anger, or if I hide my feelings I am filled with the thought of it, and carry about my trouble with me everywhere.

Is this the honour and the gratitude which I owe to a God Who has so deeply humbled Himself for me, to the

end that I may be made in some way equal to Him ? He has not disdained to take upon Himself all my infirmities and sorrows, and there is nothing of which I have a greater horror than being made like to Him, by that through which He has made Himself like unto me, and which has so blessedly drawn me to Him. There must be some likeness between the Head and the members : what proportion, what union can there exist between His humility and my pride ? What indignity, says S. Bernard, and what shame that under a thorn-crowned Head we His members should live lives of pleasure and self-indulgence ! Well can I repeat this to myself, how opposed and how contradictory it is, that under a Head Who has willingly so humbled Himself, I, who claim to be one of His members and feel it a happiness to be so, yet cannot endure any humiliations, and reject and put far away from myself, any occasion of being humbled.

Is it not to deny Him and to separate myself from Him ? for no sooner do the members cease to hold communion with their Head, than they lose a share in His virtues, and fall away from Him ; this is what I have to fear. God permits a soul given to vanity to languish in lukewarmness, and to fill itself with foolish thoughts which may amuse through life but can never really satisfy the soul.

It is indeed a blessing if it stops there, and if He does not permit it a greater and more grievous falling away, for His holy word says, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." Without humility no Christian temper can exist, and therefore more certainly no religious frame of mind ; and on the same principle no drawing near to God, and no union can exist between God and such a soul. I have too truly felt this. Do I

seek to do so again ? rather should I not desire and seek to find the best and most certain remedy ?

Affections.

It is Thou, O LORD, Who hast taught me this powerful means by which I may be able to overcome the great evils which pride has till now worked in me, and to stop the pernicious results which it daily produces even under the holiest circumstance. The first of all sins was that of pride, and it is from this poisoned source that gradually so many other vices have sprung. Only Thy humiliations, O LORD, could make reparation for them, and for this reason didst Thou begin to humble Thyselv on first coming upon earth.

Thy example teaches me a very plain lesson, and one easy to be understood. Thou being a God didst will to become a little Infant in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Thou didst will to live in obscurity and be unknown. What dost Thou teach me from this, if it be not that I must try to become through humility like a little child ? Can I fail to know this good and holy lesson ? Is honour more my due than it was Thine ? And should my name be better known on earth than was Thine ?

O LORD, these thoughts fill me with confusion, and I find in them my entire condemnation ; now that I have realised and brought them before myself, I am deeply concerned, and feel disposed to endure every humiliation and be ready to live as the most despised of mankind ; but these feelings so soon pass away, it requires so little to blot them out. Of all virtues, there is not one which is acquired with greater difficulty, than that of a true humility, none which needs greater efforts or sacrifices. At least, O my God, I feel in this my own weakness,

and humble myself before Thee. My sensitiveness is excessive, I cannot overcome it myself. Vouchsafe to help me, O LORD. Strengthen me to perform the good purpose with which Thou hast inspired me, and to endeavour to root out of my heart the seeds of pride which lie within it, and which spread themselves over all my works and over my whole life.

SIXTEENTH MEDITATION.

OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST IN HIS ACTIVE LIFE.

" This is My commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."—S. John xv. 12.

AFTER thirty years passed in retirement and obscurity, our Blessed LORD came forth into the world to preach His Gospel. He there had to encounter all sorts of persons, which doubtless called forth all His Love. The virtue of charity is the most necessary in intercourse with mankind, and without it no intercourse can continue. Hence the Love of CHRIST JESUS in His preaching was specially distinguished by three qualities, which should serve as our examples. His was a gentle, a benevolent and an universal charity, and such should mine be towards my neighbour. And if my charity be wanting in any one of these characteristics, it is neither a Christian, nor a religious charity.

First Consideration.

The love and charity of our Blessed LORD was both meek and gentle ; and these qualities appeared in all His ways, and in His forbearance and patient endurance. For what had He not to put up with from a hard and unbelieving people, when He spake His Divine Truth ? With what condescension did He not spare so many divided minds, and accommodate Himself to them to persuade and to win them ? How many contradictions and

oppositions did He not uncomplainingly bear? What were His Apostles? Poor fishermen, lowly in birth, unlearned, and ignorant. What must it not have cost Him to conform them to His likeness? They often were not able to understand His sayings; and to make Himself better understood by them, He many times repeated His words, and explained them anew to them. When they disputed and reasoned amongst themselves, He made them at one again. He lived with and dwelt amongst them, notwithstanding the displeasure and disappointment they must but too often have caused Him. He had constant intercourse with them; and far from being awed by their presence, He desired to have them ever about Him.

Therefore well might He say to us, as indeed He does in His holy Gospel, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." (S. Matth. xi. 29.) And at the same time learn that you should yourselves be so. Have I as yet learnt it? Have I learnt to bear with the weaknesses of others? They have to endure with mine. Is it not, then, unjust that I desire them to forgive me many things which I do, when I am unwilling to overlook their slightest fault? It is the bearing with their defects which should work out my affections, and elevate my love instead of weakening it; for were I obliged to have love and forbearance for those only in whom nothing is wanting, any charity that I had would be nothing worth; or rather I should possess none, for there is no one who is without fault. If I only lived with Angels or perfect men, patience and charity would not be needed, as there would be no opportunity of exercising them; but I have to live amongst those who have their own peculiar notions and views as I have mine; and who have their own tempers, fancies, prejudices, and errors, as I also

have mine. To attempt to change them is not what I am called upon to do, and would be what I should never accomplish. It remains, therefore, for the sake of peace, and for the exercise of charity, that I should accommodate myself to them as far as possible, and endeavour to win them by my gentleness. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," (S. Matth. v. 5,) that is to say, they will win all hearts. Am I of the number of these? Or rather, how much have I not to reproach myself on this score? How many times, instead of being charitable and indulgent towards my neighbour, have I made him feel my dislike? How often have I not, and do I not still speak sharply, and behave myself unkindly towards him? Often do I pay him no attention; and yet I do not consider that he has any cause of offence with me. It would be still far worse if, as some do, I praised and commended myself for such acts. These things are the causes of troubles and divisions. A little self-mastery would prevent these evils, and what is there that I ought not to sacrifice to avoid them?

Second Consideration.

The same love and charity which caused the LORD JESUS CHRIST to bear with such gentleness and patience the imperfections of those with whom He vouchsafed to dwell, and hold communion, induced Him also to employ His Divine power to bestow abundant graces upon them; for His was a benevolent love and charity. "He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed with the Devil," comforting the sorrowful, raising the dead, speaking of the kingdom of God, and working unceasingly for the salvation of souls.

I am unable to perform miracles in behalf of my neigh-

bour, as did the LORD JESUS CHRIST. It does not rest with me as it did with my SAVIOUR, to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, health and healing to the paralytic and the possessed: but yet not a day passes without many opportunities arising to help and oblige my neighbour. This is what Christian love does: how much more religious love? Have I in this matter all the zeal and fervour which it is my duty to have? Am I not rather of the number of those indifferent persons who think only of themselves, and will never inconvenience themselves for others? Ought I not to feel it to be my duty to help others to the utmost of my power? Do I perform this duty cheerfully, and with ready affection? At least, have I enough love to desire for them all the good which I am unable to obtain for them? Do I share in and rejoice over whatever they receive? Am I filled with sympathy for their troubles; and do I make their sorrows my own when any afflictions or misfortunes befall them? For true charity demands all this of me.

But is it not in all this that I both have offended and do still offend against charity? I feel only too keenly when it regards myself; and I exaggerate the duties of charity in what I consider due to myself, and when I think that it is denied me. I then place no limit to the exercise of charity, and am sensitive about not finding it ever ready to serve me. Is it thus that I practise it towards those to whom I owe it on so many accounts? All costs me an effort when it is a question of my neighbours; and instead of doing them all the good which lies in my power, perhaps, I envy them what they receive, and may even sometimes wish to put obstacles in the way of what they wish to obtain, instead of forestalling or anticipating their needs. And when my duty does not require it of me,

have I not ministered to them grudgingly when called upon by my office to do so? Our LORD JESUS CHRIST has expressly told us, that we should receive the same from His FATHER which we have given to our brother. According to this measure, what have I to hope for from GOD, and with what confidence may I pray to Him to bestow upon me the abundance of His gifts if I retain so unsympathising a heart as I have had towards the members of His body and His children?

Third Consideration.

That in which the love of JESUS CHRIST was even more greatly to be admired was its extent. It was an universal charity. As He had been sent by His FATHER for the sake of all men, and as in His FATHER He loved all men and gave Himself for all, so He cared for all without respect of persons. Jews and Gentiles received from Him the same teaching, and the same healing both of soul and body. He was never seen to be either repulsed by the misery and wretchedness of some, or preoccupied by the greatness and riches of others. Those even who most openly and unjustly opposed Him, ever found Him ready to do them good; and it depended only upon themselves to draw near to this Good Master to receive from Him all the gifts He has to bestow. Not only was He willing to give all to them, but He even called, invited, and sought them out. If I do not endeavour to frame my love for my neighbour after this pattern, my charity is not only imperfect, but it is a false charity in that it is not Christian charity. For Christian charity makes us love our neighbour in regard to GOD, and in His sight. Therefore this motive has no limit, and to restrict it to certain objects without

extending it to others, is to destroy it completely and entirely.

Therefore the Son of God, and after Him the Apostles, in commanding the practice of love and charity, as among the most important of our duties, make use of one expression, "Love thy brother, Love thy neighbour." This name of brother and of neighbour belongs not more to one than the other, and therefore does not oblige us more towards the one than towards the other. If "ye do good," adds the SAVIOUR of the World, "to them that do good to you," if you are only prepared to "lend to them of whom you hope to receive again," or with whom ye have a community of interest, and ties of affection, "what thank have ye?" do not even sinners the same? But charity should have a distinct and saintly character, which should elevate it above natural benevolence, which was the virtue of the heathen, and which is still only that of the world. Therefore the SAVIOUR of Men, in the Commandment which He gives us of loving one another, and which He calls His precept and His law, would have us embrace therein our enemies and such as injure us, "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them which curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you." (S. Luke vi. 27.)

How perfect, but how rare is the greatness of this charity! But rare and all-perfect as it is, it is nevertheless an absolute duty, and Christianity and consequently religion, recognizes no other true charity but this, neither does God reward any other.

Where am I then? And how do I fulfil this obligation? For what did our LORD Himself tell us, but that a time would come when the love of many would wax cold; and this does not only take place among worldly

people, but also among such as profess godliness. Love in truth does but too often wax cold ; and in that it does so, its limits become narrowed.

We have our likings and aversions, and according to the difference of our feelings so is the tenour of our actions. We have our special friends, for whom we spare nothing ; but we are uninterested in our common acquaintance. We do not show the same care for all, but indulge in our particular likings ; and whereas we are full of thought and care for some, we neglect and are cold towards others. Do we feel hurt by anything, our feelings of resentment arise ; and instead of true charity overcoming them, we but too often allow them to appear.

What is also very common, and what entirely overthrows the law of love and charity, is that we are often full of gentleness and love for strangers, and for those with whom we are little thrown, and have only coldness, and perhaps even unkindness for our brethren with whom we are united in such close and holy bonds. Where is then the love of JESUS CHRIST ? Indeed it is not here ! She lives but in certain souls, whom GOD for our edification gives us for examples. Have I never seen any ? Are none ever before me ? It seems as if they were indwelt by charity ; as if in them love ever increased and multiplied, as objects upon which to bestow love and care come before them. They are admired ; but are there many who imitate them ? What good will it do me to admire them if I do not strive to follow their example ?

Affections.

