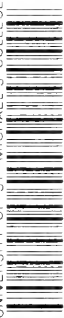


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The editors and publishers of “MY BOOKCASE” SERIES are OPTIMISTS, as all good Americans must be. They know that backed by a high-minded and generous public, “MY BOOKCASE” SERIES will not fail.

(Signed) JOHN C. REVILLE, S. J.,
Editor-in-chief.

THE
CREATOR AND THE CREATURE
OR,
THE WONDERS OF DIVINE LOVE

BY
FREDERICK WILLIAM FABER, D.D.

NEWLY EDITED, AND WITH AN
INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN C. REVILLE, S.J., Ph.D.



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO "MY BOOKCASE" SERIES.....	PAGE iii
---	-------------

THE CREATOR AND THE CREATURE

INTRODUCTION	xi
--------------------	----

BOOK I

THE CASE STATED BETWEEN THE CREATOR AND THE CREATURE

CHAP.		
I.	A New Fashion of an Old Sin.....	1
II.	What it is to Be a Creature.....	26
III.	What it is to Have a Creator.....	66

BOOK II

THE DIFFICULTIES OF CREATIVE LOVE

I.	Why God Wishes us to Love Him.....	109
II.	Why God Loves Us.....	139
III.	Our Means of Loving God.....	175
IV.	Our Actual Love of God.....	217
V.	In What Way God Repays our Love.....	244

BOOK III

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

I.	The Easiness of Salvation.....	277
II.	The Great Mass of Believers.....	317
III.	The World	363
IV.	Our Own God.....	401
INDEX		439

INTRODUCTION

"MY BOOKCASE" Series opens with what many, perhaps, will think too serious a volume, "The Creator and the Creature," by Frederick William Faber. It is a serious work and intended for serious readers. But it is a timely, eloquent and beautifully written book. It treats of the most important problem with which man has to deal. It is a problem which every individual, no matter what his religious belief, whether he be a pagan, Christian, Catholic, Buddhist or Jew, must solve. It deals with the relations which bind the creature to the Creator. Every man must settle in the right way that question. It is the paramount question. No other approaches it in importance, in dignity, in the consequences which it entails.

It is unfortunately a question which Catholics even and Christians, not to speak of others, too often dismiss entirely or relegate to the rank of the unessential or the secondary. The root-evil of the first quarter of the twentieth century, as it was of the time when the author wrote this work more than sixty years ago, is forgetfulness of the Creator on the part of the creature. It is to be found in the belief that the Creator, as Faber said, is a nuisance in His own creation, that He must be kept in the background, and that the relations which bind man to Him must be, as far as possible, ignored, or at least that they must not be allowed to obtrude themselves too imperiously into our lives.

The book is a protest against this criminal folly. It might be entitled an "*Apologia pro Deo*," an apology, a defense of the Deity, a vindication of the rights of God. It is also a marvellous exposition of the "Wonders of Divine Love." The rights of God are presented with such logic

and force, such eloquence and argumentative skill, and the wonders of God's Love are painted in such glowing colors, with such pathos and poetry, that the reader's mind, imagination and heart are enlightened, charmed and won.

"The Creator and the Creature" is one of the great books of English literature. The fact that it is a purely ascetical work and from the pen of a convert from Protestantism to the Catholic Church, of a priest and a religious; that it deals with the most heart-searching of questions, a subject which too many men like to shirk, has stood in the way of its popular success except in a limited sphere. But it has all the seals of greatness.

It is a human book with a decided human appeal. The writer knows and loves men. He realizes the trials and the difficulties of holy living. He is fully aware of the world's dreadful power to weaken the allegiance of the creature to the Creator. His pages breathe a deep and tender sympathy for his brethren. Their philosophical groundwork is solid, their theology accurate in statement and amazing at times in extent. Father Frederick William Faber is not a rigorist. He makes virtue lovable in its nature and easy in practice. He is the poet of the ascetic life. He radiates enthusiasm, idealism, humor. For sweep and breadth of diction, for lofty conception, for imagery and melody, some of the pages of "The Creator and the Creature" are among the finest in English letters.

We are not afraid to put this splendid work at the head of the list of "My Bookcase" Series. We feel confident that it will make its way into the hearts of our readers. The solidity of its doctrine, the importance of the lessons taught and the glowing language in which these lessons are clothed, insure its success.

The publication in our series of this work of Father Faber will help, we are sure, to revive interest in his other works and in the life and virtues of one who has been

affectionately called "A Modern St. Philip," another Philip Neri, of course as yet uncanonized. Even before his conversion to the Catholic Church Frederick William Faber resembled in some way the gentle Saint, the tercentenary of whose canonization has just been celebrated in Rome.

Frederick William Faber (1814-1863) long before his conversion to the true Faith in 1845, and his entrance into the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in 1848, combined in his rich nature many of the characteristics which we admire in the Roman Saint. He had something of his quaint humor, his simplicity, his love of children and the young. Like Philip he loved all that was beautiful, poetry, music, the hills, the streams, the fields and the flowers. At Oxford, where he first studied at Balliol, and then at University College, he won the coveted Newdigate Prize by his poem "The Knights of St. John." No one was astonished when Faber in 1837 decided to enter the ministry of the Anglican Church, in which he thought that he might find that close union with Our Lord which he sought all throughout life. While at Oxford he had come under the influence of the Tractarian movement and later as "priest" in the Anglican communion had become unsettled in his religious convictions, as far at least as the validity of his Orders and the connection of the Anglican Church with the Apostolic See were concerned. Two trips on the Continent, association with Catholic peoples and Catholic customs, the influence and lessons of Christian and Papal Rome won his heart and allegiance at last, and in November, 1845, a month after Newman's conversion at Littlemore, he was received into the Church.

When on a gray November morning in 1845, Frederick William Faber left his Anglican parish at Elton in Huntingdonshire to be received that evening into the one true fold by Bishop Waring, the village folk, to whom he had ministered with singular charity and sympathy, crowded

their doorways and with tears in their eyes, bade him farewell in these affectionate words: "God bless you, Mr. Faber, wherever you go!" That blessing followed him everywhere. It was his reward for the sacrifice he was making, in the cause of truth and the best interests of his soul.

Wherever his lot carried him, the former Rector of Elton became a power for good, a guide to the highest spiritual ideals, an apostle of unworldliness and of the Love of God. Like his Father in Christ, St. Philip Neri, he had a deep and childlike trust in God, and an inexhaustible fund of sympathy and tender love for all God's children. For the suffering and the poor, for the sinner and the wayward he was a bright angel of pity and mercy. What he was in life and practice he has admirably, artlessly revealed in his works, in his "Hymns," in "All for Jesus," in "Bethlehem," "At the Foot of the Cross." Here as in "The Creator and the Creature" he proved himself a spiritual force of the first order for the Catholics of the middle of the last century.

It may be said that the ascetical writings of Father Faber were a special gift of God to the Catholics of sixty years ago. They came as one of the fairest flowers of that Second Spring whose almost unheralded burst and bloom Newman so pathetically described. They were as much a boon to that generation as Newman's "Apologia," or Wiseman's "Fabiola" to theirs. They met its needs, and their influence has not yet been fully measured or realized. They became at once popular not only in England, but in Italy and France. St. Alphonsus Liguori used to say that he liked those preachers, whose message flashed, not directly from the brain to the tongue, but first reached the speaker's heart, and warmed there by love, leaped vibrant to his lips. Most readers like spiritual writers of that type. Hence the popularity of the author of the "Imitation" and

of St. Francis de Sales in his "Introduction to a Devout Life." In "Growth in Holiness," in "The Creator and the Creature," in his "Spiritual Conferences," Faber shows himself of that chosen band. The rich products of his mind seem to have a nobler birth in his heart.

Faber's mental endowments were of the finest and most delicate texture.

Any page taken at random from his works gives proof of intellectual acumen, depth of feeling, originality of thought and expression. As a spiritual writer he had something far better. His treatises everywhere display solid and extensive theological knowledge. That was the soul of his teaching, the foundation of his work. The firm principles of dogma and asceticism support the delicate and at times elaborately carved tracery of his thought. They do not obtrude themselves formally upon the reader, but they are felt to be a silent power everywhere guiding the writer in the lessons he lays down and the conclusions which he draws. He treads with the elastic step of the traveler acquainted with every feature of the landscape, in the realm of the supernatural, and peers boldly into the secret operations of grace, the mysteries of the Sacraments and the veiled glories of the future life. We are startled at the minuteness, familiarity, and assurance with which he talks of the unseen world "as if it were the banks of the Rhine, or the olive-yards of Provence, the *campagna* of Rome, or the crescent shores of Naples." The things of the other world were close to the heart of Faber. He lived in the white light of eternity.

Not only had he mastered the science of theology, he had a thorough knowledge of the human heart. Certain phases of its weaknesses he could analyze with the science of an expert. The pages on self-deceit in the "Spiritual Conferences" are admirable for their sure diagnosis and anatomic skill. This penetration was refined in him by a still higher

gift, the knowledge of the workings of grace in the soul, that peculiar boon which has been called the science of the Saints.

It is undoubtedly for these reasons that Faber wins his readers. To the educated and the cultured he offers his solid theological teaching. For the simple and the less scholarly, he unlocks the heavy tomes of ascetical lore and makes their treasures accessible. For the religious he sounds a note of the highest spirituality; worldlings he allures to higher ideals and standards by seeming for the moment to condescend to their weaknesses. But this condescension never goes so far as to betray the sacred cause which he is pleading.

It would be doing a great injustice, however, to the memory of this apostle to think that he ever for a moment minimized or whittled away the dogmas or the teachings of the Church. As gentle as his father, St. Philip, he could be as rock-rigid and as uncompromising as St. Ignatius when there was question of principle. Not a single passage can be found in his works where he sacrifices an iota of truth to the spirit of Protestantism or pseudo-Christianity so prevalent in his day. When there was question of sin or evil he offered no compromise and no quarter to the world. But he was tolerant of men and their foibles because he wished to win and conquer souls.

The science of the Saints, the knowledge of the human heart and its infirmities was enhanced in Faber by another quality which has been called "the style of the Saints." The reader feels that the author has a message for his soul. He realizes that the message has been heard by the writer himself and that he has lived its commands in his own life, and that he is delivering it now only because his heart is athrill and overflowing with its meaning and import. Hence the vitality, the spontaneity, the color, the glow, the depth of feeling, the enthusiasm with which the message is de-

livered. It is so important that it must come home to all. It must be repeated then time and again and clothed in newer garb. It is so noble that it must not lose in dignity or power, so it is delivered with all the grace and unction of style which the writer commands. It is God's message. It must not be marred by self-seeking or pretense, but must come home full-toned to all. To attain this end, the style is clear, popular, rich and large. There is in it an intimate appeal which convinces.

With the alchemy of the Saints, Faber transforms the sublimest doctrines and the loftiest spiritual axioms into personal devotion and love. In his volume on "The Blessed Sacrament," a book which the Angel of the Schools and Suarez would have read with admiration, the dogmas which he touches with such a sure hand do not remain mere speculative teachings but become a burning and holy passion.

His first book, "All for Jesus," gives the dominant note and the leading motive of Faber's work. It is like the solemn chord which Beethoven sounds in the first bars of a symphony and which is woven again and again into the mazes of his harmony. Under the Oratorian's hand, the note is struck with all the tenderness and affection of the musician bending over the organ and drawing from its depths strains of sweetest melody on the one theme which has won his heart. "All for Jesus," though the first written of Faber's books, was the practical conclusion to which he would lead all men. His speculative theories and the groundwork of his Christian philosophy are to be found in the volume now given to our readers, "The Creator and the Creature" where with splendid logic and an overwhelming sense of the Divine Majesty and His outraged rights, which remind us of St. Ignatius and his "Exercises," he points out the relations, too often neglected and flouted, which bind man to his Maker. That masterpiece should make many converts to-day.

Faber is sometimes prolix and verbose. He abuses his wonderful powers of amplification and sows from the whole bag. He gets lost amid the mazes of his well-stored treasure-house. But what generosity of feeling, what rich and Oriental imagination, what solid structure of thought, what winsome humanity, what gracious and tender familiarity are displayed in his books! He is the poet among the great spiritual writers. Everywhere in "Bethlehem," in "The Precious Blood," while the teacher is always felt, we recognize the former singer of "The Knights of St. John," of "The Cherwell Water-Lily." And the "Hymns" of Frederick William Faber, sung by Protestants and Catholics alike, wherever the English language is spoken, complete the picture of the man. He is dull of heart who can listen unmoved to the majestic refrains of his Passion hymn "Oh Come and Mourn with Me Awhile." The words "Jesus, Our Love is Crucified" fall on the ears with a moving cadence which even the poorest singing cannot dull. "Faith of Our Fathers, Living Still," "O Paradise! O Paradise!" "The Eternal Years," "The Pilgrims of the Night," have the power, the popular appeal, simplicity and depth of feeling of the best hymns in the language.

Frederick William Faber was the gentlest of men. But he had the heart of the Crusader, the tenderness of those Knights of St. John whom he had sung in his Newdigate prize-poem. He had also their fearlessness. Hear him in "The Right Must Win":

For right is right, since God is God;
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.

That martial note is often heard in the works of Faber.

But what is more often heard is the note of tenderness and sympathy. Few, provided they will allow themselves to come under the charm of this master of the spiritual life, will be proof against the contagion of his deep love of God, his sweetness, his buoyancy of spirit, his enthusiasm. If carefully and reverently read, his "Creator and Creature" should accomplish that which Faber intended, enthrone God in the place of honor, which by every right is His, in the hearts of His children.

JOHN C. REVILLE, S. J.,
Editor-in-chief.

THE CREATOR AND THE CREATURE

BOOK I

The Case Stated Between the Creator and the Creature

CHAPTER I

A NEW FASHION OF AN OLD SIN

FORGETFULNESS of God has been in all ages the grand evil of the world: a forgetfulness so contrary to reason, and so opposed also to the daily evidence of the senses, that it can be accounted for on no other hypothesis than that of original sin and the mystery of the fall. This forgetfulness of God has been far more common than open revolt against Him. The last is rather the sin of Angels, the first the sin of men. Yet every age of the world has its own prevailing type and fashion of iniquity; and in these latter times it appears as if the forgetfulness of God had taken the shape of forgetfulness on our part that we are creatures. Men may real-

ize that they are creatures, imperfect, finite, and dependent. This truth may be continually coming uppermost in books of morals, in systems of philosophy, and in the general tone of society. And yet, with all this, God may be set aside and passed over, almost as if He did not exist. The world simply does not advert to Him.

Who that has read certain philosophical and scientific books of the last century does not know how men could write of creation without their thoughts so much as touching or coming in contact with the idea of the Creator? To such writers creation seems the end of and answer to all things, just as the Most Holy Trinity is to a believer. They speak of creation, investigate creation, draw inferences from creation, without so much as brushing against a personal or living Creator even in their imagination. *Creator* is to them simply a masculine form of the neuter noun *creation*, and they have a kind of instinct against using it, which they have probably never perceived, or never taken the trouble to explain even to themselves. It is not on any theory, or any atheistical principle, that God is thus passed over. He is unseen, and hence is practically considered as absent; and what is absent is easily forgotten. He is out of mind because He is out of sight. There is no objection to giving God His place, only He is not thought of. This is one phase of the world's forgetfulness of God.

Then again there have been times and literary schools, in which God was continually referred to, and His Name used in an impressive manner, sometimes reverently and sometimes irreverently. He

has been a fashionable figure of speech, or an adornment of eloquence, or the culminating point of an oratorical climax. Or there has been a decency in naming Him honorably, as if it were burning a kind of incense before Him. It soothes the conscience; it gives an air of religion to us, and it enhances our own respectability, especially in the eyes of our inferiors. And yet this word *God* has not in reality meant the Three Divine Persons, as the Gospel reveals Them to us.

It has been an imaginary embodiment or a vague canonization of an immense power, of distant majesty, and of unimaginable mystery: a something like the beauty of midnight skies, or the magnificent pageant of the storm, elevating the mind, quelling and tranquillizing littleness, and ministering to that poetry in our nature which is so often mistaken for real worship and actual religion. The ideas of duty, of precept, of sacrifice, of obedience, have been very indistinctly in the mind, if they have been there at all. It is the notion of a grand God, rather than a living God. The multitude of His rights over us, the dread exorbitance of His sovereignty, the realities of His minute vigilance, of His jealous expectations, of His rigid judgments, of His particular Providence, of His hourly interference, these things have not been denied, but they have not been part of the idea awakened in the mind by the word *God*. The close embrace and tingling pressure of His omnipresence, as theology discloses it to us, would have made the men of whom we are speaking start away in alarm or in disgust. The God who demands an account of every idle word, and

measures His penalties to each unbridled thought, and before whom all men are simply and peremptorily equal, is a different Being from the poetical sovereign who reigns over the Olympus of modern literature, to keep our inferiors in check, to add gravity to our rebukes, to foster our own self-respect, and, in a word, to "paint a moral or adorn a tale." This God is rather our creature than our Creator; He is the creature of moral respectability, the necessity of a dissatisfied conscience, the convenience of a social police, the consolation of an unsupernatural sorrow, and the imagery of a chaste and elegant literature.

Yet the atheism of this is not explicit: it is only implied. No revolt is intended. A false God has slipped into the place of the true one; and because their faith had failed, men did not see the change, and do not see it still. This is another common form of forgetfulness of God; but it does not seem to have the peculiar characteristics or particular malice of the form which we suppose to belong eminently to our own days. For in the form, of which we have been speaking, the Name of God was a necessity just because men did not forget that they were creatures. Nay, it was respectable and moral to speak slightly of human nature, its weaknesses, and its vagaries, and to say great things of the far-off God. Men's notions of God wanted correcting and purifying, enlarging and heightening; above all, they wanted to be made real, and brought home to them, and laid as a yoke upon them. Nevertheless they remembered they were creatures; only, because they had lost the true idea of the

Creator, they made the weaknesses of the creature an apology for his sin, and so went desperately astray.

GOD, PASSIVELY IGNORED

But if we mistake not, the characteristic malice of these times takes a somewhat different direction. God is certainly ignored; but He is rather passively than actively ignored, rather indirectly than directly. Men do not look at His side of the question at all. They do not pass Him over, even contemptuously. Still less do they look at Him, and then put Him away. They are otherwise engaged. They are absorbed in the contemplation of themselves. Theories of progress and perfectibility throw so much dust in their eyes, that they do not see that they are creatures. They do not know what it is to be a creature, nor what comes of it. Hence the idea of God grows out of their minds: it is thrust out of them, extruded as it were, by the press of matter, without any direct process or conscious recognition on their parts. Their minds are purely atheist by the force of terms. They are the proprietors of the world, not tenants in it, and tenants at will. They hardly suspect that there are any claims on them. God was a fine thought of the Middle Ages, and religion an organized priesthood, which was not always simply an evil, but which has now outlived any practical utilities it may ever have had. God is subjective: He is an idea: He is the creature of man's mind. If there be any real truth in religion, it must be looked for in the direction of

Pantheism. But the world is too busy to think much even of that. This is practically their view, or would be, if they took the trouble to have a view at all. What it comes to is this. Men are masters. They begin and end with themselves. Humanity marches onwards with great strides to the magnificent goal of social perfectibility. Each generation is a glorious section of the procession of progress. Liberty, independence, speed, association, and self-praise, these compose the spirit of the modern world. The word *creature* is a name, an affair of classification, like the title of a genus or a species in natural history. But it has no religious consequences: it entangles us in no supernatural relations. It simply means that we are not eternal, the remembrance of which is salutary, in that it quickens our diligence in the pursuit of material prosperity.

All phases of civilization have a monomania of their own. Certain favorite ideas come uppermost, and are regarded with so much favor that an undue importance is given to them, until at last the relative magnitudes of truths and duties are lost sight of, and the ethics of the day are full of a confusion that only rights itself in the failure and disappointment, in which each age of the world infallibly issues at the last. Then comes a reaction, and a new phase of civilization, and a fresh monomania; and either because the circle looks like a straight line, because we see so little of it at a time, or because the living world, like the material one, really advances while it revolves, we call these alternations *progress*.

Now we generally find that each of these

monomanias, with its cant words, its fixed ideas, and its one-sided exaggerations, transfers its temper and characteristics to the view which it takes of God. The ideas of liberty, progress, independence, social contracts, representative government, and the like, color our views of God, and influence our philosophy. No one can read much without seeing how the prevailing ideas of the day make men fall into a sort of unconscious anthropomorphism about God. Indeed nothing but the magnificent certainties and unworldly wisdom of Catholic theology can rescue us from falling into some such error ourselves. At the present day particularly we should be careful and jealous in the view we take of God; careful that it should be well ascertained, and jealous that it should be according to the pattern showed us in Catholic theology.

In whatever direction we turn we shall gain fresh proof of the want of this true view of God, and fresh evidence that the peculiar forgetfulness of God in these times consists in the forgetfulness on our own part that we are creatures. For, think in what this forgetfulness consists. It is the new fashion of an old sin. Nothing offends our taste more than disproportion, or unseemliness. We like things to be in keeping, and when proprieties are violated, we have a sense of being wounded. If a servant puts on the manners and takes the liberties of a son, we are angry with him because he forgets himself, and a whole string of moral faults is involved in this forgetfulness. The manners, which befit the member of our own family, are unbecoming in a guest; and the demeanor and address of a

stranger differ from those of an acquaintance. Our taste is annoyed when these things are confused, and the annoyance of our taste is only the symptom of something far deeper in our moral nature. So is it in the matter we are discussing. The propriety of man as man, his moral and religious propriety, consists in his constantly remembering that he is a creature, and demeaning himself accordingly. The bad taste and vulgarity (to use words which may make the meaning clearer) of his not doing so are in reality sin and irreligion, because the contempt, presumption, and affectation, fall upon the majesty of the Most High God. Yet is not this forgetfulness quite a characteristic of the times in which we live?

GOD AND POLITICS, LITERATURE, ETC.

Look at politics; and may we not read evidences of this spirit everywhere? How little has religion to do with questions of peace and war? We go to war to avenge an offence, or to push an interest, or to secure a gain, or to cripple a hostile power, as if there was no God of Hosts. We do not ask ourselves the question whether it is God's will that there should be such a war. The whole action of diplomacy is as if there were no special Providence, and as if God having retired from the management of the world, we must take up the reins which He has let fall from His wearied grasp. Since the balance of power was substituted for the central unity of the Holy See, we have come more and more to act as if the world belonged to us, and we had the management of it, and were accountable to

none. On the most solemn subjects, even those of education, and religion, and the interests of the poor, how little of the tone and feeling of creatures is exhibited in debates in Parliament, or in the leading articles of a newspaper. It would seem as if there were nothing we had not the right to do, because nothing we had not the power to do. With far less of intentional irreligion than would have seemed possible beforehand, there is an incalculable amount of forgetfulness that we are creatures. What else is our exaggerated lust of liberty? What else are even the vauntings of our patriotism? What else is the spirit of puerile self-laudation into which our national character seems in the hands of an anonymous press to have already degenerated, or to be fast degenerating?

The same tone is observable in our poetry and elegant literature. Everywhere man is his own end, and the master of his own destiny. Subordination and a subject spirit are not virtues, neither in works of fiction do the meek inherit the earth. Still more strongly does this come out in systems of philosophy. Humanity is a person with a unique destination and perfectibility. Man is complete in himself. There is neither wreck nor ruin about him. The natural stands off, clear and self-helpful, from the supernatural. Accountableness is not a necessary part of self-government. There is no need to call in the idea of God in order to explain the situation of man. His duties begin and end with other men or with himself. Philosophically speaking, things can be managed at Berlin without God.

But of all things the most amazing is the innocent,

child-like, simple-hearted atheism of physical science. The beginning of matter, the elements into which it may ultimately be resolvable, how the cycles of the heavenly bodies first began, the unspeakable intricacy of their checks and counter-checks, the secular aberrations and secular corrections of the same, the secret of life, the immateriality of the soul, where physical science ends,—all these questions are discussed in a thousand books in a spirit and tone betokening the most utter forgetfulness that we are little creatures, who got here, God help us! not by our own means, and are going, God help us! where He chooses and when. We read sentence after sentence, expecting every moment to light on the word *God*, or to come across some allusion to the Creator. And the writers would not omit Him, but would speak good words of Him, if it came to them to do so. But it does not. They are not unbelievers. Nay, they would loudly profess themselves to be creatures and to have a Creator, if they were asked. They would be lunatics if they did not. But the double sense of His creation and of their createdness (to coin a word) is not in all their thoughts, and has not mastered the current of their intellectual activity. They left God at church yesterday, and are closeted with matter to-day. So many secondary causes are waiting for an audience that their time is fully occupied. Besides, is there not one day in the week fixed for the reception of the First Cause, and the acknowledgment of His claims? But, to be serious, no one we think will say that modern science, at least in England, is profane and irreligious. Really it is most creditably

the contrary. It is ourselves whom we forget: we forget that we are creatures. Our error about God comes from a mistake about ourselves.

There are many persons in these days who do not say they are not Christians; yet who write and speak as it were from without, as if they were at once Christians, and not Christians. They have not taken the pains to formulize a positive disbelief; but they do not see how progress, and perfectibility, and modern discovery, psychological or otherwise, comport with that collection of ancient dogmas which make up the Christian religion, and their instinct would be to give up the dogmas rather than the discoveries, and that with a promptitude worthy of modern enlightenment. With such persons the dignity of man is a matter of prime consideration, while, in their view, his assent to the doctrines and practices of the Church is as degrading to his intellectual nobility, as his obedience to them is superstitious and debasing. The Pope and theology, the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, grace and the Sacraments, Penance and Purgatory, scapulars and rosaries, asceticism and mysticism, combine to form a perfectly distinct and cognizable character. They give a tone to the mind and a fashion to the conduct, which is indubitable, and which it is difficult to mistake. In the Church such a character is held in honor. It is the Catholic type of spiritual beauty. But the men of whom we are speaking, are far from holding it in esteem. To them it appears mean, weak, tame, contemptible, cowardly, narrow, pusillanimous. It wants the breadth and daring of moral greatness, according to their view of greatness.

Nothing grand, lasting, or spreading will come of it. But let us put out of view for the moment the undoubted agents in the formation of this character, the Pope and theology, the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, grace and the Sacraments, Penance and Purgatory, rosaries and scapulars, asceticism and mysticism. Let us take the character as we find it, without inquiring into the process of its formation.

Granting that there is a God, eternal and all-holy, granting that we are His creatures, created simply for His glory, dependent upon Him for all things, and without any possibility of happiness apart from Him, granting His perfections and our imperfections, is not the behavior, the demeanor, of a Catholic Saint, precisely what would come of a wise and reflective apprehension of the fact that he is a creature and has a Creator? Does not Christian sanctity with inimitable gracefulness express to the life the modest, truthful, prevailing sense that we are creatures, standing before the eye and living in the hand of our everlasting Creator? And are not the self-sufficiency, the daring, the vainglory, the speed, the unhesitatingness, the reckless manners, which many esteem to be moral and intellectual bravery, just so many evidences of forgetfulness that we are creatures? Are they not vagaries and improprieties, which, to put out of sight their falsehood and their criminality, are as if a worm would fain attempt to fly or a monkey to ape the manners of a man?

It is not true that the practices and devotions and sacramental appliances of the Church introduce something which is incongruous and out

of keeping, something to be added to our human life, but still an addition easily discernible, and not dovetailing into our natural position. On the contrary the manners which they form are simply the most perfect, the most graceful, the most sensible and self-consistent exhibition of our indubitable condition, that of finite and dependent creatures. The supernatural grace, of which these practices are the channels, at once completes and restores our nature, and makes us eminently and winningly natural. If Christianity were not true, the conduct of a wise man, who acted consistently as a creature who had a Creator, would strangely resemble the behavior of a Catholic Saint. The lineaments of the Catholic type would be discernible upon him, though his gifts would not be the same.

FORGETFULNESS OF GOD WIDESPREAD

This forgetfulness that we are creatures, which prevails in that energetically bad portion of the world which is scripturally called *the world*, affects multitudes of persons, who are either less able to divest themselves of the influences of old traditions and early lessons, or are happily less possessed with the base spirit of the world. It leads them to form a sort of religion for themselves which singularly falls in with all the most corrupt propensities of our hearts: a religion which in effect teaches that we can live two lives and serve two masters. Such persons consider that religion has its own sphere, and worldly interests their sphere also, and that the one must not interfere with the other. Thus

their tendency is to concentrate all the religion of the week into Sunday, and to conceive that they have thereby purchased a right to a large conscience for the rest of the week. The world, they say, has its claims and God has His claims. Both must be satisfied; God first, and most scrupulously; then the world, not less exactly, though it be indeed secondary. But it is not a "reasonable service" to neglect one for the other. God and the world are coordinate powers, coordinate fountains of moral duty and obligation. He is the really religious man who gives neither of them reason to complain. We must let our common sense hinder us from becoming over-righteous. Men who hold this doctrine, a doctrine admirably adapted for a commercial country, have a great advantage over the bolder men of whom we spoke before. For they enjoy all the practical laxity of unbelievers, without the trouble or responsibility of disbelieving; and besides that, they enjoy a certain good-humor of conscience in consequence of the outward respect they pay, in due season and fitting place, to the ceremonies of religion.

Hitherto we have spoken of classes of persons in whom we take no interest, further than the sorrow which all who love God must feel at seeing Him defrauded of His honor, and all who love their fellow-men in seeing so much amiability, so much goodness, with a millstone round its neck which must inevitably sink it in the everlasting deeps.

Let us come now to those with whom we are very much concerned; and for whom we have ventured to compose this little treatise. Errors filter from one class of men into another, and appear in different

forms according to the new combinations into which they enter. We are all of us more affected by the errors which prevail around us than we really suppose. Almost every popular fallacy has its representative even among the children of faith; and as when a pestilence is raging, many are feeble and languid though they have no plague-spot, so is it in matters of religion. The contagion of the world does us a mischief in many ways of which we are hardly conscious; and we often injure ourselves in our best and highest interests by views and practices, to which we cling with fatal obstinacy, little suspecting the relationship in which they stand to widely spread evils, which we behold in their naked deformity in other sections of society, and hold up to constant reprobation. The forgetfulness that we are creatures, which produces the various consequences already mentioned, is an error which is less obviously hateful than a direct forgetfulness of God, and consequently it wins its way into holy places where the other would find no admittance, or scant hospitality. Good Christians hear conversation around them, catch the prevailing tone of society, read books, and become familiarized with certain fashionable principles of conduct; and it is impossible for their minds and hearts not to become imbued with the genius of all this.

It is irksome to be always on our guard, and from being off our guard we soon grow to be unsuspecting. When a Catholic enters into intimate dealings with Protestants, he must not forget to place his sentries, and to act as if he was in an enemy's country; and this is unkindly work, and as miserable

as it is unkindly. Yet so it is. When newspapers tell us that Catholicism is always more reasonable and less superstitious when it is in the immediate presence of Protestantism, they indicate something which they have observed, namely, a change. Now if our religion be changed by Protestantism, we can have little difficulty in deciding whether it has changed for the better or the worse. All this illustrates what we mean. The prevailing errors of our time and country find their way down to us, and corrupt our faith, and lower our practice, and divide us among ourselves. This unstartling error of forgetting that we are creatures is thus not without grave influence upon conscientious Catholics; and it is to this point that we are asking your attention.

DUTY AND LOVE

It is beyond all question among Christians that there are such things in religion as the counsels of perfection, and that the true way of serving God is to do so out of love. No one doubts but that a saint is a man who loves God ardently and tenderly, who attempts great things for His honor, and makes painful sacrifices to promote His glory. No one imagines a saint to be one who does no more than he is obliged to, and who, having just avoided mortal sin, is careless about venial faults, and takes his ease and liberty outside the verge of strict and certain precepts. The Church possesses a whole literature which is occupied with nothing else than teaching these principles of Christian perfection, as they are called. Many of these books, such as the *Imita-*

tion of Christ, are in such repute that it would be rash and presumptuous to question what they teach; and there are others of the very highest spirituality, such as the works of St. Theresa and St. John of the Cross, to which the Church has given her most solemn approval. Persons accustomed to the perusal of these books regard the axioms on which their teaching is based as almost self-evident. They know on the authority of the Church that there ought not to be two opinions on the matter; but even independently of that, they cannot conceive as a matter of common sense how there can possibly be two opinions about it. Even if men *might* go wrong on such a question, how *could* they do so in point of fact?