O GOD of Love ! my SAVIOUR ! it is in religious hearts that Thou dost desire to preserve the spirit which

existed when Thou didst breathe into Thy Church, and with which the first Christians were filled when all were of one heart and of one mind, and how therefore without love can any be really Thy disciple? It is not in my power to draw all hearts into one, to incline them to this entire conformity, this perfect oneness; but I should so try to order my own, and to conform it, and this must be the effect of Thy Divine Grace within it.

Grant to me, O God, this patient love, which nothing wearies; this benevolent love which refuses nothing; this universal love, which excepts nothing. Ah! LORD JESUS, however patient my love may be towards my brethren, never can it equal what Thine has been towards me; and never can I have to endure from them what Thou hast borne from me up to this present time. Whatever I may do for them, or desire to do as in Thy sight, never can it approach to what I have received from Thy infinite bounty, should I ever correct it as much as to extend my love and zeal to those with whom I live and such as come before me, when Thou hast filled the whole earth with Thy mercy, and hast extended Thy love even to those who crucified Thee.

If then on the love that I owe to my neighbour, as well as in every other virtue, I am to trace Thy likeness, O my SAVIOUR, and have Thee as my example, I may well be confounded at the little resemblance which exists between me and Thee. But what redoubles my confusion, and should complete it, is that I am so cold and so slow in the exercise of charity, when Thou art ready to accept everything that she makes me do, as done to Thyself. For Thou dost not disdain to be its spring of action, Thou dost accept it from me, and Thou dost exalt it by making it worthy in Thy sight. Oh, my God! if I love Thee, how can I fail to love those whom Thou hast given

me? Hence it is not my brethren, but it is Thyself Whom I love in them. Is it not to Thee that I offer any acts of charity I perform to them? Need I any other incentive? That heart must indeed be hard and cold, O LORD, if this one consideration does not suffice it.

SEVENTEENTH MEDITATION.

THE INTERIOR SUFFERINGS OF THE LORD JESUS
CHRIST IN HIS PASSION.

“Then saith He unto them, My Soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.”—S. Matth. xxvi. 38.

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST is our perfect Example in everything. In His passion it was His will to teach us how we should endure the sufferings and afflictions of life, of which there are two kinds; the inner ones which afflict the soul, and the outer ones through which the senses suffer. Both the one and the other supply us with matter for two important meditations; and in what relates firstly to the mental sufferings of the Son of God, we may reduce them to three kinds, which the Evangelists have traced for us, which are sadness, weariness, and fear.

First Consideration.

With what sadness was not our Blessed LORD overwhelmed when after the first Eucharist with the Apostles, He went forth to Gethsemane. Hardly is He able to support Himself, and according to what He made known to the three disciples whom He had chosen to accompany Him, the agony which overwhelmed Him was intense, enough of itself to cause His death. “My soul is sorrowful,” said He to them, “even unto death.” In this began that passion which He endured for me.

It was not enough that He gave His sacred Body to endure the anguish of the Cross, it was needful that His soul should be delivered up to endure the severest wrestlings, and that He should undergo the sharpest and most painful attacks. It was a part, a great part indeed, of that satisfaction which He should make to the FATHER for the sins of men, for it is in the heart that sin is conceived, and it is verily the soul through the disorder of the will which commits it.

Whatever it may be, what does our Blessed LORD do in this sadness which crushes Him and which He could not endure without a miracle? Does He have recourse to worldly consolation? Does He even seek some comfort and support from His Apostles? Does He give way to impatience and complaining, and to relieve His heart from the weight which presses upon it? Does He give vent to many words? Few words, two or three, are all He utters, and then not tarrying with His disciples, He withdraws Himself apart, He leaves them to pray "beneath the olives' moon-pierced shade," and spends three whole hours in prayer. Heaven is His only refuge, His sole support, and whether He be heard or not—and it appears that He was not heard—He places in it His whole confidence, and has no other feeling but one of perfect submission and complete resignation. "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

However exempt from the trials of life certain circumstances may appear to be, yet, in all there must be some dark and sad days. Everywhere there are trying moments; I must have mine as others have. We are indeed so constituted, that if we have not real causes of sorrow, we make to ourselves imaginary ones. It is not for us to ask what was the cause of the Agony endured by the SON of GOD, or to fathom the depths of

that woe to which He Himself bore witness. Yet we may not doubt that His suffering was as necessary and real, as it was bitter and keenly felt; whereas what in a thousand instances causes all my pain is an idea, a shadow. It is either only my sensitiveness, my restless temper, my self-love, or my pride. For if I will truly withdraw into myself and probe the depths of my heart, I shall find that these are generally the causes which fill it with sadness. "Why art thou so heavy, O my soul; and why art thou so disquieted within me?" It is because thou art ingenuous at tormenting thyself often without cause, and even against all reason.

But whether my sufferings are real or have no foundation, how do I bear them? With how many useless and painful thoughts do I not torment myself in secret! How many vain distractions do I not seek both within and without, under the specious pretexts of curing my fancy, and turning it away from whatever fills it with disquiet! How many spiteful and bitter feelings do I not harbour against those persons whom I imagine to be the authors of my sufferings! And even with respect to those who I know have nothing to do with them, I often give way to impatient expressions, as if I accused them or felt it to be my right to make them suffer because I am enduring pain!

Oh, if only I were submissive as the LORD JESUS CHRIST showed Himself to be. If I knew how to keep silence, a Christian silence; if I withdrew into the inner chamber of my own soul, and shut up within it all my sufferings; and if I ever went only to GOD to pour out my heart before Him, seeking no other consolations than what are found in prayer and holding communion with Him, what faults should I not avoid, and what anxiety and disturbance should I not spare myself? The Angel

of the LORD would come and comfort me, or rather the LORD Himself would pour forth upon me the unction of His Grace. He would vouchsafe to be my guide, my friend, my counsellor. He would apply a remedy to my wounds, and if it did not please Him to grant me perfect healing, He would at least soften my sufferings, and would make them not only endurable but wholesome and profitable. "My soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was delighted and was exercised, and my spirit swooned away." This is what the saintly King more than once experienced: why should I not also do the same?

Second Consideration.

Another interior suffering with which the SAVIOUR of the World permitted Himself to be affected was weariness, "and He began to be very heavy," says the Evangelist. It was a natural consequence of the exceeding sorrow with which He was overwhelmed, all became wearisome unto Him. The great motives which had previously animated and deeply moved Him, although they lost nothing of their former force and power, yet the zest had been permitted to depart. He did not allow Himself to be overcome, but upheld Himself, yet without any of those feelings or moving causes which stir up and urge forward the soul, so wholly was He, as it were, forsaken and given up to the desolation of His own heart. Such a condition is a thousand times harder to bear than any other suffering, however great it may be, a state in its degree resembling this is one in which religious people often find themselves. There are times in which we feel a distaste to all the practices of religion. Nothing pleases us: we feel nothing helpful, we

are discouraged from meditation, Confession, and Communion, spiritual readings, and all observances and practices. It needs but little to make us even sometimes regret our resolve to be more wholly devoted to God and His service. Has not this been too often my experience, and do I not often feel thus? If it is not through my own wilful remissness that this state of mind has come upon me, I need not be discouraged by it, as then such feelings are permitted, temptations which may be very wholesome and profitable for me, and through which I may even give a hundred-fold by offering to God my constancy, and thereby giving the best proof of my faithfulness.

But alas, these feelings of distaste and weariness arise but too commonly from myself, and through my luke-warmness and negligence. I will not make any effort to arouse myself, and lift up my heart to God. Is it then to be wondered at that nature draws me down? And need I be surprised that God hides Himself from me when He sees that I no longer draw near to Him; that I am languid in His service, and allow myself to feel the time long which is spent in holding communion with Him? The hours seem only too short when I am spending them according to my own fancy and inclination.

It is nevertheless true, that sometimes it may not be through my own fault that I fall into this state of indifference, and appear cut off from all things that belong unto my God. But am I then careful to make this trial as profitable as it might be to myself? I might sanctify my weariness and even my distaste. I could make them a means of putting into practice the best of virtues, patience, penitence, and perseverance. To know how to endure weariness for God, is not a matter lightly regarded by Him; neither is it a low degree in perfection

to continue to make progress even under the influence of weariness. This has been the gift of Saints ; but little do I possess of it. No sooner does any practice begin to weary me, than I either give it up, or but very imperfectly perform my duty towards it. I allow the distaste which I now feel to be a reason for omitting it ; instead of which I ought by the grace and help of God Who tries me in and through this distaste, to gather up all my powers to overcome myself. Never did David glorify God more acceptably than in saying these words, "I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost ; seek Thy servant, because I have not forgotten Thy commandments." It is in so doing that I shall best honour God, and obtain for myself great treasure of acceptableness in His sight.

Third Consideration.

A third feeling with which the sacred heart of our Divine LORD was oppressed and weighed down, was one of shrinking and of dread in the midst of the darkness of night which compassed Him about, and in the solitary spot into which He had retreated. Every point in His sacred passion presented itself to His mind ; and finding Himself on the eve of a death so shameful and so full of agony it portrayed itself before Him, so as to fill Him with fear. The apprehension was such as to trouble all His senses, and so extreme was the repugnance felt as to cause Him even to ask to be spared the draining of the bitter cup which was prepared for Him ; "O My FATHER, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." And indeed it is not surprising that in contemplating all the ignominies to which our LORD was about to be exposed, and all the sufferings which His sacred body was to endure, His human nature shrank from them.

Never could an inward struggle be more violent, never did any other equal it. In this combat He fell on the ground in mortal agony so great, that "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Yet all this suffering was but the pangs of His humanity; and without regarding the shrinking of His human nature, His will remained ever equally firm and unchanging. When the moment approached for the carrying out of His work, and His enemies approached to take Him, He thought not of hiding nor withdrawing Himself from them. On the contrary, He advanced to meet them, and declared unto them, "I am He;" "this is your hour and the power of darkness;" you may be permitted to do to Me what is commanded you. What dread joined to what courage—what dismay and what resolution—is not here displayed by the GOD-MAN.

When any occasion presents itself to me in which I have to overcome self, I cannot at first check certain natural feelings and involuntary shrinkings which arise in my heart. Is this not especially what is felt at the time of meditation? There is no soul, however lukewarm and indifferent it may be, which such a holy time does not animate and arouse God to speak to the heart; grace enlightens the mind; we reproach ourselves for our wanderings, and discover their source. We also find what remedies we should use, what we should do, and what we ought to leave undone. We discern also more clearly what we ought to be, and on what it depends to make us so. But we fear to pledge ourselves, and to undertake the task before us. We raise endless difficulties; we distrust our own strength; we argue with ourselves. But the result of all these long reasonings is only a state of uncertainty in which nothing is resolved upon, and nothing is finally decided.

Is not this such a condition in which I now find myself? In vain do I try to blind and deceive myself. God wills, notwithstanding my own opposition, to show me what I ought to reform and change in my life, so that it should become holier. Certain examples which I have before me, the secret remorse of my own conscience, the admonitions of those set over me in the LORD, the reflections which I have made during my meditation, and those which I now make—all these things do not allow me to remain in ignorance of what it is my duty to reform, and all combine to inspire me with wholesome and good thoughts and feelings. What then hinders me? That which has before done so a hundred times, a mistaken fear and mistrust which I have not courage to overcome, and which makes all things appear insurmountable to me, and as if they were impossible to me. These false fears, which I allow to overcome me, even cause me to imagine countless reasons to hold me back and prevent my pressing forward. Our LORD JESUS CHRIST neither delayed nor deliberated thus, and was His heart less agitated and disturbed than mine? Had He less cause to be? This passion which encompassed Him so closely, and which He had so vividly called to mind in all its reality, was it likely to cost Him less, and had it less in it to assuage Him? Oh, shall I always allow myself to be disheartened and discouraged by the smallest obstacles which my weakness gives rise to, and which by dwelling upon them it magnifies; or if fearfulness overcomes me shall I never learn to do battle to its first approaches; and shall I never say to myself effectually and with resolution the words which the LORD JESUS CHRIST said to His disciples, "Rise up, let us go?" (S. Mark xiv. 42.)

Affections.

It is through the infinite greatness of Thy Wisdom and Mercy, O Loving SAVIOUR, that Thou hast willed to subject Thyself to my weakness, "to be in all points tempted like as we are" (Heb. iv. 15,) to the end that by Thy example I may be both instructed and strengthened. Without this, O my God, without the perfect pattern which Thou art, and the support which I find in Thee, where should I find myself under certain circumstances, what would then become of me? Thou seest my changeableness, and how easily my mind becomes disturbed. One day my mind is in peace, and even it may be filled with holy joy; my duties cause me pleasure; and I enjoy happiness in my state of life. Nothing troubles me, and it seems as if there were no victory I might not be able to gain over myself and the evil passions of my heart. But the day following I am no longer the same being; my spiritual exercises are a weariness to me; I feel a distaste for them, which not only makes them burdensome but even painful. In this way my whole life is but a perpetual warfare and full of unrest, in which as it were two opposing minds seek to govern.

Wherefore, O LORD, dost Thou allow this? Thou hast in this, as in all else, Thine own wise purposes and intentions for me, and the sanctifying of my soul. Thou willest that I should be tried as Thou wast tried. Thou wouldest that I should practise, in that state of life in which Thou hast placed me, the same virtues, and in my degree win also the same recompense. Thou wouldest that I should endure the same sorrow of heart, and that I should also offer in sacrifice all consolations and spiritual delights. So be it, O my God, as it is Thy blessed will. It would be too easy and happy for me to

follow Thee if I ever felt equally drawn to do so; nevertheless, O LORD, cease not to strengthen me, not only with Thy holy example, but by its accompanying grace and power, that both the one and the other may establish me in following Thy steps. And grant that no troubles, no weariness, no fears, may be able to turn me back from following after Thee; that although I may not always enjoy the same sweetness in doing so, I may ever press forward with equal constancy. The greater the effort which I have to make in overcoming myself, the more will my perseverance do Thee honour, and incline Thee to prepare for my reward "a Crown of Life," promised to such as are "faithful unto death."

EIGHTEENTH MEDITATION.

THE BODILY SUFFERINGS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN HIS PASSION.

“ He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.”—Isaiah liii. 5.

Not only was it decreed that the Soul of the **Lord Jesus Christ** should expiate our sins, and through its inner sufferings should satisfy the Divine justice, but Almighty God, having given Him a Body capable of suffering, willed also that this sacred Humanity should endure the most cruel torments. It is for this reason that the **Saviour** of men went through such a bitter Passion, and after having poured forth every drop of His precious Blood, died upon the cross. Most valuable lesson for me, and perfect example of one of the most needful Christian virtues required of all, more so even of those who desire to serve Him—which is, mortification of the senses.

First Consideration.

I have first to consider, what my **Saviour** has suffered, and to form some idea of this, it is enough to take up the crucifix and to look upon this adorable Body from which the Blood streams forth and which is covered with bruises. I have but to meditate upon this, and to hear in the depth of my soul those words which my lying **Lord** says to me through the mouth of His pro-

phet, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by," along the way of this mortal life? "behold, and see, if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow." I have but to cast my eyes upon this wounded countenance, livid from the blows it has borne. This holy Head crowned with thorns. This blessed Mouth to which gall had been given to drink. These Hands and Feet pierced with nails. This sacred Heart opened by the soldier's lance. Every part of that Body torn and dislocated: to this condition the executioners have reduced Him, in this state He died; what does my heart say to this sight?

When repentance is spoken of to me, and I am exhorted in the words of S. Paul to "bear about in the body the dying of the LORD JESUS," (2 Cor. iv. 10,) it is a question of all this to me, is all this required of me? A self-denying life is required of every follower of CHRIST, but in what is its severity summed up? Is it not in obedience to the commandments of GOD? There cannot be for me a truer mortification; and according to GOD's design, in doing this, all my penitence is contained. I am bound to deny myself in eating and drinking, in sleep, not to indulge in luxury, in dress, or in any other matter which is only conducive to pleasure beyond what is really necessary in conformity with that state of life in which it has pleased GOD to place me. I should overcome all natural distaste and shrinking from hardness, and not listen to any pleadings of habit and self-love. I should persevere courageously without self-sparing, and bear manfully the weight and trial which all exercises of self-denial and self-discipline may be to me. So should I live, not for a day, or one short week, or year, but uninterruptedly, and without intermission through life and unto the hour of death. This is what GOD demands of me, this will be pleasing to Him, this

is the height to which I must endeavour to mount up. It is true that it will be hard and difficult, and especially true that this perseverance will be painful and wearisome, but what is there in it to compare to the sufferings endured by the LORD JESUS CHRIST in His Passion ?

Nevertheless, am I not obliged to acknowledge before GOD, and to do so to my own shame, that the principal study of my life and my most common thought, is how to soften and make more easy to myself every required self-denial ? How ready am I to curtail every mortification, and to seek to alleviate every trial. Reasons never fail me for so doing, and I know well how to convince myself. I have known well how to do this hitherto, that is to say, not to flatter myself, and to judge myself honestly ; I have known well how to deceive myself, and I am still glad to remain in error, because it is easier for me to do so, and does not shame my cowardice. How quickly should I not change both in feelings and actions, if the sufferings of my LORD were really engraven on my heart, and if I had more deeply impressed them upon my remembrance. All would then be easy to me, or at the least, all would be thankfully borne. Whatever nature might say, I should make answer that my sufferings are nothing when compared to those of my SAVIOUR. And if anything is required of me, it is not as it was of Him, to the shedding of my blood, I should say to myself, and indeed I should continually repeat this, that if I cannot live upon the Cross I can die on it ; and that it is better so to die, than to live and die without repentance.

Second Consideration.

Why did the LORD JESUS CHRIST suffer so much ? This is another deep and touching reflection. He suf-

fered because He had pledged Himself to suffer for the glory of His FATHER, and for the salvation of His brethren. It was a pledge both free in its principle and perfectly voluntary: yet He could not but accept the conditions traced out for Him, to suffer and to die if He would redeem the world and repair the injury which had been done to Almighty God. His FATHER's honour was too precious to Him, and He cared too much for our salvation not to sacrifice, in behalf of both the one and the other, His Blood and His Life. This is then the cause of His having laid upon Himself such mighty obligations. In consequence, therefore, of His acceptance, this law about which He was free, became to Him an absolute duty, and it is thus that "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross."

The Christian state to which I am pledged would of itself oblige me to mortify continually all my senses. In calling us to Christianity JESUS CHRIST says to all, without any exception, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross daily," (S. Luke ix. 23,) without this, we cannot be His disciples. Therefore, if this is binding upon all Christians, how much more strictly upon such as desire to devote themselves more closely to His service. Through self-indulgence and seeking my own ease have I not in a great degree thrown off the yoke of religious mortification, or at least, have endeavoured to lighten it for myself? Has this not been the case with me for years past? And what has been the result? Two things which I cannot sufficiently regret, that by so doing I have lost the blessing and benefit which this practice would have been to my soul. For there is in self-denial a hidden but very real blessing; but this is only enjoyed by such souls as are truly mortified; and to be mortified is not to

spare oneself or only to practise such self-denials as we are unable to avoid.

Happy then is this religious duty ! It supplies me with all the means whereby I may make reparation to God for my sins, purify my soul before God, and have my share in the sufferings of the Son of God. Not only does it give me these means, but it brings me under subjection to them. It is a constant, a daily, an ever-present state of penitence. Any other mortification which was my own choosing, I might be suspicious of, for I might fear that it was either not sufficient or not in accordance with the will of God ; but I cannot doubt what the Church commands me, and what God has Himself marked out for me. May He be for ever praised for this, and may I learn to make a good use of it.

Third Consideration.

In short, how did the LORD JESUS CHRIST suffer ? With invincible patience and unchangeable constancy. His patience was indeed that spoken of by the Prophet Isaiah, (lii. 7,) "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth," and "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter." He permits Himself to be taken without uttering a complaint. What was His silence before Pilate when condemned by him ? Did He speak one word against the Jews when they dragged Him tied and bound through the streets of Jerusalem ; or against the soldiers when they scourged Him in the praetorium, and when they pressed the Crown of Thorns upon His Head ; or against His executioners, who pierced His Hands and His Feet with the nails, and fastened Him to the Cross ? One might have supposed Him to be without feeling ; but here we behold the effects of

patience in bearing those sufferings which cause the most acute pain to the body. It is not that they are not felt and most keenly: but, if even not always able to restrain the groans of nature, and such complaints as give some relief, the temper of mortification and of patience both checks and moderates them.

With this spirit of patience and mortification, I shall pay less attention to the ills which befall me, and I shall not be so filled with self-pity. I shall not make known what I may be enduring. I shall speak less of my own sufferings, and beware of exaggerating them. I shall not pour out so many bitter complaints and murmurings when something that I seem to require is wanting to me. I shall neither spare myself so much, nor desire to be spared. I shall submit myself to all, and bear everything silently, or I shall endeavour only to say as did S. Paul, "that I may know Him, and the fellowship of His sufferings." (Phil. iii. 10.) This is how I should speak, these should be my thoughts. But why, then, do I speak and think so differently? It is that I know little or nothing of what true mortification is, and that I have little of its spirit in my heart.

But still less do I unite with this Evangelical patience and religious mortification a firm and abiding constancy. The patience of the Son of God never for one moment forsook Him, even to His last sigh upon the Cross.

It was there that He was to consummate His Sacrifice, and it was death alone which was to end His fearful pains. We may be willing at times to mortify our flesh, and be ready to suffer; but to persevere in this holy temper of mind, to continue in it without intermission—of this we have but few examples.

Where are now those who mortify their body and carry with them to the grave that hatred to the flesh

which made them fight against it, even to their last breath ? So great a Saint as S. Francis, when dying, was enabled to assert that he had treated his body with excessive severity. Alas ! do we not daily fall into the opposite extreme ? Hardly have I made any effort to overcome my senses, or to deny them aught that they ask of me, that I do not believe I have a right to compensate them and to comply with all their infirmities. The least inconvenience is sufficient for me to make me dispense with all penitential exercises, and to grant myself every alleviation which I might well forego if I were willing to consider and flatter myself less.

As years go on, I persuade myself that I can well lighten the severity of my rules, as if at any age we were not equally bound to deny ourselves. It is true that there are certain limits and considerations to be observed, but these have their bounds and often we place none to them. Ah, shall I never understand the happiness, after having lived in self-denial and mortification, of dying in it, and to draw my last breath as did my LORD JESUS CHRIST on the arms of the Cross !

Affections.

O GOD my SAVIOUR, Redeemer of the world, since it is by the Holy Cross that Thou hast saved me, how can I attempt to work out my own salvation by any other means ? And if it were possible how could I desire it ? In making Thyself my SAVIOUR Thou hast also made Thyself my Guide along the way of Salvation, and consequently I can lay no claim to that Salvation that Thou hast merited for me, but in so far as I strive to follow the way of the Holy Cross which Thou hast taught me.