Nevertheless there are numbers of Catholics, who, strange to say! see the question in a different light. The teaching of spiritual books and the doctrines of perfection, as laid down by the most approved writers, do not recommend themselves to them. They consider that, unless they are under the vows of some monastic Order, they should aim at nothing more than the avoiding of mortal sin, and giving edification to those around them. They are good people. They go to Mass; they aid or start missions; they countenance the clergy; they are kind to the poor; they say the rosary; they frequent the Sacraments. Yet when any one talks to them of serving God out of personal love to Him, or trying to be daily more and more closely united to Him, of cultivating the spirit of prayer, of constantly looking out to see what more they can do for God, of mortifying their own will in things allowable, of

disliking the spirit of the world even in manifestations of it which are short of sin, and of living more consciously in the presence of God, they feel as if they were listening to an unknown language. They have a jealousy, almost a dislike, of such truths, quite irrespective of any attempt being made to force such a line of conduct upon themselves. If they are humble they are puzzled: if they are self-opinionated, they are angry, critical, or contemptuous, as the case may be. There are many others to whom such views are simply new, and who with modesty and self-distrust are shaken by them, and to some extent receive them. Still upon the whole such doctrines have a sound in their ears of being ultra and extravagant, or poetical and fanciful, or peculiar and eccentric.

Now it must be beyond a doubt to any Catholic scholar that such persons are completely out of harmony with a considerable and important part of the Catholic system, that they think differently from the Saints and holy men, and that a great deal of what the Church has approved is new, startling, and perhaps displeasing to them. This is a very strong way of putting it; but we do not see that it goes beyond the truth. They do not view it in this light themselves. God forbid! but this is what it comes to in effect.

TWO INFERENCES

In speaking of unbelievers, we pointed out that the character formed by the peculiar doctrines, devotions, and practices of the Catholic Church, was not something monstrous, or exotic, or unnatural,

as they are too often in the habit of considering it. We maintained that it rested on the undeniable common-sense view that we are creatures, the creatures of an Almighty Creator, and that a man who acted consistently (if unassisted nature could do so), as a creature, would not be unlike a Catholic Saint: always excepting the practice of voluntary mortification, and all the shapes of love of suffering, for these are ideas peculiar to the kingdom of the Incarnation, or to such false religions as retain in distorted shapes great portions of the primitive tradition which prophesied of the expiation of sin by the vicarious sufferings of a Redeemer. So now we would call the attention of the good people, of whom we are at present speaking, to a similar fact. The doctrines of Christian perfection and the teaching of approved spiritual books do not rest upon any peculiarity of any school of theology, or upon any special spirit of a religious Order, or on the idiosyncrasy of any particular Saint, or upon any unusual and miraculous vocation, but simply on the fact of our being creatures. Even the practices of voluntary penance or of acquired contemplation, though not of obligation, at least rise naturally and easily out of the relations in which we every one of us stand to God as our Creator. There is nothing in the whole range of asceticism which does not turn out at last to be, a natural and logical result of our position in the world as the creatures of a Creator: and hence there is nothing in such practices fanciful, eccentric, or intrinsically indiscreet: though wrong time, wrong place, wrong measure, can make anything indiscreet.

From this fact we draw two inferences. The first is that the strangeness of the doctrines of spirituality to these excellent persons is attributable, without their knowing it, to the prevailing forgetfulness that we are creatures. They are unsuspectingly influenced by the very evil which gives its tone and color to the unbelief and worldliness of the times. They have no distinct conception of the relation in which their being creatures places them with regard to the Creator, nor of what comes of it in the way of practical religion. It has probably never occurred to them that it was a subject which needed study. Hence, unprovided with antidotes to the poison they were compelled daily to imbibe, an imperceptible change has passed upon them, or the poison of the error has been beforehand with the truth or, in the case of converts, it has troubled the processes of conversion, and stopped them short of their legitimate completion: for almost all come into the Church only half-converted, and several remain so to the last. Thus they have come as it were by instinct to rise up in arms against a claim which is urged in behalf of God. Next they have jealously examined His claims, in a commercial spirit, and with a bias towards themselves. Then they have put limits to His service, made a compromise with Him, reduced Him from a Creator to a being, who is to tax and to tithe, and no more, for He is a constitutional monarch and not despotic, and they have come to regard notions of perfection with disfavor, as an unconstitutional aggression on the part of God or His executive. Now every one of these six processes says as loudly and plainly as it can, "I

am not a creature. There is some such sort of equality between God and myself, as that I am entitled to come to terms with Him." Moreover the spirit in which all this is done is equally incompatible with the modest position of a creature. It is as if they were the judges, as if they possessed some inalienable, indefeasible rights of their own. There is no diffidence, no self-distrust. They see their way more clearly, and assert their supposed liberty more positively, than they would do in matters which concerned the claims and interests of their fellow-citizens. It would make a great change, we will not say how great, in them, if they realized and clearly comprehended the relation in which a creature, necessarily as a creature, stands to his Creator.

My second inference is, that, as the doctrines and practices of spirituality rest mainly on our position as creatures, and simply on our position as redeemed creatures, the common evasion that they belong to the cloister, and are peculiar to monks and nuns, will not hold good and cannot be maintained. A monk is no more a creature than a soldier or a sailor, a billiard-marker or a jockey, and no more comes out of his relation to the Creator than out of theirs. There may be questions of degree in the amount different men may do for God; there surely can be none as to the principles on which, and the spirit in which, He is to be served. Monks and nuns have given up their liberty by the heroism of vows. They are obliged to the practices of perfection, or to apply themselves to the acquisition of them. Theirs is a glorious captivity, in which supernatural

charity has bound them hand and foot, and handed them over to the arms of their Creator. They have used the original liberty He gave them in the grandest of ways, by voluntarily surrendering it. All then that distinguishes the Christian in his family from the monk in his community is his liberty. If he is to serve God at all it must be on the same principle as the monk.

There are not two spiritualities, one for the world and one for the cloister. God is one; God's character is one; our necessary relation to Him is one. There are many distinct things in spirituality to which people in the world are not bound, many which can with difficulty be practiced in the world, many which it would be unwise for most persons to attempt to practice in the world, and some which it would be actually impossible to practice there. But whatever differences there may be in the amount done for God, or the manner of doing it, or the obligations under which it is done, there can be no difference in the principle on which it is done. God must be served out of love. This is the first and great Commandment. No one is condemned except for mortal sin; but any man who starts professedly on the principle that he will do no more than avoid mortal sin, and that God shall have no more out of him, will infallibly not succeed in his single object, that is to say, he will not avoid mortal sin. Though he is not bound to do more than this in order to secure his salvation, yet because he has gone on a wrong principle, it will, just because it is a principle and not merely a mistake or a negligence, carry him far further than he intended, and end by being his

ruin. He will fail in his object, because he made it exclusively his object. Love is the sole principle of the creature's service of his Creator, however remiss that love may be. Thus then, if it be true that the doctrines and practices of Christian perfection are simply based on God's love of us and our love of Him, that is, the relation between the creature and the Creator, it is either true that monks are more God's creatures than we are, or that, *in our measure, and degree*, the principles of perfection are as applicable to ourselves as to them.

FIRST ELEMENTS OF PRACTICAL RELIGION

We are not going to write a book on perfection. Very far from it. But we believe that the ruling spirit of the age is rather a forgetfulness that we are creatures, than a forgetfulness of the Creator; that many more persons are infected with this evil than have any suspicion of it; that it lies at the bottom of all the objections men make to the doctrines of spirituality; and, furthermore, that many more persons would try to serve God, would frequent the Sacraments, avoid sin, and be ordinarily good Catholics, if they had a clear view of the relations between themselves and God, as creature and Creator. Hence, we are undertaking what may seem a childish, or at least an unnecessary, work. We wish to explain, or to state rather than to explain, the first elements of all practical religion, the A B C of devotion. We want to write a primer of piety; and to do so in the plainest, easiest, most unadorned style. The experience of the priesthood has led us

to think that we shall serve souls by putting forward what every one thinks he knows already, and what he will say he knew before as soon as he reads it. Nevertheless, these commonplaces are not so well known as they should be. Their very commonness leads men to overlook them; and we trust that not a few readers, if they will follow us patiently, will find that both head and heart will have learned not a little in the study.

All our duties to God, and to ourselves no less, are founded on the fact that we are creatures. All religion is based on the sense that we are creatures. The foolishness of this simple truth will bring to nought the pride of the wise world. It will be as the plain stone of the common brook against the might and bravery of the giant of modern misbelief. We speak to simple-hearted believers. We put no high things before them, but rather the lessons of a village dame. We draw no conclusions, and urge no definite duties. We only ask our dear readers to try to put together with us a few obvious matters of fact about our Heavenly Father, and then leave it to grace and our own hearts what is to come of it all. We will therefore ask each other some such questions as these—What is it, as children express themselves, what is it to be a creature?—What is it to have a Creator?—Why does God wish us to love Him?—Why does He love us?—How can we love Him?—How do we repay His love of us?—How does He repay our love of Him?—Is it easy to be saved?—And what becomes of the great multitude of believers?

What if, when we put our answers together, some-

thing new and striking comes of it all? What if it warms our hearts, and moistens our eyes? Anyhow it is very sweet to talk of God. There is no holyday in the world like it. So, dear readers, take this weary and disagreeable chapter as a preface to something better, something easier, simpler, heartier, and more loving; and let us begin, as little children, at the very beginning.

CHAPTER II

WHAT IT IS TO BE A CREATURE

LET us sit down upon the top of this fair hill. The clear sunshine and the bright air flow into us in streams of life and gladness, while our thoughts are lifted up to God, and our hearts quietly expand to love. Beneath us is that beautiful rolling plain, with its dark masses of summer foliage sleeping in the sun for miles and miles away, in the varying shades of blue and green, according to the distance or the clouds. There at our feet is the gigantic city, gleaming with an ivory whiteness beneath its uplifted but perpetual canopy of smoke. The villaspotted hills beyond it, its almost countless spires, its one huge many-steeped palace, and its solemn presiding dome, its old bleached tower, and its squares of crowded shipping—it all lies below us in the peculiar sunshine of its own misty magnificence.

There, in every variety of joy and misery, of elevation and depression, three million souls are working out their complicated destinies. Close around us the air is filled with the songs of rejoicing birds, or the pleased hum of the insects that are drinking the sun-beams, and blowing their tiny trumpets as they weave and unweave their mazy dance. The flowers breathe sweetly, and the leaves of the glossy shrubs

are spotted with bright creatures in painted surcoat or gilded panoply, while the blue dome above seems both taller and bluer than common, and is ringing with the loud peals of the unseen larks, as the steeples of the city ring for the nation's victory. Far off from the river-flat comes the booming of the cannon, and here, all unstartled, round and round the pond, a fleet of young perch are sailing in the sun, slowly and undisturbedly as if they had a very grave enjoyment of their little lives. What a mingled scene it is of God and man! And all so bright, so beautiful, so diversified, so calm, opening out such fountains of deep reflection, and of simple-hearted gratitude to our Heavenly Father.

What is our uppermost thought? It is that we live, and that our life is gladness. Our physical nature unfolds itself to the sun, while our mind and heart seem no less to bask in the bright influences of the thought of God. Animate and inanimate, reasoning and unreasoning, organic and inorganic, material and spiritual—what are these but the names and orders of so many mysteries, of so many sciences, which are all represented in this sunny scene? We, like the beetles and the perch, like the larks and the clouds, like the leaves and the flowers, like the smoke-wreaths of the cannon and the surges of the bells, are the creatures of the One True God, lights and shades in this creature-picture, kith and kin to all the things around us, in near or in remote degree. How did we come to live? Why do we live? How do we live? What is our life? Where did it come from? Whither is it going? What was it meant for? All that the sun shines upon is real;

and we are real too. Are we to be the beauty of a moment, part of earth's gilding, to warm ourselves in the sun for a while, and glitter, and add to the hum of life on the planet, and then go away, and go nowhere? The beautiful day makes us happy with a childish happiness, and it sends our thoughts to first principles, to our alphabet, to the beginnings of things.

FIVE STATES OF NATURE

But we must begin with a little theology, before we can fall back upon the simple truths of the catechism. We are not on safe ground, although it is such simple ground. Baius, Jansenius, and Quesnel have contrived so to obscure and confound and divorce the orders of nature and grace, that we cannot treat at any length of the subject of creation, unless we start with some sort of profession of faith. Theologians, in order to get a clear view of the matter, consider human nature as either possible or actual in five different states. The first is a state of pure nature. In this, man would have been created, of course without sin, but also without sanctifying grace, without infused virtues, and without the helps of a supernatural order. None of these things would have been due to his nature regarded in itself. He would have been obnoxious to hunger and thirst, to toil, diseases, and death, because his nature is compound and material, and contains the principles of these inconveniences within itself. He would have been subject also to ignorance and to concupiscence, and his happiness

would have consisted in his knowledge and love of God as the author of nature, whose precepts he would have observed by means of what is called *natural grace*.

This natural grace requires a word of explanation. What is due to nature we do not call grace; in a certain sense God is bound to give it to us. But He is not bound so to combine secondary causes that the right thoughts and motives requisite for us to govern ourselves and control our passions should rise in our minds at the right time, or even if such assistance were due to nature in the mass, it would not perhaps be due to it in the individual. Nevertheless we suppose such an assistance to be essential to a state of pure nature, and as it is over and above what our nature can claim of itself, we call it grace, but grace of the natural, not of the supernatural order. In the time of St. Thomas some theologians held that Adam was created in this state, and remained in it for a time, until he was subsequently endowed with sanctifying grace, and raised to a supernatural end. This is now, however, universally rejected. Both Angels and men were created in a state of grace. The orders of nature and grace, though perfectly distinct and on no account to be confused, did as a matter of fact start together in the one act of creation, without any interval of time between. This state therefore was possible, but never actual.

The second condition of human nature is the state of integrity. Baianism and Jansenism regard this as identical with the state of pure nature; but Catholic theology considers it as endowed with a

certain special perfection, over and above the perfections due to it for its own sake: and the twenty-sixth proposition of Baius is condemned because it asserts that this integrity was due to nature, and its natural condition. It consists in the perfect subjection of the body to the soul, and of the sensitive appetite to the reason, and thus confers upon man a perfect immunity from ignorance, concupiscence, and death. It inserts in our nature a peculiar vigor by which this glorious dominion of the soul is completed and sustained, while the tree of life, it is supposed, would have preserved the material part of our nature from the corroding influence of age. Of this state also we may say that it was possible but never actual; because, while it is true of Adam as far as it goes, he never was, as a matter of fact, left to the possession of his integrity without the supernatural addition of sanctifying grace.

The third condition of human nature is the state of innocence. By this Adam in the first instant of his creation, or as some say immediately afterwards, had the theological and moral virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, infused into him, inasmuch as he was created in a state of grace, and elevated to the supernatural end of participating in the beatitude of God by the Beatific Vision. He was likewise endowed with such a perfect science both of natural and supernatural things, as became the preceptor and ruler and head of the human race; and a similar science would have been easily acquired by his descendants in a state of innocence, though as they would not have been the heads of the race, it would probably not have been infused into them from the

first. This innocence is what we call *original justice*, to express by one word the aggregate of gifts and habits which compose it; and what constituted man in this state was the one simple quality of sanctifying grace, by which the soul was perfectly subject to God, not only as its natural, but also as its supernatural author. This is the teaching of the Church; whereas the heresies of Baius and Jansenius hold that the grace of Adam produced only human merits, and was a natural sequel of creation, and due to nature on its own account. This state of innocence, or original justice, was that in which, as a matter of fact, Adam was created.

The fourth condition of man is the state of fallen, while the fifth is that of redeemed nature, to which may be added the state of glorified nature, and the state of lost nature, in which ultimately the other states must issue. Our present purpose does not require us to enter upon these. We will only stop to point out a very beautiful and touching analogy. Just as the separate orders of nature and grace were by the sweet love of God started in the same act, so the promise of the Saviour and the actual operation of saving grace followed at once upon the fall, and fallen nature was straightway placed upon the road of reparation and redemption. Thus is it always in the love of God. There is a pathetic semblance of impatience about it, an eagerness to anticipate, a quickness to interfere, an unnecessary profusion in remedying, a perpetual tendency to keep outstripping itself and outdoing itself: and in all these ways is it evermore overrunning all crea-

tion, beautifying and glorifying it with its own eternal splendors.

What, then, we must bear in mind throughout, is this, that the orders of nature and grace are in reality quite distinct; that God must be regarded as the author of both; and that we must continually bear in mind this distinction, if we would avoid the entanglement of errors which have been noted in the *Condemned Propositions*. At the same time, we shall speak of God, throughout, as at once the author of both these orders, and of creation as representing both; because, as a matter of fact, they both started in creation, in the case both of Angels and of men. Out of this significant fact, that God created neither Angels nor men in a state of mere nature, our view of God materially proceeds. It is a fact which reveals volumes about Him. It stamps a peculiar character upon creation, and originates obligations which greatly influence the relations of the creature to his Creator.

Creation was itself a gratuitous gift. But, granting creation, nothing was due to the natures either of Angels or men, but what those natures respectively could claim on grounds intrinsic to themselves. It was to have been expected beforehand, that God would have created them in a state of perfect nature. It is a surprise that it was not so. On the very threshold of theology, we are arrested by this mysterious fact, that rational creatures came from their Creator's hands in a supernatural state; and that, in His first act, the natural never stood alone, but it leaned, all perfect, as it was, upon the supernatural. It was as if God did not like to let nature go, lest haply

He should lose what He so dearly loved. This one fact seems to us the *great* fact of the whole of theology, coloring it all down to its lowest definition, and marvellously illuminating, from beneath, the character and beauty of our Creator. It is a hidden sunshine in our minds, better than this outer sunshine that is round us now. Oh, surely, to be a creature is a joyous thing! and even our very nothingness is dear to us, as we think of God; for it seems to be almost a grandeur, instead of an abasement, to have been thus called out of nothing by such an One as He.

THE MEANING OF "CREATURE"

We are creatures. What is it to be a creature? Before the sun sets in the red west, let us try to have an answer to our question. We find ourselves in existence to-day, amid this beautiful scene, with multitudes of our fellow-creatures round about us. We have been alive and on the earth so many years, so many months, so many weeks, so many days, so many hours. At such and such a time we came to the use of reason; but at such an age and in such a way, that we clearly did not confer our reason upon ourselves. But here we are to-day, not only with a reason, but with a character of our own, and fulfilling a destiny in some appointed station in life. We know nothing of what has gone before us, except some little of the exterior of the past, which history or tradition or family records have told us of. We do not doubt that the sun and the moon, the planets and the stars, the blue skies and the four winds,

the wide green seas and the fruitful earth, were before our time; indeed, before the time of man at all. Science unriddles mysterious things about them; but all additional light seems only to darken and to deepen our real ignorance.

So is it with the creature *man*. He finds himself in existence—an existence which he did not give to himself. He knows next to nothing of what has gone before; and absolutely nothing of what is to come, except so far as his Creator is pleased to reveal it to him supernaturally. And thus it comes to pass, that he knows better what will happen to him in the world to come, than what will be his fortune here. He knows nothing of what is to happen to himself on earth. Whether his future years will be happy or sorrowful, whether he will rise or fall, whether he will be well or ailing, he knows not. It is not in his own hands, neither is it before his eyes. If you ask him the particular and special end which he is to fulfil in his life; what the peculiar gift or good which he was called into being to confer upon his fellow-men; what the exact place and position which he was to fill in the great social whole; he cannot tell you. It has not been told to him. The chances are, with him as with most men, that he will die and yet not know it. And why? Because he is a creature.

His being born was a tremendous act. Yet it was not his own. It has entangled him in quantities of difficult problems, and implicated him in numberless important responsibilities. In fact, he has in him an absolute inevitable necessity either of endless joy or of endless misery; though he is free to

choose between the two. Annihilation he is not free to choose. Reach out into the on-coming eternity as far as the fancy can, there still will this man be, simply because he has been already born. The consequences of his birth are not only unspeakable in their magnitude, they are simply eternal. Yet he was not consulted about his own birth. He was not offered the choice of being or not being. Mercy required that he should not be offered it; justice did not require that he should. We are not concerned now to defend God. We are only stating facts, and taking the facts as we find them. It is a fact, that he was not consulted about his own birth; and it is truer and higher than all facts, that God can do nothing but what is blessedly, beautifully right. A creature has no right to be consulted about his own creation; and for this reason simply, that he is a creature.

He has no notion why it was that his particular soul rather than any other soul, was called into being, and put into his place. Not only can he conceive a soul far more noble and devout than his, but he sees, as he thinks, peculiar deficiencies in himself, in some measure disqualifying him for the actual position in which God has placed him. And how can he account for this? Yet God must be right. And his own liberty, too, must be very broad, and strong, and responsible. He clearly has a work to do, and came here simply to do it; and it is equally clear, that if God will not work with him against his own will, he also cannot work without God. Every step which a creature takes, when he has once been created, increases his

dependence upon his Creator. He belonged utterly to God by creation: if words would enable us to say it, he belongs still more utterly to God by preservation. In a word, the creature becomes more completely, more thoroughly, more significantly a creature, every moment that his created life is continued to him. This is, in fact, his true blessedness—to be ever more and more enclosed in the hand of God who made him. The Creator's hand is the creature's home.

As he was not consulted about his coming into the world, so neither is he consulted about his going out of it. He does not believe he is going to remain always on earth. He is satisfied that the contrary will be the case. He knows that he will come to an end of this life, without ceasing to live. He is aware that he will end this life with more or less of pain, pain without a parallel, pain like no other pain, and most likely very terrible pain. For though the act of dying is itself probably painless, yet it has for the most part to be reached through pain. Death will throw open to him the gates of another world, and will be the beginning to him of far more solemn and more wonderful actions than it has been his lot to perform on earth. Everything to him depends on his dying at the right time and in the right way. Yet he is not consulted about it. He is entitled to no kind of warning. No sort of choice is left him either of time or place or manner. It is true he may take his own life. But he had better not. His liberty is indeed very great, since this is left free to him. Yet suicide would not help him out of his difficulties. It only makes certain to him

the worst that could be. He is only cutting off his own chances; and by taking his life into his own hands he is rashly throwing himself out of his own hands in the most fatal way conceivable. One whose business it is to come when he is called, and to depart when he is bidden, and to have no reason given him either for his call or his dismissal, except such as he can gather from the character of his master,—such is man upon earth, and he is so, because he is a creature.

Is it childish to say all this? We fear we must say something more childish still. We must not omit to notice of this creature, this man, that he did not make the world he finds around him. He could not have done so, for lack of wisdom and of power. But it is not this we would dwell on. As a matter of fact he did not do so; and, therefore, as he did not make the world, it is not his world, but somebody else's. He can have no rights in it, but such as the proprietor may voluntarily make over to him in the way of gift. He can have no sovereignty over it, or any part of it, unless by a royal grace the true Sovereign has invested him with delegated powers. In himself, therefore, he is without dominion. Dominion does not belong to him as a creature. Dominion is a different idea and comes from another quarter.

Furthermore—and we do not care whether it be from faith or reason, or from what proportion of both—this creature cannot resist the certainties that there is an unseen world in which he is very much concerned. He is quite sure, nervously sure, that there are persons and things close to him, though

unseen, which are of far greater import than what he sees. He believes in presences which are more intimate to him than any presence of external things, nay in one Presence which is more intimate to him than he is to his own self. Death is a flight away from earth, not a lying down a few feet beneath its sods; it is a vigorous outburst of a new life, not a resting on a clay pillow from the wearyful toil of this. All things in him and around him are felt to be beginnings, and the curtains of the unseen world, as if lifted by the wind, wave ever and anon into his face, and cling to it like a mask, and he sees through, or thinks he sees. This is the last thing we have to note of this man, as he sits upon the hill-top, in the sunshine, part and parcel of the creatures round about him. He finds himself in existence by the act of another. He knows nothing of what has gone before him, nothing of what is to happen to himself, and next to nothing of what is to come, and that little only by revelation. He was not consulted about his own birth, nor will he be about his death. He has to die out, and has nothing to do with the when or the how. He did not make the world he finds around him, and therefore it is not his. Neither can he resist the conviction that this world is for him only the porch of another and more magnificent temple of the Creator's majesty, wherein he will enter still further into the Creator's power, and learn that to be in the Creator's power is the creature's happiness.

It is not our present business to explain or comment on all this, we are only concerned to state facts. This is the position of each one of us as men

and creatures, the position wherein we find ourselves at any given moment in which we may choose to advert to ourselves and our circumstances; and the fact that such is our position is no small help towards an answer to our question, What is it to be a creature? But let us now advance a step further. Let us pass from the *position* of this creature to what we know to be his *real history*. Let us look at him on the hill-top, not merely in the sunshine of nature, but in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Now we shall gain fresh knowledge about him, and understand him better. We shall know his meaning and his destiny, and can then infer from them his condition, his duties, and his responsibilities.

THE CREATURE'S REAL HISTORY

He may occupy a very private position in the world. He may not be known beyond the sanctuary of his own family, or the limits of a moderate circle of acquaintances. The great things of the world have no reference to him, and public men do not consult him. He has his little world of hopes and fears, of joys and sadnesses, and strangers intermeddle not with either. His light and his darkness are both his own. But he is a person of no consequence. The earth, the nation, the shire, the village, go on without his interference. He is a man like the crowd of men, and is not noticeable in any other way. Yet the beginning of his history is a long way off. Far in the eternal mind of God, further than you can look, he is there. He has had his

place there from eternity; and before ever the world was, he lay there with the light of God's goodness around him, and the clearness of God's intentions upon him, and was the object of a distinct, transcending, and unfathomable love. There was more of power, of wisdom, and of goodness in the love which God bore through eternity to that insignificant man, than we can conceive of, though we raise our imaginations to the greatest height of which they are capable.

May we say it? He was part of God's glory, of God's bliss, through all the unrevolving ages of a past eternity. The hanging up in heaven of those multitudes of brilliant worlds, the composition, the adornment, and the equipoise of their ponderous masses, all the marvels of inanimate material creation, all the unexplicable chemistry which is the world's life, were as nothing compared to the intense brooding of heavenly love, the compassionate fullness of Divine predestination, over that single soul. Think of that, as he sits among the trees and shrubs, with the insects and the birds about him! So long as there has been a God, so long has that soul been the object of His knowledge and His love. Ever since the uncreated abyss of almighty love has been spread forth, there lay that soul gleaming on its bright waters. Oh, no wonder God is so patient with sinners, no wonder Jesus died for souls!

But this is not the whole of his real history. There is more about him still. We do not know what the secrets of his conscience may be, nor whether he is in a state of grace, nor what might be God's judgment of him if He called him away at

this moment. But whatever comes of these questions, it is a simple matter of fact that that man was part of the reason of the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. He belongs to Jesus and was created for Jesus. He is part of his Saviour's property, and meant to adorn His kingdom. His body and his soul are both of them fashioned, in their degree, after the model of the Body and the Soul of the Word made flesh. His predestination flowed out from, and is enclosed in, the predestination of Jesus. He is the brother of his God, and has a divine right to call her mother, who calls the Creator Son. He was foreseen in the decree of the Incarnation. The glory of his soul and the possibilities of his human heart entered as items into that huge sum of attractions which drew the Eternal Word to seek His delights among the sons of men, by assuming their created nature to His uncreated Person. His sins were partly the cause why the Precious Blood was shed; and Jesus suffered, died, rose again, and ascended for him, as completely as if he were the only one of his race that ever fell.

There must be something very attractive in him for our Lord to have loved him thus steadily and thus ardently. You see that He counted that creature's sins over long and long ago. He saw them, as we blind men can never see them, singly and separately in all their unutterable horror and surpassing malice. Then He viewed them as a whole, perhaps thousands in number, and aggravated by almost every variety of circumstance of which human actions are capable. And nevertheless there

was something in that man which so drew upon the love of the unspeakably holy God, that He determined to die for him, to satisfy, and over-satisfy for all his sins, to merit for him a perfect sea of untold graces, and to beguile him by the most self-sacrificing generosity to the happiness of His Divine embraces. All this was because that man was His creature. So you see what a history his has been, what a stir he has made in the world by having to do with the Incarnation, how he has been mixed up with eternal plans, and has helped to bring a seeming change over the ever-blessed and unchanging God! Alas! if it is hard to see good points in others, how much harder must it be for God to see good points in us, and yet how He loves us all!

But to return to our man, whoever he may be. It is of course true that God had a general purpose in the whole of creation, or to speak more truly, many general purposes. But it is also true that He had a special purpose in this man whom we are picturing to ourselves. The man came into the world to do something particular for God, to carry out some definite plan, to fulfil some one appointed end, which belongs to him in such a way that it does not belong to other men. There is a peculiar service, a distinct glory, which God desires to have from that man, different from the service and the glory of any other man in the world; and the man's dignity and happiness will result from his giving God that service and glory, and no other. As he did not make himself, so neither can he give himself his own vocation. He does not know what special function it has fallen to him to perform in the immense scheme and

gigantic world of his Creator; but it is not the less true that he has such a special function. Life as it unfolds will bring it to him. Years will lay his duty and his destiny at his door in parts successively.

Perhaps on this side of the grave he may never see his work as an intelligible whole. It may be part of his work to be tried by this very obscurity. But with what a dignity it invests the man, to know of him that, as God chose his particular soul at the moment of its creation rather than countless other possible and nobler souls, so does He vouchsafe to be dependent on this single man for a glory and a love, which, if this man refuses it to Him, He will not get from any other man nor from all men put together! God has an interest at stake, which depends exclusively on that single man; and it is in the man's power to frustrate this end, and millions do so. When we consider who, and how infinitely blessed, God is, is not this special destiny of each man a touching mystery? How close it seems to bring the Creator and the creature! And where is the dignity of the creature save in the love of the Creator?

Furthermore, this man, it would appear, might have been born at any hour of the day or night these last five thousand years and more. He might have been before Christ or after Him, and of any nation, rank or religion. His soul could have been called out of nothing at any moment as easily as when it pleased God in fact to call it. But it pleased God to call it when He did, because that time, and no other time, suited the special end for which that man was to live. He was born, just when he was,

for the sake of that particular purpose. He would have been too soon, had he been born earlier; too late, if he had not been born as early. And in like manner will he die. An hour, a place, a manner of death are all fixed for him; yet so as not in the least to interfere with his freedom. Everything is arranged with such a superabundance of mercy and indulgence, that he will not only die just when it fits in with the special work he has to do for God, and the special glory God is to have from him, but he will die at the one hour when it is safest and best for himself to die. The time, the place, the manner, and the pain of his death will be better for that man than any other time, place, manner, or pain would be. The most cruel-seeming death, if we could only see it, is a mercy which saves us from something worse, a boon of such magnitude as befits the liberality even of the Most High God.

Once again: a particular eternity is laid out for that man, to be won by his own free correspondence to the exuberant grace of his Creator. There is a brightness which may be his for ever, a distinct splendor and characteristic loveliness by which he may be one day known, admired, and loved amid the populous throngs of the great heaven. His own place is ready for him in the unutterable rest of everlasting joys. That man, who is gazing on the landscape at his feet, has an inheritance before him, to which the united wealth of kings is poverty and vileness. A light, a beauty, a power, a wisdom, are laid up for him, to which all the wonders of the material creation are worse than tame, lower than uninteresting. He is earning them at this moment,

by the acts of love which it seems as if the simple cheer of the sunshine were drawing out of his soul. They have a strange disproportionate proportion to his modest and obscure works on earth. God, and Angels, and Saints, are all busy with solicitous loving wisdom, to see that he does not miss his inheritance. His eternity is dependent on his answering the special end of his creation. Doubtless at this moment he has no clear idea of what his special work is; doubtless it is one of such unimportance, according to human measures, that it will never lay any weight on the prosperity, or the laws, or the police of his country. His light is probably too dim to be visible even to his neighborhood. Yet with it and because of it, he is one day to shine like ten thousand suns, far withdrawn within the peace of his satisfied and delighted God!

Such is the man's real history, traced onward from the hour when it pleased God to create his particular soul. And how many things there are in it to wonder at! How great is the dignity, how incalculable the destinies of man! All these things belong to him, not certainly in right of his being a creature, but at least because he is a creature. Creation explains all other mysteries. No wonder God should become man, in order to be with him, or should die for him, in order to save him. No wonder He should abide with him in mute reality in the Tabernacle, to feed his soul, and to sustain him and keep alive His creature's love by His own silent company. No wonder the Angels should cling about a man so fondly, nor that the one master-passion of the Saints should be the love of souls.

The wonder is that God should have created man; not that, having created him, He should love him so tenderly. Both are wonders; but the first is the greater wonder. Redemption does not follow from creation as a matter of course: but creation has so surprised us, that we are less surprised at new disclosures of the Creator's love. In truth man's dignity, wonderful as it is, is less a wonder than the creating love of God. How He holds His creature in His hand for ever! How all things, dark as well as bright, are simply purposes of unutterable goodness and compassion! How difficulties and problems are only places where love is so much deeper than common, that the eye cannot pierce it, nor the lines of our wisdom fathom it! Oh, of a truth God is indescribably good, and we feel that He is so whenever we remember that He made us! What a joy it is to be altogether His, to belong to Him, to feel our complete dependence upon Him, to lean our whole weight upon Him, not only for the delight of feeling that He is so strong, but also that we are so weak, and therefore so need Him always and everywhere! What liberty is like the sense of being encompassed with His sovereignty! What a gladness that He is immense, so that we cannot escape from Him, omniscient so that we are laid open and without a secret before Him, eternal so that we are in His sight but nothingness, nothingness that lives because He loves it!