But supposing it were possible for me to follow some

other road, could I consent to do so? Would not all my reason and every feeling of religion rise up against me? What, my **LORD** and **SAVIOUR**, I behold Thy Sacred and Innocent Body wounded and torn with blows, and could I wish to flatter my own guilty nature and indulge it in all ways? I see Thy thirst quenched with vinegar and gall, and could I indulge my appetites and give way to complaints when they are not satisfied? I behold Thee ending Thy life in the most cruel tortures, and could I wish that mine should pass gently and easily? Ah! **LORD**, should the disciple, yea, rather the servant and the slave be better treated than his Master? How should I a Christian devoted and dedicated to Thee in so many ways appear before Thy Judgment Seat after having so indulged myself? And how should I ever bear to behold the fearful difference which would appear between Thee and me? How can I bear the thought even now? Does not one glance towards Thee on the Cross suffice to overwhelm me with confusion? Rather, O my **SAVIOUR**, do I need aught else to arouse me, to awaken anew within me the spirit of penitence and mortification, to inspire me with new power, to strengthen and sustain my constancy in whatever battles I have to fight against my nature and myself?

No, my **God**, I know nothing henceforth, and I desire to know nothing but as Thy great Apostle said, “ **JESUS CHRIST** and Him crucified.” Herein is all my wisdom. It would be but little to know this unless I try to practise it. To contemplate Thee upon the Cross, O my **SAVIOUR**, is a means of sanctification; but to endeavour to bear our Cross and to carry it well, this is salvation and the highest perfection.

NINETEENTH MEDITATION.

OF THE NEW LIFE OF OUR LORD IN HIS RESURRECTION.

"Like as CHRIST was raised up from the dead, even so we also should walk in newness of life."—Rom. vi. 4.

First Consideration.

OUR LORD went not down into the grave to remain there: for though He became "obedient unto death," it was in order that He might vanquish and destroy death itself. Now, the first thing that strikes us in contemplating the Resurrection of the GOD-MAN, is, that He raised Himself from the tomb. The Psalmist had said of Him that He should be "free among the dead :" that is to say, that He should die at the time and after the manner that He had appointed: but that He would likewise at the appointed time break asunder the bonds of death, exerting His Might no less for His own Resurrection than for the raising of His creatures. This was fulfilled on the third day after His passion. The hour came, and then "very early in the morning" He issued forth from the sepulchre where He had lain. He appeared in the midst of the soldiers who guarded it, and they were smitten with a terror which forbade their attempting to detain Him, or to bar His way. "O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ?" "I will be thy destruction." These words of the Prophet Hosea, and of the Apostle S. Paul, are applied by the

Church to our LORD, the Victor over death, and from them we learn how it pleased Him to accomplish the miracle of His Resurrection.

It would be a presumptuous and fatal error on my part if I thought that I could, of myself, and without the HOLY SPIRIT's aid, spiritually rise again in CHRIST. Weak as I am, how can I suppose it possible for me to vanquish my evil habits, and cure my defects, save by the Divine Grace? For here the example of our LORD affords no precedent, nor can any parallel be drawn. But I will assume the presence of this Divine Grace as an absolute necessity and an indispensable foundation—this Grace which GOD'S Mercy permits me to claim, and which, far from withdrawing itself from me, redoubles its calls, especially during this holy season of retirement: by this Grace I must act—with it I must co-operate—and thus far does the work of my sanctification and spiritual resurrection depend upon myself. The Resurrection of our LORD was His great victory: shall not mine also be a triumph? As the SAVIOUR'S Body was bound in the winding-sheet, even so am I fettered by the bonds of sin. As that Divine Body was covered by a great stone, so have I also a heavy weight to cast away: that is the natural weakness of my heart, and the sloth in which I have so long indulged. Around the sacred Body His enemies kept watch, lest It should be secretly carried away: and I have not only the invisible foes of my salvation striving to draw me back, but how many other enemies to fear! Human respect, evil examples, mocking conversations, pernicious friendships, negligent habits, frequent temptations, which I have so much difficulty in resisting—in a word, all which I have hitherto considered in the light of hindrances, without having the firmness to overcome them. But the Son of GOD hastened, in

spite of all apparent obstacles, to fulfil the promise which He had made to His disciples that He would rise again and be seen by them : and now, therefore, I who have made so many promises and resolutions, and who have so often assured my Maker that I had finally determined to change my course and to walk in newness of life like a risen soul ; now ought I to prove myself faithful, and from this day forth put in practice all that I have hitherto planned and resolved. Is my choice really made ? That must be proved by the result. Ah, LORD, will my courage forsake me at the very moment of trial ? Thou wilt not fail me, O my God. Woe to me, then, if I should fall away from Thee.

Second Consideration.

Our Blessed LORD in His resurrection took upon Himself a new life—a glorious life, unlike that with which He had until now been clothed. The Divine Redeemer, Who had hitherto been subject to all the privations of obscurity and poverty, Who had undergone all the shame and suffering of His bitter Passion, now appeared shining with a celestial light brighter than the sun. Hitherto His Body had felt the weakness of our mortal nature : now its strength was wholly Divine, and His persecutors had no more power over It. It was now in a manner a Spiritual Body, dazzling by Its splendour, passing from one spot to another with the swiftness of thought, and penetrating through the closed doors of the room where the Apostles were met together. Thus this great mystery was our LORD's second Transfiguration, a thousandfold more wondrous than that on Mount Tabor.

If I wish my spiritual Resurrection to be real and perfect, I must be renewed and changed in like manner.

For there is nothing in my whole life which does not need renewal and reformation. May this holy renewal be both outward and inward! The inward renewal is the most important and the most difficult. It would be easy enough to acquire an outwardly devout and recollected manner; but of what avail would this be whilst my heart remained unchanged? I must therefore strive to renounce my will, to purify my affections, to regulate my aspirations and intentions, to humble my pride, to spur on my flagging zeal. I must banish from me all errors and delusions to which I too readily lend an ear: I must renounce many attachments, in themselves innocent, yet which are neither in God, nor for Him: above all I must cast away the self-love by which I am enslaved: in short, I must try to gain a new heart. From this inward change an outward reformation will follow. I will faithfully endeavour to fulfil all the duties of my station, and by submission I shall conquer.¹ Will it indeed be thus with me, O LORD? Alas! such graces are not the result of a single meditation, of a brief retirement from the world: yet they may be the fruition of the good resolves which I have formed at this holy time. These devout resolutions shall be imprinted on my heart, they shall be daily renewed, and thus day by day they will help me to renew myself.

Third Consideration.

The Resurrection of our LORD would have offered a less perfect example if, in taking up this new and glorious life, He had not at the same time entered upon the Life

¹ “Fixed to hold Love’s banner fast
And by submission win at last.”

Christian Year, 2nd Sunday after Trinity.

Everlasting. But now “CHRIST being raised from the dead dieth no more.” This saying of the Apostle has been verified for ages past, and its truth will continue to be proved in time and eternity. The dead who came forth from their graves when the Son of God expired upon the Cross, arose but for a time, and remained still subject to death ; but He “the first fruits of them that slept” quitted the tomb once and for ever.

The thought of this blessed Immortality calls to my mind one of the most necessary, but one of the rarest and most difficult virtues—perseverance. There are few who do not, for a time at least, derive some benefit from spiritual retirement. Their inner life is renewed, and, as it were, re-vivified. They strive to work out the resolutions which they have made in the presence of God, and are not satisfied with mere words and expressions of feeling. Yet how quickly do they fall back into their accustomed ways! Have I not often experienced this myself? Let me not judge others, when I also am found wanting. How have I profited by these seasons of retirement, and what advance have I made from my state in former years? Well will it be for me if I have not cause to wish that I were even as I was in past days: for, instead of pressing onward in the race, I may gradually have relaxed my efforts and fallen farther and farther behind. Be this as it may, let me ask myself why these holy and constantly recurring seasons have profited me so little? And yet, on almost every occasion, the Grace of God has touched and enlightened me. How many times in sincere repentance and earnest prayer, have I wished to begin, and indeed have begun, but I have not completed my work. My natural imperfection has drawn me back to my former paths, and I have fallen into my habitual state of languid indifference. Must it be always

thus with me?¹ At this moment I feel disposed to make good resolves: but how long will they last? How can I hope to stand firm? Rather, why should I not hope to do so? I am weak and wavering; but the arm of God is not shortened, nor is the fountain of His Grace dried up. My will is feeble, but I know the means whereby it may be strengthened. The first thing to be done is to discover the cause of my frequent falls. This may be difficult, but God will help me. If from the beginning I had shown more energy in surmounting obstacles, I might now be reaping the fruits of my labours. This is now the time to make my final choice, and to abide by it. Years pass swiftly by, and the goal may be nearer than I imagine. Is it too great a sacrifice to devote to God all that is left me of time? Let me remember that those only shall be saved who shall endure unto the end.

Affections.

O LORD, I beseech Thee to crown Thy victory! Do Thou exert that Power by which Thou didst raise Thy Body from the tomb, to rouse my soul from its deathlike torpor. May it not be said that the one miracle is as wondrous as the other? By Thy Divine Will alone Thou didst rise again according to the flesh: but Thou hast ordained that my spiritual resurrection should be a harder work, necessitating my co-operation with Thy Grace. It is but just, O my God, that I should make an effort for this, and that I should exert myself to the utmost of my powers to aid this great work. I feel that I am

1 "Wilt Thou not work this hour in me
The grace Thy Passion merited,
Hatred of self, and love of Thee?"

bound to live a new life, which should not indeed be new for me, but which ought long since to have become an habitual state of holiness. Thanks to Thy merciful goodness, O my SAVIOUR, time is still granted me to embrace it, and my choice is made. Henceforward, all must live anew in me ; my whole conduct must be purified and reformed. No middle course, no half measures, can be allowed. I look not beyond the day. I do not ask whether I shall always be as I am at this moment, whether my feelings will be unchanged, and my resolves be fulfilled ; for when I think of these things, my natural weakness terrifies me, and how shall I have strength to fight against it ? Thou wilt provide, O LORD, and if I distrust myself, it only redoubles my confidence in Thee, and Thy all-powerful aid. Thou wilt never reject those who seek Thee to ask Thy help : and with Thy help there is nothing which I cannot overcome. Let me not, then, be troubled for the morrow. Let me only strive to do well now, while it is day ; for the present is granted me to prepare for that which is to come, and to enable me to sanctify it.

TWENTIETH MEDITATION.

OF OUR LORD'S RETURN TO HEAVEN IN HIS ASCENSION.

" If ye then be risen with CHRIST, seek those things which are above, where CHRIST sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth."—Col. iii. 1, 2.

First Consideration.

I BEGAN these meditations by considering the end for which I was created: the subject of this day's reflections—the Ascension of our LORD—leads me back to the same subject. For by His glorious Ascension the SON of God teaches us that Heaven is the goal to which we must all aspire. After His Resurrection He appeared occasionally to certain of His disciples: but on the last day of His sojourn upon earth, He assembled them all together, that thus all might behold Him leave this world to return to His FATHER. Our LORD's intention in so doing was to convince them of the great truth that, after our appointed time of trial here, Heaven is the term of our pilgrimage: thither should all our thoughts tend, and thither should all our hopes be directed. CHRIST had often spoken thus to His hearers; but His words made no lasting impression upon them, and it was necessary to give them one, last, convincing proof of the truths that He had taught, by making them eye-witnesses of His Ascension, and in their sight returning to the Heavenly abode which He had opened to them.

When therefore they beheld this, doubt had no more place, and they called to mind all that He had told them of the Kingdom of God ; namely, that their FATHER's Kingdom was their true home ; that He went before them Himself to prepare a place for each one of them ; that He, as their Head, led the way, and they, as members of His Body, were one day to follow Him ; that He only left them for a while on this earth as a place of pilgrimage, and that thus they should look upon themselves as but strangers and sojourners here. All these sayings rushed back upon their minds with such truth and power, that they were henceforth enabled to use the world as though they used it not, and to place all their hopes and affections in that future life of which their Divine Master had given them so sure a pledge.

Let me take these gracious assurances to my heart : for all which CHRIST said to His disciples, He said also for me. In Heaven is my hope, and I can have none other. This I believe, for it is an article of faith ; but how do I believe ? Is it with that absolute certainty which forces itself upon the soul, and utterly takes possession of it ? If I am firmly and thoroughly convinced, why has this conviction so little influence upon my life, and why do I think so little of the tremendous results which may ensue ? For having once acknowledged this truth, Heaven must be my sole object. It must be to me in all things, and above all things ; and in the words of the Apostle, my "conversation" should be "in Heaven." All that passes with respect to the things of this world, whether my share therein be direct or indirect, should be indifferent, or, rather, should be as nothing to me. For since we are only pilgrims here, of what account can earthly affairs be ? I see around me human pomp and splendour, wealth and prosperity : these may dazzle the

eyes, but I can say in the words of a great Saint, "All this is not my God," this is not Heaven, this is not my end and aim: therefore I must look upon these things without longing for them, and thus keep my heart pure and unworldly.

Second Consideration.

Not only is Heaven our goal, but the joys which are there promised to us are unspeakable, beyond all that we can imagine or desire. Our happiness will be complete, for it will give us full possession of Him Who is alone the Sovereign Good—God Himself. The SAVIOUR of the World hastened to return to His Kingdom; and when He spoke of His departure to the Apostles, He comforted them for the loss of His visible Presence by describing the blessedness of that Heavenly Kingdom. He spoke to them of the untroubled peace which would succeed to all the cares and sorrows of this mortal life: of the unfading glory which would know no change or shadow of turning: of the gathering together of all good things wherewith their souls would be filled. We may believe that on the very day when He left them, He once again recalled all these wondrous promises to their minds: so that when at last the cloud received Him out of their sight, they remained upon the spot, unable to withdraw their gaze from Heaven, and yearning for their blissful Home, which as yet they saw not, but the thoughts of which possessed their hearts.

The same Kingdom is promised me. What there awaits me I know but very imperfectly; for "eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." But Faith gives me sufficient evidence

of these things hoped for, to make me willing to renounce the world and all its pomps. Looking to my eternal inheritance I cast away all earthly treasure, and am ready like Mary to choose "the better part." I say this, and, to a certain extent, feel it; but do I really act upon it? On the contrary are not my mind and heart still fixed upon the things of this world? What is the usual bent of my thoughts and affections? The Angels reproved the Apostles for standing gazing up into Heaven. This rebuke was necessary to withdraw them from the profound contemplation in which they were wrapt. How different a reproof do I deserve! How far otherwise is it with me! Why is my mind filled with so many vain and unworthy objects, which can never wholly satisfy me? My soul seeks after perfect peace and happiness: but where have I sought them—where shall I find them? Can I indeed ever hope to attain them? All my life has hitherto been passed in frivolous pursuits, which, far from giving tranquillity of mind, have caused, both to myself and others, anxiety, vexation and sorrow. Happy are those who, whilst in the world, can detach themselves from worldly things, and looking only for those which are unseen, can even here enjoy a foretaste of their Divine fulness, their Heavenly sweetness!

Third Consideration.

Having been taught to know the end for which we are created, and the recompence which awaits us, it remains for us to acquaint ourselves with the conditions upon which our reward is promised, and the means which we must use to attain it. This is what the Son of God teaches us in this mystery. He ascends to Heaven as a Conqueror: to win it He has shed His Blood, He has

given His Life. We are reminded of the cost of our ransom when we meditate upon the Sacred Wounds, the marks of which remain on His Divine Body, even in His glorious triumph. And He seems to show them to us, and to say, "This is the price of Heaven; thus must you also earn your crown, for you shall not possess it except by following in My footsteps." Who can murmur at this just decision? How can we hope to reign with CHRIST, if we are not willing to suffer with Him?

Yet how do we obey this commandment? We may be leading a life of strictness and self-denial—for life should be to all Christians a daily cross: still, if we do not bear our cross purely for the love of God, and without thought of the promised prize, all that we endure, all that we do, is as nothing in the sight of Heaven. Let us examine by what spirit we are moved in the performance of the duties of our station. Do we act from an earnest desire of fulfilling the Divine Will, and doing all for His Glory? If it is not so with us, there is cause to fear that we have strayed from the Heavenly path. There is no reflection so powerful to touch the soul as this—"I follow in the footsteps of my LORD to reach the same goal." Every duty, exactly performed in a religious spirit, carries us forward upon the road. In this frame of mind we can bear all things: nothing is too hard or too severe. Our calling is made sacred to us, when we look upon it as the way to Heaven. Oh, how blessed shall we be when, after having borne the cross with our suffering Redeemer, we shall be admitted to share in the glorious immortality of our Risen LORD!

Affections.

What is man, O God, and what am I that I should hope to be of the number of Thine elect? Thou art all-

bounteous in giving, and Thy promises are ever sure. When Thou didst return to the Bosom of Thy FATHER, it was that Thou mightst receive me there at the time ordained by Thy Divine Providence. Thou hast given me assurance of this, and it is in virtue of Thine own Word that I look for the realisation of my hope. But, with this blessed expectation, what, O my SAVIOUR, can make me wish to remain here upon earth? Or, if till the appointed hour I must wear this mortal flesh, why is not my heart already in Heaven? Alas! O LORD, I am still earthly-minded, notwithstanding all these gracious promises. Too well do I deserve the reproach of the holy Psalmist, when, speaking in Thy Name, he exclaims, "O ye sons of men, how long will ye blaspheme Mine honour; and have such pleasure in vanity, and seek after leasing?" I beseech Thee, O my Redeemer, to purify this heart of mine, and wean it from all worldly things. Make me, I pray Thee, more and more to understand that my true happiness is in Heaven alone: that my salvation, though a free gift from Thee, must be worked out by myself: and that to attain this end I must not merely be a Christian, but live the Christian's life. Let me but endeavour to regulate my conduct by these precepts, and I shall find truly much in me which calls for speedy amendment.

TWENTY-FIRST MEDITATION.

ON THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHICH IS
THE LOVE OF GOD.

“The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the HOLY GHOST which is given unto us.”—Rom. v. 5.

First Consideration.

ALL creation displays the power of God, and at the same time shows forth His loving-kindness to us upon whom He unceasingly bestows the gifts of His bounty. Thus all created things should awaken in us the love of the Creator. But yet the voice of Nature alone is not forcible enough to touch our hearts: something more is needed to rouse us from our apathy. How, then, is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts? It is by the descent of the HOLY SPIRIT Who is the Divine Love. The HOLY SPIRIT came down under the Form of Fire, to show how great and burning is that Divine Love, and to kindle the same ardour in the souls of men. It was not only on the Feast of Pentecost that the HOLY SPIRIT was given to us: He communicates Himself to us day by day, and at certain seasons His grace has a specially powerful influence, particularly during a Spiritual Retreat. The Apostles had met together for prayer and retirement when the PARACLETE was sent to them: if I use this opportunity profitably, the same HOLY SPIRIT will descend upon me. This will be made manifest by my love for God: for to receive the HOLY SPIRIT, and

to love GOD, are one and the same thing, and my love will be in the same measure with the grace which is given to me. But why do I attempt to measure that which should be boundless? There are no limits to the Grace of GOD, neither should there be any to our love of Him. O my GOD, grant that my love may be as unsparing as Thy bounty. Thou art Infinite: so should be also my love for Thee: for, how great soever it may be, it can never equal that with which Thou hast loved us: and this Thy HOLY SPIRIT, when He takes possession of my soul, repeats to me continually, and calls to my mind all Thy greatness, Thy loving-kindness, Thy absolute perfection: and hence I see that the love of Thee, however unmeasured, can never be in undue measure. All other things may be carried to excess: I may be too reserved and circumspect in my intercourse with others: I may be too anxious and scrupulous in keeping watch over myself: I may even run into extremes of self-denial and asceticism—but there can be no excess, O LORD, in my love of Thee! The Spirit of Love is never weary, and never says “It is enough.”

Second Consideration.

The Spirit of Love is shed abroad in our hearts. It is there that He makes His Throne; and it is there, too, that His greatest miracles are wrought. For this love, above all things, is shown in heart-felt personal attachment to our LORD. There is nothing which this love cannot inspire in the soul—nothing from which it cannot detach the soul—nothing to which it cannot elevate the soul. This was seen in the Apostles. The first fruit of the descent of the HOLY SPIRIT upon them was, that their hearts were completely purified from all earthly

attachments save such as came from GOD, and were returned to Him: for they anticipated, as it were, the thought of the great S. Augustine: "Too little, O my GOD, does he love Thee, who loves anything with Thee, which he loveth not for Thee." Thus, their hearts being unfettered by earthly bonds, the flame of Divine Love burned unchecked in the Apostles, so that they appeared in a kind of rapture, or as men in a dream. Why cannot my heart, which GOD created for Himself, feel this ardent love of Him? Why is it so cold and hard towards Him? In all which relates to GOD, nothing seems to touch it: neither prayer, nor the offices of the Church, nor pious conversations, nor spiritual reading. I may be told that it is possible to love GOD without experiencing all these strong emotions. This is true; but it is no less true that if I had cast from me all worldly thoughts, and fixed my heart on GOD alone, my feelings towards Him would be far different. In comparatively trivial matters I am easily softened; but towards GOD my heart seems to be of stone. And yet what do I not owe Him? What bounties does He not shower upon me day by day? Are not the titles which He bears of FATHER, CREATOR, PRESERVER, REDEEMER, tender enough to win me and draw me to Him? Does not reason itself convince me of this, and does not everything which I see around me proclaim the infinite mercies of GOD? They are indeed unspeakable, O LORD; but the more they surpass my comprehension, the more unaccountable is my cold indifference, and the more deeply do I reproach myself with it, and humble myself before Thee.

Third Consideration.

But let me ask how the love of GOD is proved to dwell in us? Surely not by mere expressions of devotional

feeling ! To answer this question it suffices to consider what God has done for us in this mystery. He loves us, and to assure us fully of His love, He gives us both His Son and His HOLY SPIRIT, in giving Whom He gives Himself. Such is the love of God for me, the meanest of His creatures : nothing which concerns me is beneath His Fatherly care, and at the same time He permits me to share in all His greatest and divinest gifts. Few arguments are needed to convince me of the vast debt of gratitude which I owe Him. He has loved me with an everlasting love, and therefore His love has not been passive, but has been displayed in the most stupendous and overwhelming manner. If therefore I love Him, can I refuse Him anything ? Should I not be unsparing of myself in any matter whereby I can do His work or fulfil His will ? For if I do not obey His precepts with unswerving fidelity in every point, and that in the exact manner and measure in which He Himself requires that they should be carried out, it is in vain that I profess my love for Him : it is a mere empty phrase, and nothing more. The love of God is thus "the fulfilling of the law," because this love would not suffer us to neglect the smallest point of the Divine law, while at the same time it enables us to accomplish that law's highest decrees. If I loved God heartily, all my difficulties would vanish, all stumbling-blocks in my path would be removed. I read with astonishment of the great works which the Saints undertook for God, and of the hardships which they endured for His sake: but it would be more surprising if, loving Him as they did, they had done nothing for Him. Hence I can judge how far my love for Him extends: I have often proclaimed it, yet, if my words are to be proved by my deeds, I fear but small reliance is to be placed on my professions. Deeply humiliated by the

consciousness of this, I pray Thee, O my God, to enkindle the flame of Divine Love in my heart now and for ever.

Affections.