Something more is still required in order to complete our picture of the creature. We have represented his *position*, and have traced his *real life*; but we have got to consider the *condition* in which

he is as a creature. We shall have to plead guilty to a little repetition. The nature of our subject renders it unavoidable, and we must crave the reader's indulgence for it!

THE CREATURE'S CONDITION

The first feature to be noticed in the condition of this creature *man* is his want of power. Not only is his health uncertain, but at his best estate his strength is very small. Brute matter resists him passively. He cannot lift great weights of it, nor dig deep into it. Even with the help of the most ingenious machinery and the united labor of multitudes he can do little but scratch the surface of the planet, without being able to alter the expression of one of its lineaments. Fire and water are both his masters. His prosperity is at the mercy of the weather. Matter is baffling and ruining him somewhere on the earth at all hours of day and night. He has to struggle continually to maintain his position, and then maintains it with exceeding difficulty. Considering how many thousands of years the race of man has inhabited the world, it is surprising how little control he has acquired over diseases, how little he knows of them, how much less he can do to alleviate them. Even in his arts and sciences there are strangely few things which he can reduce to certainty. His knowledge is extremely limited, and is liable to the most humiliating errors and the most unexpected mistakes. He is in comparative ignorance of himself, of his thinking principle, of the processes of his immaterial soul, of

the laws of its various faculties, or of the combinations of mind and matter. Metaphysics, which should rank next to religion in the scale of sciences, are a proverb for confusion and obscurity. Infinite longings perpetually checked by a sense of feebleness, and circumscribed within the limits of a narrow prison,—this is a description of the highest and most aspiring moods of man.

Such is the condition of our man if we look at him in his solitary dignity as lord of the creation. But even this is too favorable a representation of him. His solitary dignity is a mere imagination. On the contrary he is completely mixed up with the crowd of inferior creatures, and in numberless ways dependent upon them. If left to himself the ponderous earth is simply useless to him. Its maternal bosom contains supplies of minerals and gases, which are meant for the daily sustaining of human life. Without them this man would die in torture in a few days; and yet by no chemistry can he get hold of them himself and make them into food. He is simply dependent upon plants. They alone can make the earth nutritious to him, whether directly as food themselves, or indirectly by their support of animal life. And they do this by a multitude of hidden processes, many of which, perhaps the majority, are beyond the explanation of human chemistry. Thus he is at the mercy of the vegetable world. The grass that tops his grave, which fed him in his life, now feeds on him in turn.

In like manner is he dependent upon the inferior animals. Some give him strength to work with, some warm materials to clothe himself with, some

their flesh to eat or their milk to drink. A vast proportion of mankind have to spend their time, their skill, their wealth, in waiting upon horses and cows and camels, as if they were their servants, building houses for them, supplying them with food, making their beds, washing and tending them as if they were children, and studying their comforts. More than half the men in the world are perhaps engrossed in this occupation at the present moment. Human families would break up, if the domestic animals ceased to be members of them. Then, as to the insect world, it gives us a sort of nervous trepidation to contemplate it. The numbers of insects, and their powers are so terrific, so absolutely irresistible, that they could sweep every living thing from the earth and devour us all within a week, as if they were the fiery breath of a destroying angel. We can hardly tell what holds the lightning-like speed of their prolific generations in check. Birds of prey, intestine war, man's active hostility,—these, calculated at their highest, seem inadequate to keep down the insect population, whose numbers and powers of annoyance yearly threaten to thrust us off our own planet. It is God Himself who puts an invisible bridle upon these countless and irresistible legions, which otherwise would lick us up like thirsty fire.

What should we do without the sea? Earth and air would be useless, would be uninhabitable without it. There is not a year but the great deep is giving up to the investigations of our science unthought-of secrets of its utility, and of our dependence upon it. Men are only beginning to learn

the kind and gentle and philanthropic nature of that monster that seems so lawless and so wild.

Our dependence on the air is no less complete. It makes our blood, and is the warmth of our human lives. Nay, would it be less bright or beautiful, if it allowed to escape from it, let us say, one gas, the carbonic acid, which forms but an infinitesimally small proportion of it, the gas on which all vegetation lives? It exists in the air in quantities so trifling as to be with difficulty discernible; yet, if it were breathed away, or if the sea drank it all in, or would not give back again what it drinks, in a few short hours the flowers would be lying withered and discolored on the ground, the mighty forests would curl up their myriad leaves, show their white sides, and then let them wither and fall. There would not be a blade of grass upon the earth. The animals would moan and faint, and famished men would rise upon each other, like the maddened victims of a shipwreck, in the fury of their ungovernable hunger. Within one short week the planet would roll on, bright in its glorious sunshine, and its mineral-colored plains speckled with the shadows of its beautiful clouds, but all in the grim silence of universal death. On what trembling balances of powers, on what delicate and almost imperceptible chemistries, does man's tenure of earth seem to rest! Yes! but beneath those gauzelike veils is the strong arm of the compassionate Eternal!

It would require a whole volume to trace the various ways in which man is dependent upon the inferior creatures. All the adaptations, of which different sciences speak, turn out upon examination

to be so many dependencies of man on things which are beneath him. In material respects man is often inferior to his inferiors. But there is one feature in his dependency which does not concern his fellow-creatures, and on which it is of consequence to dwell. There is a peculiar kind of incompleteness about all he does, which disables him from concluding anything of himself, or unassisted. It is as if his arm was never quite long enough to reach his object, and God came in between him and his end to enable him to realize it. Man is ever falling, God ever saving; the creature always on the point of being defeated, the Creator always coming to the rescue opportunely. Thus man plants the tree and waters it, but he cannot make it grow. He prepares his ground and enriches it, he sows his seed and weeds it; but he cannot govern the weather, or the insects, on which his harvest depends. Between his labor and his labor's reward, God has to intervene.

When he lays his plans, he does nothing more than prepare favorable circumstances for the end which he desires. In war, in government, in education, in commerce, when he has done all, he has insured nothing. An element has to come in and to be waited for, without which he can have no results, and over which he has no control. Sometimes men call it fate or fortune, sometimes chance or accident. It is the final thing; it is what completes the circle, or fires the train, or makes the parts into a whole. It is the interference of God, the action of His will. In every department of human life we discover this peculiarity, that of himself, that is, with means left at his own disposal, man can approach his end,

but not attain it; he can get near it, but he cannot reach it. He is always too short by a little; and the supplement of that littleness is as invariably the gratuitous Providence of God. Nothing throws more light than this on the question. What is it to be a creature?

But our real history adds a great deal to our condition which is full of important consequences. Man is not as he came forth at first from the hand of his Creator. He has fallen: and his fall is not merely an external disability, consequent on an historical fact so many thousand years old. He bears the marks of it in himself. He feels its effects in every moral act, in every intellectual process. He is the prey of an intestine warfare. Two conflicting laws alternate within him. He has lost his balance, and finds it hard to keep the road. Notwithstanding the magnificent spiritual renewal which the mercy of his Creator has worked within him by the supernatural grace of a Sacrament, each man has added to the common fall a special revolt of his own. Nay, most men have repeated, imitated, aggravated the act of their first father. They have fallen themselves, and their sin has been accompanied with peculiarly disabling circumstances of guilt. Then the unwearied compassion of the Creator has come forth with another Sacrament to repair this personal wilful revolt of the poor fallen creature. With its grace fresh upon him, he has revolted again, and then again. He has diversified his falls. He has multiplied his treasons by varying their kind. He has broken, not one, but numerous laws, as if to show that it was not the hardness of any particular

precept, so much as the simple fact of being under God's yoke at all, which he found so unbearable. And again and again and again has the merciful Sacrament repaired and absolved him, and grace goes on, with a brave patient kindness of its own, fighting against seemingly incorrigible habits of sin; and, even at the hour of death, how reluctantly does mercy seem to capitulate to justice!

Now see how all this affects his condition as a creature. A man born under civil disabilities has no guilt in the eye of his country's laws, yet he does not take rank with a true citizen. A pardoned criminal to his last day will not cast the inferiority which he has brought upon himself. No pardon, no honors can ever cover the fact from others or himself. Nay, so far as he himself is concerned, they will only keep the fact bright and burnished in his mind.

The man who has been tried and cast for nearly every crime in almost every court in the land, and who is at large by a simple and amazing act of royal clemency, must feel that he has made a condition for himself which he never can forget, and out of which he draws every hour peculiar motives of conduct and demeanor; and the better man he is the less likely is he ever to forget his past. So surely it is with us men. If looked at without advertence to the original fall, or to our own fall, or to our renewed falls after grace given, what are we but finite, dependent, imperfect; but when those three additional facts of our real history are added to our condition, how much more narrow and little, dependent and inferior, do we appear to become! The least word seems too big to express our littleness.

But we can go lower still. Pardon lowers us. The abundance and frequency of mercy humbles us. The goodness of God gives a new life to the sense of our own misery and hatefulness. It quickens our knowledge of our own inferiority into a positive feeling of self-contempt. It is true that the first fall, and our own fall, and our repeated falls, all flow, voluntary though they be, out of our necessary imperfections as creatures; yet nevertheless they add something to the consciousness that we are creatures, just as all developments seem to add to their germ, even though, like sin, they are not inevitable but free developments. And then God's pardoning mercy adds again to our consciousness that we are creatures. It appears to sink us lower and lower in our own nothingness, to envelop us more and more in the sense of our *createdness*. For in our sin God has condescended to make a covenant with us, and He is hourly fulfilling His share of it. On His part the covenant seems an abandonment of His own rights, a waiving of His own dignity, a service gratuitously given, or for a nominal payment which makes it less dignified than if it were gratuitous, a lowering of Himself towards our level, a series of apparent changes in Him who in His essence and knowledge and will is gloriously and majestically immutable. All this makes us feel more and more intensely what it is to be a creature. The consciousness that clung to the beautiful soul of the unfallen Adam becomes a deeper consciousness to the fallen sinner, and that deeper becomes deepest in the chastened joy and humbled peace of the forgiven sinner.

Thus each of us finds himself in his place, his own allotted place, in nature and in grace, with this threefold consciousness upon him. Beneath the weight of this happy and salutary consciousness he has to work out his destiny. Criticism of his position is not only useless; so long as he remembers himself, it is impossible. Not only does he know in the abstract that all *must* be right; he knows by his feeling of being a creature that all *is* right. To him criticism is not only loss of time; it is irreligion also. He does not know how to sit in judgment upon his Creator. He cannot comprehend even the mental process by which others do it, much less the moral temper. For, while he has this threefold consciousness that he is a creature, he cannot conceive of himself without it, nor what he would be like if he was without it, and therefore those who are without it are beyond his comprehension for the time, both in what they say and do. There are not two sides to the question of life, God's side and man's side. God's side is all in all. Not only is there nothing to be said on the other, there is no other. To think that man has a side is to forget that he is a creature, or at least not to realize what it is to be a creature. Encompass man's littleness with the grand irresponsible sovereignty of God, and then is he glorious indeed, his liberty large beyond compare, and his likeness to God more like an equality with Him than we can dare to put in words.

CONCLUSIONS

Now let us go back to the man we left sitting on the hilltop in the brightness of the summer sun. We have to draw some conclusions about him from what has been already said; and the first is this. As "*creature*" is his name, his history, and his condition, he must obviously have the conduct and the virtues befitting a creature. He must behave as what he is. His propriety consists in his doing so. He must be made up of fear, of obedience, of submission, of humility, of prayer, of repentance, and above all, of love. As fire warms and frost chills, as the moon shines by night and the sun by day, as birds have wings and trees have leaves, so must man, as a creature, conduct himself as such, and do those virtuous actions, which are chiefly virtues because they are becoming to him and adapted to his condition. The demeanor, the behavior, the excellencies of a creature must bear upon them the stamp of his created nature and condition. This is too obvious to need enforcing; obvious when stated, yet most strangely forgotten by most men during the greater part of their lives.

Our second conclusion about this man is that, whatever may be his attainments or his inclinations, the only knowledge worth much of his time and trouble, the only science which will last with him and stand him in good stead, consists in his study of the character of God. He received everything from God. He belongs to Him. He is surrounded by Him. His fate is in God's hands. His eternity

is to be with God, in a companionship of unspeakable delights. Or if it is to be in exile from Him, it is the absence of God which will be the intolerableness of his misery. His own being implies God's Being; and he exists, not for himself, but for God.

Of what unspeakable importance then is it for him to find out who God is, what sort of Being He is, what He likes and what He dislikes, how He deals with His creatures and how He expects His creatures to deal with Him. Can his understanding be employed upon anything more exalted? Is there any novelty equal to his daily fresh discoveries in the rich depths of the Divine Perfections? Is there any person in the world whose ways and works are of such thrilling interest to him as those of the Three Uncreated Persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? Is there any existing or possible thing to be conceived or named one half so curious, one half so attractive, one half so exciting, as the adorable self-subsisting Essence of the Most High God? Oh no! Obviously whatever that man may be thinking of now, he ought to be thinking of God. As long as he sits beneath the fragrant shadow of that pious thought, that he is a creature, so long will he feel that his one wise and delightful task, while he is a lodger among the mutable homes of this swift-footed planet, must be the study of his Creator's character.

Our third conclusion is that, if God is to be the subject of the man's intellectual occupations, God must be equally the object of his moral conduct. God must have his whole heart as well as his whole mind. We have no doubt that man's soul is a per-

fect mine of practical energies, which the longest and most active life will not half work out. The muscle of the heart acts seventy times a minute for perhaps seventy years, and is not tired; yet what is this to the activity of the soul? He has far more energy in him than his neighbors are aware of, more than he suspects himself. He can do wonders with these energies if he concentrates them on any object, whether it be pleasure, wealth, or power. Our conclusion implies that, while he may *use* his energies on any or all of those three things, he must *concentrate* them on God only, on the loving observance of his Creator's law. We do not see what being a creature means, if it does not mean this; though we know that there are creatures who have irrevocably determined not to do it, and their name is devil, a species they have created for themselves in order to escape as far as they can to the outskirts of the creation of eternal power and love. Why be like them? Why go after them? Why not leave them to themselves, at the dreadful dismal pole of our Father's empire?

These three conclusions are inevitable results of that man's being a creature. If he does not intend to make them the law of his life, he has no business to be in the sunshine. If he wants to be a god, let him make a world for himself. Ours is meant for creatures. Why is he turning all our bright and beautiful things to curse and darkness, all our sweet gifts to gall and wormwood? What right has he to be lighting the fires of hell in his own heart at the beams of that grand loving sun? A creature means "All for God." Holiness is an unselfing

ourselves. To be a creature is to have a special intensified sonship, whose life and breath and being are nothing but the fervors of his filial love taking fire on his Father's bosom in the pressure of his Father's arms. The Sacred Humanity of the Eternal Son, beaming in the very central heart of the Ever-blessed Trinity,—that is the type, the meaning, the accomplishment, of the creature.

If we take all the peculiarities of the creature and throw them into one, if we sum them all up and express them in the ordinary language of Christian doctrine, we should say that they came to this,—that as man was not his own beginning, so also he is not his own end. His end is God; and man belies his own position as a creature whenever he swerves from this his sole true end. Every one knows what it is to have an end, and how much depends upon it. To change a man's end in life is to change his whole life, to revolutionize his entire conduct. When he sees his aim distinctly before him, he uses his sagacity in planning to attain it, his courage in removing the obstacles which intervene, and his prudence in the selection of the means by which he is eventually to succeed. More or less consistently, and more or less incessantly, the man's mind and heart are occupied about his end. It forms his character, it possesses his imagination, it stimulates his intellect, it engrosses his affections, it absorbs his faults, it is his measure of failure and success, it is ever tending to be his very standard of right and wrong.

A creature, in that it is a creature, is like a falling stone. It seeks a centre, it travels to an end,

irresistibly, impetuously. It is its law of life. Hence it is that the end gives the color to the creature's life, describes it, defines it, animates it, rules it. This is true of pleasure, of knowledge, of wealth, of power, of popularity, when they are sought as ends. They lay passionate hold upon a man, and make him their slave, and brand their mark all over him, and the whole world knows him to be theirs. But all this is still more true when man makes God, what God has already made Himself, his single and magnificent end. And how glorious are the results in his capacious soul! To make God always our end is always to remember that we are creatures; and to be a saint is always to make God our end.

Hence to be a saint is always to remember and to act on the remembrance, that we are creatures. Yet, horrible as it sounds when it is put into words, it is the common way of men to make God a means instead of an end, a purveyor instead of a judge, if they make any use of Him at all. He has to forecast for their comforts, to supply their necessities, to pay for their luxuries. "All men seek their own," murmured the indignant Apostle. To seek the things of Christ was his romance, which worldly disciples did not understand. How few can turn round upon themselves at any given moment of life when they do not happen to be engaged in spiritual exercises, and can say, "God is my end. At this moment, when I unexpectedly look in upon myself, while I was acting almost unconsciously, I find that I was doing, what a creature should always be doing,—seeking God. My worldly duties and social occupations were understood to be means only, and

were treated accordingly. There was nothing in my mind and heart which partook of the dignity of an end except God." Yet is it not our simple business? We expect even a dog to come when he is called, and a clock to go when it is wound up; and in like manner God, when He creates us, expects us to seek Him as our only end and sovereign good.

We are almost frightened at what we have written. We covenanted not to speak of high things, nor entangle you in discourses of spiritual perfection; and we honestly do not intend to wile you to commit yourselves to anything which is not commonplace and necessary. Yet when we simply say what it is to be a creature, we seem to be demanding the highest sanctity. The creature seems to slip into the saint. The natural temper and disposition proper to us because of our created origin seems to put on the hue and likeness of supernatural grace and contemplation, and the commonplace insensibly to glide into the heroic. There must be some mistake. Where is it? Our conscience tells us that we have been honorably checking ourselves a score of times in the last score pages, from saying what was burning in our heart to come out. It is not we that have broken faith with you, gentle reader.

Have we then overstated the case of the creature? Have we drawn any conclusion without a premise to warrant it? Have we invented what does not exist, or falsely embellished what does? The more we consider the case, the less we seem to have done so. We may have wearied you with telling you what was so old and trite—we do not think we have told you anything new, or that there is any part

of our statement from which you dissent. How then have we come to this pass? Is it true that every one is obliged to be what is technically called a saint, or what theology styles perfect, simply because he is a creature? We cannot say Yes, and yet we hardly dare say No. What if it be true that perfection is only the result of corresponding to grace as it is given, and thus that all good people are in the road to perfection always; so that perfection is not one thing, and common holiness another; but that common holiness is perfection in its childhood, and perfection is common holiness in its maturity. We will not say that this is so. But we will say thus much, that the simple statement of our position and condition as creatures brings us to this—that to serve God out of love is not the peculiar characteristic of what is termed high spirituality, but that, without reference to perfection, nay without reference to redemption, creation of and by itself does bind the creature to serve the Creator out of love; and we confess that this conclusion is as pregnant of consequences as it is inevitable in its truth.

In the last chapter we said that a heathen, who without revelation should act consistently (if he could) with the constant remembrance that he was a creature, would, bating certain gifts and graces, be a portrait of a Catholic saint. Now that we have examined more in detail the characteristics proper to a creature, and so the duties which become him, the same truth comes out still more clearly. What on a superficial view seems the peculiar excellence of high spirituality, namely, that in it God is served out of love, turns out to be a universal obligation

undeniably founded on the simple fact of creation. Thus all practical religion is based upon a man's behaving himself becomingly as a creature. It is the humility and modesty that come out of that thought which give to his actions all their gracefulness and beauty, and commute them into worship and adoration. When we seek for the first principles of holiness, we find them where the heathen finds the roots of his moral duties, and where asceticism and mysticism discover the axioms out of which they draw unerringly that vast series of amazing truths which theology records and classifies. These axioms are all implied in the fact of our creation. They are the religious intuitions proper to a creature. Bind yourself to no more than on reflection you will acknowledge yourself to be bound to by the simple fact that God created you, and then you will become holy. It needs no more than that.

If we examine the falls both of Angels and men, we shall see that what lay at the root of them was a forgetfulness that they were creatures, or a perverse determination to be something more. Whether the Angels contemplated their own beauty and rested with an unhallowed complacency in themselves as their end, or whether they would not bow to the divine counsel of the Incarnation and the exaltation of Christ's human nature above their own, in both cases they forgot themselves as creatures, and demanded what it was not becoming in a creature to demand. "You shall be as gods," was the very motive which the tempter urged in order to push man to his ruin. Man insisted upon sharing something which it had pleased God for the time

to reserve to Himself. The knowledge of God was the object of Adam's envy; and so unsuitable was it for him as a creature, that, when he got it, it ceased to be science and turned into guilty shame. In both cases, it was not merely that the Angels and man refused to obey their Creator; they wanted themselves to be more than creatures. They would not acquiesce in their created position. Can anything show more plainly the importance of keeping always before us the fact that we are creatures?

Yes! we may go still higher. We say of our Blessed Lord that He is our example as well as our mediator. Yet He was God as well as man. What is this then but saying that of such consequence was it to the happiness of man, that he should know how to behave himself as a creature, that it was necessary the Creator should take a created nature, and come Himself to show him how to wear it? Thus one of the many known reasons of the sublime mystery of the Incarnation was that the Creator Himself might show the creature how he should behave as a creature. What interest does not this throw upon the minutest incidents and most rapid graphic allusions of the Four Gospels? The mysteries of Jesus are man's studies of the beauty of holiness. His soul drinks beauty out of them, and so is imperceptibly transformed into the likeness of God made man. He takes the form and the hue of the Incarnate Word.

If we turn from our Lord's example to His work for us as our mediator, the same truth meets us in another shape. Not only was His created nature necessary for this office in the counsels of God, but

especial stress is laid upon those things which are eminently characteristic of a created nature as created. Speaking of His intercession the Apostle says that "in the days of his flesh he was heard because he feared," and again he speaks of the Crucifixion in the same way, "He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." It is as if Jesus redeemed the world especially by acknowledging in an infinitely meritorious manner through His created nature the sovereignty and dominion of the Creator.

To sum up briefly the results of this chapter, it appears that to be a creature is a very peculiar and cognizable thing, that it gives birth to a whole set of duties, obligations, virtues and proprieties, that it implies a certain history past and future, and a certain present condition, that on it are founded all our relations to God, and therefore all our practical religion, and that it involves in its own self, without reference to any additional mercies, the precise obligation of loving our Creator supremely as our sole end, and of serving Him from the motive of love. Thus, as we may say to the misbeliever that he would be a Catholic if he only had an intelligent apprehension of the mystery of creation, so we may say to the Catholic that he would be more like a saint, if he only understood with his mind and felt in his heart, what it was to be a creature.

CHAPTER III

WHAT IT IS TO HAVE A CREATOR

AS creatures we are ourselves surrounded with creatures in the world. Above us and beneath us and around us there are creatures, of manifold sorts and of varying degrees of beauty. The earth beneath our feet, and the vast sidereal spaces above us, are all teeming with created things. When we come to reflect upon them, we are almost bewildered with their number and diversity, on the earth, in the water, and in the air, visible and invisible, known to science or unknown. Then theology teaches us that we are lying in the mighty bosom of another world of spiritual creatures, whom we do not see, and yet with whom we are in hourly relations of brotherhood and love. The realms of spirit encompass us with their unimaginable distances, and interpenetrate in all directions our material worlds. Creation is populous with Angels.

They are the living laws of the material world, the wise and potent movers of the wheeling spheres. All night and day they bear us company. They hold us by the hand and lead us on our way. They hear our words, and witness our most hidden acts. The secrets of our hearts are hardly ours; for we let them transpire perpetually by external signs be-

fore the keen vision of the Angels. Nay, have we not asked God to let our own Angel see down into our hearts and know us thoroughly, so that he may guide us better with his affectionate and surpassing skill? Because we are creatures, creatures exercise a peculiar influence over us. Love is stronger than the grave. Blood and family and country rule us with an almost resistless sway. We can so attach ourselves to an unreasoning animal as to love it beyond all bounds, and to weep when its bright little life is taken from us. The very trees and fields of our village, and the blue dreamy outline of our native hills, can so possess our souls as to sway them through a long life of travel or of money-making or of ambition.

Alas! we are so saturated with creatures, that we think even of our Creator under created symbols; and God's merciful condescensions seem to show that a material creature could hardly worship with a spiritual worship, until the Creator had kindly put on a created nature. Thus every report of the senses, every process of the mind, every form and figure in the soul's secret chambers of imagery, every action that goes out from us, every pulse of our natural life, the atoms of matter that circulate through us in swift and endless streams, clothing the soul with its garment of marvellous texture which is being woven and unwoven every hour, as swiftly as the changes on a dove's bright neck,—all of them imply creatures, are kindled by them, fed by them, lean upon them, and cannot for one moment be disentangled from them, except by some most rare process of supernatural grace. Our

life seems inextricably mixed up with creatures, and, to use a metaphysical term, is unthinkable without them.

How difficult then is it to conceive of a Life without creatures, a Life which was from everlasting without them, which needs them not, which mixes them not up with itself, to which they can add nothing, and from which they can take nothing! We have to banish from our minds, or to attempt it, the ideas of time and space, of body and of motion; and even then the unimaginable void, which is not space, or the colorless light which is not body, is still a created image built up of created notions. There is something unutterably appalling in a Life eternally by itself, self-sufficing, its own glory, its own knowledge, its own magnificence, its own intense blessedness, its own silent, vast, unthrilling love. Surely to think of such a Life is to worship it.

But It—it is not It—there were no *things* then—it is *He*, our God and our Creator! Out of that Life we came, when the Life had spent an eternity without us. The Life needed us not, was none the happier because of us, ruled not over a wider empire through us, multiplied not in us the objects of omniscience. But the Life loved us, and therefore out of the Life we came, and from its glorious sun-bright fountains have filled the tiny vases of our created lives. Oh, how the sublimity of this faith at once nourishes our souls like food and recreates the mind like rest! Of how many illusions ought it not in its magnificent simplicity to disabuse us! The very idea of the Life of God before ever the worlds were made must of necessity give a tone and a color, impart a

meaning, and impress a character upon our own lives, which they would not otherwise have had. It furnishes us with a measure of the true magnitudes of things which teaches us how and what to hate and despise, and how and what to love and esteem. To put the thought into easier words, we cannot fully know what it is to be a creature, until we know as fully as we can what it is to have a Creator.

It is the peculiar beauty of the Old Testament that it brings out this truth to us in the most forcible and attractive manner. This is probably the secret of the hold which it lays of the minds of those who have become familiar with it in early youth, and of the deep basis of religious feeling which it seems to plant in them. Though it is made up of various books, differing in date, and scene, and style, though psalm and prophecy and moral strains mingle with history and biography, every one feels that it has, almost as completely as the New Testament, one spirit, one tone, one color, one scope. Whether it is when Adam and Eve are doing penance in Asia, and Cain is wandering out on the great homeless earth, or whether it is in the patriarch's tent beneath the starry skies of Mesopotamia, or amid the brick fields of the Nile, or the silent glens of stern Sinai, or during the rough chivalric days of the Judges, or in the palaces of Jerusalem, or by the waters of the captivity, whether it be when Debbora is chanting beneath her palm, or the king of Israel is singing to his harp, or amid the allegorical actions of some wailing prophet, or the conversations of the wise men

of the Stony Arabia, we are ever learning what it is to be a creature, and what it is to have a Creator.

We are being taught the character of the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God that was not like the gods of the heathen. We either see or hear what He desires of us, how He will treat us, the ways, so unlike human ways, in which He loves us and will show His love, His style of punishment, His manifold devices of mercy, what He meant human life to be, and how men were to use both each other and the earth which He had given them to farm. We do not know why it is that a tale, the like of which in common history would barely interest us, should fascinate us in the words of inspiration, why ordinary things should seem sacred because they are related there, and why simple expressions should have a latent spell within them enabling them to fix themselves deep in our souls, to be the germs of a strong and dutiful devotion through a long life, and then be a helpful power to us in death. It is because it is all so possessed with God. The true humble pathetic genius of a creature comes into our souls, and masters them. The knowledge of God becomes almost a personal familiarity with Him, and the thought of Him grows into the sight of Him.

OUR RELATION TO THE CREATOR

We can therefore but try to express in cold and vague words the idea which a loving Christian heart has of the Creator. It is plain that our Creator is one who stands in a relation to us which has no

parallel whatever among the relations which exist between ourselves and other creatures. It is not a question of degree; it is one of kind also. It stands by itself, and we can compare it with nothing else. We cannot even understand it in its fulness. Do we know what the act of creating a soul out of nothing implies? Do we comprehend the difference between being nothing and possessing an immortal life? Do we fathom what it is to be loved eternally? Do we quite take in what it is to interest God in our happiness, and to have Him employed about us? Do we understand what it is that there should be the infinite and everlasting God, and also, beside Him, something which is not Himself? Yet unless we know all these things, we could not know what the relationship of creature and Creator involves. But we can easily perceive so much as this.

Not only is the relationship between our Creator and ourselves unlike anything else, without parallel and beyond comparison, but it is far closer than any other tie of love by which the human soul can possibly be bound. He is obviously nearer to us than father or mother. We come more directly from Him than from them. We are more bound up with Him, and owe Him more. We cannot come of age with God, nor alter our position with Him. We cannot grow out of our dependence upon Him, nor leave the home of His right hand. The act of our creation is not done once for all, and then ceases. Preservation is but the continuance of creation, the non-interruption of the first act of Divine power and love. The strong spirit of the highest Angel needs the active concurrence of God

every moment, lest it should fall back into its original nothingness.

But not only is our relation to our Creator the closest of all relations, it is also the tenderest and the dearest. Nay its sweetness may almost be said to follow from its closeness; for the closer the union, the more perfect should be the love. It is not within the power of God's omnipotence, if we may speak so boldly, to make Himself otherwise than infinitely desirable to His creature. He is in Himself so surpassingly beautiful, so attractively good, so unspeakably compassionate, that He must of necessity draw us towards Him. Even those, who of their own will are lost, struggle towards Him, in spite of their reluctant aversion, with all the might of their nature and with the burning thirst of an incessant desire. Whatever then is sweet, whatever is delightful, whatever is satisfying, in human love, parental or filial, conjugal or fraternal, is but a poor shadow of the love which enters into the tie between the Creator and the creature. Hence we are not surprised to find that this tie is so durable that it can never be broken. The child in heaven owes no allegiance to its earthly father, and like the Saints, may be in glory far above him. In heaven there is no marrying nor giving in marriage. The resurrection has emancipated all from every earthly bond.

But it is not so with the relation between the creature and the Creator. Everywhere and always that remains the same. Nay, as the lapse of time is ever adding to the creature's debt, swelling the huge sum of his obligations for benefits received,

opening out new reasons for dependence upon his Maker, and drawing him into still closer union with Him, we may even say that the tie is continually acquiring new strength, and is being drawn tighter instead of being relaxed. It is God's unbounded love, rather than His immense magnificence, which makes Him ever new to us, and His beauty always a fresh surprise and a fresh delight. It is not only, to use the distinction of the psalm, the greatness of His mercy, but it is the multitude of His mercies, which make our trust and confidence in Him so inexpressibly consoling, and our union with Him so far more intimate than any other tie of which we can conceive. We are one with Him, as our Lord prayed we might be, even as the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are One.

If we endeavor to take to pieces the idea of a Creator, it may seem as if we were raising idle questions, and satisfying a barren curiosity rather than ministering to solid edification. Yet it will not be found so in reality; and there is no other way by which we can get the idea clearly into our minds. If then we reflect attentively on the trains of pious thought excited in our minds when we meditate on God's glorious and fatherly title of Creator, we shall find that there are at least nine different considerations involved in it, none of which we could spare without injuring the idea.

CONSIDERATIONS INVOLVED

When we meditate on our Blessed Lord's Passion, there is something lying unexpressed and only

implicitly perceived under all our thoughts, and which gives to the different mysteries their peculiar attraction and solemnity. It is our faith in His Divinity. However exclusively we may seem to be occupied with His Sacred Humanity, we never in reality for a moment forget that He is God. So in like manner when we think of God as a Father or a Spouse, however much we appear to ourselves to be engrossed with the peculiar and special relationship in which He has been pleased to reveal Himself to us, our whole mind is in fact pervaded by the invisible thought that He is of a different nature from ourselves, that He is in truth God, and all that is implied in that blessed Name; and it is just this which makes us thrill all over with joy and surprise as we venture to call Him by names which we could not have used without His permission, and which are only applicable to Him in a certain transcendental sense, which is rather to be felt than either spoken or conceived. The difference of nature between Him and us, which faith never loses sight of, is the first element of the idea of a Creator, and one which pervades all the others. The Divine Nature is the grand thought which is the fruitful mother of all our thoughts and by the memory of it are all our memories magnified.