O HOLY SPIRIT, Divine Source of that undying Love with which the Angels and the blessed Spirits are filled, descend upon me and enlighten me! Make a way for Thyself, I beseech Thee, into my heart, even if it remains closed against Thee; for one ray of Thy celestial light can illuminate the darkest mind, and communicate to it the fire of Divine Love. Thou canst inspire me with the same love, and therefore with the same courage, fervour, and energy, wherewith Thou didst endow the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost. Nothing could henceforth separate them from the love of CHRIST—who then shall separate me from His love? O Spirit of Love, I give myself to Thee, that I may be united to my God in a bond of undying love! O LORD, I have hitherto, alas! given Thee a divided heart: it was not Thine, because it was not wholly Thine; for Thou art a jealous God, and dost claim an exclusive devotion. This is but Thy due; and unworthy should I be of Thy bounties, if I had not learnt from them to love Thee. Havé I indeed, O my God, felt and known this? Truly it is the only thing worth a thought: if I had known it, I should have known all things; for this knowledge would have enabled me to fulfil all the duties, and exercise all the virtues of my state of life. This Thy HOLY SPIRIT will teach me. Grant, O Heavenly FATHER, that He may ever inspire me, that I may obey His inspirations, and that His Divine Fire may burn unquenched for ever in my soul!

Appendix.

TWENTY-SECOND MEDITATION.

ON THE PERFORMANCE OF COMMON DUTIES.

IN what GOD has vouchsafed to make plain to us we see, that our perfection does not consist in doing much ; this was Martha's error which the LORD JESUS CHRIST reproved. Neither is it attained in the performance of great acts. There are Saints, and very great ones in the sight of GOD, who never did anything great for Him ; Saints whose lives were hidden and unknown, whose deeds had in them nothing remarkable or striking, of whom the world never made mention. They were great through saintliness ; but the whole of their sanctity was made up of little things, and GOD caused them to find treasures of infinite grace in the faithfulness with which they performed these little things. They were great through their humility, and their humility ever led them to take the lowest place, to perform the lowliest actions, leaving others to do such things as should become known, and judging themselves unable to do them. Indeed our perfection does not require of us either great or extraordinary deeds. Such as are great and extraordinary are rare, and the occasions in which to perform them seldom arise, and our perfection is to be attained in what

is most habitual to us, what most commonly occupies us, what we have ever in hand, and what fills up the days and years of our life.

First Point.

It follows from this that the perfection to which GOD calls us depends on our common duties, for herein are contained the actions of our position and calling ; and consequently they are those which GOD specially demands of us, since He has called us by His grace into this state and position to live in it and to be obedient to its laws. It is also certain that the sum of our perfection is the Will of GOD ; that it is this Will of GOD which gives value to all we do ; and that without this Will of GOD our greatest deeds are nothing worth, but that when they accord with this Will of GOD our smallest duties become of great value. I must therefore be convinced that I shall never attain to perfection in GOD's sight, but through the performance of my common duties. What did the LORD JESUS CHRIST do during thirty years ? Nothing great in the world's esteem, indeed nothing but what appeared of little worth in the eyes of men ; but because He was doing His FATHER's Will, because as He Himself said, He did all things according to His FATHER's good pleasure, His actions though little in the sight of men, were in the sight of GOD of great price.

What cause of consolation is this for us ! It is not needful to seek our perfection afar off, it lies close around and within us. I shall find my own in the duties and the religious exercises of each day. A perfection outside of these duties would not stand me in their stead, and would be for me an ill-regulated and worthless perfection,

which GOD would not acknowledge, and which even the world would not approve, and which might fill me with vanity and expose me to the temptation of many faults. Instead of which, the perfect performance of the duties of common life is approved both by GOD and man. It edifies, it causes virtue to be highly esteemed, it maintains order, it does not puff us up, it is not subject to vanity. It is thought to be easy and so it is in contemplation ; but to persevere in it, to practise it continually, there are difficulties to be overcome, there is self to be mastered ; but also through it rewards are to be obtained.

Second Point.

Our perfection does not stop here ; but to the common duties upon which it depends, certain conditions and certain circumstances have to be added which are necessary to it ; that is to say, it is not enough to do those things which our condition in life, our employment, and our position require of us, but we must do our duties so well, that of us in a degree, those words may be said, which were applied to the SON of GOD, "He hath done all things well."

Hence, to perform our duties well, is to do them with exactness, with punctuality, with fervour, and with perseverance. First, with exactness, in such a manner that nothing is wilfully omitted, that we do not curtail them, or any part of what belongs to them. This punctuality refers both to the hour, the manner, and the place ; for not to do our duties at the appointed time, in the proper place, and in the prescribed way, are so many imperfections which take from their acceptableness, inasmuch as they are so many transgressions of the Will of GOD, which orders all things, extends itself to all without for-

getting the smallest details. Secondly, with fervour. This does not mean that we must feel a sensible pleasure, inclination, and taste for our duties, although fervour is generally accompanied by this taste, pleasure and inclination; but they are not always inseparably joined with it. We may be very fervent and yet feel a natural distaste for what we do, experience repugnance, and find only coldness and dryness in our deeds. It is even in such case that fervour is far more deep and of far greater value when she makes us act resolutely and deliberately, notwithstanding these feelings of distaste and this coldness and dryness. Thirdly, with perseverance. Above all else is this perseverance painful to us, and it was this which made S. Bernard say, speaking of the Religious Life, that only looking at each exercise by itself and alone it is very far removed from martyrdom; but to collect them all together and to contemplate their duration, there does not exist, according to nature, a more unendurable martyrdom.

On this account do we see so many Religious in Communities, and even Christians in the world, faithful to their religious observances and to their duties at certain times and on certain days when they are more filled with the Love of God. But to find those who always press forward with equal ardour, who do not give way to feelings and to changeableness, who act with the same attention and care on one day, as they do on another, and who never give way and are never untrue to their profession to the last hour of their life, this almost amounts to the miraculous.

Here are then the three rules which I must take up to direct me along the way of perfection and sanctification in the performance of my duties—exactitude and punctuality, fervour, perseverance. But at the same time are

they not three great reasons which should humble me, and make me sorrow over all my past unfaithfulness? It only needs to sanctify me that I should carefully act up to my duty. And of how many omissions am I not guilty? How much of inconstancy and slothfulness? Should I be surprised that with so many means and helps for pressing forward I have made so little progress? Or rather, have I not cause to fear that I have advanced so little with such ever-present, abundant, and powerful helps towards attaining my perfection?

Third Point.

Yet this is not even all. There remains one more degree of perfection with which our actions should be inspired, and which is as the soul is to our life—which is, to do all with an interior spirit, and on a religious principle. For all else is as it were only the body of holiness; but this gives them life, this sanctifies and consecrates them; this is the motive which leads us, and the intention which we propose to ourselves. To do our duty from fancy, caprice, inclination, custom, human respect, ostentation, interest, this is not to do them for GOD, or as in His sight; and when GOD has no more part in them, what value can He give to them or how can He accept them? “The King’s daughter is all glorious within,” by the grace of GOD alone, for “He is her LORD, and she worships Him.” If then I should do the most heroic deeds, and GOD was not their end, and if I failed to do them to please Him, as they would not glorify Him, so He would at least look upon them with indifference and I should obtain no benefit from them.

Terrible truth if I meditate seriously upon it. For if I go over all my actions and weigh them in this balance,

how many shall I find upon which I may be able to reckon? It is true that outwardly I act as do others, I go to prayer, to work, to my occupations, I take part in all and outwardly do my duty, but how often alas in forgetfulness of GOD, without turning to GOD, often with frivolous thoughts and a distracted mind, which takes away all good reflections and feelings. Often from habit which may have grown upon me, and which may blind me to myself at best, through a certain good disposition and purely natural motives: sometimes may be merely from necessity and obligation: at other times and even perhaps frequently through a secret desire to be noticed and thought well of. And all this, how does it appear in the sight of GOD? But nevertheless is it not of all such things that my life is made up? I act as though I did not do so, and all that I do no more helps forward my perfection than if I did nothing.

All the more sad and blameable is this, for there is no duty so little and trifling which I might not offer to GOD, and which if done to His Glory would not be accepted by Him. For what GOD considers in our actions is not so much what they are, as in what spirit they are performed. And in this we must behold both the wisdom and goodness of His providence. He has not given to all the same talents, He has not placed all in the same position in life, or to fulfil the same employments; but inasmuch as He has called us all to "be perfect," He wills that there should be no duty however humble and unseen, which could not be elevated through the uprightness and pureness of our intention, and which in its degree might not help to raise us. From this I ought indeed to sorrow and see myself so poor and wanting in all spiritual gifts, when it would have been easy for me to become rich in them, and to grow and proceed from virtue to virtue.

Every action of my life might have helped me, but how do I know that God has been well pleased to accept one as worthy of being offered to Him, or which has been helpful to the progress of my soul? What loss have I not to regret; but may it entice me to redouble my efforts that all my zeal and earnestness may be rekindled to repair past loss and to atone for past neglect.

TWENTY-THIRD MEDITATION.

ON SPIRITUAL READING.

THE habit of Spiritual Reading has been in all times one of the exercises most commonly and frequently recommended to all persons ; it has served to convert the unbelieving, and it is reading which helps as nourishment to true devotion, and greatly assists in preserving it. A thousand examples prove this to us, and therefore all should have a fixed time for the practice of this useful exercise ; but as there are bad books, so there are also such as are of little profit to us, as well as those which are of great use ; we must therefore examine into reading. There are bad books which are forbidden, indifferent ones which are tolerated, good ones of which we are advised to make use. It is in regard of these three sorts of literature that we may now consider all that has reference to our Spiritual Reading.

First Point.

In the first place we will consider such reading as is both harmful and forbidden. Of this there are two kinds. Some books are dangerous through their evil moral tendencies, and others may injure Faith and true Devotion. As against the former, religious persons would be careful to guard themselves, we need not say much about them ; but of such books as may injure Faith, and draw us away from the path of true Devotion, we cannot be too watchful to preserve ourselves from the dangers

to which they might expose us. How many books are there not scattered about, which are full of errors condemned by the Church; and also how many are there not whose doctrines are at least unsound, and whose poison is therefore the more to be feared in that it is more hidden from us. How many also which are full of opinions calculated to throw discredit upon old and valuable customs and practices, seeking to abolish them and replace them by new ones. One may well say that all such reading is indeed harmful, therefore the Church has plainly forbidden some, and although she has not so expressly done so about others, because it would involve too much of detail, her ministers and faithful pastors have clearly expressed her mind, and are ever careful to guard their people against the poison they contain.

It is a very shallow and mistaken argument which is brought forward by some in defence of dangerous reading, that the harm which exists in the books is not perceived, neither are they aware of the possible contamination: this is the reasoning adduced. It would be equally fair to say that a person is safe in drinking what is poisonous, if only what is drunk is pleasant and agreeable to the taste. Rather is it to be wished that they might be aware of the infection, so as to guard themselves against it; but not seeing it after they have been warned of its existence, there can be but one safe course open to them, which is absolutely to put away from themselves what might lead them astray unless they used this precaution. But, alas, such is not what is too often made use of, we desire to look into certain books of which the world may be talking, and through a principle of evil which is within us, it suffices that we know these books to be harmful, and therefore forbidden to us, to increase and excite our curiosity about them. It is in vain, too

often, that we are warned against them, we will read them and feed our minds upon them.

What is most strange in all this is, that we too often feel no scruple of conscience about such pernicious reading; although the books may have received the most positive condemnation of those best able to judge of their merits, we yet do not submit our obstinate opinion in their favour. In such a case can we in truth believe that the **HOLY SPIRIT** is guiding us? May we hope that **GOD** will bless such reading? Can we assure ourselves that we have no cause for fear; nothing with which our consciences will reproach us? If we persuade ourselves of this we are indeed falling into grievous error.

It would be far wiser and better to make such rules for Spiritual Reading as the following, and strictly to adhere to them. Firstly: To read no religious book contrary to the advice of our director. Secondly: To consult him about the spiritual books we desire to read. Thirdly: To mortify the longings we may feel to read all that is talked about, imagining ourselves able to form a judgment, and that in doing so there is no danger or risk for ourselves. Fourthly: To refrain generally from all such reading as may be open to suspicion, it should suffice that it may be of doubtful service to our souls. If only we were true to these principles they would greatly help to guard the purity of our Faith, and we should not have to mourn over the falling away from Truth and Faith in ancient practice and discipline which too often comes before us, both in ourselves and others.

Second Point.

Secondly, we will consider seemingly harmless reading, which is on that account not forbidden. There are many

books which are neither good nor bad as regards Faith and morality ; works in which the authors make no allusion to matters of Faith, nor the duties of religion. We read them as pastimes, for our amusement, without seeking to gather aught from them whereby to edify the soul.

If we have not sufficient control over ourselves to deny ourselves these vain amusements, and to forbear indulging ourselves in them, at least we are bound to be the more careful not to fall into such faults and errors as we find ourselves in danger of committing through granting ourselves this pleasure. Firstly : When once we have a taste for such reading we give too much of our time to it. Reading, for which a few moments should suffice, becomes our daily habit and practice, for our inclination is ever accompanied by some powerful feeling, which has no sooner taken possession of our minds than we know neither how to quell it, nor keep it within bounds. Secondly : It follows from this that we are so obstinate in reading what pleases us to the neglect of our duties, which we either curtail or perform hurriedly and carelessly. If during the day we cannot give ourselves all the time we wish, we take it from our hours of rest at night, and so long as we satisfy ourselves, we take no heed of the injury this may do to our health, or that in doing so we are breaking some rule laid down for us. Thirdly : What is also a great danger in such trifling reading as that with which we may fill our imagination and engross our mind, and of which we may make either a study or a pleasure, is that it engenders a distaste in us gradually for all Spiritual Reading, which we either give up or perform so carelessly that our eyes wander over the pages while our minds are far away ; the most valuable works, full of religion, good sense, and talent, do not compare in our minds with those with which

we have become fascinated. We look upon them as unsuited to ourselves, and through a miserable perversion, over which holy souls lament, we prefer, as said the Apostle, "fables and endless genealogies," (1 Tim. i. 4,) to the Truth, and frivolous discourses to the most holy doctrines. Fourthly: Do we draw from this anything wherein to glory? We pride ourselves on our powers to discern what books are well written, and to express an opinion upon them. We load our memory with various anecdotes we have collected from them, which we may repeat either well or ill, but always with certain pride: in this way we attain to being thought clever, or we seek to be considered so. We are jealous of such a reputation, not remembering that the truest and best wisdom which can be possessed by a religious soul, is to know how to humble herself to press forward in the way of God's Commandments and to become holy. This is what we hardly learn from those books which we may seek after with so much care, and yet all wisdom and every science which is apart from this, is altogether vanity.

Third Point.

Thirdly, we will consider good and devout spiritual books, which we are strongly advised to use. Two things unite to render reading wholesome and profitable, what the book is in itself, and how we use it. With regard to what the book is, although there are a great variety of Devotional Works, and some are of a higher order than others, we are free on this point to follow the leadings of our own taste and inclination. Some prefer such books as help to instruct them; others are more drawn to those which kindle their affections, and touch their hearts. The taste of some inclines them to prefer

the histories of those Saints whose lives place before them subjects for imitation ; others purely spiritual subjects, which supply them with food for contemplation, and convince by their power of reasoning. But whatever it may be, it seems of small importance to which kind of books we are drawn, provided that they are good, that is, books both orthodox and edifying, and from which we may derive what will profit us for our advancement in the path of perfection.

But it is not enough to read ; we must read well, for often all depends upon the way a thing is done, and there is always such a good way of doing a thing as to make it more profitable, and increase the good we can derive from it. To read very hurriedly and quickly, is to receive no impression of what we have read, for in that case it is not possible to pay due attention. Food taken too hastily, often does our health more harm than good. Reading too much at a time is to fill our minds with so many thoughts and ideas, that we are unable to sort and arrange them, and we therefore retain but a vague and passing recollection of what we have read, in the same way that we are unable to digest an over-quantity of bodily nourishment.

Reading merely to remark certain passages either out of Holy Scripture, or the writings of the Fathers, especially such as may be less well known, is to turn our reading into a barren study, which would only distract the mind ; or again to stop in reading, to consider simply either the beauty of the style, or the purity of the language in what we are reading, is to amuse ourselves in plucking its flowers, instead of stopping to gather its fruit.

From all this it is easy to determine how we should practise Spiritual Reading, and what rules we should

adhere to. Firstly: To turn and have recourse to God, to lift up our hearts to Him, and seek from Him the enlightenment of His HOLY SPIRIT; for God alone can give the increase, especially to His Holy Word, either read or heard. Secondly: To read quietly, so that every point may be carefully thought over and weighed, that they may be the better impressed in our minds, and may sink into our souls as drops of dew which penetrate the earth. Thirdly: For this reason, we should read but little daily, having a far greater esteem for a short reading well thought over, than for a long one ill-digested, and carelessly performed. Fourthly: To dwell upon the points which most specially strike us, to go over them, that we may taste of their fulness, applying them to ourselves and our own case. In this way reading becomes a kind of meditation; and it is a most wise counsel given by the masters of the Spiritual Life to those who are not yet versed in the practice of Mental Prayer, but who are seeking to become so, to begin by such reading and to be content to draw therefrom some good resolves. Fifthly: To read over from time to time such books as are highly esteemed, and of which we may ourselves have learnt something of their value and depth. It is a mistake which many allow themselves to fall into, never to read any book over a second time, being convinced that however much they may have cared for it the first time, in the second they will only find weariness; whereas, a really good book is like a rich mine, in which we shall ever work with much profit.

In all which has now been said concerning the practice of Spiritual Reading, it behoves each of us to exercise so good and great a means of sanctification and advancement in holiness as this is, and one which is ever within our reach, and easy for us.

TWENTY-FOURTH MEDITATION.

ON SOCIAL INTERCOURSE.

It is but too true that in conversation with our neighbour we are apt to fall into much that is evil, which we cannot do better than try to guard ourselves against by three practical rules which are of the utmost importance. The first is, that our conversation should ever be accompanied by religion, modesty, and by a wise reserve. Secondly, that it should be true and useful. Thirdly, that it should be ruled by charity, which should exclude all that could mar peace and concord.

First Point.

Our conversations should be accompanied by a religious modesty, for as worldly people have to observe the proprieties of the world, so it is also the duty of those who aim at a higher standard of religious life than that which the world places before its votaries, and therefore there are many subjects which may be spoken upon by these, which would be unsuited for and even blameable in others. It is therefore more especially to those who are aiming at some degree of religious perfection that the Apostle addressed these words of counsel, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." (Philip. iv. 5.) It should be apparent in the manner, countenance, gesture, tone of voice, terms of expression, in fact in the whole being. This does not mean that there should be aught

that is either affected or overstudied, for affectation can never be good; but without either any constraint or embarrassment, all exaggeration, all excitement, all thoughtlessness in our words, and all overloud speaking should be carefully avoided.

We make a great mistake in supposing that in our intercourse with worldly people, careless and unreserved conversation makes us either more popular with them or gains for us their esteem and confidence. Rather indeed is the world both a clear-sighted and severe judge of those who profess greater religiousness, and it is perfectly well aware of the watchfulness which they should practise not to offend against their high profession.

Thus in the intercourse of one professing godliness the world expects to find a serious temper of mind, recollectedness, moderation, discretion, and some degree of wisdom. And if it sees these qualifications in any one, that one is sure to win both its esteem and confidence. But without them none are considered to be worth more than to minister to the amusement of the hour, their words will make but a slight impression, and gain for them but a passing attention.

Ordinarily the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart. Nor is it less true that the heart expresses itself through the lips, from which we may be sure that any one who is careless and worldly in conversation cannot in mind be either religious or thoughtful, but rather in so far as such conversation is indulged in, likely to become less and less so. A recollected soul, who is ever bearing about within itself the remembrance of God's Presence, does not give way to such "manner of communication." She will be gentle and truthful, but she will guard herself against too unreserved confidences or giving way too much to excitement;

She will be neither morose nor melancholy, but in the midst of joy and in her expressions of it she will lose nothing of that seriousness with which she should be tempered. She will not abide in dull or mournful silence, but neither will she seek to engross all conversation, or aim at being the only one to speak : but she will express her thoughts simply, giving to others the opportunity of saying what their opinion is. She will be careful never to interrupt others, and be ever more ready to listen than herself to speak. How many faults should we not avoid if we endeavoured to frame our intercourse with others on this model, and tried never to forget both the religious and the Christian respect which we owe to one another.

Second Point.

Our intercourse with our neighbour should be profitable. This does not imply that our conversation is to turn exclusively upon devotional and spiritual subjects. Religion does not require this of us, however much it might be to be desired ; but we are permitted to vary our intercourse with our neighbour, and may commune with him upon less elevated and important matters ; and this is a very reasonable and rightful liberty which is given to us.

But what would be highly unbecoming in those who seek after a high standard of holiness of life, is first, that we should speak only of frivolous matters, and waste all our time in talking of trifles. Secondly, that we should talk only of matters of this world, and what is passing around us in it, that we should meet with others only to gossip and to satisfy each other's curiosity. Thirdly, that in all our intercourse, the most private and the least

so, we should never say one word relating to our GOD, but only such as refer to the spirit and the maxims of this world. Fourthly, that we should try to let the subject drop when any one would seek to draw it towards Heavenly things, and mix with it some words likely to edify ; and that when this is done we should appear weary, and seem to feel contempt. Such things can but ill accord with any profession of religion.

If, after a conversation, in which we have only been filled with frivolous thoughts, we come before GOD in prayer, and feel not taste, nor fervour, nor attention, what cause have we to be surprised ? One good reflection which we had heard in profitable conversation, might have nourished the soul and enkindled it, for oftentimes more is not required to do so. The two disciples to whom the Risen LORD joined Himself on the way to Emmaus, felt indeed that their hearts had burned within them while He talked with them by the way, and opened to them the Scriptures. But what do we mostly carry away from intercourse with our neighbour ? An empty heart, distracted thoughts and mind, dryness and indifference for the service of GOD. Are there not too many who could bear witness to the truth of this ?

What appears even more to be regretted is, that persons professing godliness, often in their intercourse with those who may be simply given up to this world, never try to mix with their conversation Christian truths, and such things as belong unto salvation ; they fear to alienate and to offend through such things ; and although it is true that we should not turn conversation into preaching, yet three things are very certain nevertheless. First, that worldly people are not so averse as it is sometimes supposed, from listening to the expression of religious feeling, if such were imparted to them by those equally

devoted to this world as they may themselves be; it might be so, but coming from those whose hearts' desire it is to be wholly given to their **LORD**, they will often listen attentively, and indeed their respect will but be increased for those whom they see true to their profession, and not shrinking from what they feel to be a duty. Secondly, not only are worldly people not alienated through this, but they may be drawn to profit from what they hear, and what would rather shock them is that one professing godliness should so forget his Heavenly **Master**, Whom he is bound to serve and glorify. Thirdly, and indeed if such godly communications are not accepted, and do not gain the sympathy of such as hear them, the result will merely be to separate those who are thus uncongenial to each other. It was the wise principle of S. Ignatius, "Either worldly people," he said, "will hear me willingly when I speak to them of holy and edifying subjects, and then God will be glorified, and I shall obtain what I have asked of Him; or, disliking such matters they will forsake me, and thereby cause me to lose less time, and I shall be able to lose less with them."