But this leads us still further. For the difference between His Nature and ours is not like that which separates the Angels from men, or men from the various tribes of animals below them. It is an infinite difference. And thus when we call Him Father or King, Shepherd or Friend, our language implies only a privilege which He allows to us, not

any duties to which He is bound or rights to which we are entitled. We have no compact with God, except the unmerited enjoyment of His merciful indulgence. As our Creator His rights are simply unfathomable. He has no duties to us, nothing which can rigorously be called duties. He has made promises to us, and because He is God, He is faithful. But, as creatures, we have no claims. We are bound to Him, and bound by obligations of duty, and under penalties of tremendous severity. He on His part overwhelms us with the magnificent liberalities of His unshackled love. Yet God is neither a slavemaster nor a despot, not only because of His infinite goodness and unutterable sweetness, but because His rights are not limited like theirs. No creature can feel towards his fellow-creature as we feel towards Him, in the grasp of whose omnipotence we are at once so helpless and so contented. Though the blaze of St. Michael's beauty and power were able to put us to death, if we saw it in the flesh, we could never feel ourselves in his hands as we are in the hands of God. Though we are unable to imagine the risk we would not trust to Mary, our most dear and heavenly Mother, or to conceive anything which should weaken our confidence in her one atom, yet it is not in our power, it is not a possibility of our nature, provided we know what we are about, to trust her as we trust God, simply because His rights over us are illimitable.

Hence also we never think of questioning the wisdom of God, or His power, or His love. Our confidence in the worth of men is in a great measure

proportioned to the degree in which we consider them pledged to us, whether by duty, by gratitude, by relationship, by honor, or by necessity. Whereas it is just the reverse with our trust in God. Our confidence in Him is boundless, because His sovereignty over us is boundless also. We have our doubts about holy persons; we criticise the Saints; we take views about the Angels. There is nothing in creation which we do not seem to have some sort of right to question. But with God it is not so. Here we are simple belief, implicit reliance, unhesitating dependence. We should be mad to have any other thoughts where He is concerned.

Then, as we cannot question Him, we must take Him on faith. It does not perplex our dealings with Him, that we do not understand Him. His height above us does not obscure our perception of His sovereignty. We can trust Him without knowing Him. We listen and obey, even when He gives no reasons; for we know that we should possibly not appreciate His reasons if He gave them, and that no reasons could enhance our certainty that His orders are the perfection of what is just and holy, compassionate and good. Our fellow-men must be reasonable, if they would govern us and use us for their purposes. But God's will is to us above all reason, more convincing than all argument, more persuasive than any reward, because of the very infiniteness of His superiority over us. We take God on faith, because He is God; and we take nothing else on faith except so far as we account it to represent God, either as His instrument, or

His representative, or His likeness in goodness, in justice, in fidelity, or in love.

Thus, looking at our Creator as it were outside of ourselves, we form an idea of Him, and of our relations to Him, which can be accounted for only by His unspeakable eminence in power, in wisdom, and in goodness. The nothingness to which He has given life, and being and His own image, has a secret bond to Him, which has more to do with its worship of Him than even His superlative excellence and unimaginable glory. But the idea of a Creator is yet more singular, more isolated, more special, and more intimate. For we are never really outside of God nor He outside of us. He is more with us than we are with ourselves. The soul is less intimately in the body, than He is both in our bodies and our souls. He as it were flows into us, or we are in Him as the fish in the sea.

We use God, if we may dare to say so, whenever we make an act of our will, and when we proceed to use God, if we may dare to say so, whenever we make an act of our will, and when we proceed to execute a purpose. He has not merely given us clearness of head, tenderness of heart, and strength of limb, as gifts which we may use independently of Him when once He has conferred them upon us. But He distinctly permits and actually concurs with every exercise of them in thinking, loving, or acting. This influx and concourse of God, as theologians style it, ought to give to us all our lives long the sensation of being in an awful sanctuary, where every sight and sound is one of worship. It gives a peculiar and terrific character to acts of sin. It

is hard to see how levity even is not sacrilege. Everything is penetrated with God, while His inexpressible purity is all untainted, and His adorable simplicity unmingled with that which He so intimately pervades, enlightens, animates, and sustains. Our commonest actions, our lightest recreations, the freedoms in which we most unbend,—all these things take place and are transacted, not so much on the earth and in the air, as in the bosom of the omnipresent God.

Thus, when we use the words *dependence*, *submission*, *helplessness*, *confidence*, about our relation to God, we are using words which, inasmuch as they express also certain relations in which we may possibly stand to our fellow-creatures, are really inadequate to express our position towards our Creator. We have no one word which can fully convey to the mind the utterness of that honorable abjection in which we lie before Him who made us. But this is not all. The liberality of God is not satisfied with pouring out upon us in such profusion the wonderful gifts of a reasonable nature, He enriches us still more nobly, He unites Himself to us still more intimately, by the yet more marvellous gifts of grace. Sanctifying grace is nothing less than a participation of the Divine Nature.

If we try to think of this, we shall soon perceive that even imagination cannot master the greatness and the depth of this stupendous gift, any more than it can sensibly detect the manner of its intimate existence within us, or the delicacy of its manifold and incessant operations when stirred by the impulses of actual grace within our souls. “God,”

says Thauler (*Institut. cap. viii*), “has created us for so high a degree of honor, that no creature could ever have dared to imagine that God would have chosen it for so great a glory; and we ourselves are now unable to conceive how He could raise us higher than He has done. For, as He could not make us gods by nature, a prerogative which can belong to Him alone, He has made us gods by grace, in enabling us to possess with Him, in the union of an eternal love, one same beatitude, one same joy, one same kingdom.” The fact that God created Angels and men at first in a state of grace, and not merely in a state of nature, and then further that He heaps upon us now such an abundance of grace and makes us members of Himself by the Incarnation, causes us to feel that He did not create us to be simply His subjects and outside of Himself, but to be drawn up to Himself, to live with Him, to share His blessedness, nay, and His Nature, too. Moreover, our continual dependence upon grace, upon gifts which are by no means due to us as creatures, but which are simply supernatural, compels us to acknowledge that we cannot even do the good we intensely desire to do, except by a sort of miraculous communion with Him; and this gives to our dependence upon God another of its peculiar characteristics.

But He is not only our first cause and fountain, not only our constant living preservation, not only the source of supernatural gifts and graces over and above the ornaments of our nature, not only Himself the original of which He vouchsafed to make us copies, but He is also our last end. And

He is so in two senses. He is our last end, because He is the reason of our existing at all, because it is for Him, for His own glory, that we live, and not in any way for our own sakes; and He is also our last end, because we go to Him, and rest nowhere but in Himself, not in any gifts which He gives us, but simply in His own living and ever-blessed Self. Our eternity reposes on Him, and is in Him, and with Him, and is the sight of Him, and His embrace. This is something which no creature, nor all creation together, can share. It is the sole prerogative of God, and one which gives out a whole class of affections proper to itself. Nothing in life has any meaning, except as it draws us further into God, and presses us more closely to Him. The world is no better than a complication of awkward riddles, or a gloomy storehouse of disquieting mysteries, unless we look at it by the light of this simple truth, that the eternal God is blessedly the last and only end of every soul of man. Life as it runs out is daily letting us down into His bosom; and thus each day and hour is a step homeward, a danger over, a good secured.

Hence it is, because God alone is our last end, that He alone never fails us. All else fails us but He. Alas! how often is life but a succession of worn-out friendships? Youth passes with its romance, and crowds whom we loved have drifted away from us. They have not been unfaithful to us, nor we to them. We have both but obeyed a law of life, and have exemplified a world-wide experience. The pressure of life has parted us. Then comes middle life, the grand season of cruel mis-

understandings, as if reason were wantoning in its maturity, and by suspicions and circumventions and constructions were putting to death our affections.

All we love and lean upon fails us. We pass through a succession of acquaintanceships; we tire out numberless friendships; we use up the kindness of kindred; we drain to the dregs the confidence of our fellow-laborers; there is a point beyond which we must not trespass on the forbearance of our neighbors. And so we drift on into the solitary havens of old age, to weary by our numberless wants the fidelity which deems it a religion to minister to our decay. And there we see that God has outlived and outlasted all: the Friend who was never doubtful, the Partner who never suspected, the Acquaintance who loved us better, at least it seemed so, the more evil He knew of us, the Fellow-laborer who did our work for us as well as His own, and the Neighbor who thought He had never done enough for us, the sole Superior who was neither rude nor inconsiderate, the one Love that, unlike all created loves, was never cruel, exacting, precipitate, or overbearing. He has had patience with us, has believed in us, and has stood by us. What should we have done if we had not had Him? All men have been liars; even those who seemed saints broke down when our imperfections leaned on them, and wounded us, and the wound was poisoned; but He has been faithful and true. On this account alone, He is to us what neither kinsman, friend, or fellow-laborer can be.

The more deeply we enter into these plain truths, and the more assiduously we meditate upon them,

the more we find growing over us a certain humility, which consists not so much in prostrating ourselves before the majesty of God, as in a kind of hatred of ourselves, which increases together with our increase in the love of God. It is not the contempt of our own vileness which follows after sin, and is a part of Christian repentance. It is not like that fresh burst of love to God, which follows when He has inflicted some just punishment upon us for our sins, and which turns our hearts with such exceeding tenderness towards Him. It is a sort of ignoring of our own claims and interests, a forgetting of ourselves because of the keenness of our remembrance of God, and an abandonment of our own cause for His: and all this with a sort of dislike of ourselves, of patient impatience with our own meanness, a pleasure in acknowledging our own unworthiness, like the pleasure of a contrite confession, a grateful wonder that God should treat us so differently from what we deserve, and ultimately a desire to remind Him of our own self-abasement, of that intolerable demerit of ours, which He seems in His mercy so entirely to forget. In a word, self-abasement is the genius of a creature as a creature; it is his most reasonable frame of mind; it is that which is true about him when all else is false.

Yet, in apparent contradiction to this self-hatred, the idea of our Creator is accompanied with a familiarity, for which it is difficult to account, but which seems an essential part of our filial piety towards our Heavenly Father. We can say to Him what we cannot say to our fellow-creatures. We can take liberties with Him, which in no wise impair

our reverence. We are more at ease when only His eye is full upon us than when the gaze of men is fixed upon our actions. He misunderstands nothing. He takes no umbrage. He makes us at home with Him. Childlike simplicity is the only ceremonial of our most secret intercourse with Him.

His presence does not oppress our privacy. His knowledge of our nature, or rather our knowledge that He created it, gives us a kind of familiarity with Him, for it is a question of kind rather than of degree, such as we can never have with the great ones of the earth, nor even with those nearest and dearest to us. We could not bear to let our fellow-creatures always see us. But nothing makes us common to God. He never—may we say it?—loses His reverence for those whom He has deigned eternally to love. There is no need of concealment with Him, who sees through us, who regards the acknowledgment of our manifold weakness almost as acceptable worship of His majesty, and to whom our infirmities are His own laws, and our indignities but the timely exhibition of our needs.

Such are the considerations which make up our idea of a Creator in our minds. They lie there implicitly. Sometimes we realize them, sometimes not. Now one of them starts to view, and for a while occupies our thoughts, and now another. But on the whole this is what the idea comes to when it is analyzed. We think of Him as one who is not like our parents, because He is not of the same nature with us, of one whose rights are illimitable, and rest on no compact, of one whose wisdom, power, and love we may not question, and whom

therefore we must take on faith, and trust, simply because of the infiniteness of His superiority; of one who penetrates us with the influx of His omnipresence, and concurs with all our movements, who enlightens nature with grace, and as our last end recompenses grace with glory; to trust in whose never-failing faithfulness is as much a joy as it is a necessity, to love whom is to despise ourselves, and yet with whom we are on terms of mysterious intimacy far transcending the closest equalities and most unproved freedoms of any human tie. This is our idea of a Creator; all these things seem to follow from our knowledge of that eternal Love, who saw us from the first, and when the time came, called us out of nothing.

WHAT IS OUR SERVICE OF THE CREATOR?

To analyze our idea of a Creator is the first step towards answering the question we proposed to ourselves, what it is to have a Creator. We have now to take a further step. If our Creator is such as we have described, if the fact of His having condescended to create us puts Him in such a position towards us, what must the service of Him necessarily be to us His creatures? The service of the Creator must obviously be the end and purpose of the creature. God is His own end: and He is ours also. Everything short of God is to the creature a means, not an end, something transitory, and not permanent, something in which at best he can have but a fitful joy, not a contented and blessed rest.

The value of everything in life depends on its power to lead us to God by the shortest road.

But as the service of God is the creature's real work, so also is it his true dignity. The rank and pageantry of the world cannot clothe us with real dignity. To serve God is the only honor, which it is worth our while to strive after. The order of holiness is to the eyes of the enlightened Angels the only authentic precedence in the world. So what is man's true dignity is also his greatest happiness. Oh, we do not value as we ought our inestimable privilege of being allowed to worship God! We do not prize our heavenly prerogative of being permitted to keep His Commandments. We look at that as a struggle which is in truth a crown. We look at that as an obligation which is more properly a boon. We call it duty when its lawful name is right, the right of best-beloved sons. Have not millions tried to be happy in something which was not the service of their Creator, and how many of them have succeeded? And did ever one creature seek his happiness in God, and not find unspeakably more than he had ventured to conceive? Why, the very austerity of the Saint is more light-hearted than the gaiety of the worldling. So many men die in a minute the world over, and what is the last lesson of every one of them, but that the service of God is the highest happiness of man?

But we talk of interest. Interest leads the world. It is self-love's god. It is strong enough to warp the stoutest mind, and to beat down the most romantic affections. All things give way to interest. The days of chivalry are past; and perhaps

when they were present, interest was as much the crowned king of society as it is now. Yet if the best interest is that which is first of all most secure, and then most abundant, and after that most lasting, and finally to be gained with the least outlay, what interest can compare with our interest in serving God, and speculating only on His favor and fidelity?

We talk of wisdom also. These are days of wisdom. Knowledge covers the earth as the water covers the sea. Yet the prophecy is not fulfilled, for it is hardly the knowledge of God which abounds amongst us. But if that be the highest wisdom which sees furthest and clearest, which embraces the greatest number of truths, and the highest kind of truths, which contemplates them with the most complete and accurate certainty, and which is of practical use to all eternity, then what earthly wisdom will compare with the wisdom of serving God? How is it that we are so fascinated by the various sciences of mind and matter, and yet find theology so tame and dull? Why is it that we are so excited by a new book on geology or chemistry, and turn away with weariness from the old-fashioned traditions of the Christian Church? Surely it is because we have no love of God, because we do not keep up our relations with Him as our Creator. Were it not so, we should find our modern sciences uninteresting in their details and sterile in results, unless we ourselves make a theological commentary upon them as we read.

Liberty is another idol of the sons of men, and one whose worship is of all false worships the least blameworthy, although the greatest of crimes have

been perpetrated in its name. Yet what does our liberty amount to? Freedom of action, of speech, and of pen, are indeed noble achievements of civilization, and mighty missionaries of the Gospel too. Yet is a man really free who is not free from self? If he is a slave to base passions, or the tool of his own spite and malice, or the pander to his own criminal pursuits, or the victim of his own self-love, with what kind of liberty is he free? If he is chained down to earth, then he is disabled for the liberty of heaven. If he has practically sold himself to the evil angels, who is more a bondsman than he? From Satan, world, and self there is no liberty, but in the service of our Creator; and His service is liberty indeed, not only the truest and the sweetest, but the widest also. Oh, for the unconstrained spirit of the Saints, who have cut off all ties and snapped all bonds asunder, that they might fly away and be with Christ!

The service of the Creator is also the creature's most enduring reality. The unreality of the world is an old story. It was told in Athens, before ever our Saviour preached in Palestine. It is a miserable thing to build on sand, or to give our money for that which is not bread. Yet it is what we are all of us doing all our lives long, except when we are loving God. Human love is a treachery and a delusion. It soon wears threadbare and we die of cold. Place and office slip from us, when our hands get old and numb, and cannot grasp them tight. "Riches," says the Holy Ghost, "make to themselves wings and fly away." Good health is certainly a boundless enjoyment; but it is always giving way

beneath us, and our years of strength are after all but few, and our vigor seems to go when we need it most. But the service of God improves upon acquaintance, gives more than it promises, and after a little effort is nothing but rewards, and rewards which endure for evermore.

But this is not all. Not only are all these things the truest, greatest, highest, wisest, best, widest, and most enduring dignity, happiness, interest, wisdom, liberty, and reality; but the service of the Creator is the creature's *sole* end, dignity, happiness, interest, wisdom, liberty, and reality. He has no other, none that have a right to the name, none that are not pretenders; and he who seeks any other will never find them. However deliberate his evil choice, he will not gain earth by forfeiting heaven. If he works for Here, he will lose Here as well as Hereafter. Whereas if he works for Hereafter, he will gain Here as well. Moreover the service of the Creator is not only the creature's solitary end, dignity, happiness, interest, wisdom, liberty, and reality; but the opposite evils of all these things will flow from its neglect. In a word, unless we serve God, the world is a dismal, unmeaning, heart-breaking wilderness, and life no more than an insoluble and unprofitable problem. Oh, look how cruel life is to the wicked man! Take him at his best estate, reckon up the pains he takes, the efforts he makes, the activity he expends, how he is burnt up with the fever of insatiable desires, running a race after impossible ends, impoverishing heart and mind with excitements which are their own punishment; what a tyranny the slow lapse of time is to

him, what a bitter stepmother the world he has so adorned! The flood-tide of irritation and then the ebb of helpless languor; who would live a life of which those are the incessant alternations? The wilful sinner is but a man who in order to get rid of God explores, to his own cost, every species of disappointment, and nowhere finds contentment or repose.

What is it that we have said? The service of the Creator is the creature's last end, his true dignity, his greatest happiness, his best interest, his highest wisdom, his widest liberty, and his most enduring reality: the service of the Creator is, furthermore, the one solitary thing which answers truly to any of the above names: and lastly, from its neglect, the very opposites of dignity, happiness, interest, wisdom, liberty, and reality, follow to the creature, and the end of all is everlasting perdition. We are almost ashamed to write down such simple things, and to take up your time with reading a string of propositions which no one in his senses would dream of controverting. It is like printing the merest rudiments of Christian doctrine under a more pretentious title than that of a catechism. Yet, when we look at our past lives, perhaps our present lives, in the light of these elementary truths, it would seem as if they could never be stated too often, and as if there was no one, learned or simple, saint or sinner, to whom the statement of them was ever an unseasonable admonition or an unnecessary repetition. God has established His right to our service by so many other titles than that of creation, that self-love is able, almost unconsciously, to

think more of those titles, the acknowledgment of which implies more faith and more generosity in us, and to dwell less on that which is at once the most self-evident, involves the completest submission, and will not admit of more than one opinion.

No one can exaggerate the extent to which God is ignored in His own world. It is a miserable fact, which is always a discovery, and is always new, because we see more of it every day of our lives. To the friends of God it is a growing unhappiness, because as they advance in holiness and know Him better, it seems to them less and less possible not to love Him with the most ardent, enthusiastic, and exclusive love, and yet at the same time experience is forcing upon them the unwelcome conviction that they know not one-tenth part of the wickedness of bad men, or of the criminal inadvertence of those who profess to acknowledge the sovereignty of God. The world has many trades and many tasks for its many sons; but there is one daily labor which it seems to add to all of them, the effort to put away from its children the remembrance that they are creatures, in order that they may the more undoubtingly forget that they have a Creator. Oh, blessed be the goodness of God, for giving us the grace to remember Him; for out of that grace will all others come; and thrice blessed be His infinite compassion for the further grace of loving Him, and of yearning to make others love Him more!

THE SPIRIT OF OUR SERVICE

It follows from what has been said that there cannot be much question as to the extent of our service of God, or the degree in which we are to serve Him. If He is our last end, then His service is that one thing needful of which our Lord spoke in the Gospel. With all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength—it must be thus, and only thus, that we should serve our Creator; for any service short of this, or short of a real effort to make it this, would be disloyalty to His infinite majesty and goodness. But in what way, or in what spirit, are we to serve God? This question also appears to be settled, without any further argument or appeal, by our own idea of what it is to have a Creator. It is plain that the kind of worship which we pay to Him must be something of the following description. It must be an easy service, as well because of His immense compassion as because of our unhappy weakness. It would be doing a dishonor to His goodness to suppose He has made the way to His favor difficult, or that He does not efficaciously desire to save countless, countless multitudes of His fallen creatures. It would be an unfilial irreverence to our most dear and loving Creator to imagine that His service would not be easy and delightful.

But it must not only be the easiest of services, it must be the noblest also. We must not offer to God except of our best. It must be the noblest, as for Him who is noble beyond word or thought, and

it must be the noblest as ennobling us who serve Him and making us more like Himself. It must be the happiest of services. For what is God but infinite beatitude and eternal joy? His life is joy. All that is bright and happy comes from Him. Were it not for Him, there would be no gladness, either in heaven or on earth. There can be nothing melancholy, nothing gloomy, nothing harsh, nothing unwilling, in our service of such a Father and Creator. Our worship must be happy in itself, happy in look and in expression, happy in blitheness and in promptitude and in beautiful decorum; and it must also be such a worship, as while it gladdens the tenderness of God and glorifies His paternal fondness, shall also fill our souls with that abounding happiness in Him, which is our main strength in all well-doing and in all holy suffering.

It must be a service also which calls out and occupies the whole of man. There must not be a sense of our bodies, nor a faculty of our minds, nor an affection of our hearts, not a thing that we can do, nor a thing that we can suffer, but this service must be able to absorb it and transform it into itself. We must not only worship God always, but the whole of us must worship God. Our very distractions must be worship, and we must have some kind of worship which will enable them so to be. Thus it must be an obvious service, one which at the very first sight shall strike a creature as reasonable and fitting; and in order to be so, it must be such a service as a creature would wish to have rendered to himself. It must have that in it which alone makes any service graceful or acceptable. But

as our wants are many, our feelings manifold, and our duties multiplied, our service of the Creator must be one which includes all possible services, expresses all our numerous relations with Him, satisfies all His claims upon us, at least in some degree, and has power to impetrate for us the many and various supplies of our diversified necessities.

It must be a service also, which in a sense shall comprehend God, and embrace the Incomprehensible. It must honor all His perfections, and all of them at once, even while it sees God, rather as Himself universal perfection, than as having any distinct perfections. It must not worship His mercy to the detriment of His justice, or His simplicity to the injury of His beauty; it must not lose sight of His jealousy in His liberality, nor lightly esteem His sanctity because of His facility in pardoning. And it must settle all these difficulties in a practical way, the wisdom of which will be acknowledged as soon as it is stated, and which will not perplex our simple communion with God by subtleties and distinctions.

It must be a service, whose direct effect must be union. It must have such a special power over the human soul, and at the same time so peculiarly prevail with God, as to join God and the soul together in the most mysterious and indissoluble union. For the creature tends to close union with the Creator, and union alone is the perfection of all true worship. Finally, this service or worship, as it is union, must last, and outlive, and take up into itself, and develop, and magnify all other graces. Moreover it must be something more than they are, something besides, which words cannot

tell, but which will be an inconceivable and eternal gladness, brightening in our souls for evermore.

Any service, either short of this or different from this, would plainly be unsuitable as an offering from the creature to the Creator. It is implied in the very notion of creation; for we cannot understand creation otherwise than as an act of eternal love. Our own idea of a Creator has already settled the question for us. We do not anticipate the least objection to any of the requirements specified above; and numerous as they are, and differing in so many ways, there is one spirit, one worship, one temper, one act, one habit, one word, which at once satisfies all of them in the completest way possible to a finite creature. That one word is *love*.

The creature cannot serve the Creator except with a service of love. Love is the soul of worship, the foundation of reverence, the life of good works, the remission of sins, the increase of holiness, and the security of final perseverance. Love meets the first of our requirements; for of all services it is the easiest. Its facility has passed into a proverb. It is also the noblest and the happiest of services, the noblest because it is the least mercenary, the happiest because it is the most voluntary. It is the only one which calls out and occupies the whole man; and it is naturally a creature's obvious service; for it is the only service which he would care to have rendered to himself. Love alone fulfils all the Commandments at once, and is the perfection of all our duties. It is the only one which does not deny, or at least pretermitt something in God. Fear, when exclusive, denies mercy, and familiarity

weakens reverence when the familiarity is not profoundly based on love; whereas love settles the equalities and rights of all the attributes of God, enthrones them all, adores them all, and is nourished in exceeding gladness by them all. Love also, and alone, accomplishes union; and while faith dawns into sight, and hope ends in everlasting contentment, love alone abides, as we said before, out-living, taking up into itself, developing, and magnifying all other graces, consummating at least that mystical oneness with God which the Saints have named Divine Espousals.

EVILS OF NOT RECOGNIZING THIS FACT

In concluding this chapter, even at the peril of repeating, we must once more allude to the evils which follow from not realizing what it is to have a Creator. In the first place it introduces wrong notions into practical religion. It gives an erroneous view of the mutual relations between God and ourselves, and substitutes lower motives, where higher ones would be not only more religious, but more easy also. It destroys the paternal character of God, and makes His sanctity obscure His tenderness instead of illustrating and adorning it. It leads us to look upon God as an independent power who has, as it were, come down upon us from without, and stands aloof from us, even while He governs us, and not as if we were from Him, and through Him, and in Him. It is as if He had conquered us rather than created us. Hence our submission is the submission of the conquered. We do not dispute His

right of conquest, for our subjection is evidently complete, but we make the best terms we can with Him, and hold Him to the conditions on which we surrendered. It is as if His service were simply a sacrifice of ourselves to Him, an immolation of ourselves to His surpassing glory, and not as if His interests were not really the same as ours, His end, which is Himself, the same as ours, and our happiness wrapped up in His beatitude. It would be less unreasonable to look upon ourselves, if we could, as external to ourselves, as a foreign power with whom we were on a kind of armed neutrality, as an adverse interest to be suspected and watched, than to look upon God, as we must inevitably look upon Him, if we put out of view that He created us out of nothing. Dryness, weariness, reluctance, instability, and scantiness, in practical religion, are in a great measure the results of this forgetfulness that we have a Creator.

Then again, has real piety a greater or a deadlier enemy than the popular ideas of enthusiasm? If a person loses his taste for worldly amusements and blameless dissipations, if he prefers the church to the theatre, early Mass to lying in bed, almsgiving to fine dress, spiritual books to novels, visiting the poor to driving in the park, prayer to parties, he is forthwith set down as an enthusiast; and though people do not exactly know what enthusiasm is, yet they know that it is something inconceivably bad; for it is something young people should be especially warned against, and above all pious people, as most needing such admonition. The mere word *enthusiasm* is a power in itself; for it accuses, tries,

condemns, and punishes a man all at once. Nothing can be more complete. Yet, in the first place, dear reader, look over your numerous acquaintance; and tell us—whatever may be your notion of religious enthusiasm—did you ever know any one injured by it? You have heard that it makes people mad: did you ever have one of your own friends driven mad by it? And while you condemned their enthusiasm, did you ever yourself get quite rid of a feeling that, however unfit it was for life, it would be far from an undesirable state to die in?

In the next place, what is enthusiasm? Dr. Johnson tells us that it is a “vain belief of private revelations”: did any of your devout friends dream that they had had private revelations? It is “a heat of imagination”: did not your friends seem to grow cold rather than hot? Were they not often tempted to go your way because it was pleasanter? Did they not find it hard to persevere in spiritual practices, and did they not embrace them, not at all from any imagination hot or cold, but simply because they thought it right, and because grace had begun to change their tastes? It is “an exaltation of ideas”: now were not the ideas of your friends, in any true sense of the word, rather depressed than exalted? Were they not more humble, more submissive, more obliging; and whenever they were not so, did you not distinctly feel that they were acting inconsistently with their religious profession? Were any of their ideas in any sense exalted, even of those which had most to do with their pious practices? Were not even these ideas rather subdued than exalted? These are Dr. Johnson’s three

definitions. They will not suit you. Do you mean then by enthusiasm, doing too much for God? You would not like to say so. Do you mean doing it in the wrong way? But is daily Mass wrong, is almsgiving wrong, are spiritual books wrong, is visiting the poor wrong, is prayer wrong? Or will you say it is doing them instead of other things, which are not sinful? Well! but is not this tyranny?

A man might answer, "If an opera would be to me the most tiresome of penances, or a ball the most unendurable of wearinesses, why am I obliged to go? Or if I simply prefer prayer to the opera, or spiritual reading to the ball, why am I to have less liberty in gratifying my tastes than you in gratifying yours?" Do you mean that God spoils everything He touches, and is a mar-pleasure wherever He interferes? The truth is that by enthusiasm men mean the being more religious than themselves. And this is an unpardonable offence; for they are the standards of what is moderate, sober, rational, and reflective. Enthusiasm, in common parlance, has no other meaning. Whoever uses the word is simply making public confession of his own tepidity. Thus the whole popular standard of practical religion is wrong and unfair, because it is fixed with reference to a false calculation; and it is this which leads to the popular fallacy about enthusiasm.

If men realized more truly and more habitually what it is to have a Creator, and how much follows from that elementary truth as to the nature and amount of the service we owe Him, there can be no doubt they would assent to a far higher standard on the unsuspecting evidence of natural reason and

common sense, than they will now concede to the arguments of spiritual books which are founded on higher motives, and appeal to a greater variety of considerations. The fact is that we only appreciate God's goodness, in proportion as by His grace we become good ourselves; and His goodness is so great and high and deep and broad, that it makes little impression upon the dulness of our spiritual sense, until it is quickened and sharpened with heavenly light. And thus, when we are low in grace, and unpracticed in devotion, the simple truth that God is our Creator, and that a Creator necessarily implies what we have seen it implies, will come home to us with greater force, and make a more decided impression, than the complex consideration of the further and higher mercies which God has so multiplied upon us that they almost seem to hide one another's brightness. No man would accuse his neighbor of enthusiasm, which is a practical endeavor to lower the standard of his religious practice, if he saw that his practice already fell short of what plain common sense and decency require from a creature.

But it is remarkable that it is not only the great multitude of men who would find their account, and in truth a thorough reform, in dwelling more habitually on what it is to be a creature and what it is to have a Creator. This is one of the points in which the extremes of holiness meet, its rawest beginnings with its highest perfection. The tendency of the spiritual life, especially in its more advanced stages, is to simplify the operations of the soul. The variety of considerations, the crowd of reasons,

the number of heightening circumstances, the re-duplicated motives which characterize the arduous work of meditation, give place to a more austere unity, and a more simple method, and a more fixed sentiment in the loftier practice of divine contemplation. The multiplicity of lights, which filled us with a very trouble of sweetness at the first, grow pale before the one fixed ray of heavenly light which beams upon us as we approach the goal. Hence we find that one commonplace truth, which would seem tame and trivial in our meditations, is enough to a saint for long hours of ecstatic contemplation. This is the reason why we are so often surprised at the apparently exaggerated esteem in which the Saints have held certain spiritual treatises, that we in our lower and duller state have condemned as spiritless, or prosy, or uninteresting. The book is but one half the work. The interior spirit of the reader is the other and the better half. And it is this last in which we fail. Thus the very truths which we are considering in this treatise, what it is to be a creature and what it is to have a Creator, have no varied interest or exciting novelty, and yet it is just to these two elementary truths of Christian doctrine that the highest contemplatives return, with all the power of lifelong habits, and of intense prayer, with their intelligence purified by austerities which make us tremble, and with the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, those mighty engines of spiritual enterprise.

Look at St. Francis Borgia, the Saint of humility. It seems a less wonderful thing to raise the dead, than to spend, as he did, three hours daily in the

absorbing and undistracted contemplation of his own nothingness. Is it easy to conceive how the three times sixty minutes were spent in the embrace of this single and so homely a truth?

To the same forgetfulness of what it is to have a Creator may be attributed the wrong principles now so much in vogue, by which we regulate our intercourse with misbelievers. We look at them rather than at God, at their side of the question rather than His; or it would be more true to say that we in reality do our best to betray their interests, because we do not look first at His. Those who realize what it is to be a creature and what it is to have a Creator, will never make light of any disturbance or interruption in the relations between the Creator and the creature. Every fraction of Divine truth is worth more than all the world besides, and every rightful exercise of spiritual jurisdiction is of nobler and more lasting import than all the physical sciences will be when they have pushed their discoveries to the uttermost limits of their material empire. The spurious charity of modern times has stolen more converts from the Church than any other cause. While it has deadened the zeal of the missionary, it has fortified the misbeliever in his darkness and untruth, and stunted or retarded in the convert that lively appreciation of the value of the gift of faith, upon which it would appear that his spiritual advancement exclusively depends.