And is it then necessary to be so much in the world, and taken up with the world's doings, if all the visits we pay, and all those we receive, tend so little to the **sanctification** of our neighbour or our own? Is it for such an object that we should spend nearly all our time? Better, far better would it be to remain in a perpetual retreat, and to say in accordance with the words of the **LORD JESUS CHRIST**, "Let the dead bury their dead." His Apostles were in the world, but only as teachers to instruct and to preach the Kingdom of **God**. Needlessly to mix in the world after having sought to give it up, is but to expose ourselves to the temptation of becoming

once again devoted to it, and possibly in a greater degree than we were before we sought to renounce it.

Third Point.

Our conversation should be overruled by charity, and should never offend any one. The Wise Man has said, speaking generally, that he who offends not in word is a perfect man; and it may specially be said, as regards charity, that it is a greater perfection and a very rare virtue never to wound her in any intercourse with our neighbour. For even to religious persons this is one of the greatest dangers that they have to guard against. We find love and charity dried up and exhausted in various ways, of which the following are the most common. Firstly: Natural impatience and certain quick and excitable temperaments, who can never express their feelings gently, to whom we can scarcely make any remark without receiving an unpleasant answer, and although we may be most careful to offend in nothing, yet we can never guard ourselves from doing so in some way or other. Secondly: The discussions which may arise, and over which all parties may dispute warmly. This arises through two different sets of characters which are much to be reprehended in social intercourse. Some are of those who always contradict, others who are obstinate, from whence it comes that the former through a contradicting disposition are ever raising objections to all that is said to them, the others from unwillingness ever to give way will not admit that they can be in error, from which cause words are often spoken which pain and wound the heart. Thirdly: Such jesting as we are either too ready to indulge in, or too sensitive about being offended by it. For there are some tempers of mind so weak, that it needs but a word to shock them, as there

are also others who allow themselves to indulge in such unbounded jesting, that they make fun of everything, and so long as they themselves are amused they seek not to inquire whom they may offend and wound. The pain they give is often but too real, and though it may be mistaken, as it often is, in whoso indulges it: and although it may only arise from oversensitiveness, we cannot be too careful not to cause it, as not only religion, but Christian charity, demands this of us. Far from this being the case, we oftentimes take pleasure in making fun of some one person, we make that person the subject of all remarks, and amuse ourselves at their cost. Fourthly: The murmurings against, and habits of judging, those who may in any way be set over us, as soon as there is something about them we do not like, (and who is there of whom every one speaks well?) Whatever it may be, if we see anything of which we do not approve, we cannot keep silence, if only we made our comments with the view to their leading to a happy result; but we are well aware perhaps that they will be useless. Why are we therefore so ready to criticise, but from the evil pleasure we feel in condemning and finding fault with others and expressing our own feelings? Fifthly: Evil-speaking—this point is all the more important, as religiously disposed people have no less need of caution in this matter, than worldly persons. On all other points, those professing godliness have generally a more tender and scrupulous conscience, but on the subject of slander they bring but little carefulness or principle to bear. There are few conversations in which our neighbour has no part, and it is an unhappy power of attraction, that no sooner have we begun but we do not leave off until we have said all that we know of him, upon which we ought to have kept silence.

Charity should correct all this, and banish such things far away from all Christian intercourse. There should be no rudeness, abruptness, or bitterness in our speech ; and although we may not always be able to prevent feelings arising in our hearts, we should be at least sufficiently master of ourselves to check their finding any expression. We should be careful neither to contradict too strongly, nor to dispute. Each person has his own opinion, and is at liberty to express it, although it may differ from that of others. But the moment that we perceive that differences are about to arise, it is infinitely better to be silent and not prolong the argument, than obstinately to seek to gain the best of it, and become thereby an occasion of discord. Sharpness, and satire, are also to be avoided, although if there be no one whose feelings can be wounded, or if the person who possibly might be, takes the matter in good part, and shows no annoyance, a certain moderate degree of satire pleasantly expressed, is far from being always blameable. But after all, too much jesting has often unhappy results ; and we must not plead in excuse that what we indulge in is harmless and innocent, for jesting can be neither harmless nor innocent the moment that charity suffers by it, and it is scarcely possible that charity should not suffer, through the sensitiveness of persons who may easily be offended, and who strongly resent any apparent injury. There should be neither murmurs nor complaints, at least not in public. If we see anything to find fault with, we may explain ourselves privately to one in whom we are well able to confide ; but to find fault before others, is on all accounts to be avoided. Indeed, if evil-speaking is a real sin, and wrong in all, how much greater is it in those who seek to lead religious lives. Let us only speak well of

every one, or if we are unable to do this, let us be silent. In keeping to these rules, we avoid a great number of faults; and we render social intercourse both pleasant and profitable, and testify to the truth of the words of the Royal Prophet, "Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is, brethren, to dwell together in unity." (Ps. cxxxiii. 1.)

TWENTY-FIFTH MEDITATION.

ON THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

OF all the exercises of the Christian and the Religious Life there is none to which the Saints have given themselves more devotedly or that they have more earnestly recommended than that of the Presence of God. It is very important for us to know its duties, its utility, and in what its practice consists.

First Point.

The duty of this exercise is grounded upon two principles of our faith. God is everywhere, and God sees all things. God is everywhere: I must therefore in every place seek to do Him honour. I must therefore never forget His pre-eminent greatness and my own dependence upon Him. There is indeed no spot in the whole universe that is not made holy by the Presence of the Majesty of God; and wherever I may find myself I am able to say, as Jacob did, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not," (Gen. xxviii. 16,) or rather, I failed to remember it. God is here, and I forgot Him, and did not attend unto Him. Therefore the practice of the Presence of God is His lawful worship, and the homage which I offer to the greatness of my God. S. Augustine pictured it to himself as a vast ocean in which all creatures are engulfed and, as it were,

lost in God, and thoroughly impregnated and imbued with the Divine Essence, unable also to subsist without Him, apart from Whom they can neither have life nor being. Is it not therefore just that man, who is an intelligent and reasonable being, should look upon religion as one of his bounden duties, and should have ever before his mind and heart that he is in God, that God dwells in him, since such close ties exist between himself and God?

While God is at the same time everywhere, He sees and observes all things. I should therefore to the utmost of my power try never to lose sight of Him, but so to press forward as having Him for my continual witness, not only of my actions, but also of my inmost thoughts, this God Whose insight into all things is infinite, and to Whose all-seeing gaze I am, independently of myself, ever present, and from Whose knowledge we can hide and keep back nothing. "Whither shall I go then from Thy Spirit," said David, "or whither shall I go then from Thy Presence? If I climb up into heaven, Thou art there: if I go down to hell, Thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall Thy Hand lead me, and Thy Right Hand shall hold me. If I say, Peradventure the darkness shall cover me; then shall my night be turned to day; yea, the darkness is no darkness with Thee, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and light to Thee are both alike." (Ps. cxxxix. 6—11.) Such was the reasoning of the Saintly King from which he drew the obligation under which he was of bearing himself ever as in the Presence of God. Why should I not come to the same conclusion for myself?

Second Point.

The value of this practice of the Presence of God consists in its being a sovereign preservative against sin, and still more, a short and easy way of attaining perfection.

It is a remedy against sin, for there can be nothing more likely to hold me back from wrong-doing than the thought that I am in the Presence of my God. Nothing more effectual to prevent my evil passions from gaining the mastery over me, or to make me victorious under the assaults of any violent temptation, or withhold me from being overcome in any unforeseen trial, than to say to myself, "I am in my Judge's Presence, before Him Who is about to condemn me, Who is now ready to pronounce sentence against me if I venture to commit this sin." There can be no temptation, I may well say, which this reflection would not overcome; no hastiness which it would not check; no weakness or fall from which it would not shield me. We commonly fall into sin because we lose sight of God, and we should seldom if ever give way to sin if we had the thought of God ever before us. To sin against God, says S. Augustine, is a crime; but to sin against God in the consciousness of His Presence is so great a wickedness that few sinners would be guilty of it if they had kept this thought before them, "Thou God seest me." This was indeed the very thing with which the prodigal son reproached himself when in the sorrow and bitterness of his soul he exclaimed, "FATHER, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee."

It is a short and easy way of attaining perfection in that it was the one which God Himself taught to Abraham when He said, "Walk thou before Me, and be

thou perfect." For the true perfection of the Christian and religious soul lies in doing everything well ; not performing any action in a negligent or lukewarm way, but doing all diligently and in a spirit of fervency. What can there be as powerful as this realizing the Presence of my God to inspire me with fervour in the performance of every duty, or to correct and restrain within me all lukewarmness and carelessness. God is ever looking upon me. I am ever in His sight. With this knowledge can I be cold and half-hearted in what I do for Him ? Besides which this Presence of God is a source of comfort to all holy souls, and a support in the efforts and struggles which the care of their own perfection must entail upon them. What can there be more blessed than this thought, God is with me ; Almighty as He is, He is having a care for and taking thought of me, even me ? This one thought, is it not all-sufficient to soften all the sufferings which may come upon me, and to strengthen me in all the conflicts which I must encounter with the enemy of my soul ? Such is the fruit of the Presence of God that Holy Scripture bids "the righteous be glad and rejoice before God," (Ps. lxviii. 3,) and how could they fail to be so ? for they ever behold God, and "shall live in His sight," (Hosea vi. 2.)

Third Point.

As regards the practical application of this exercise of the Presence of God two things are requisite. One is carefully to avoid whatever might be a barrier to God's Presence ; and the other is faithfully to conform oneself to all that might help in the attainment and preservation of it.

1. To avoid the hindrances, which are, for instance, vain,

worldly amusements, certain frivolities which are very liable to engross the heart, irregular pleasures which distract the mind, the society of those who are apt to turn us aside from our duties, those ties of friendship which attach us too strongly to and wholly occupy us with the creature, all excessive longings which disturb and divide us, the heat of our tempers which exhaust and trouble us, the useless conversations which fill our thoughts with trifles, all needless cares which perplex us, such constant and too great occupations as are likely to weigh us down, a thousand things which occupy our attention, and also all the matters which distract and engage us. We must curtail all these, for all such things are out of harmony with the Presence of GOD. Is it reasonable, O my God, that I should so make use of such things? For since Thy Divine Presence is an infinitely precious treasure, there is nothing which I ought not willingly to give up to possess it, and I can never obtain it at too great a price. Happy shall I be if through so doing I can gain possession of it, and if, giving up all else, I can find myself joined to Thee in realizing Thy Blessed Presence, which is even in this life a foretaste of future blessedness.

2. To conform oneself to the means of gaining and preserving the Presence of GOD. One is constant prayer; asking daily of GOD this great and good gift, and saying to Him with the Royal Prophet, "Lead me, O LORD, make Thy way plain before my face," (Ps. v. 8,) and grant that I may never depart from Thy Presence. Another is silence and retirement: to have certain fixed times in every day in which to commune with GOD and to separate oneself from the noise and bustle of the world. Also to order all one's actions, performing none except in a spirit of obedience to GOD, accomplishing in all things

God's good will and pleasure, seeking God even in those which are most indifferent, making Him, in them, our end; not thinking of the creatures more highly than we ought to think—that is to say, looking upon them merely as created in His image, and as partially reflecting some of God's perfections; heaven, as the temple of His glory; the earth as His footstool; men, as the instruments of His providence; prosperities, as the results of His bountifulness; adversities, as His just chastisements.

Herein lies the secret of never losing the consciousness of God's Presence. S. Ignatius was continually drawing near to God; it needed for him but the sight of a flower to enrapture him, and to fill him with the highest conception of the Almighty Author of Nature. Could we only in some such degree, according to the Apostle's maxim, find God everywhere and in all!

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