The ancient Fathers of the Church seemed to have looked in different ways at the two bodies of men which then lay outside the fold, the heathen and the heretics. They regarded the heathen with

horror, indeed, yet still rather with compassion than dislike. They contemplated them as their own future conquest, the raw material out of which by the preaching of the Gospel they were to build up an empire for their Lord. They were to them monsters of ignorance rather than monsters of perversity; and with kindness and yearning, they found no difficulty in detesting the falsehood while they clung tenderly to those who were astray. But they looked on heretics in a very different way. It was less easy to separate their errors from themselves. They had received the truth, and had corrupted it; and a direct, schismatical, and personal hostility to the Church actuated them. They had mixed the doctrine of devils with the pure Gospel. They had been guilty of personal treason to Jesus. As Judas was more odious than Pilate, so were they more hateful than the heathen. Hence, amidst all their charity and patience and sweetness, the elder Christians looked on heresy with a sternness of spirit which did not actuate them towards the heathen. St. John would not enter the building where Cerinthus was; we find no such thing recorded of him in his intercourse with those who worshipped Diana of the Ephesians. We have no difficulty in recognizing the difference between the two cases, and in understanding the grave charity of the Apostle of love. The whole truth, even when preached ungently and with forwardness, is a more converting thing than half the truth preached winningly, or an error condescended to out of the anxiety of mistaken love.

THE PRESENT GENERATION

We trust it will not seem a paradox to say, that the great mass and multitude of the English people are to be regarded rather as heathen than as heretics, and are therefore entitled to the more kindly view which the ancient Fathers took of those without the fold. So far they are in better case than the heathen, because they possess, at the least implicitly, a belief in so many of the principal doctrines of the Christian faith. The present generation—we speak of them in the mass—have no determinate choice of error rather than truth, no self-will, no obstinate, perverse adherence to the principles of a sect. They have no personal hostility to the Church; and the national war-cry of “No Popery” is no real proof to the contrary. Their religious errors are the traditions of their forefathers, and they know no others. They know nothing of the Catholic Church. Their ideal Church is very like it, though it falls below the reality. But the actual Church they have been taught to believe is the enemy of God, and Jesus Christ, and the souls of men. They have no more notion that such a state of things exists on the surface of the earth as we know the inside of the Catholic Church to be, than they know how the Angels spend their time, or what the glory of the third heaven is like. They look on us, as an old heathen did, who believed that Christians met early in the morning to slay infants and to eat their flesh; and of such sort is their honest conviction. Furthermore the consequence of

their misbelief has been a total misconception of God, a misconception really rather than an ignoring of Him. They have the word *God*, and an idea attached to the word, and a sense which goes along with the idea; but, if we may so speak, He is as much a different God from ours, as the old Christian's Father of our Lord Jesus Christ was from the *Jupiter Tonans* of the poor heathen, or the Primal Cause of the proud philosopher.

Hence, while we can neither compromise nor conceal the truth, we may look with the kindest compassion on our fellow-countrymen, as our future conquest, as the raw materials for an ardent host of Christians, as poor wanderers in darkness who want to be taught rather than controverted, and who above all things desire to have their sins forgiven, if they only knew the way. But one word, one look, which goes to show that being in the Church and being out of the Church are not as fearfully far asunder as light from darkness, as Christ from Belial, will rob God of more souls than a priest's life of preaching or a saint's life of prayer has won. It is an old proverb that the worst of all corruptions and counterfeits is the corruption and counterfeit of that which is most excellent. If charity then, both in heaven and on earth, both for time and for eternity, is the most excellent of gifts, how sad must be the desolation, how wide the ruin, how incurable the wound, of spurious charity, which satisfies its own worthless good-nature at the expense of God's truth and its neighbor's soul?

By far the greater number of objections which are urged against the Catholic doctrines have their

root in this oblivion of the respective positions of creature and Creator. And this is equally true of the difficulties which sometimes haunt and harass Catholics themselves, and of difficulties which seem to prevent another from receiving the teaching of the Church at all. If we remove from the objections urged against the Incarnation, or against the Blessed Sacrament, or against the doctrine of grace, all those which are founded in an inadequate view of God, or are derogatory to His perfections as reason represents them, or to His right as implied in the very fact of His being our Creator, very little indeed will be left to answer. Neither would it be difficult to show that most of the misconceptions about Catholic devotions and practices have their rise from the same copious fountain. All worldliness comes from it. Who would be worldly if he always remembered the world was God's world, not his? And as to sin, it must of necessity be either a forgetfulness of what it is to have a Creator, or a revolt against Him.

But—we speak now to more loving souls,—there is another mischief which comes from the same error. In all ages of the world it has been a temptation to good and thoughtful men, and the speculations of modern philosophy have perhaps now increased the number, to take inadequate views of God's love. Nothing is more fatal to the soul, nor more dishonorable to God. The world, with the sun extinguished, and the hideous black moon whirling round our benighted planet, is but a feeble picture of what life becomes to a susceptible conscience which puts God's love of man too low. Take what

views we will of grace, it must come to this, that the immensity of God's love is our only security. Because He is our Creator, He must love us; His love must be immense; He must efficaciously desire the salvation of every one of His rational creatures; He must judge every single soul that maliciously eludes the embrace of His merciful longing, and escapes from Him into outer darkness; He must do all but offer violence to our free will in order to save us; His own glory must be in the multitude who are saved and in the completeness of their salvation.

Nay, on our view as Scotists, He was incarnate because He was our Creator, and He is with us in the Blessed Sacrament because He is our Creator. Even if we take the Thomist view that the Incarnation and the Blessed Sacrament were a second love, and because of sin, that second love came out of the first love wherewith He created us out of nothing. True it is that we have no name for the feeling with which one must regard a being whom we have called out of nothing, we may call it paternal love, or by the name of any other angelic or human love; and yet we know that it must be a feeling far transcending, in height, and depth, and comprehensiveness, in kind, endurance, and degree, all loving ties which we can conceive. Surely when reason tells us all was meant in love, and that He who meant that love was God, we may well trust Him for details which we cannot understand, or for apparent contradictions which should not make a son's heart fail or his head doubt. Oh! uncertain and distrustful soul! God be with you in those not

disloyal misgivings, which ailment of body or turn of mind seem to make in your case inevitable. The mystery of Creation is the fountain of your pains. As it has been your poison, so take it as your remedy. Meditate long, meditate humbly, on what it is to have a Creator, and comfort will come at last. If broad daylight should never be yours on this side the grave, He will hold your feet in the twilight that they shall not stumble, and at last with all the more love, and all the more speed as well, He will fold you to His bosom who is Himself the light eternal.

BOOK II

The Difficulties of Creative Love

CHAPTER I

WHY GOD WISHES US TO LOVE HIM

A CHILD'S first sight of the ocean is an era in his life. It is a new world without him, and it awakens a new world within him. There is no other novelty to be compared with it, and after-life will bring nothing at all like it. A rapid multitude of questions rush upon the mind; yet the child is silent, as if he needed not an answer to any of them. They are beyond answering; and he feels that the sight itself satisfies him better than any answer. Those great bright outspread waters! the idea of God is the only echo to them in his mind; and now henceforth he is a different child, because he has seen the sea.

So is it with us when we sit by the ocean of creative love. Questions throng upon us; problems start up on all sides; mysteries intersect each other. Yet so long as we are children, are childlike in heart and spirit, the questions are not difficulties.

Either they answer themselves, or they do not need an answer, like questions which are exclamations only; or we would rather not have an answer, lest peradventure some high thing should be lowered or some holy thing be made common. To gaze—to gaze is all we desire. The fact, that so much is mystery to us, is no trouble. It is love. That is enough. We trust it. We would almost rather it was not made plainer. It might be darker if it were. Whereas now, though it is indistinct, it is tranquillizing also, like the beauty of a summer night.

We have thoughts which cannot be put into words, but it seems to us as if they more than answered all difficulties. How the broad waters flow and shine, and how the many-headed waves leap up to the sun and sparkle, and then sink down into the depths again, yet not to rest; and, placid as the azure expanse appears, how evermore it thunders on the hard white sand, and fringes the coast with a bewitching silver mist! Why should we ever stir from where we are? To look on the sea seems better than to learn the science of its storms, the grandeur of its steadfastness, or the many moods of its beautiful mutabilities. The heathen called the sea-spirit father. There was much in the thought. But when we cease to be children and to be childlike, there is no more this simple enjoyment. We ask questions, not because we doubt, but because, when love is not all in all to us, we must have knowledge, or we chafe and pine. Then a cloud comes between the sun and the sea, and that expanse of love, which was an unde-

fined beauty, a confused magnificence, now becomes black and ruffled, and breaks up into dark wheeling currents of predestination, or mountainous waves of Divine anger and judicial vengeance; and the white surf tells us of many a sunken reef, where we had seen nothing but a smooth and glossy azure plain, rocking gently to and fro, as unruffled as a silken banner.

We shall be children once again, and on the same shore, and we shall then never leave it more, and we shall see down into the crystal depths of this creative love, and its wide waters will be the breadth and measure of our joy, and its glancing splendor will be the light of our eternal life, and its soft thunder will be the endless, solemn, thrilling music of our beatitude. Oh, happy we! but we must be changed first of all, and perchance by fire!

But we must not altogether cease to be childlike, when we begin to ask and answer questions. Pride can understand nothing about God. We may question, then, but it must be in faith and trust and love, content with half an answer when more cannot be given, and to be left without answer at all, when the heights of God's goodness soar beyond all vision but that of faith, whose prerogative it is, in some sense, to equal and to comprehend its Giver and its Author.

We have endeavored, so far, to get some idea of what it is to be a creature, and of what it is to have a Creator; and it seems to have taken many words to explain those simple things. Our next step must be to ask and answer, as well as we can, five questions which concern so many wonders of Divine

Love; and we shall then be in a condition to examine certain phenomena in the actual life of the world, which seem at variance with our doctrines.

Thus, speaking generally, the present treatise may be said to have three parts. The first, which stated the case, and which was concluded in the last chapter: the second, which is concerned with the five mysteries of the relation between the Creator and the creature, and which will occupy this and the next four chapters: and the third, which deals with certain objections from the state of things in the world, and which will occupy the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters. After which, nothing will be left but to close the work, and leave it to the blessing of God and St. Matthew, under whose invocation we have ventured to place it, and to the judgment and reflection of the reader. The five questions now to be asked, are as follows: 1. Why God should wish us to love Him; 2. Why He Himself should love us; 3. What sort of love we have for Him; 4. In what way we repay His love for us; and, 5. In what way He repays our love of Him. They are all abysses of creative love, and wonders which make us wiser even when they refuse to give up the secrets which they contain.

We have, therefore, now to inquire why it is that God wishes us to love Him. At first sight, it seems one of those facts which are so very obvious that we never think of asking the reason of them. But, on reflection, this old and commonplace fact unfolds so much that is strange and wonderful, that we almost unconsciously ask ourselves, if we are quite clear

of the fact, if it is really so completely beyond all doubt that God wishes us to love Him.

SOME DIFFICULTIES ANSWERED

The difficulties, which make us begin almost to doubt the fact, are some such as these. That God should wish us to love Him, appears to imply some sort of want in Him. A desire is a kind of confession of imperfection; and, according to the strength of the desire, so is the appearance of imperfection and incompleteness. Yet we know, that to attribute any sort of want to the Creator would be simple blasphemy. "Thou art my God," says the Psalmist, "*because* thou desirest none of my goods." But our love is our greatest good, the affections of our heart are the noblest of our possessions, and God, we are told, earnestly desires to have them. Besides, if we once grant this fact, we are led into a further difficulty. For, immediately, this fact assumes such an importance, that it becomes the interpretation of all God's doings. Almost all we know of Him has at once to be resolved into this desire. A hundred other difficulties come up, and claim to be explained in the same way. We cannot conceive of God except as our Creator, nor of our Creator except as our Father; for creation is unintelligible, unless it is defined to be a free act of Eternal Love, and then everything He does is the act of a Father, and is to be understood by the fact of our being His sons. We see that God cannot, simply because He is God, be moderately good to us. If we grant that He cares for us at all, then forthwith we see, that

He must care for us so very much, that the vision of it tries our faith. So God cannot desire our love with a weak and indifferent desire. If He desires it at all, He must desire it with all the might of His ever-blessed perfections, and it requires strong faith and stronger love to look at this consequence, and not draw back before its seeming audacity.

If He reveals Himself to us at all, it is because He wants us to serve Him; and as we saw in the last chapter, He being what He is and we being what we are, the creature cannot serve the Creator with any other than a service of love. This is what the Church means when she tells us, that without some love in our repentance, we are incapable of absolution. If He gives us positive precepts or an acceptable ceremonial, it is as a way to Him, because He would fain secure our love. If He sends His Son to save sinners, it is because He vouchsafes to appear as if He cannot make up His mind to lose the love of men. If He takes us to Himself in heaven, it is that He may have us with Him, and feed His glory on our love. For we creatures cannot be His end: His end must be Himself, and nothing can exist except for His glory. If He detains us in Purgatory, it is to multiply earth's harvest of love, and to make a greater profit on imperfect souls. If, dread thought! He lays us in the hopeless dismal deep of fire, it is because we have frustrated His yearnings, and refused Him the love He vouchsafed so incomprehensibly to covet.

But this is not all. He seems to forget that He is God because of the greatness of this desire. His ever-blessed Majesty will forgive us words of this

sort, by which alone we can force upon our dull hearts the conviction of the immensity of His love. He appears to deny His own nature and greatness in order to obtain our love. Is the facility of pardon consistent with the rigor of His vindictive justice, or with the spotlessness of His overwhelming sanctity? Is it easy to see how He should require the unspeakable sufferings of our dearest Lord, and should take them as an expiation for the sins of others, and for sins that were not to be committed till hundreds of years had come and gone? Is it easy to see why baptized infants should be admitted to enjoy the Beatific Vision, or to reconcile with our notions of right that he who came to toil only at the eleventh hour should receive the same wages with him who had borne the burden and heat of the day? Does God seem to legislate so much for His justice, or His sanctity, or His dignity, as for procuring the greatest number of souls to love Him, and for rendering the harvest of redemption as enormous as the perversity of our free-will allows?

There is a further difficulty in the unintelligible value which He seems to set upon our love. Think of what our love is like, and of what good it can possibly be to God, and then conceive its being worth the price He paid for it on Calvary! Yet if we do not suppose it was worth it, we bring a charge against His wisdom, as if the Incarnation and the Passion were gratuitous and exaggerated.

And it is no answer to say that it was all for our sakes, and rather a proof of His love for us, than of His desire for our love. For we must continually bear in mind what sound theology teaches us, that

God alone can be His own end, and not we creatures. He can only bless us for His own glory. It is His perfection, that He must needs seek Himself in all things. He would not be God, if it were not so. We can hardly conceive of God creating, if He did not set a value upon His own creation. Yet we could not bring ourselves to believe that God set any value upon a few millions of round orbs, or on their velocity, or on their fidelity to their orbits, or to their eccentricities, or to the mere vastness of sidereal space, or to the various structure of matter, or to the threads of metal in the bowels of the mountains, or to the vivifying force of the solar ray, or to the gigantic play of the ubiquitous electricity, or to fine trees, or to clear lakes, or to sylvan dells, or to the outlines of a sea coast, or to the gorgeousness of sunsets, or to the pomp of storms, or to anything whatever of that sort. Even we creatures should feel that we were lowering Him in our own estimation, if we thought that He set a value upon, or took pains with, or had an interest in, such things as these. Yet we are told that He does distinctly set a value on the spirits of Angels and the hearts of men.

Man is the end of the material world, but God alone is the end of man. Physical philosophers can love strata of rock, or the distribution of plants, or a peculiar fauna, or the habits of earthquakes, or the occultations of stars, or the physical geography of the sea, or the delicacies of chemistry, more than they love the hearts of men, the slaves of the South, or the inmates of a hospital. But God

cannot do so. 'All His own material creation is worthless to Him in comparison with one peasant's heart, or with one child's first serious prayer. He has given away, with the indifference of interminable wealth, all the rest of His creation; but hearts He has kept for Himself, and will not even share them, much less surrender them. Yet where is their value? What is finite love to an Infinite Beatitude? Really it is not easy to see. Yet can we doubt that it is something, and something very precious in His eyes to whom all things else are nothing worth?

One difficulty more. What is the meaning of that surpassing joy which human love causes in God? Surely this is a profound mystery. The life of God is joy, joy illimitable, joy ineffable, joy unimaginable, joy eternal. The whole bewildering immensity of angelical and human joy is but a tiny drop out of the boundless ocean of the joy of God. What a variety of joys there are in each human heart. No two of these joys are exactly the same. They differ as one note differs from another note in music. They make new joys by new combinations. Different scenes, different phases of life, different ages, all diversify the throng of joys which one human heart can experience. Yet no two hearts are exactly alike; so that the multitudinous joys of the heart are to be multiplied by the myriads and myriads of hearts, dead, alive, or yet unborn. Now every one of these joys has its representative in the simple plenitude of the joy of God. But what are human joys to joys angelical? Yet they too are all but a manifold umbrage of the one joy of God.

The joys of the animal creation, their joy in health and strength, in light and air, in cold and heat, in wet and dry, in their sweet songs or their loud wars, in their speed of flight or their spring of muscle, in tending their young or tearing their prey, all are shadows, lowest, dimmest, faintest, poorest shadows of the joy of God. And who is sufficient to compute these things? And what if the joys of the Immaculate Heart of the Divine Mother are to be reckoned also, and those of that Sacred Heart which the Person of the Word deluged with its oil of gladness, and yet left it human still? Yet when we have got so far, we can hardly be said to have begun.

Who can tell the joy of the Father in His Innascibility, or the joy of the Son in His eternal and perpetual Generation, or the joy of the Holy Ghost in His everlasting and incessant Procession from the Father and the Son? The Jubilee of the Father and the Son is Himself; not a thing or a perception, but an eternal Person, Himself the illimitable Limit of the illimitable God. Who will dare to picture to himself the awful and majestic jubilation of the August Trinity in the Threefoldness of Persons and the Unity of Essence? God's joy in His own Oneness,—who can look at it except either he be stricken with an ecstasy of rapture, or be dissolved in tears of believing love? And is all this not enough? Is God seeking joy, more joy, joy elsewhere? And is it joy in creatures, created joy? Can His own joy hold more, can it grow, can it receive, can it want? If not, why break the silence of eternity to create, why this hunting after human love, why this ardent patient pursuit after sinful

hearts, why this joy over returning sinners, why this preciousness in His sight of the death of His Saints? We may indeed ask, why; but can we give an answer? O heaven and earth! O Angels and men! What a Being God is! What a joy it is to be a creature! What a glory to have a Creator!

What is to be done with all these difficulties? One thing is plain. We need not try to answer them. St. Thomas himself, if he rose from the dead, could not answer them. But there is one thing to be observed about them, and it is this. While they are such difficulties as make us doubt whether God really does desire our love, they are at the same time irrefragable proofs of the fact that He does desire it, and that He desires it with a most mysterious intensity. They prove the fact, if they do not account for it; and they prove it in such a way as that we need not have it accounted for, in order to receive it. For we can have no doubt about the fact. But can we approximate to a solution of the problem? Can we throw any kind of light upon the mystery? Can we diminish the difficulties which we confessedly are unable to answer? This must be our next endeavor; and whether we succeed or not, we shall at least gain a great amount of additional evidence to the fact that God does desire our love. We have our misgivings whether we shall do more than this.

THE KINGDOM OF NATURE, DIVINE, ANGELICAL, ETC.

Let us look first of all at the kingdom of nature, whether Divine, angelical, or human, and see if it

does not disclose to us reasons why God should so yearn for the affection of human hearts. One reason why it is impossible for us to comprehend the Divine Nature, or even to make an imaginary picture of it, is its extreme and adorable simplicity. Properly speaking God has no perfections. He is Himself His own one sole perfection, the perfection of perfections. What we call the Divine perfections are only our imperfect ways of approaching towards a true idea of Him. Nevertheless we are capable of considering Him as not our Creator, and then again as our Creator. We know that although God is immutable, still there was a time when He had not created us, and again a time when He had created us. Or if we consider that He had always created us in His own mind, still we can, from what He has been pleased to tell us of Himself, conceive of Him as being without any creatures at all. As a world is the largest thing we know of, a cosmos, an order, a beauty, all on the vastest scale, so we may dream of the great God as fourteen worlds in Himself, of surpassing beauty and variety, yet all without limit and circumscription, and one, absolutely one in their own simplicity, although fourteen in our conceptions.

Four of these worlds seem—remember how utterly short of the mark, and beside it, human words are in the matter—to contain the inmost life of God. We call them His Infinity, His Immensity, His Immutability, and His Eternity. They are at once conditions of His Essence, and of all the perfections which we can attribute to His Essence. Around them stand four other worlds, of ravishing

loveliness enough to separate body and soul if we might see them uncloudedly. They are Omnipotence, Wisdom, Perfection, which is the natural goodness of God, and Sanctity, which we may call His moral goodness. Now in these eight worlds there is not necessarily any respect to creatures. They belong to the eternal Self-sufficiency of God independent of any creation whatever. They furnish us with no reason at all why God should desire our love. On the contrary they are so magnificently self-sufficing, so adorably complete, that they are rather so many arguments against the existence of any such unfathomable desire.

Around these eight worlds are six other worlds, to be mentioned only with the wondering humility of filial and more than filial love, worlds which concern ourselves and are colored by our destinies, worlds in which we ourselves also dwell from eternity, and which are at this hour, and will be evermore, our only country and our only home. They are the Divine Benignity, Dominion, Providence, Mercy, Justice, and that perfection of God which we call His being the Last End of all things. If God were to be conceived without creatures, nothing can be added to the first eight worlds, and nothing taken from them, without His ceasing to be God. If He be conceived as with creatures, as He is actually, then the addition of anything to the whole fourteen worlds, or the subtraction of anything from them, would inevitably alter our idea of God. We may use many other great words of Him, but the meaning of them, the excellence intended by

them, is already implied and included in one of the fourteen worlds.

Now the very existence of these six worlds in God of itself will furnish us with most overwhelming proofs of His desire that we should love Him. . . .

Creation in a state of grace is the wonder of creation doubled. Then, when He foresaw the free and wilful demerits of some, and the free loyal correspondence to grace in others, there was no energy in that prevision to secure the condemnation of the first, while His mercy rejoiced already to adorn and set aside the crowns for the second. Nor was it, as we suppose, until after this prevision, that there was any absolute election or reprobation. And thus man's liberty was secured throughout; and the result is, that of all the multitudes of those who are lost, not one can attribute his ruin to any predetermining act of God, but simply to their own efforts to free themselves from the solitudes of His grace; while, of all the countless souls and spirits of the Blessed, there is not one who does not owe his joy to the eternal predestination of His Maker. And what is all this, but another set of evidences to prove the greatness of God's desire to have our love, while it still leaves deep down in the abyss of His goodness the reason of this desire?

If we consider the arrangements of creation and natural preservation, we shall see that they, in like manner, testify to the Creator's desire to excite our love. It is impossible to make too much of the fact, that both Angels and men were created in a

state of grace. Then, again, there is a sort of superabundance in our natural gifts. We have so many more than seem absolutely necessary to our discharging the duties for which we came into the world. Life is itself an intense pleasure; so much so, that men prize it above all other things. The most miserable of men will hardly part without reluctance with the simple power of living. All our natural gifts, also, are so constructed as to be avenues of enjoyment and delight. There is not a sense, in whose exercise there is not a keenness and a peculiarity of satisfaction, of which those who lack that sense can form no adequate conception.

It requires a soul, either in the strength of its first integrity or in the vigor of supernatural grace, to hold us back from being swept away by the might of sensual pleasure. The exercise of the various faculties of the mind, also open out new sources of the strangest delight and the most thrilling happiness. We can think of and count up a score of different pleasureable feelings consequent on the use of our minds, not one of which we can adequately describe in words. What, then, shall we say of the romance and nobility of the affections of our hearts, those very hearts God so much covets? Almost as many loves grow in the soil of the heart, as there are wines in the vineyards of the earth; and has not the whole world many a time gone wild with their intoxication?

So, also, in the adaptation of material nature to our dominion, everything is characterized by excessive profusion, by unnecessary beauty. Everything, almost, has a sweetness beyond and beside its own

proper function. The heathen talked of Mother Earth; and truly God has filled her teeming bosom with the milk of more than a mother's kindness. Whether she feeds, or heals, or soothes, or inspires, or simply wins us by the lustre of her physical beauty, she is ever doing more than she promises, and enhances her gifts by the fondness of her ministrations. There is something to make us tremble to see with what fineness of balance, with what nicety of restraint, our Creator tames the huge elements in our behalf, and makes us live at ease amid the bewildering vastness of their operations, and close by the uneasy laboratories of their titanic power. Everywhere, and for our sakes, He governs, not through the catastrophes of violent power, but through the meekness of a patient and a pleasant uniformity. Here is fresh demonstration that He craves our love, and no reason given but the blessed one of His free benignant will.

Once more, before we leave the kingdom of nature, let us look at the way in which the Bible discloses Him to us in successive dispensations. He plants an Eden for his new-made creatures, and then comes to them Himself; and the evenings of the young world are consecrated by familiar colloquies between the creatures and their Creator. He tests their love by the lightest of precepts; and, when they have broken it, clear above the accents of a strangely moderate anger, are heard the merciful promises of a Saviour. Then come centuries of mysterious strife, like Jacob wrestling with God by the tinkling waters of the midnight stream. No sin seems to weary Him. No waywardness is a

match for the perseverance of His love. Merciful and miraculous interventions are never wanting. No gifts are thought too much or too good, if the creatures will but condescend to take them. On the Mesopotamian sheep-walks, in the Egyptian brick-fields, in the palm-spotted wilderness, among the vineyards of Engaddi, by the headlong floods of harsh Babylon, it is always the same. God cannot do without us. He cannot afford to lose our love.

He clings to us; He pleads with us; He punishes only to get love, and stays His hand in the midst; He melts our hearts with beautiful complainings; He mourns like a rejected lover or a suspected friend; He appeals to us with a sort of humility which has no parallel in human love. What a character of God we should draw from the Bible only! and what would it all come to, but that to win the love of His creatures was the ruling passion of the Creator? Oh! horrible beyond all horrors must the heart be that will not love God, that particular God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! God desiring, and man withholding and then God getting, as it were, by stealth or by caress, less than a tithe of His due from less than a tithe of His creation, and then as it were spreading Himself out in a kind of joyous triumph at His success,—is not this a truthful compendium of the Bible history?

KINGDOM OF GRACE

If from nature we turn to grace, we shall find that the whole resolves itself into a loving pursuit

of souls on the part of God. We shall meet there the same evidence of the fact with as little solution of the difficulty. The kingdom of grace, if it is not founded on the permission of evil, seems at least to imply it; and the permission of evil is nothing less than the intense desire of the Creator for the love of His creatures. Surely that is the whole account of this terrific mystery. At what a price must He estimate the love of Angels and of men, if He would run so fearful a risk to gain it? Nay, it could be no risk to Him whose foreknowledge made all things present to Him. Every possible, as well as every actual, consequence of that permission was vividly before Him, and yet He persisted. It was worth while. It was for His glory, and His glory is our inestimable good. If evil was not permitted, Angels and men would not be free. If they were not free, they could not serve Him with a service of love; for freedom is necessary to love. They, whom the sight of Him now confirms in holiness for evermore, would not have won their crowns, and therefore a heaven of Saints ready made from the beginning would not in fact have been a service of free allegiance and voluntary love. Yet what a fearful venture, rather what an appalling certainty, was that permission of evil. The All-merciful saw before Him the burning abyss, so sadly populous. It was to Him a vision of more unutterable horror than it could be even to the capacious soul of Mary or the keen intelligence of Michael. Yet onwards He drove right through it, in the plenitude of that greater and more overwhelming goodness where-with He yearned for His creature's love. Oh, what

clearness of demonstration is there here in the pitchy darkness of that intolerable secret!

Then that grave permission came to His eldest sons, to that primeval world of Angels. For one moment they looked at Him in all the beauty of His kind dominion, and then they looked at self with its enticing liberty, and forthwith one whole multitude, a third of that wide empire, ten million times ten million spirits, a very universe of loveliness and gifts and graces, made their irremediable choice, and in the madness of their liberty leaped into the stunning war of the fiery whirlpool, far away from the meek paternal majesty of God. Their irremediable choice! what a thought is that for us! The Angels could not complain. They had had a marvellous abundance of love. The gifts of their nature were something beyond our power of imagining. They were so bright and vast and sure as to be almost a security against their fall. They had also been created in a state of grace, and doubtless of the most exquisite and resplendent grace. Moreover they had all perhaps merited immensely by the first act of love with which they greeted their Creator in the exulting moment when at His dear will their grand spirits sprung from nothingness. Yet one chance, one only! Our different experience of God makes us tremble at the thought. When we broke our light precept, and forfeited our original integrity, He would not lose us so. He only redoubled His mercies, and multiplied our means of salvation: so that it has become almost a doubt in theology whether we are not better off now that

we have fallen, than we should have been had we preserved the innocence and rectitude of paradise.

When we consider the various dispensations which followed the fall, the antediluvian times, the patriarchal dispensation, the Levitical, the Christian, as if God would still leave us free, yet for all that, and in spite of fearful losses, would not be baffled in His yearning for our love, we might almost venture to compare His infinite Majesty to one of His own insignificant creatures, to the spider who with the same quiet assiduity of toil is ever repairing its often broken web, still trusting the same treacherous site, still braving the same almost inevitable calamities. Can we give any reason for this, or say more, than that there is a reason, which God has hidden in the greatness of His own goodness?

The Incarnation, that mystery of the Divine magnificence, in which all the intelligible perfections of God pass in array before us as in beautiful procession, teaches us the same lesson. If God would have come to His unfallen creature, and been borne within the womb of a human Mother, and have shared our nature, and have lived among us, and for three-and-thirty years have unfolded countless mysteries of glory, surpassing even those of the Paschal forty days, what can we say but that it would have been a proof of His desire for His creature's love, which we could only have adored in silent thankfulness? A creature the Creator cannot be; but He will have a created Nature, and make it unspeakably one with His Divine Person, so that He may be more like one of us, and heighten our reverence by the trembling freedoms of our

familiarity, if only He may so enjoy vast augmentations of human love. If because we fell, He changed the manner of His coming, if rather than abandon His coming He plunged His Mother and Himself in a very ocean of sorrows, if, without humbling us by telling us of the change, He contentedly took shame for glory, suffering for joy, slavery for a kingdom, the cross instead of the crown, what did it all show but that He would still have our love, and that with ingenious compassion, which could only be Divine, He would take the advantage of our miseries to exalt us all the more, and so win more abundant love? If He came only because we had fallen, if He condescended to be but a remedy for an evil, if He stooped to fight our battle in person, and in human flesh, with our triumphant enemy, if the Incarnation was an interference to prevent His own world from being stolen from Him, if it was a fresh invention out of the boundless resources of the Divine pity, then still what does it mean but that He would not let us go, He would not let us lose ourselves, because in His strangely persevering goodness He would not lose our love?

So again what is the Church but His way of rendering the blessings of His Incarnation omnipresent and everlasting? What is the Baptism of infants but a securing prematurely, and as it were against all reason, the eternal love of their unconscious souls? What is Confession, but mercy made common, justice almost eluded, the most made out of the least? These are human words, but they express something true. What is the Sacrament of Confirmation but an act of jealousy, lest the world

should steal from God what He had already got?

What is the Sacrament of Matrimony, but a taking of the stuff and substance of human life, its common sorrows and joys, its daily smiles and tears, the wear and tear of its rough and smooth, and elevating it all by a sort of heavenly transfiguration into a ceaseless fountain of supernatural and meritorious love? What is Extreme Unction, but an expression of affectionate nervousness, if we may so speak, of our dearest Lord, lest we should fail Him just at the last, when so many risks are run? What is the Sacrament of Order, but systematizing and ensuring a succession of daily miracles, such as consecrations, absolutions, exorcisms, and benedictions, each one of which is to create, and then to fertilize, and then to beautify, a little world of love for Him?

Ask the Divine Solitary of the Tabernacle why He lives His hermit life amongst us, and what could His answer be but this—I wait, to show love and to receive it? But wide as He has made the ample bosom of His Church, and though He has multiplied with a commonness, which almost injures reverence, the potent Sacraments, this is not enough. None must slip through, if He can but help it. None must be lost except in His despite. There must be something still left, which needs no priest, something as wide as air and as free, which men may have when they cannot have, or at the needful moment cannot find, the Sacraments of His own loving institution. One thing there is, and one only, and we are not surely now surprised to find that one thing—love. If need be, love can baptize without water, can confirm without chrism, can absolve without

ordination, can almost communicate without a Host. For love is a higher emanation of that priesthood which is for ever according to the order of Melchisedech. How shall we read these riddles, if they may not mean that God so desires our love, that He almost tires our attention and outstrips our imagination by the novelty and profusion of His merciful desires to secure this marvellously priceless treasure, the puny love of finite hearts?

There are many difficulties in the doctrine of grace, as well as in those of predestination and the permission of evil, which seem to interfere with our perception of God's love, with its impartiality as well as its completeness. But if we, each of us, remove the cause from the theological schools to the court in our own heart, these difficulties will be greatly diminished, if not entirely dispelled. Let our own hearts therefore be the last part of the kingdom of grace which we shall examine. Can any one of us say that we have not received numberless graces to which we have not corresponded? Have we ever sinned, not only without its being wilfully done, but also without a distinct resistance to conscience, grace, or contrary inspirations? If we were to die and be lost at this moment, is it not as clear as the sun at noon that we have no one to blame for it but ourselves? Has not our whole life been one series of merciful interferences on the part of God? Have there not been many times when our petulance and waywardness have reached such a point, that we in like case should have given up our dearest friends, our closest kindred, as past the possibility of amendment, or not worth the trouble of reproof?

'And yet God has not given us up. His tenderness, His liberality, His assiduity, His patience, His hopefulness, and if we may use the word, His extraordinary unprovokedness, have been beyond all words.

And how do we stand at this hour? We have merited hell. Perhaps we have merited it a thousand times over. We ought to be there now, if justice had all its rights. But it is an unjust world, and God is the grand victim of its injustice. He alone has not His rights. He lets His mercy do strange things with His liberty. We have merited hell purely of our own free will: nay, we have had to stifle inward reproaches and to make considerable efforts in order to accomplish our own perdition.

That we are not yet in hell, that we have actually a good chance of heaven, is simply because God cannot find in His heart to abandon the possibility of our love. In a word, look at yourself, for self is the only thing which concerns you in these difficulties of grace and predestination. Has God ever done you anything but good? Has He not done you an overwhelming amount of good? Has He not simply been so good to you, that you yourself cannot conceive of anything, except the Divine Nature, being so good? Either in kind, or in degree, in manner, or in matter, can you so much as conceive of any created goodness being anything like so good? O merciful God! Thou art too good to us. Thou standest in Thine own light. Thy mercies hide in one another; they go out of sight because they are so tall: they pass unnoticed because they are so deep: they weary our thankful-

ness because they are so numerous: they make us disbelieve because they are so gratuitous, so common, so enduring. We should more readily have acknowledged what Thou hast done for us, if Thou hadst only done much less!

KINGDOM OF GLORY

Are we tired of all this evidence, especially when it leaves still unexplained the mystery it so amply proves? This is not the place to discuss the joys of the Beatific Vision although there is hardly a more tempting province of theology. Nevertheless we can hardly close our case without some consideration of the kingdom of glory, considered in reference to our present inquiry. In the case of a parent or a teacher we judge of the value set upon a particular line of conduct, by the greatness of the reward promised and actually conferred. Now, if we love God, the reward promised us is nothing less than the sight of God Himself, face to face, not transiently, not as a glorious flash of light renewed once in ten thousand years to feed our immortality with contentment and delight, but an abiding Vision, a glory and a gladness, a marvellous rapture of the will, and an ecstasy of vast intelligence, for evermore. Think how such a reward transcends all the expectations, all the possibilities even, of our nature! How God must love us, and how too He must love our love, to have prepared for us such joys as these, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor man's heart conceived!

We must consider also that although our beati-

tude, quite rigorously speaking, does not consist so much or so directly in love, as in the actual vision of God by our understandings, nevertheless love is that which immediately follows from it, and which is directly connatural to it. So that it comes to this: our reward is for having loved God; it is no less a reward than God Himself, not any of His gifts; and it is an ability to love Him infinitely better than we have ever done before, and also eternally. He takes us to Himself. He makes us His own companions for evermore. He multiplies Himself in us, and reflects Himself in our beatified souls, as if it were in so many images of Himself. "In other created things," says Lessius, "as in the fabric of the world, and the various degrees of things, certain thin rays of His Divinity shine forth, from which we can, as it were by a conjecture, learn His power, His wisdom, and His goodness. But in our minds elevated by the light of glory and united to Him in the Beatific Vision, the whole plenitude of the Divinity shines forth, the whole of His beauty softly glows; so that, although the Divinity is one in itself, it is in a marvellous manner multiplied, so that there seem to be as many divinities as there are beatified minds." Love is the reason of the reward, love is the consequence of the reward, love is the conduct rewarded, and the reward itself is love. If we knew nothing more of God than this, need more be known?

We must not forget also the huge price which this reward has cost our Creator. When we had forfeited it, it required as it were an effort of all His conjoined perfections to recover it for us once

again. A God made Man, the shame of a God, the sufferings of a God, the Blood of a God, the death of a God! Such was the price of what we shall one day enjoy in heaven. What can we do but weep silently? How do all complaints about the permission of evil and the mystery of election die away, when we think of things like these! How ungraceful, ungraceful rather than ungrateful, do they seem. The Incarnation of a God, the shame of a God, the sufferings of a God, the Blood of a God, the death of a God! That was what I cost! It is now my daily bread, my daily light, my daily life! I confess that faith is almost overwhelmed with these considerations. Oh, for some corner, the least, the lowest, and the last in the world to come, where we may spend an untired eternity in giving silent thanks to Jesus Crucified!

But, if what God paid was so great, the littleness of what earns it on our part is a mystery almost as wonderful. A Magdalen's love was but a paltry price to pay for a reward so vast. But think of the dying thief! One act of love, one act of contrition, the brief tardy graces of a death-bed,—what must be the might of our Saviour's Blood when it can concentrate the whole merit of eternal life in such little momentary things as these? If we died at this moment, it is our firm hope that we should be saved; and yet can our hope rest on what we ourselves have done? Is there not something painful in confronting the magnitude of our recompense, with the trifling service we have given God but grudgingly, out of hearts only half weaned from the world, and scarcely weaned at all from self?

Surely God must desire our love with an amazing fervor of desire, when He gives so much, to have so little in return!

There is one thing more to remark about the Beatific Vision, before we close our case. It is a very obvious reflection, yet perhaps we do not dwell upon it sufficiently, that now, in our fallen state, it is not innocence which earns the sight of God, but love, humble, repentant, penance-doing love. Nay, even in an unfallen or angelic world, it would only be innocence in the shape of love, which could earn the heavenly recompense. Thus also in our journey heavenwards, it is love which takes every step, and love alone. It is not the sharpness of the austerity which merits, but the love. It is not the patience in sickness, or the silence under calumny, or the perseverance in prayer, or the zeal of Apostolic labor, which win the crown, but just the love, and the love only, that is in the patience and the silence and the prayer and the zeal. Martyrdom without love is unprofitable before God. He has no longing for anything but love. He puts no price on other things. His taste is exclusive. His covetousness is confined to that one thing. Oh, if we could be as simple and as single in our desires as God! He only wants our love, and more of it, and more, and more. Why should not we also want one thing only, to love Him, and to love Him more, and more, and more? Surely if we prayed only for that after which He longs so earnestly, our prayer would not wait for its answer long; and then in His eyes, and who would wish to be so in the other eyes? we should soon be like the Saints.

We conclude from all these considerations, that of the fact that God condescends intensely to desire our love, there can be no possible doubt; and we think it is more true to say that this fact, that He desires our love, is the foundation of all practical religion, than the equally certain fact that He loves us. We mean that our duties and our love flow more obviously from the one than from the other. The one comes nearer to us than the other. But as to the reason which we are to assign for this desire on the part of our beneficent Creator, we can only say that often in religion the answer to one mystery is another mystery greater than the first. We can find no better answer than this, He wishes us to love Him, because He so loves us. Upon which we are obliged forthwith to ask ourselves the further question, Why does God love us? And this must be the inquiry for the next chapter.

Meanwhile we are not at all disconcerted with the vagueness of our answer, nor with the apparently small result of our inquiry. The fact is that religious truth is always fruitful and enchanting; and God is our truest enjoyment even already upon earth; and as we shall enjoy Him in heaven, yet never comprehend Him, so it is life's greatest joy on earth to watch the operations of God and to muse upon His wonders, though their meaning is either only partially disclosed to us, or perhaps even hidden from us altogether. Oh! is any one so dead in heart, so blighted in mind and aspiration, as to be able to look all this Divine love in the face, and not be won by it to better things? Blessed, blessed God! Wonderful Father! Compassionate Creator!

This mystery of His desiring our poor love should of itself be a lifelong joy to us in our time of pilgrimage. Its puts a new face upon the world. All things glow with another light. A feeling of security comes upon us, like a gift from heaven, and wraps us round; and the cold chill goes from our heart, and the dark spots are illuminated; and we want nothing more now, nothing. Earth has nothing to give, which would not be a mere impertinence after this desire of God. Our hearts are full. We have no room for more. This desire of God solves all the problems of our inner life; for it at once calms us in our present lowness, and spurs us on to higher things, and the name of that double state, the calm and the spur,—what is it but perfection? God loves me—God desires my love. He has asked for it; He covets it, He prizes it more than I do myself! I would fain tell the poor trees, and the little birds that are roosting, and the patient beasts slumbering in the dewy grass, and the bright waters, and the wanton winds, and the clouds as they sail above me, and that white moon, and those flickering far-off stars, that God desires my love, mine, even mine! And it is true, infallibly true. O God, Thou art my God because my goods are nothing unto Thee! What shall I do? If I may not doubt this mystery, what can I do but die of love? Oh Thou, who in the world above givest us the light of glory that we may bear to see Thy beauty, give us now the strength of faith to endure these revelations of Thy love!

CHAPTER II

WHY GOD LOVES US

IF the answer to our first question, why God wishes us to love Him, only resulted in a mystery, we may be sure the answer to this second question, why God loves us, will only bring out a still greater mystery. Nevertheless, we must proceed to the discussion of it. Inquiry is more solid and more fruitful in divine things, than the most complete and satisfactory results in human sciences.

The whole creation floats, as it were, in the ocean of God's almighty love. His love is the cause of all things, and of all the conditions of all things, and it is their end and rest as well. Had it not been for His love, they never would have existed, and, were it not for His love now, they would not be one hour preserved. Love is the reading of all the riddles of nature, grace, and glory; and reprobation is practically the positive refusal on the part of the free creature to partake of the Creator's love. Love is the light of all dark mysteries, the sublime consummation of all hopes, desires, and wisdoms, and the marvellous interpretation of God. Light is not so universal as love, for love is in darkness as well as light. Life is less strong than love; for love is the victory over death, and is itself an immortal life.

If it pleased God at this moment to destroy the air, the planet would have wheeled but a few leagues eastward before it would have become the home of universal death and desolation. Myriad myriads of warm and joyous lives would have been extinguished in one inarticulate gasp of choking agony. Not only would the streets and fields have been strewn with the suffocated dead, but the birds on the wing would have fallen lifeless to the ground; the deep blue waters of the sea would not have screened their multitudinous tribes from the energy of the destroying edict. The subterranean creatures would have been found out and stifled in the crevices of the rocks, the black waters, or the winding ways beneath the ground. Earth's green vesture would be unrolled, and the fair orb would revolve in space an ugly mass of dull, discolored matter. Yet this picture of ruin is but a faint image of what would happen if God withdrew into His own self-sufficient glory, and called off that immensity of gratuitous love with which He covers all creation. For the destruction of the air would be but a material desolation. It would not invade the vast kingdoms of moral beauty, of spiritual life, of natural goodness, of infused holiness, of angelical intelligence, or of the beatitude of human souls. As far as creation is concerned, God, as it were, concentrates all His attributes into one, becomes only one perfection, and that one perfection is to us the whole of God: and it is love. "God is love," says St. John briefly; and after that, nothing more was needed to be said. He has infinite power, boundless wisdom, indescribable holiness; but to us the power, the wisdom, and the

holiness come simply in the shape of love. To us creatures His infinity, His immensity, His immutability, His eternity, are simply love, infinite, immense, immutable, eternal love.

When we proved God's desire of our love, we at the same time proved undoubtedly His love of us. Reason and revelation, science and theology, nature, grace, and glory, alike establish the infallible truth that God loves His own creatures, and loves them as only God can love. The question is why He loves us; and our first step towards an answer must be to examine the character and degree of this love. The nature of a thing is often the best explanation both of its existence and its end. Let us see what God's love of us is like.

THE DEGREES OF GOD'S LOVE

In the first place, it passes all example. We have nothing to measure it by, nothing to compare it with. The creatures which God has created, furnish us with ideas by which we can imagine creatures which He has not created. We could not have conceived of a tree, if God had not made one. But now we can imagine a tree which shall be different from any actual tree, either in size, or in foliage, or in flower, or in fruit, or in the character of its growth and outline. So also of an animal, or even of a possible world. Whether we are unable to imagine any possible thing, which shall be more than a combination of certain actual things, or a variety of them, or an excess of them, is a question which we do not touch. God gives us something to build our imagi-

nary creatures upon, because He has surrounded us with a countless variety of creatures; and we can judge of imaginary things in poetry, painting, or sculpture, according to the standard of nature. But we have no such help in understanding God's love of His creatures. It is without parallel, without similitude. It is based upon His own eternal goodness, which we do not understand.

This leads us to its next feature, that it does not resemble human love, either in kind or in degree. It does not answer to the description of a creature's love. It manifests itself in different ways. It cannot be judged by the same principles. We cannot rise to the idea of it by successive steps of greater or less human love. The ties of paternal, fraternal, conjugal affection all express truths about the Divine love; but they not only express them in a very imperfect way, they also fall infinitely short of the real truth, of the whole truth. If we throw together all the mutual love of the Angels, of which doubtless among the various choirs there are many nameless varieties, if we cast into one all the passionate fidelity and heroic loyalty and burning sentiment of all the husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors, that ever were, ever will be, or in the vast expanse of omnipotence ever can be, our total will be something inconceivably more short of the reality of God's love for us than the drop is short of the ocean, and the minute of eternity. If we multiply the same total by all the figures we can think of without losing our heads in the labyrinths of millions and billions, we shall not mend matters. When we have come to an

end we have not got the shadow of an idea of the degree of fervor with which God loves us. And then if we contrived to comprehend the degree, where should we be in our reckoning? There remains the fact that God's love of us is a different kind of love from any for which we have got a name. Oh, how it gladdens our souls to think that when we shall have been a million of years in the bosom of our Heavenly Father, we shall still be sinking down deeper and deeper in that unknown sea of love, and be no nearer the bottom of its unfathomable truth and inexhaustible delights!

This is our third feature of it, that not even a glorified soul can ever understand it. The Immaculate Mother of God at this hour is almost as ignorant of it as we are. Almost as ignorant, for there can scarcely be degrees in a matter which is infinite. The gigantic intelligence of St. Michael has been fathoming the depths of Divine love through countless cycles of revolving ages, longer far than even those seemingly interminable geological epochs which men of science claim, and he has reported no soundings yet. And still, these endless calculations are the happy science of the Blest.

Still, the saints on earth, in ardent contemplations, work this problem, which they know beforehand they shall never solve. And we, who creep upon the ground, what better can we do than bewilder ourselves in these mazes of celestial love? For we shall still be learning to love God more, still learning to wonder more at what He has done for us, and to wonder, most of all, at the nothing which we do for Him. If even they who see God, cannot com-

prehend His love, what manner of love must it necessarily be? And yet it is ours, our own possession; and God's one desire is, by hourly influxes of grace, to increase that which is already incalculable, to enrich us with an apparently unspeakable abundance of that whose least degree is beyond the science of Archangels, beyond the glory-strengthened eye of the Mother of God herself!

It is another feature of this love, that it seems so to possess God as to make Him insensible to reduplicated wrongs, and to set one attribute against another. At all costs love must be satisfied. There is nothing like God's love except God's unity. It is the whole of God. Mercy, the most exquisite, tender, delicate, susceptible mercy, must be risked by the permission of evil. That choice perfection of the Most High, His intolerably shining, unspotted, simple sanctity, must be exposed to inevitable outrage by the freedom of created wills. Only love must be satisfied. The most stupendous schemes of redemption shall seem to tax the infinity of wisdom so as to satisfy justice, provided only that the satisfaction be not made at the expense of love.

Love is the favorite. Love appears—oh these poor human words!—to stand out from the equality of the Divine perfections. Yet even love, for love's own sake, will come down from the eminence of its dignity. It will take man's love as a return for itself. It will consider itself paid by a kind of affectionate fiction. It will count that for a return which bears no resemblance to the thing to be returned, either in kind or in degree. The mutual love of God and man is truly a friendship, of which the reciprocity

is all on one side. Compared to the least fraction of God's enormous love of us, what is all the collective love He receives from Angels and from men, but as less than the least drop to the boundless sea! And yet, in the Divine exaggerations of His creative goodness, the whole magnificent machinery of a thousand worlds was a cheap price to pay for this.

Hence we may well reckon as a fifth feature of this love, that its grandeur is a trial even to the faith which finds no difficulty in the Blessed Sacrament nor even in the mystery of the Undivided Trinity. If we have had to work for God as priests, have we not found more men puzzled and tempted by the love of God than by any other article of the faith? Indeed most of the temptations against the faith, when properly analyzed, resolve themselves into temptations arising from the seeming excesses of Divine love. We might dare to say that God Himself, in spite of our daily prayer, leads us into temptation by His incredible goodness. It is the excessive love of the Incarnation and the Passion, which make men find it hard to believe those mysteries. It is the very inundation of love with which Mary is covered, which really makes her a stumbling block to proud or ill-established faith, or to inquiry which has not yet reached the strength of faith. The Blessed Sacrament is a difficulty, only because it is such an exceedingly beautiful romance of love. If God's love had not as it were constrained Him to tell us so many of His incomprehensible secrets, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity would have been less fertile of objections.

Another feature of this love is that it is eternal,

which is in itself an inexplicable mystery. As there never was a moment when God was not, in all the plenitude of His self-sufficient majesty, so there was never a moment when He did not love us. He loved us not only in the gross, as His creatures, not only as atoms in a mass, as units in a multitude, all grouped together and not taken singly. But He loved us individually. He loved us with all those distinctions and individualities which make us ourselves, and prevent our being any but ourselves.

The seventh feature of this love which God bears us, is that it is in every way worthy of Himself, and the result of His combined perfections. It would be of course an intolerable impiety to suppose the contrary. Nay rather, it is the most perfect of His perfections, His attribute of predilection, if we might dare so to speak. If it be a finite love, where is its limit? If it went to the Crucifixion, if it comes daily to the Tabernacle, who can say where it will not go, if need should be? Jesus has more than once told His Saints that He would willingly be crucified over again for each separate soul of man. Where can such love stop? If it be a love short of immense, who has ever exhausted it? Who ever will exhaust it?

Look at it in heaven at this moment—oh that we too were there!—it is rolling like boundless silver oceans into countless spirits and unnumbered souls. How Mary's sinless heart drinks in the shining and abounding waters! How the Sacred Heart of Jesus seems to embrace and appropriate the whole gracious inundation in itself! A few years, and you will be there yourself, and still the same vast flood of

Love. Ages will pass uncounted, and still the fresh tides will roll. Oh, is not this an immensity of love? O beautiful gateway of death! thou art a very triumphal arch for the souls whom Jesus has redeemed.

If His love be mutable, when did it change? Is a whole past eternity no warrant for its perseverance? Is not fidelity its badge and token, a fidelity which is like no created thing, although we call it by a human name? If it be not eternal, when did it begin, and when will it end? The day of judgment, which will be the end of so many things, will only be the beginning of a fresh abundance of this love. If it were a love less than omnipotent, could it have created worlds, could it have assumed a created nature to an uncreated Person, could it have accomplished that series of marvels required in the consecration of the Blessed Sacrament? Could it have been unhurt by the coldness of men, or unimpaired by their rebellion? Is it not a wise love? Shall we dare to say even of its excesses that they are inconsistent with faultless wisdom? Had its wisdom been at all less than inexhaustible, could it have accomplished the redemption of mankind as it has done, could it have distributed grace with such profound and unerring decision, could it have made the complicated arrangements of a vast universe testify so uniformly of itself, could it judge the world when the time shall come? Is it in any way an imperfect love? Where does it fail? What purpose does it not fulfil? To whom does it not extend? For what need is it not sufficient?

Is it an unholy love? The very thought were blasphemy. On the contrary it is the very highest ex-

pression of God's ineffable holiness. Is it not also a benignant love? a merciful love? a just love? Is it not a love which directs the whole Providence of God, and makes His absolute dominion over us our most perfect freedom? And finally, is it not its very characteristic that it should be itself our end, our reward, our consummate joy in God? Thus it is the result of His combined perfections, a sort of beautiful external parable of His incommunicable unity.

But not only is love the preacher of God's unity; it expounds the Trinity as well. . . .

Such is the love of God; such its character and its degree. This is the love He is loving us with at this very moment: a love passing all example, a love rising above all created loves, a love which even a glorified spirit cannot understand, a love which seems to govern God, a love that tries our faith from its sheer immensity, a love which is eternal, and a love which is in every way worthy of God Himself, and the result of His combined perfections. Let us pause to think. At this very moment God is loving me with all that love. "Lord! I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." Oh, what then are all things else to me? Pain or ease, sorrow or joy, failure or success, the wrongs of my fellow-creatures or their praise—what should they all be to me but matters of indifference? God loves me: now is the time to die!

THE REASONS OF GOD'S LOVE ON OUR SIDE

But we have next to seek for the reasons of this love. They must be either on our side, or on God's side, or on both. Let us examine our own side first.

The first thing which strikes us is that man is in himself nothingness. His body has been formed of the dust of the earth, and his soul has been directly created out of nothing by God Himself. Consequently we can have nothing original in us to attract this love of our Creator. Nay, the very act of our creation showed that His love for us existed before we did ourselves. Our very being was because of His love. This consideration alone would seem to settle the question of man's independent possession of any title to the love of God. We have simply nothing of our own, nothing but the disgrace of our origin. There is not a gift of our nature but, if God loves it, He is only loving what is His own, and which in the first instance came to us from His love. There can be nothing therefore in our own being to love us for, when that very being is nothing more than the effect of a preexisting love.

Moreover when God had once called us into life, our extreme littleness seems a bar against any claim to His love, founded on what we are in ourselves. We are only a speck even amidst rational creatures. What are we individually? What is our importance in our country, or even our neighborhood? What is our moral or our intellectual greatness? We are almost lost in the number of men who are now living on the earth. Our leaving it, which must happen one day, will hardly be perceived. We shall leave no gap behind us. We shall hardly want a successor, for what will there be to succeed to? And if we are mere atoms in the huge mass of men now living, what are we compared to all the multitudes of men who have ever lived, or the enormous hosts who are

yet to live before the judgment-day? And after the judgment-day, if God goes on filling the immensity of space, and the numberless orbs of the nightly heavens, with new rational creations, new subjects for the Sacred Humanity of Jesus, more Angels, or more men, or beings that shall be neither Angels nor men, we shall become imperceptible motes in the great beams of creative love. And even now there are the Angels, and who shall tell their number? For we know that multitudinousness is one peculiar magnificence of their glorious choirs. It is even said that the lowest choir, which is the least in number, far outnumbers all the men that shall have been born from Adam to the day of doom. What have we to present to the eye of our Creator but an almost indescribable insignificance?

If there is anything positive about us at all, it is our badness. To our nothingness we have contrived to add rebellion. That really is something of our own. We have thoroughly mastered with our understandings the difference between right and wrong, and have deliberately chosen the last and rejected the first. We have looked God's Commandments in the face, and then broken them. Grace has come to us with quite a sensible heat and force, and we have summoned up our power of will, and resisted it. The Holy Ghost has spoken, and we have listened, and then returned an answer in the negative. Conscience has proclaimed the rights of duty, and without so much as taking the trouble to deny the assertion, we have refused obedience to the mandate. We have looked calmly at eternal punishment, we have clearly perceived that nothing short of an

omnipotence of anger has been required for the creation of those unutterable tortures, and then for an hour of sin we have braved it all. Time after time we have put God in one scale, and some creature in the other, and then of our own will have pressed down the scale, and made the creature outweigh the Creator. We have neglected God and outraged Him also. We have at once disobeyed Him and forgotten Him. We have both ignored Him and yet have insulted Him as well. All this is our own. There is no one to share it with us. Truly we are wonderful creatures, to have done so much in so short a time, to be able indeed to do such things at all. Yet are we making out a very promising case for a title to eternal love?

We have said, there was no one to share these miserable prerogatives with us. It is true, and yet it is not true either. For think awhile. Has not Jesus at least offered to share them? There have been times when their real nature, their awful wretchedness, came home to us, and a world would have been a cheap payment to get rid of the guilty past. To be a door-keeper in the house of God seemed then an infinitely better lot than a thousand years amid the splendors of ungodliness. And Jesus came to us in one of those times. He offered to take all this horrible accumulation of rebellion and self-will, and to make it His own, and to give His sufferings for it, and to pay His Blood to ransom us from the intolerable debt of fire, which we had wilfully and scornfully incurred. And we were too glad to accept an offer of such almost fabulous love. And then in a little while, leaving all that old debt on Him,

we left His service also. We took back our rights; we reentered upon the exercise of our unhappy prerogatives; and trampling mercy under foot now, in addition to the other Divine perfections we had outraged before, we once more earned for ourselves an endless death, and preferred to the holy love of God the blackness of everlasting fire. And perhaps this process has been repeated a score of times, in our short lives, or a score of scores of times. And certainly such conduct is all our own. An Angel never had the opportunity given him of such new choice of evil. Here is the first time in which we come in sight of anything which belongs undoubtedly to ourselves as men; and it was strange indeed if such excess of guilt should be the blissful cause of such exceeding love.

But if, instead of being such quite incredible sinners, we were equal both in our faculties and our innocence to the highest Angels, should we be much better able to establish our right and title to the inestimable love of God? What can we do for God? What can we add to Him? What can we give Him, which He does not possess already, and possess to an infinite extent and with an infinite enjoyment?

Is there one of His perfections to which we could put a heightening touch, an additional beauty? Could we by any possible contribution of ours swell the overflowing ocean of His glory? Is there a little joy, however little, which we can give Him, and which is not His already? We could not even be of any real help to Him in the government of the world. If He condescended to make use of our ministrations

we should only add to the weight on the shoulder of His omnipotence, not take anything from it.

For He would have to concur to every act we did, to every movement we made. He would have actively to fill our nothingness with life, to fortify our feebleness with strength, to illuminate our darkness with His light. The most magnificent of the Angels is no help to God. On the contrary, if we may use the word, he is rather a drain upon Him. For the creature thirsts for the influx of the Creator, and the more capacious his nature the more vast are his needs, to be supplied from the undiminished plenitude of God. When God lets His creatures work for Him, it is rather that they make more work for Him to do, as children do when they pretend to help their father. It is a condescension, an honoring of the creature, the clearest proof of God's exceeding love for us. Thus though St. Michael's brightness dazzles us, while we look at it, until we gaze upon it through the many-colored veil of a creature's necessary imperfections, we can see even in him no right or title to his Creator's love, except the gifts which that love placed there first of all. But we are not St. Michael. We are not magnificent Angels. We are but the most miserable of men, relapsed sinners, even now perhaps only half repentant, with a most cowardly repentance.

If then we must judge of ourselves by human rather than angelic principles, let us apply these human measures to our actual service of our Maker. What is our service of God like? What is its worth, what its true character? Let us for a moment put aside from God the consideration that He is God.

He is our Father, our Master, our Benefactor, our fondly loving Friend. In His immense longevity He has been busy doing us good. It seems to have been His one occupation. He lived for us. We were His end. Words cannot tell the amount of self-sacrifice He has made for us. He slew an only Son to keep us out of harm. Figures could not put down the number of graces He has given and is hourly giving to us. His life will be prolonged, not for His own sake, but for ours, some more centuries, in order That He may go on and complete the sum of His prodigious benefactions. It is not easy to tell what He has been to us. We feel that we do not half know it ourselves. Suffice it to say that this ancient earth has never seen a Father like this Father, or a Master half so kind or half so like an equal, or a Benefactor more prodigal or more self-forgetting, or a Friend more ardently romantic in His attachment. And we have all this love to return. And how do we return it? A certain amount of pious feeling, a scant obedience of a few easy Commandments, a respect for His expressed wishes when they do not too much clash with our own interests, a fluctuating quantity of prayer and of thanksgiving, but which engrosses us so little that we are generally thinking of something else all the time.

This is what we do for Him in a very irregular and perfunctory kind of way. And if we ourselves were good-natured human fathers, should we be satisfied if our sons did as much for us as we do for God, and no more? If a friend of seven years' standing repaid thus our love and loyalty, should we

not think his friendship and his service almost insulting? Should we not think it so cold, so fitful, so self-seeking, so unjust, that, although charity hopes all things and believes all things, we should consider ourselves justified in saying that it would be utterly impossible, however disposed we might be to waive our rights and to stretch a point, to put a favorable construction upon the conduct of our friend?

But all the while it is God, not merely a friend and benefactor, but God whom we are thus treating, with His ten thousand other ties upon us, and His incomparably greater tenderness, and His absolutely eternal love! Oh, is it not humiliating to think of these things? But we have not yet drunk our vileness to its dregs. While we are thus abusing the long-suffering of God by our ungraceful slackness, by our injurious coldness, and by our insulting scantiness of service, we have the effrontery to persuade ourselves that we are doing some great thing for Him, that we are almost laying Him under an obligation to us, and that any one who urges upon us a higher perfection is a troublesome dreamer, who is far from doing justice to the reasonable and moderate profession of piety on which we pride ourselves. And all this to God, remembering who God is! And all this after all He has done for us, and is doing now! And all this, when we have so much of the criminal past to undo, so much lost time to make up, so much of actual rebellion to repair and expiate! Surely it was not too much to say that even on human principles our very service of God is almost insulting, our very reparations a new affront.

If they be not so, to what is it owing but to the unlimited forbearance of Him upon whose paternal love experience teaches us we can with so much security presume?

But if God is His own end, and by a sort of necessity cannot but seek His own glory in all things, it would seem as if to be like God would be a legitimate title to His love. He will look with complacency upon that which reflects Himself. Still if even on this account God loved men, it would be a reason rather on His side than on our own. Nevertheless let us see what the real truth of the matter is.

We are the contradictory of God in almost every respect. To say nothing of the finiteness and feebleness belonging to us as creatures, our moral qualities present a more fearful dissimilarity from His holiness and perfection. We are deficient in the very virtues which we are able to acquire, and for the acquisition of which He has given us special aids of grace. Nay, when He has summed up all that shall entitle us to the forgiveness of our sins, all that shall win for us the very kindness and favor which we seek from Him, into one simple precept, and told us to forgive if we would be forgiven, and to do to others as we would He, as well as they, should do to us, our corrupt nature finds the simple lesson an infinite hardship in practice. Times have been, alas! who will say those times are not now? when the world's sins have so sickened God that He has repented, immutable though He be, that He ever created man. And now what in all the world does He behold like Himself? Nothing but the grace He has planted there, like an ailing exotic in an

uncongenial soil, stunted in growth, with a few pale leaves scarcely hanging on to its boughs, flowering hardly ever, and only under great forcing heat, and bearing fruit in this climate never?

Is that the heavenly tree? Who would know it in such woful plight? Of a truth God has much to bear not to be downright offended with the grace He sees on earth, to say little of the nature there, and still less of the prolific sin. We know our own hearts far too well: and can we believe that God can look down from heaven, and see Himself reflected there! Earth has but one consolation. Truly there is something on man's side, something which is man's own, on which God's eye can rest, and love not only what it sees, but be so ravished thereby, that it will pour itself out in floods, and run over, and deluge the universe with light and loveliness, and that sight which is man's own, though it is not in man, is the Blessed Sacrament, where the patience of God securely rests its foot, and the Divine anger rests and sleeps sweetly, and wakes not to remember its errand of vindictive purity.

There is one characteristic of man which especially precludes our finding in him the reasons of God's amazing love. It is not exactly sin. It is not precisely any one of the imperfections to which as a finite being he is subject. It is rather the combined result of all his imperfections. He is characterized by meanness. When we do really great things, we fail in some little point of them. There is a flaw of meanness running across our generosity, and debasing every one of its products. Our love and hatred, our praise and blame, our anger and

our good-humor, have all got the same crack in them, this flaw of meanness. With ourselves, what is self-deceit but meanness, what is slavery to bodily comforts, what greediness at meals, what rudeness in manners, what personal vanity, what a hundred idle extravagances of self-praise in which we daily indulge, what the inexhaustible pettiness of wounded feeling, but meanness, downright meanness?

In our intercourse with others, what is lying but meanness, what are pretence, selfishness, irritability, and more than half the world's conventions, but meanness, systematized meanness? In our relations with God, what are lukewarmness, and hypocrisy, and self-righteousness, but meanness? what is venial sin but miserable meanness? Many a man, who has found it hard to hate himself, when he looked only at his sins, has found the task much easier when he had the courage to hold close to his eyes for a good long while the faithful picture of his incredible meanness. Oh, what a piercing, penetrating vision it is, running all through us with a cold sharpness, when grace lets us see how low and vile, how base and loathsome, how little and how sneaking—forgive the word, we cannot find another—we are in everything. Everybody seems so good, except ourselves; and we, oh so intolerably hateful, so ugly, so repulsive, such a burden to ourselves! And if this can be made plain to our dull, gross sight, what must it be to the clear penetration of the All-holy Majesty of God?

REASONS OF GOD'S LOVE ON HIS SIDE

But surely it is useless going on. We have doubtless by this time lost sight of all claims to love, which we might have fancied we had when we started. It is plain that the reasons for God's love of man are not at all to be found on our side, and therefore they must be on the side of God. If any truth in the world is established, this is. Certainly the extremity of our lowness may be the measure of the height of God's love, but it cannot furnish us with the reason of it. We are often tempted, when reflecting on these matters, to say shortly that God loves us because we are so peculiarly unloveable. This may do well enough for a paradox in the pulpit to strike sleepy auditors; but we must go deeper down than this when we read or meditate.

Now every one of the reasons for God's loving us being on His side, not on ours, is it not remarkable that in our service of God we should feel as if it were a bargain between two more or less equal parties, and that if we did our share the other would be held to do his? We do not at all realize the spiritual life as an intercourse where all the duty is on one side, and all the liberality on the other. Yet surely it must be so. If certain things are due to us as creatures, when once we have been created, so that God would not be God, if He did not give them, yet that we were created at all was an immense gratuitous love. If He condescends to make a covenant with us, yet it is of His own free love that He stoops to bind Himself; and again love,

eternal love, must first have created us, before we could exist to be parties to a covenant.

So that all is love. The analysis of creation resolves itself simply into love. Moreover what would become of us, if God gave us nothing but our due, or if He kept His munificence within the limits of His strict covenant? Is not His love breathing out everywhere, and breaking down our pride into humility, as the summer rain beats down the fragile flower, while we are weighing with minutest scales each ounce, and drachm, and scruple, of the miserable alloy with which we are paying Him under the sweet-sounding name of love?

So far then is clear, that all the reasons for God's love of us are to be found exclusively on His side. No reasons whatever exist on ours. It is still a further inquiry what these reasons are; and one to which we must now betake ourselves. Alas! with our puny minds it is a hopeless inquisition to search through the vast recesses of the Divine Nature to find the reasons of God's love. God Himself is love, simple love; and we may well suppose that if we might question each one of His perfections, the answer from them all would still be love. We are so sure of this that we do not anticipate any difficulty. Yet when we come to make the trial, the results are not altogether according to our expectations.

There are few of God's attributes more beautiful or more adorable than His justice. There is no justice like His, for it is founded on His own Divine nature, not on any obligations by which He is bound. Some of the Saints have had a special devotion to

His justice, and have made it in a peculiar manner the subject of their contemplations. An intelligent creature would rather be in the hands of God's justice, than at the mercy of the most loving of his fellow-creatures. The Apostle tells us that the acceptance of our contrition and the forgiveness of our sins depends upon God's justice. His distribution of the gifts of nature, grace, and glory, is the masterpiece of His justice, which alone and of itself could fill us with gladness and wonder for a whole eternity. His promises are the children of His justice, and His fidelity to them is His exercise of that most royal attribute. It is because His love is so great a love, that His justice is so perfect and so pure. His punishments even are at once magnificent to look at, yet most dreadful to endure, because of the extremity of their unalterable, and comprehensive and truthful justice. Even the vengeance of our God is a subject which love trembles to contemplate, but from which it will not turn away! His justice, moreover, even in the acceptance of our works, is a justice due to His own perfections rather than to the efforts of our misery; for what He receives from us is much more His own than ours.

And is there a sight more exalting or more affecting amid all the wonders of theology than to see the beautiful, the faultless rigor of Divine justice satisfied to its utmost demand, its enormous and most holy requirements paid in full, and its dread loveliness and majestic sternness worshipped with an equal worship, by the Precious Blood and the mysterious Passion of our Blessed Lord and

Saviour Jesus Christ, God and Man? He has hardly begun to know God who has not addicted himself, with humility and fear, his mind hushed and his heart in his hand, to the study of God's tremendous justice. But is it there that we can look for the reason of His love? Was our creation a debt of justice due to our original justice? Has our use of the gifts of nature, or our correspondence to the calls of grace, been such, that we dare to call on God to come and note it with all His justice, and pay it according to the rigor of its merits? Listen to the sweet lamentation that issues evermore from the souls of Purgatory through the breathing-places of the Church on earth,—is it not more true? “O Lord, if Thou shalt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, Lord! who shall abide it?” Of a truth we must be well clothed with the grace and justice of Jesus, before we shall dare to say with Job of old, “Let him weigh me in the balance of his justice.” Surely if justice alone were to be concerned, we should look for punishment rather than for love.

In the seventeenth century a succession of holy men were raised up in France, who were drawn by the Holy Spirit to honor with a peculiar intensity and devotion the sanctity of God, and by the same unerring instincts of grace they were led to couple with this devotion a special attraction to the spirit of the Priesthood of Jesus. Let us approach this attribute of sanctity, and see if we can find there the reason for God's exceeding love of creatures.

God is infinite holiness, because He is essential purity. Who can stand before the blaze of such a blinding light? He is holy, because the Divine

Essence is the root and fountain of all holiness. He is holy because He is the rule, the model, the exemplar of all holiness. He is holy, because He is the object of all holiness, which can be nothing else than love of God and union with Him. He is holy, because He is the principle of all holiness, inasmuch as He infuses it into Angels and men, and as He is the last end to which all their holiness is inevitably directed. He is infinitely holy, because He is infinitely loveable; and as all holiness consists in the love of God, so God's holiness consists in the love of Himself. Thus, and what an adorable mystery it is! the infinite purity of God is simply His self-love. We know not if a creature can gain a higher idea of God than is given out by this stupendous truth.

But let us suppose that we are ever so holy, how will this created holiness stand by the side of that of God? He is holy in Himself, and of Himself, holy in essence, which it is impossible for a creature to be. To no creature, says theology, can it be natural to be the son of God, to be impeccable, to have the Holy Ghost, and to see the Divine Nature. Our holiness consists in gifts gratuitously super-added to the feebleness and impossibilities of our finite nature. The holiness of God is substantial, His own very substance; ours is but a quality and an accessory, an illumination of mind and impulse of will imparted to us by Himself. God is holy infinitely, both in intensity and in extent. Whereas we have, alas! no words low enough to express the extreme littleness, the deplorable languor, the soon exhausted capacity, of our brightest and most burn-

ing holiness. The holiness of God can neither grow nor be diminished. It cannot grow, because it is already infinite. It cannot be diminished, because it is His Essence. Ours is but a speck, whose very nature, hope, and effort it is to grow. The holiness of Mary might grow for centuries with tenfold the rapidity that her vast merits grew on earth, and at the end she would be as little near the holiness of God as she is now. God's sanctity is eternal, ours but of a year or two; perhaps it began quite late in life. God's sanctity is unintelligible from its excess of purity and its depths of unspotted light; ours, alas! a fellow-creature could see through and appreciate in less than half an hour. The holiness of God is ineffably fruitful; for it is the cause which originates, preserves, sets the example, and gives the aim to all created holiness whatsoever. Ours is fruitful, too, for holiness, as such, must be fruitful: but how little have we done, how many souls have we taught to know God and to love Him? If the scandal and edification we have given were put into the scales, which would weigh down the other?

All this on the supposition that we are as holy as we might be. But we are not so. We are hardly holy at all. And knowing ourselves to be what we are, is it possible for us to conceive that infinite sanctity bade love create us out of nothing, because it was so enamored of what it foresaw we should become? The holiness of God has no necessary respect to creatures, as His mercy has; and yet, strange to say! it is this seemingly most inimitable of all His attributes, which is expressly put before us as the object of our imitation. We are to be

holy because God is holy, and perfect even as our Heavenly Father is perfect. Do we then so represent and reflect this sanctity of God, as to become the object of such exuberant affection? If it were only to God's holiness that we might appeal, should we expect to find there the reason of His love? Nay, if we had not truer views of God's equality, could we not more easily fancy omnipotent love required to hinder infinite holiness from turning away from us in displeasure and aversion? What did David mean when he said in the eighty-fifth Psalm? first of all, "Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear me, for I am needy and poor," and then, "Preserve my soul, for I am holy." He was a man after God's heart: but what manner of men are we? Yet, while he was pleading his own holiness, it was not to the holiness of God he was appealing; for he adds, "For thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild, and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee."

Is it the Divine beauty which is so in love with us miserable creatures? Yet how shall we search the unsearchable loveliness of God? One momentary flash of His beauty would separate body and soul by the vehemence of the ecstasy which it would cause. We shall need to be fortified with the mysterious strength of the light of glory, before in the robust freshness of our immortality we can lie and look upon that beauty tranquil and unscathed.

We shall see before us in living radiance, in the light of its own incomprehensibility, in the shapeliness of its own immensity, infinite light and infinite power, infinite wisdom with infinite sweetness, infinite joy and infinite glory, infinite majesty with

infinite holiness, infinite riches with an infinite sea of being; we shall behold it not only containing all real and all imaginary and all possible goods, but containing them in the most eminent and unutterable manner, and not only so, but containing them, oh, breathless exhibition of most ravishing supernal beauty! in the unity of a most transcending and majestic simplicity; and this illimitable vision is in its totality the beauty of the Divine Nature; and what we see, though we say *it*, is not a thing, but Him, a Being, Him, our Creator, Three Persons, One God.

This Beauty is God, the beautiful God! oh, how we ourselves turn to dust and ashes, nay, to loathsome death and corruption, when we think thereon! We were going to say that God has His beauty from Himself, we ours from Him; that His was illimitable, ours almost imperceptible; that His was within, ours borrowed from without; that His could neither grow nor fade, while ours is a vague, uncertain, fluctuating shadow: but is it not more true to say that we have no beauty whatsoever? O my heart! my heart! how loudly art thou telling me to stop, for, as for infinite beauty, unless it might be infinitely deceived, it could only be revolted by thy guilt and wretchedness!

Infinite wisdom must have strangely forgotten itself, if it can be in love with us for our own sakes. The most fearful thing about the Divine wisdom, and that which makes it so adorable is, that it is God's knowledge of us in Himself. He does not look out upon us, and contemplate us, like an infinitely intelligent spectator, from without. But He looks into

Himself, and sees us there, and knows us, as He knows all things, in the highest, deepest, and most ultimate causes and judges of us with a truth, the light and infallibility of which are overwhelming and irresistible. St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi examined her conscience out loud in an ecstasy, and we look upon it as a supernatural monument of delicate self-knowledge. But what is the self-knowledge of an examination of conscience, by the side of God's instantaneous, penetrating, and exhausting knowledge of us in Himself? That wisdom also is the capacious abyss in which all the manifold beauties of possible creatures, and the magnificent worship of possible worlds, revolve in order, light, and number amidst the Divine ideas. And what are we by the side of visions such as these? As the flood of the noontide sun poured cruelly upon wounded eyes, so is the regard of God's knowledge fixed sternly on the sinner's soul. Oh, the excruciating agony it must be, added to the torments of the lost, to feel how nakedly and transparently they lie in the light of God's intolerable wisdom? Must not we too have some faint shadow of that feeling? If the Sacred Humanity of Jesus did not cover our cold and nakedness and shivering poverty as with a sacred mantle, or if we fell out from beneath it into the broad day of God's unsparing wisdom, we should surely faint away with fear and terror in the sense of our abject created vileness. Can we dream then that God loves us so well, because He knows us so thoroughly? Oh, no! like little children must we hide our faces in the lap of our dearest Lord, and cry with half-stifled voice, "Turn away Thy face from my sins, and blot

out all my iniquities!" Infinite wisdom has almost taxed itself with ingenious desires to save our souls and to win our love; and what, in spite of all its curious array of graces and inventions, have we become? and how can that wisdom look upon us and be otherwise than disappointed? And what must disappointment be like in God?

That which is most like a limit to omnipotence, is the free will of man; and that which looks most like a failure in unfailing power, is the scantiness of the love which God obtains from man. We have no words to tell the power of God. We have no ideas by the help of which we can so much as approach to an honorable conception of it. What a boundless field of wild speculation possible creatures and possible worlds open out to view! Yet all this does not aid us to imagine God's unimaginable power. Possibility seems to us almost infinite, so widely does it reach, so much does it imply, so stupendous is the variety of operations within its grasp. But a Being who is not bound by impossibility, to whom the impossible is no limit whatever, to whom nothing is impossible, what can He be like? We may heap up words for years, and we get no nearer to realizing what we mean. We have no picture of it in our minds. Now if, to such terrific power, there could be great or small, should not we be so small as to be contemptible in its sight, and so it would pass us over? But if we have restrained this grand omnipotence, if we have dared to brave its might, if we have ventured to try our strength with its strength, if we have dared to throw our wills as an obstacle beneath the rushing of its impetuous wheels, should

we not expect, if God were only and simply power, that it would tread us out of life, trample us back into our darksome nothingness, and then onward, onward, onward still, upon its swift resplendent way through exhaustless miracles, uncounted worlds, and nameless fields of unimaginable glory?

God is truth, all truth, the only truth. Truth is the beauty of God, and His beauty is the plenitude of truth. Everything is what it is in the sight of God, and it is nothing else. Truth is the character of God's mind, and the perfection of His goodness. All truth in creatures is a derivation from the truth of God. Everything in the Divine ideas has a peculiar fitness and congruity which makes it worthy of Him, because it makes it truthful. God is truth, not only in Himself, absolute, unapproachable truth, but He is especially truth as He is the exemplar of creatures. Whatever is true in them, is so because it is in accordance with Him, as their rule and pattern, or, as philosophers call it, their exemplary cause. The whole truth of creation is, therefore, in its conformity to God; and whatever is not conformed to Him is a distortion, a horror, and a lie.

Yet there is, perhaps, none of the Divine excellencies which more broadly distinguish the Creator from the creature, than this of truth; none with which it is more important for us to communicate; and none whose communication is more thoroughly supernatural, or in which perseverance is more difficult. Moreover, so necessary to creation is this Divine perfection in the Creator, that all creatures might say, by instinct as well as by inspiration, Let God be true and every man a liar. But, now, if truth,

the only created truth, is likeness to God, conformity to God, a direct aiming at God, how far is there any truth in us? How far do we differ from our original, how do we vary from our pattern, how do we swerve from the straight line, and are awkward in the hands of Him who builds the heavenly Jerusalem after the model of His truth? Must not truth abhor that which is so untrue, as we know ourselves to be?

Is it not the case that, many a time in life, the Holy Ghost has wakened us up to a sense of our exceeding untruthfulness, so that we see our whole reality fading away in the darkness of hypocrisy, conceit, pretence, vainglory, intentional falsehood, half-deliberate diplomacy, circuitous insincerity, and unintended unavoidable concealments, which yet make us be all the while acting a part, and seeming to be what we are not? Oh! we feel all miserable and shameful with the uncleanness of untruth, and love to think, in the agony of our self-hatred, that, at least, the eye of God sees through and through our dishonorable disguises, and pierces with His rays of light abysses we ourselves only suspect, and do not know, of the most undignified and monstrous self-deceit. Does God love us, then, because we are so truthful?

Let us ask our question of one more attribute, and then we will conclude our search. But how shall we speak of thee, O beautiful mercy of God! It is mercy which seems, above all things, to make us understand God. While the practice of it in reality makes the creature like the Creator, it seems to us as if, when He practiced it, it made the Creator like the creature. For it has about it an appearance of sadness and of

sympathy, a pity, a self-sacrifice, a pathos, which belong to the nobility of a created nature. It makes God to be so fatherly, as if truly He sorrowed for His sons, and spoke kind words, and did gentle things, out of the exuberant affection of the pain He feels for our distresses and our needs. How shall we define this golden attribute of mercy? Is it not the one perfection which we creatures give, or seem to give, to our Creator? How could He have mercy, were it not for us? He has no sorrows that want soothing, no necessities that need supplying; for He is the ocean of interminable being. Mercy is the tranquillity of His omnipotence and the sweetness of His omnipresence; the fruit of His eternity and the companion of His immensity; the chief satisfaction of His justice; the triumph of His wisdom; and the patient perseverance of His love. Wherever we go, there is mercy: the peaceful, active, broad, deep, endless mercy of our Heavenly Father. If we work by day, we work in mercy's light; and we sleep at night in the lap of our Father's mercy. The courts of heaven gleam with its outpoured prolific beauty. Earth is covered with it, as the waters cover the bed of the stormy sea. Purgatory is, as it were, its own separate creation; and is lighted by its gentle moonlight, gleaming there soft and silvery through night and day. Even the realm of hopeless exile is less palpably dark than it would be, did not some excesses of mercy's light enter even there.

What but mercy could have divined the misery of non-existence, and then have called in omnipotence and love to build a universe, and fill it full of life? This was its first essay. Yet, as if, in the very in-

stant of peopling nothingness with angelic and with human life, it outstripped itself, and was not content with its mighty work, it raised its creation to a state of grace simultaneously with its state of nature. Then, when the human race perversely fell from this supernatural order, and drifted away from God, to deluge the world with grace was not enough for mercy. It brought down from heaven the Person of the Eternal Word, and united it to human nature, that so it might redeem the world with the marvels, almost incredible marvels, of a truly Divine Redemption.

Anything, therefore, might be asked of mercy. It might be asked to furnish the reasons of the Creator's love. Yet, if we may say so, mercy seems to be but one method of His love. His love is, somehow, wider than His mercy, although His mercy is simply infinite. Mercy is one of His perfections, while love is the harmony of all. Mercy does not tire of us, does not despair of us, does not give over its pursuit of us, takes no offense, repays evil with good, and is the ubiquitous minister of the Precious Blood of Jesus. But love seems more than this. Love fixes upon each of us, individualizes us, is something personal. Love is just and equitable no less than kind, is wise as well as powerful. Love is tantamount to the whole of God, and is coextensive with Him. Mercy is something by itself. Love is the perfection of the Uncreated in Himself. Mercy is the character of the Creator. Mercy pities, spares, makes allowances, condescends. But love rewards, honors, elevates, equalizes with itself. The idea of predilection does not enter into mercy, whereas, it is the secret

life of love. We do not know; but it does not seem as if mercy quite answered the question we are asking. And yet, if mercy is not the reason of God's love, where else shall we find it in His infinity?

But it is time to close. We have seen with what a love it is that God loves us, and we have asked why it is He loves us. It must be for reasons to be found either on man's side or on God's side. Not on man's side; for he in himself is nothingness; he is but a speck even amid rational creations. To his nothingness he has added rebellion, and in no way can he add anything to God. Even on human principles his very service of God is almost insulting. He is the contradictory of God in all things, and if he is characterized by any one thing rather than another, it is by pusillanimity and meanness. We have therefore had to look for the reason on God's side; and looking at His chief perfections, one after another, we have hardly found what we were seeking. Infinite justice would lead Him to punish us. Infinite sanctity would turn away from us in displeasure. Infinite beauty would be revolted, and infinite wisdom be disappointed. Infinite power would regard us as contemptible and pass us over. Infinite truth would contemplate us as an hypocrisy and a lie. Finally, mercy all but infinite would tire of us, and it is just the infinity of mercy which does not tire. But love is something more than not being tired.

Why then does God love us? We must answer, Because He created us. This then would make mercy the reason of His love. But why did He create us? Because He loved us. We are entangled in this circle, and do not see how to escape from it.

But it is a fair prison. We can rest in it, while we are on earth; and if we are never to know anything more, then we will make our home in it for eternity. Who would tire of such captivity?

God loves us because He has created us. What sort of a feeling is it which the peculiarity of having created some one out of nothing would give us? Who can tell? We suppose it to be a feeling which contains in itself all the grounds of all earthly loves, such as paternal, fraternal, conjugal, and filial; and of all angelic loves besides, of which we know nothing. We suppose it to contain them all, not only in an infinite degree, but also in the most inconceivably eminent manner, and further than that, with an adorable simplicity which belongs only to the Divine Nature. But when we have imagined all this, we see that something remains over and above in a Creator's love, which we cannot explain; but which we must suppose to be a feeling arising out of His having created us out of nothing, and which is what it is, because He is what He is, the infinitely blessed God. This then is our answer: He loves us because He has created us. Certainly the mystery does not fill our minds with light; at least not with such light as we can communicate; but, which is far more, it sets our hearts on fire.

CHAPTER III

OUR MEANS OF LOVING GOD

IT has often been the benevolent amusement of sages and philanthropists to draw pictures of imaginary republics. Sometimes they have placed their ideal citizens in positions unusually favorable for the exercise of the highest virtues, at other times they have represented the whole duty and happiness of men to consist in some one virtue, as patriotism or simplicity, or again these legislators have delivered their imaginary people from all the restraints and conventions of civilization, in order that the development of their liberty might take its own direction and have the fullest play. So we also might amuse ourselves by conceiving some possible imaginary world. We might suppose that, when the day of doom is over, God's creative love will move to some other planet of our system, and people it with rational creatures, to serve Him and to glorify His Name. We might picture to ourselves these creatures as neither Angels nor men; but of some different species, such as God knows how to fashion.

They might preserve their original integrity, and neither fall partially, as the Angels did, nor the whole race, as was the unhappy fortune of man.

They would of course be the subjects of Jesus, because He is the head and first-born of all creatures. But their way of worshipping Him might be quite different from ours. They might also be under different material laws; and different powers of mind and will might involve varieties of moral obligation very different from those which belong to us. They might thus be another variety in the magnificence of Christ's Church. They might be higher than Angels, or lower than men, or between the two. They would be least likely to be lower than men, because then our Blessed Lord would not have carried His condescension to the uttermost. When we had fully pictured to ourselves this possible world, we might curiously descend into every conceivable ramification of that new planetary life, and see what the behavior of these creatures would be like.

We might watch them in the arrangements of their social system, in the complications of their public life, or in the minute habits of their domestic privacy. We might picture to ourselves their trades and professions, their standards of the beautiful, their arts and sciences, their philosophy and literature, their rules of criticism, their measures of praise or blame. We might imagine war to be an impossibility to their nature, their political revolutions to be without sin, their sufferings not to be penalties of a past fault, or solitude to be to them the same sort of normal state which society is to us. When we had completed our picture, this possible world would have some kind of likeness to our own, although it would be so very different, partly because God would be its Creator, and partly because

we could not paint the picture without copying in some degree from ourselves.

This imaginary world would probably, however, differ less from ours, than ours would differ from itself, if the precept of the love of God were fully kept by all the inhabitants of the world. Let us try now to put a picture of this before ourselves. It need not be altogether imaginary, and it may actually help to realize itself. Every man and woman in the world, and every child as soon as it comes to the use of reason, is bound by the golden chains of that delightful precept. Christian or Jew, Mahometan or idolater, all souls, in all their degrees of darkness and of light, are under the bright shadow of that universal Commandment. Nothing can be more reasonable. Every creature was created by God for God's own sake. Hence he has nothing to do but God's work, nothing to seek but God's glory; and that work and that glory God has been pleased to repose in love, in the easy service of a rational and yet supernatural love. Neither has He left us in uncertainty with respect to the extent of the precept. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength." St. Matthew tells us that a doctor of the law said to Jesus, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment." Where Moses says, "with thy whole strength," St. Matthew says, "with thy whole

mind." Thus God is solemnly declared to be the object of our love, which love is to be distinguished by two characteristics. It is to be universal: heart, soul, mind, and strength are to go to it. It is to be undivided: for it claims the whole heart, the whole soul, the whole mind, the whole strength.

Putting it then at the lowest, and setting aside such heroic manifestations of love as are either the ornaments of a devout piety or the counsels of a high perfection, what is every one bound to by this precept, as soon as he attains the use of reason? He is bound to love God better than anything else: he is bound to put a higher value upon God than anything else: he is bound to obey all the will of God about him as far as he knows it: and he is bound, at least in general intention, to direct all his actions to the glory of God. In his heart nothing can be allowed to come into competition with God.

His soul must be engrossed by nothing short of God. His mind must esteem nothing at all in comparison with God; and all his strength must be at God's service in a way in which it is not at the service of anything else. Whatever he falls short of all this from the first day of reason's dawn to the closing hour of life, he must repair with a loving sorrow based on God's eternal goodness. This is of simple obligation to the whole world, through the populous breadth of Asia, in the crowded coasts and vast cities of Europe, across Africa from one ocean to the other, from the northernmost dwelling of America to where its extreme headlands face the antarctic ice, and in every island of the sea and palm-crowned coral reef, both great and small. It is as much of

obligation, more so if it could be more, as to do no murder. Not a creature of God ever has entered or ever will enter into His eternal joy, who has not kept this precept, or by sorrow won his forgiveness for the breach, except the baptized infants of the Catholic Church.

Many considerations may be more startling than this: but we know of none which are more profoundly serious. For we must bear in mind that we are speaking, not of counsel, but of commandment, not of perfection but of obligation, not of possibilities, but of necessities. It is the very alphabet of our religion, the starting point of our catechism, the first principle of salvation; and reason claims to join with revelation in imposing this universal precept on the souls of men.

HOW CHANGED THE WORLD, IF IT LOVED GOD!

Does the world keep it? Let us see what it would be like if it did keep it. We are to suppose that all the men, women, and children over seven, throughout the earth, loved God always, God supremely, and God with an undivided heart. The world might then be called a world of undivided hearts. It would be the peculiarity of this planet, of this portion of God's creation, of this fair moonlit garden third in order from the sun: it would be its peculiarity that it was a living world of loving human hearts, over which God reigned supreme with an empire of undivided love. This, we must use human words, is what God intended, what God expected, the paradise and court He had prepared for His Incarnate Son.

And if it were so, would it be less unlike the real world than that imaginary possible world which we were picturing to ourselves just now?

If all classes in their places, and all minds in their measure and degree, were loving God according to the precept, wonderful results would follow. To realize them we should have to penetrate into every corner of the world, into every secret sanctuary of life, and watch the revolution which Divine love would bring about. No one thing would be the same. The world would not be like a world of Saints, because we are not supposing heroic, austere, self-sacrificing love, but only the love of the common precept. Voluntary suffering is part of the idea of the Incarnation, or flows from it: for Christian austerity is a form of love, which has little in common with the proud expiating penance of the Hindoo, except the look. It would not be like an immense monastery: for all men would be in the world, not leaving the world; and the world would be a means of loving God, not a hindrance which our courage must vanquish, or a snare from which our prudence is fain to fly. There would be no wickedness to make a hell on earth: yet earth could not be heaven, because there would be no vision of God. It would be more like Purgatory than anything else. For the love of God would not hinder suffering, though it would almost abolish sorrow. But it would make all men pine very eagerly and very patiently to love God more, and to see Him whom they already love so much. The whole earth would be one scene of religion, not of religious enthusiasm or the romance of sanctity, but of active, practical, exclusive, busi-

ness-like religion. Common sense would be engrossed with religious duties. Each man would be unimpassionately possessed with religion, as if it were his ruling passion, working powerfully under control. Yet all this would be within the bounds of the common precept, not like the sublime preternatural lives of the canonized Saints. Remember—we are not speaking of what is possible, so much as of what is conceivable.

What a change would come over the political world! The love of God would be the honest and obvious and exclusive end of all States and nations. Diplomacy would fade away into mutual counsel for God's glory, and having lost all its mystery, it would lose all its falsehood too. Commercial treaties, questions of boundaries, the rights of intervention, —what a new character the love of God would infuse into as many of these things as it still allowed to live! The mercantile world, how calm and indifferent it would become! No one would make haste to be rich. Except food and raiment and ordinary comforts, we say comforts because, on the hypothesis, men would not be Saints, all else of life would be prayer and praise and works of mercy, with confession perhaps for venial sins. The literature of these men would give forth nothing but what was chaste and true, ennobling and full of faith. A daily newspaper, such as we are acquainted with, would be a blissful impossibility. We fear that antiquarian questions might be pursued with somewhat less of zest than now, and possibly fewer sacrifices of life be made to advance the interests of science. A most vigorous reality would enter into and animate every-

thing. Many professions would change their characters; many more would cease to exist. Systems of education would be greatly modified; and prisons and police would disappear from the land. Sessions of Parliament would be very short, and little would be said, and very much be done. The tone of conversation would be changed, and a sort of strange tranquillity would come over the race of men, with which energy would not be necessarily incompatible, but under which our energy would be so different from what it is now, that we cannot at all adequately represent it to ourselves.

But, in return for this apparent dulness, which might affect some of the things on which our activity at present fastens, by morbid predilection, how much the world would gain in other ways! How magnificent would be the controversies of such a world! The peace and light of the love of God would elevate the intellect a thousand-fold. The products of the human mind would be incalculably more profound and beautiful than now, and the amount of intellectual activity would be immeasurably increased, while a larger proportion of it also would be employed on the higher branches of mental philosophy. What elevation, too, and gigantic progress, would the physical sciences probably receive, as well from the greater cultivation of mental philosophy, as from the reach and grasp of intelligence which more abundant grace would restore to us!

The sciences of beauty, too, how much more beautiful and abundant would they come, when they were called to minister to the sanctuary of God, and not to the mere material indulgences of men! Who can

believe we should not know much more of nature, and of its mysterious properties, if we knew more of Him who originated them all, and love would teach us more of Him? The amount of private happiness would be likewise augmented beyond all calculation. All other loves would be, as it were, glorified by the love of God; and would be poured out of each human heart with an intensity and an abundance to which sin is now a complete impediment.

The moral perfections of our nature would bring forth exquisite and generous fruits, of which we have at present but rare instances, at distant intervals. But, above and beyond all this, there would be a world of supernatural actions, flowing in incessant streams from every heart, uniting us to God, purifying our commonest intentions, and transforming us, day by day, into an excellence far beyond ourselves. What must the precept be whose common observance would do so much as this? And yet this precept actually lies upon each one of us at this moment, with the most inevitable universality and the most stringent obligation! Surely we must see to this.

Hitherto, we have been engaged in two very elementary inquiries: Why does God wish us to love Him? and, Why does He love us? If God desires us to love Him, there must be some sort of love with which it is possible and right to love Him. This is obvious. Yet, in the course of our investigations, we have come across so much in ourselves that is little and vile and mean, that we may be tempted to think that we cannot love God with any real or acceptable love. It is just here that God meets our

self-abjection, guards it from excess, and hinders its doing us any injury, by laying upon us the absolute and essential precept of loving Him with our whole heart and soul and mind and strength. He enables us to fulfil this Commandment, by disclosing to us a beautiful variety of grounds or motives for our love; and He makes the fulfilment easy, by the many kinds of love of which he has made our souls capable, and which suit the different temperaments of men. So, what we have to do now, is to examine our grounds for loving God, and then the various kinds of love with which it is happily in our power to love our most merciful Creator.

THE GROUNDS FOR OUR LOVE OF GOD

We must observe, first of all, that the love which is required of us by the precept, is a personal love. None else will satisfy. It is not the love of the approbation of conscience, or of the self-rewarding sense of duty, or of the loveliness of virtue, or of the immensity of our recompense, or of the attraction which a well-ordered mind has to rectitude and propriety. It is a personal love, and must be characterized by the warmth, the generosity, the intimacy, the dominion, and all the peculiar life which belongs to a personal love, as distinguished from the love of a thing or of a place. It is the love of a Being, of Three Divine Persons, of God. He reveals Himself to us in various affectionate relationships, so as to make our love more intensely personal, more like a loyalty and a devotion, and, at the same time, to adapt it better to our human nature.

But when we return the love of another, it very much concerns us to know what kind and amount of love it is which we have to return. At the risk of repetition, we must, therefore, briefly sum up the love of God to man, as theology puts it before us. God's love of His creatures is not the fruit of His mercy, or of any of the Divine Perfections by themselves. His love of us is part of His natural goodness; and His natural goodness is simply the excellence of His Divine Nature, considered in itself.

God's goodness, we are taught in the Catholic schools, is threefold. He is good by reason of the perfection of His Nature, and this is His natural goodness. He is good also by reason of His sanctity, and this is His moral goodness. He is good also by reason of His beneficence, which is called His benignity. But, in reality, this last goodness is simply a part of the first, a necessary consequence of the perfection of His Nature, of His natural goodness; so that love of creatures, or the Divine benignity, is part of the perfection of the Divine Nature. How unspeakable, therefore, is the value of the love of God! how transcending the dignity with which it invests the poor helpless creature! and how completely does the origin of His love of us, deep down in the primal fountains of the Godhead, simplify Him, and all His condescensions, and His gifts, and His justice, and His anger, to pure and simple love!

Creation, if we may say so, is perhaps only in its infancy; and as God seems to have an inconceivable love of order, and He, to whom there is no succession, appears to delight in doing things successively in realms of time and space, so, when the doom has

closed the probation of the family of man, other creatures may succeed, other natures people material worlds, or immaterial homes of spiritual beauty; and so God may go on in His fertile benignity for evermore. I cannot look at the starry skies, but this thought comes to my mind like a belief.

There may be rational creatures lower than man, though it certainly is very difficult to conceive of them. But even our limited capacities can imagine a perpetual efflux of rational creations higher than man in almost numberless degrees. Thus creation is God doing freely, what in the Generation of the Son and the Procession of the Holy Ghost He does necessarily. The natural goodness of God, which is defined to be the excellence of the Divine Nature, is the single explanation of all His operations, whether within Himself or without. So that the same love which evermore “produces” in God, as theologians speak, the Holy Trinity, made of its own free will both men and Angels, and cherishes them with an eternal compassion. What a view of creation does not this open out before us! How is it we can ever think of anything but God? Oh, how more than royal is the origin of our immortal souls, and in what vast destinies does Divine love intend that they should expatiate for evermore! Earth grows more and more like a speck as our thoughts ascend: our affections detach themselves from it more and more. As life goes on, and life and grace together draw us nearer to God, earth, in spite of all its affectionate memorials, becomes only a pretty planet, and nothing more: but oh! why is it we let slow time do the work which swift grace would so much better do?

But this account of God's love of creatures does by no means include all that is to be said of His love of man. The creation of Angels is incomparably more magnificent than the creation of men. Men are all of one species. The diversities of the Angels are no doubt specific. Some have thought that as Angels do not produce each other, like the fruitful generations of men, each Angel must be a species himself.

Others consider, for reasons this is not the place to enter into, that each choir consists of three species, which in the nine choirs of the three hierarchies would make twenty-seven species. None would doubt but that the hierarchies and even the choirs must differ from each other specifically. Nay, to us we confess it seems unlikely that earth with its infinite variety of beasts and birds, of insects and fishes, should outdo in this peculiar kind of magnificence, namely, the numberlessness of species, the great angelic world; and if the specific differences of the Angels are more simple than those of earth, they would be all the more striking because of their simplicity. Yet in spite of the superiority of the angelic world, and because perhaps we are less acquainted with its peculiar prerogatives, men seem to have many indubitable preeminences above the Angels. The Angels imitate the virginity of the Most Holy Trinity without its fruitfulness. Man shares in the fruitfulness of God; and Mary, a pure daughter of man and whose nature is merely human, shares at once the fruitfulness and the virginity of God, and, as His Mother, rules the Angels with queenly supremacy in heaven. This pretty planet was the scene of the Incarnation and the Crucifixion

of the Son of God. He took man's nature upon Him, not that of Angels. He had a human Mother, a human soul, a human body. He spoke human language, and had human thoughts. He had human ways about Him, human habits, gestures, peculiarities, and even infirmities. Furthermore, when the Angels fell, He held out no hand to check them as they went down the frightful abyss. Man He forgives not once, or twice, or seventy times seven times, but many times a day, and all day long.

He stands in a different relation to man, and man to Him. His love of man comes out of the same natural goodness, which gives forth His love of the Angels. But His love of us is a different sort of love. His love of us seems to contain more than His love of them. At least it has certain peculiarities proper to itself, a fondness, a clinging to us, a patience with us, a pursuit of us, an attraction to us, which the pardon of the Fall and the mystery of the Incarnation do nothing but exemplify. Whence this predilection for the human race? Whence this preference on the part of the Divine Nature of human nature over the angelic? Is it because we are so little and so low? Is it because the Divine Nature in yearning to communicate itself, yearned to do so to the uttermost, was not content short of the lowest point of the rational creation, and that the depth of its abasement was the measure of its gladness and its love? If so, new creations will be higher than man, not lower: lower than the Angels, God's eldest born, but higher than that lowest step in the scale of intellectual creations, whereon the Incarnate Word has taken His stand that He may embrace all creations

beneath His Headship, and cement all of them together, the highest with the lowest, as one dominion pertaining to the Unity of God.

RELATIONS ON WHICH OUR LOVE OF GOD RESTS

Such is the only picture that we, after trial, have been able theologically to make to ourselves of the love of God for man. It is this enormous love which it is our duty to return. It is not a matter of choice, or of perfection. It is a question of precept and obligation. It is a Commandment, which we shall be lost eternally if we do not endeavor to fulfil. Our next step, therefore, must be to inquire upon what feelings of our human nature God has engrafted the possibility of our loving Him, in what channels He has bidden that love to run, what motives are to actuate it, on what relationships to Him it is to establish itself. For it will be found that God is so essentially good that whatever position He takes up with regard to us is a new right and title to our love.

We do not say that those who are lost will love Him, but even in their case His mercy has a right to love, both because punishment was so long delayed, and because it is now inflicted with so much less severity than they have both merited and could be supernaturally strengthened to endure. But in our case, whose account is mercifully not yet closed, it is simply true that every relation in which God stands to us furnishes us with new and constraining motives to love Him with a fresh and daily beginning love.

First of all, we are God's subjects. There are

none of us who desire to question His dominion. We should be simply ruined, annihilated, if we were not in His care and keeping. Obedience to Him is safer and happier for us than any liberty of which we could dream. He is our king, and never monarch had so many claims to enthusiastic popularity as He. His rule over us is the gentlest we can conceive. It hardly makes itself felt at all. His omnipresence is like the pressure of the air, needful to health and life, yet imperceptible. His government is one of love. His very penalties we have to wring from Him by repeated treasons, and when they come they are so disguised in mercy, that it is hard to discern between chastisement and love. His facility in pardoning is something beyond compare. He seems to compromise His own regal dignity by the profuse liberality with which He uses His prerogative of mercy. He pardons not only after the nervousness of trial and the ignominy of conviction, but He pardons us without mentioning it, without boasting of it, without warning us, without getting the credit of pardoning, often as in Baptism, and with forgotten sins, without even our acknowledgment of guilt. Often He seems to forgive before the offence is complete. We sin, half knowing we shall be forgiven. As to the consequences of our sins to others, He hardly ever lays on us the responsibility of attending to them. He charges His own administration with that burden, which of a truth requires a love, a wisdom, and a power which He alone possesses. No earthly king was ever like Him in His Providence over His subjects. No angelic monarch could come near Him in this beautiful perfection. Every want is foreseen.

The vast complications both of nature and of grace fit close to the individual life, shield it from every danger, penetrate it with a balm and sweetness which give vigor and delight, and make each man feel as if the world were made for him alone, and as if he were rather the last end of God than God the last end to him. In the exercise of His royalty, all is equable, timely, harmonious, pliant; nothing harsh, sudden, abrupt, disconcerting, or domineering. Surely then, simply as His subjects, we are bound to a loyalty and love as warm, and generous, and faithful, as it is easy, ennobling and delightful.

But we are His servants also. He is our master as well as our king. All servitude is full of motives of humility. Servants, when they forget that they are servants, cease that moment to be good servants. Yet, if we thought and felt aright, presumption would be more likely than abjection to grow upon the thought that we are in the service of our Maker. The annals of history give us many beautiful examples of the attachment which a noble-minded servant can have for his earthly master; and the memorials of private life are full of them all the year round. But what is it which makes a master so justly dear to a good servant? It is his considerateness. And who is so considerate as God?

Wonderful mystery! see how God always shows by His manner to us His remembrance of our little services, a forgetfulness of our slovenly shortcomings, an affectionate exaggerated satisfaction with what we do, and at the worst a look only of wondering wounded feeling, when disgrace, reproof, or chastisement would better have fitted our misdeeds!

He never lets us be oppressed with work. He never disregards our fatigue. He cheers us under failure. It is, if we must say it, almost the fault of His easy kindness that we are apt to forget ourselves, to play the master, and to wonder when He does not wait on us and serve, though of a truth He seldom fails to change places with us when we want it. His forbearance is one incessant miracle. We should not keep a servant a month who treated us as we treat Him. Awkward, ungracious, reluctant, it is thus we always meet the courtesies of His abundant love, which vouchsafes to treat us on equal terms, lest even the look of condescension should wound the silly susceptibilities of our childish pride. As to wages, both those He has bound Himself to give, and those which come in the shape of frequent gifts, and perquisites unspecified, the bounty of an earthly master is to His munificence as the poverty of the creature is to the wealth of the Creator. Who would not rather be the servant of such a Master, than have a whole world left to himself and to the liberty of his disposal? Who would care to have creation for his property, when he may have the Creator for his own?

God is our Friend. It requires an act of faith, and not a little act, to say so. But so it is; the Infinite, the Omnipotent, the All-holy is our bosom friend. We doubt if any human friendship ever really lasted the whole of two mutual lives. Few men are habitually sincere even with the few whom they love extremely. Fewer still trust their friends with a perfectly confiding trust. Nay, friendship shows itself in a morbid readiness to take offence, in petty

diplomacies to find out if injurious suspicions are true, in proud silences which will not ask for explanations, or in childish breaches made for the childish excitement of reconciliations. The truth is, friendship is a romance, that has been written and spoken a thousand times among men, but never acted, unless in a dramatic way.

Thus we pray proverbially to be saved from our friends, and we say that a man who has many acquaintances, and few friends, is at once the happiest and the safest of mankind. There have hardly been a dozen friendships since the time of Jonathan and David, which could bear the weight of an awkward-looking circumstance, or a decently attested report. And friendship at its height, in the fervor of its fever-fit, what is it but a tyranny? Our friends think themselves gods, not men, and us their instruments, the profitable implements of their pleasure, their ambition, and their will. Friendship is not consecrated by a Sacrament as marriage is. Yet we must have a friend. We shrink from unbefriended solitude. But there is no real friend but God. He is in His own world almost the solitary example of the beauty of fidelity. See what a friend He is! He acts as if He thinks better of us than we think even of ourselves. He can suspect nothing; for He is God. He forgives offences as fast as we commit them, and appears to forget as soon as He has forgiven. His love is always as fresh to us as it was at the beginning. And He keeps plighting His friendship with us by presents, whose exuberant variety never tires, while their magnificence and exceeding price outstrip the fondest ex-

pectation, and the grace with which they are conferred removes from the sense of obligation all the feeling of oppression, and conduces rather to the equal familiarity of love. Whenever we will we can be friends with God, and He gives Himself up to His friends with such a romantic exclusiveness, that we feel as if He belonged to us alone, and that all of Him was ours.

God is our Father also, and we are the children of His predilection. Truants and prodigals, no longer worthy to be called His sons, and yet still His heirs, still the objects of His most lavish paternal tenderness. Did ever mother yearn over the cradle of her first-born, as He has yearned over us? Did ever father make his children's sorrows more his own than God has done, or yet leave to them so generously untaxed, and untithed, the treasures that were theirs? Did ever parental love remain true love, and yet punish so infrequently as He, or when it punished, did it with so light a hand or with a sorrow more reluctant? Can Divine Love quite exculpate itself from the charge of having spoiled us by its indulgence? Did ever father so consistently or with such grave affection win his children to repentance by the sorrow that He showed and by the increased kindness of his manner, as God has melted our hard hearts and drawn us, humbled yet doubly loving, to His knees for pardon? Does not each chastisement seem worth far more than the pain it gives, by the increase of love and the new inventions of His favor with which He follows it? Oh, who is such a Father as God is! The Eternal Father, the Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ, the Father of His creatures, the Father from whom all fatherhood is named in heaven and on earth! When we think of Him we forget the love of our earthly fathers; for they hardly look like fathers by the side of Him.

He is our Creator also, and we are His creatures, the least and lowest of those who can glorify Him with a reasonable worship, and yet whom He has loved above the Angels, and chosen to be nigher to Himself. Here we have no earthly term of comparison whereby to judge of His surpassing love. He has chosen us; and choice is the highest act of love. He chose us when as yet we lay in the bosom of the great void, distinguishable only to the piercing eye of His preference and love. He chose us rather than others. He had a special love for something we by grace might be, and which others could not be or would not be. It was His first choice of us. It was eternal. Our likeness lived in the Divine Mind from everlasting, and was cherished there with infinite complacency. He prepared a fortune for us, marked out a life, measured our sorrows to us with wise love, and tempered our joys so that they might not be an injury. He gave us a work, clothed us with a vocation, and destined for us a particular crown and place in heaven. We cannot name the thing which is bright and good within us, nor the thing which is attractive and delectable without us, but it comes from our creation. We have to do with it, as being the creatures of the infinitely benignant God. All we are or have is His, together with all we are capable of being and having. That we are not imprisoned in perdition at this moment

is simply an interference of His goodness. Our creation is our share of the infinite goodness of God. What should we be without it? Can any love of ours be otherwise than a poor return for such a love as His?

But we are not only God's creatures; we are His elect as well. He made as it were a second choice of us in Jesus Christ. He foresaw our fall. He beheld not only what Adam's fall entailed upon us, but He saw our own actual sins and guilt. He did not exaggerate our shame, but He knew it as not all men and Angels together could have known it. He penetrated its unbearable corruption. He laid its loathsomeness all bare before His eye. It was incredible. Such graces slighted, such inspirations neglected, such Sacraments profaned, and with a perversity, a frequency, an ingenuity of aggravating circumstances, so great that perhaps, if we saw the hideous vision all in one, we should fall back and die. Nevertheless it was not enough to repel His electing love. He chose us to be bathed in the Precious Blood of His Incarnate Son. He elected us to a magnificent inheritance of grace, and to the royalties of His Holy Church. By virtue of this election He gave us the gift of faith, and threw open to us the golden gates of the overflowing and joyous Sacraments. By His first election He chose us out of nothing to have life: by His second, out of darkness to have light. Here again His benignity outstrips all the comparisons of earthly love. When we think who it is that elected us, who we are that He elected, what He gives us through this election, the way in which He gives it, and the end for which

He has elected us, we shall acknowledge that His election of us is a tie to be repaid, and even then what payment is it? with all the fervor and fidelity of lifelong love. For wherefore was it that He chose us? He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight, in love!

Can more be said? Yes! there is still another tie which binds us fast to God. It is the end of what creation was the beginning; it is the consummation of God's eternal choice. It is the marriage of our souls with Him. We are His spouses, as well as His creatures and His elect. Indeed we are His spouses, because we are His creatures and His elect. But how can we tell wherein the peculiarity of that intimate union consists? When the Saints are betrothed to God, it is by operations of grace so magnificent, by supernatural mysteries so transcendent, that the language in which they are related seems unreal and inflated; and if such be the espousals on earth, what will the marriage be in heaven? Oh! who shall dare to picture the interior caresses which the soul receives from Him who loved it eternally, and chose it out of nothing in a rapture of creative love? Who shall dare to fasten in ungainly human words the sort of inexpressible equality with God which the soul enjoys, or her unspeakable community of goods with Him?

And wherefore does He use the word *spouse*, but to express this glorious unity? Marriage was made a figure of the unity of God, and a shadow of Christ's union with His Church. Its love was to supersede all other ties. It was to obliterate the father's and

the mother's home from the young wife's heart. It was to ride conqueror over the fond mother's idolatry for her first-born. Yet all this is the faintest of shadows, the feeblest of figures, to set forth the union of the soul with God! How shall we love Him as we ought? Rather the question should be, Can we love Him at all with anything worthy of the name of love? May we even try to love Him who has loved us with such an overwhelming love? Must not our only love be speechless fear? No! for it is the law of all creation, the beautiful, benignant law, the unexpected, the incredible Commandment,—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole soul, with thy whole heart, with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength!”

WONDERS OF GOD'S LOVE

Man's imagination can fly far, and picture the wildest pictures to itself. But now let it loose to ride upon the winds of heaven, to search the heights and the depths, to dream the most marvellous dreams, and to conceive the most impossible combinations. Can it picture to itself, can it, however dimly and remotely, divine a greater, a more wonderful, a more various, a more perfect love, consistent with the liberty of the creature, than the love which God has shown and is daily showing to the sons of men? Short of His laying violent hands upon our freedom, and carrying us off to heaven by force, and then doing fresh violence to our nature, and making it endure and rejoice in the Vision of God, which without holiness would be intolerable to

us,—short of this, which would be power rather than love, can we imagine any salvation more complete or more abundant than that with which God has rescued man?

Count up all that God has done for yourself. There is your eternal predestination, and the creative love which called you out of nothing; there is your rational and immortal soul, with its beautiful dower of gifts; there is your marvellous body, with its senses, which is one day to be transformed into surpassing loveliness, while every sense with its glorified capacities will pour into the soul such floods of thrilling and exquisite delights, as it will require the strength of immortality to bear; there is the whole material world, made for your intellectual or physical enjoyment or support, so vast and glorious, that a little knowledge of one of its least departments, its minerals, for example, or its plants, makes a man famous among his fellows; there is the guardianship of bright and holy Angels; there is your election in Christ, by which you now enjoy the faith and Sacraments; there is the giving up by God of His only Son, to take your nature upon Him, to suffer and to die, to redeem you from your sins; there is the gift of His Precious Blood and of His renewed forgiveness, conferred upon you ten thousand times ten thousand times, since you were seven years old, nay, from the very first hour of your regeneration; there is His preservation of you, which is simply the unbroken continuity of your creation, requiring, every moment of day and night, of time and of an eternity to follow, as much influx from the Most High, as was needed to

call your soul out of nothing at the first; there are all the special helps, the wisely adapted graces, and the fresh arrangements of Divine tenderness, which are waiting, ready for the hour when you shall come to die; there is the indwelling of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity by grace within your soul; and, finally, there is your immeasurable reward, which is no gift of God, no immense collection of created pleasures, no multiplication by millions of the highest human and angelic joys, but God, the living God Himself. So that, strictly speaking, as a theologian says, it is not simply God who is the end of man, but God possessed, God by an ineffable communication of Himself become our own, our property, and our enjoyment.

In this catalogue of the demonstrations of love, there are many things so great and so utterly Divine, that the unassisted intelligence of the highest Angel would never have suspected them. Yet, when once the Incarnation was revealed, many imaginations might have been based thereon. We do not know if we could have ventured to dream of an Incarnation in humility and shame, in poverty and hiddenness, unless we had been told it. But if our dearest Lord had lived on earth His three-and-thirty years, and then gone away, we think we might have conceived some possible extensions of His love. We might have thought it would have been an additional tenderness if He had remained on earth personally until the day of Judgment, that we might minister to Him, and share the privileges of Mary and Joseph, the Apostles and the devout women in Judea, and have Him near us sensibly, and thus

worship Him, as it were, at His own feet. But could we ever have dreamed of the superabundant way in which He has effected this, by the astounding mystery of the Blessed Sacrament?

We might also have conceived that it would be a great consolation to have Him still on earth that we might ask Him for dispensations when we needed them, that we might have intricate cases of conscience solved by His unquestionable authority, that we might have formal permission from Him to carry out our favorite schemes for His greater glory, that we might receive absolution from our most heinous sins, that we might ask Him what difficult passages in Scripture meant, and that we might hear from His infallible lips the truth or falsehood of uncertain doctrines. All this would have been an immense consolation to us, as it were a fresh dispensation of His love growing out of the exuberant mystery of the Incarnation. But it is just this, which He has provided for us in the Papacy. He has given, out of His dominion, the plenitude of His valid jurisdiction to the Holy Father, that we might have it in our necessities, dispensed with a wisdom which He guides, with a liberality like His own, and a valid jurisdiction no whit inferior to His, because it is in fact His own. These two congenial mysteries of the Blessed Sacrament and the Papacy seem to extend the lovingness of the Incarnation as far as our imaginations can conceive.

But there is a negative which is almost as inconceivable, a consequence which we should have expected to follow from the Incarnation, which has not followed. Surely, if, when the Incarnation had

been first told us, with all its prodigal tenderness, its unnecessary sufferings, its fierce deluge of intolerable ignominies, the various atrocity of its pains, the pleading eloquence of its spendthrift bloodshedding, we had measured its length and breadth, its height and depth, to the best of our ability, we should have expected that henceforth, under the Christian law, perfection would be an obligation, that a precept would have been laid upon us all to love like the Saints, and to live lives like theirs. It would not have seemed at all a stretch of jurisdiction, if our Lord had commanded very long fasts, frequent self-flagellations, voluntary austerities, sleeping on the ground, or painful vigils.

We could neither have been surprised nor discontented, if, in return for what He had done for us, and in likeness and honor of His suffering life, He had forbidden under pain of mortal sin all or most of the amusements and recreations of the world. But we think it is most surprising, in fact it would be incredible to us if the faith did not assure us of it, that the Incarnation and Crucifixion have not added one jot or tittle to the original precept of the love of God, that they have actually diminished instead of multiplied our obligations, that the more incalculably beyond our power of repayment Divine love has become, it should in fact be easier to repay it, and that less on our parts will save us, now that so much more has been done on His part for our salvation. We are never weary of wondering at this result of the Incarnation, which is to us at once so unexpected, and at the same time so full of overwhelming love.

The conclusion we draw is this: Theology, with all its numberless and marvellous deductions, enables us to imagine possible things with an almost unlimited power of imagination. Now we have combined all the extremes we could, and conceived the most impossible conjectures; and we cannot, do what we will, leave man his liberty, and conceive one additional instance of His love which God could give to the human race. We cannot heighten or embellish what is actual, nor can we dream of anything possible to add. The love of God for man exhausts the possibilities of our imagination. Did God mean more than this, did He mean that it had exhausted the possibilities of His wisdom and His power, when He says so pathetically in *Isaias*, "O ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and ye men of Juda, judge between me and my vineyard. What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it?"

SEVEN WAYS IN WHICH WE CAN LOVE GOD

It is this love outstripping all imagination, which we have to return: and how? There are doubtless numberless ways in which God can communicate Himself to created intellects and wills, and each way will produce a different rational creation, and each rational creation be capable of loving God in a great variety of ways. Thus among the Angels there may be thousands of different loves of God, for which we have neither name nor idea; and all of them are doubtless extremely beautiful, and highly spiritual. We are so entangled with matter

and material ties that our love is debased in kind, as well as kept down in degree. Whereas the Angels, having no connection with matter during their probation, doubtless loved God in their lowest degree with a purity and a fixity of contemplation which the highest Saints hardly attain amongst ourselves; though the merits of many Saints may have exceeded those of many Angels. Leaving then the capacious spirits of Angels as an unknown land, we come to the souls of men; and as far as we can divide one sort of love from another, where in reality each more or less involves the other, it seems we can love God with seven different kinds of love, the loves, namely, of *benevolence*, of *complacence*, of *preference*, of *condolence*, of *gratitude*, of *desire*, and of *simple adoration*. These are as it were so many capabilities of the human soul; and if the fulfilment of the precept of love is what concerns us most, both in this world and in the world to come, the knowledge of these seven varieties of love must be of the greatest importance to our happiness.

The *love of benevolence* is one which has been commonly practiced by the Saints, and often has seemed childish, or at best mere poetry, to those who love God less fervently. There is a strange pleasure in it, from our putting ourselves in an impossible position towards God, in order to confer it on Him. We make ourselves, as it were, His benefactors, instead of His being ours. We put ourselves on an equality with Him, or even above Him.

So it seems. Yet in reality this love of benevolence is the fruit of a holy humility too deep for words, almost too deep for tears. By the love of benevo-

lence we, first of all, wish God to be more perfect, if it were possible, than He really is. Yet what a wild impossibility! But if God's love of His creatures is itself so exaggerated, He must let us love Him with the simplicity of these fervid exaggerations. Moreover this habit of wishing God impossible perfections is not only the result of a more worthy and true appreciation of His perfection and His majesty, but it tends also to produce it, to sustain it, and to increase it. It is at once the cause and the effect of honorable thoughts of God. Another while the love of benevolence takes the form of venturesome congratulations. We wish God all the immense joy of His unimaginable perfections. We know that He possesses it without our wishing it. We know that our wishes cannot swell by one drop the mighty sea of His interior jubilation. But it is an expression of our love, not in words only but in inward sentiment, which in His sight is an act, and a meritorious act. We bid Him rejoice. We wish Him countless happy returns of that eternal festival, which He has in His own blissful self.

Or, another while, by the same love of benevolence, we wish Him all increase of His accidental glory; and our wish is efficacious prayer, and obtains for Him a real augmentation of that particular glory. The very wish of itself adds to it, and adds immensely when it comes out of a pure heart and a fervent spirit. It also obtains grace for others, and makes the cause of God to prosper in the world. Sometimes we earnestly desire that He may have accidental glory which He does not receive. We wish that Purgatory were emptied into heaven, or that

there were no hell, or that all the heathen were converted, or that all wanderers might return to the fold, or that some one day or night there might be no mortal sin in all our huge metropolis. All this, which the Saints have reduced to as many practices as there have been Saints to practice it, is the love of benevolence.

The *love of complacence* is of a different disposition. It is content with God. It not only wants nothing more, but it only wants Him as He is. It is adapted to different moods of mind, suits other characters, or meets the changeful dispositions of the soul, which now needs one class of sentiments, and now another. Complacence fixes its eye upon what it knows of God with intense delight and with intense tranquillity. It rejoices that He is what He is. It tells Him so. It tells it Him over and over again. Whole hours of prayer pass, and it has done nothing else but tell Him this. O sublime childishness of love! O most dear repetition, how far unlike the vain repetitions of the heathen, which our Lord reproved! Then it broods over its own joy. It slumbers over its own heart, a sweet and mystical repose, and wakes to renew its oft-told tale.

Then a change comes over its spirit. A new strain of music steals out from its inmost soul. It rejoices that none else is like to God. It rejoices with Him in His unity, one of His own deepest and most secret joys. It exults that none can come near it. It asks all the hierarchies of creation with a boastful certainty, vaunting in its triumph, Who is like unto the Lord our God? There is none other God but He. But its eloquence has so touched its own

heart, that it becomes silent once again. It leans on God, and at last seems lost in Him, absorbed in quiet gladness and a rapture of holy thought. Thence once more it wakes, and seeing there is none like unto God, simply because He is God, and for no other cause, it bursts forth into passionate rejoicings, that He is not only what He is, but always has been, always will be what He is, that He is of a truth, and shall be, and must be, and alone can be, eternally and victoriously God. These are the delightful occupations of complacent love.

The *love of preference*, or of esteem, hardly aims so high. It is more mixed up with thoughts of creatures. But it thinks of them only to despise them, and to insult them with its intelligent contempt. It compares God with all other things, as if it had tried them, convicted them of falsehood and grown weary of their vanity. It tramples them under foot, and makes steps of their ruins whereby it may rise to God. Their nothingness grows upon it. It becomes disabused. Earthly ties no longer hold it down from heaven. Detachment is its characteristic grace. It passes unresistingly over the world, as a swallow skims the green meadow, and seems to have no need of resting. Hence it comes to appreciate God rightly, because it appreciates Him incomparably above all other things. It began by terms of comparison, and ends by seeing that nothing can compare with Him, and that all comparison is foolish, because He is infinite, eternal, and all-holy. It gives God His right place in the world, which the multitude of men do not give Him.

What is practical religion but giving God His right

place in the heart and in our life? The misery of the world is that God's rights are disallowed. This it is which makes it such a desolate and weary land. It is the confusion of the world which tires a loving heart and a quiet spirit. It is all a kind of base anarchy. Words and things not passing current for their right values and their true acceptations; importance attaching to the wrong things; darkness unaccountably held to be light; everything just sufficiently out of its right place to make a tumult all around it, and yet so nearly right that we chafe because we cannot right it:—it is all this which the love of preference remedies, by esteeming God, not as He deserves to be esteemed in Himself, but as He deserves to be esteemed in competition with creatures. This love expresses itself by the energetic abundance of its good works, by its active zeal, by a most intense hatred of sin, by a neglect of comforts, by sacrifice, and by austerity. These are its natural vents, and they at once depict its character. It is a love which, while it worships all the attributes of God, delights above all things to extol His sovereignty.

The *love of condolence* differs widely again from this. It looks upon God as wronged, and outraged, and in sorrow, as if He needed help, and were asking for an ally. Its tendency is to wed His interests, and to become strangely susceptible about His honor. Its eyes are opened to see what common men cannot see. It beholds God concerned and implicated, where others cannot perceive so much as a vestige of religion being in question. It sees God everywhere, as if His omnipresence had been made

visible to it, like the whiteness of the light or the blueness of the sky. It is a jealous love, and considerably inconsiderate, so that men are apt to take umbrage at it. It is very discreet, but not with a discretion which the world approves. Its discretion leads it to keep awake itself, and to awaken others, lest God should pass by unseen, and men should not uncover as He passed. It mingles its own cause with God's, and speaks of the two in the same breath and in the same way, as David does in the Psalms. It seeks God rather than looks at Him, and follows Him, delighted with the humblest servitudes. It has one life-long grief, like Mary's dolours; and that grief is in the abundance and effrontery of sin.

Sin is a sharp pain to it. It does not make it angry, but it makes it weep. Its heart sickens with the goings on of men, and it tries to shroud God in the light of its own affectionate compassion. It has no anger with sinners. On the contrary it has quite a devotion to them. Our Lord's passionate, piteous, complaining love of sinners, as it is depicted in the divine Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena, is the food of its soul. The Sacred Heart is the object of its predilection. It is ever telling God how sorry it is for sin. It has a grand gift of abiding contrition for its own sins, and takes a holy pleasure in self-revenge. It lends God its eyes to weep rivers day and night for sins that are not its own. The Seven Dolours of Mary are as seven lives of sweet sorrow which by grace it may lead, to soothe God for the transgressions of His children. The gift of piety, that peculiar gift of the Holy

Ghost, moulds its spiritual life, and its attitude towards God is eminently filial. The atmosphere of its heart is a spirit of reparation; and it lets its life, secretly yet usefully and beautifully, waste away, like sweetest aromatic gums, in sighs and tears before the offended Majesty of God. Oh, happy they who love with such a love! for they have reached that height of virtue which the philosopher saw only as an ideal before him, to feel pleasure and pain, when and where we ought! Oh, sweetest of all novitiates for heaven! to have their hearts on fire on earth, burning the sweet perfumes of human love before the throne of the Incarnate Word! To them, true dovelike souls, especially belongs that tender benediction, "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted."

It is to be observed of the four kinds of love already described, that their characteristic is disinterestedness. It is not that self is expressly excluded, as a false spirituality would teach, but that it is undeveloped. It is not rejected, but it is passed over. In the next two kinds of love it occupies, and without reproof, a much more prominent position.

If the quiet eye and the profound heart of the contemplative Mary delights in that love of condolence, which is such a favorite love with cloistered souls, the love of gratitude better suits the external diligence of the active Martha. The *love of gratitude* is preeminently a mindful love. It ponders things and lays them up in its heart, as Our Blessed Lady did. It meditates fondly on the past, as Jacob did. It sings of old mercies, and makes much of them, like David in the Psalms. It enters largely into the

composition of the Missal and Breviary of the Church.

Where another has the memory of his sins continually before him, a soul possessed with the love of gratitude is perpetually haunted by a remembrance of past benefits; and his abiding sorrow for sin is a sort of affectionate and self-reproachful reaction from his wonder at the abundant loving-kindness of God. The hideousness of sin is all the more brought out, when the light of God's love is thrown so strongly on it. Hence it comes to pass that a very grateful man is also a deeply penitent man; and as the excess of benefits tends to lower us in our own esteem, so we are humble in proportion to our gratitude. But this love does not rest in the luxurious sentiment of gratitude.

It breaks out into actual and ardent thanksgiving; and its thankfulness is not confined to words. Promptitude of obedience, heroic effort, and gay perseverance, these are all tokens of the love of gratitude. It is loyal to God. Loyalty is the distinguishing feature of its service. It is constantly on the lookout for opportunities, and makes them when it cannot find them, to testify its allegiance to God; not as if it was doing any great thing, or as if it was laying God under any obligation, but as if it was making payment, part payment and tardy payment, by little instalments, for the immensity of His love. It is an exuberant, active, bright-faced love, very attractive and therefore apostolic, winning souls, preaching God unconsciously, and though certainly busied about many things, yet all of them the things of God. Happy the man whose life is one long

Te Deum! He will save his soul, but he will not save it alone, but many others also. Joy is not a solitary thing, and he will come at last to his Master's feet, bringing many others rejoicing with him, the resplendent trophies of his grateful love.

But the love which has most to do with self is the *love of desire*, or, as theologians often call it, the love of concupiscence. Saints and sinners, the perfect and the imperfect, the young and old, the penitent and the innocent, the cloistered and uncloistered, all must meet in the sanctuary of this love, and draw waters with gladness from its celestial fountains. What rational creature but must desire God, and desire Him with an infinite and irresistible desire? What created understanding but longs to be flooded with His sweet light? What created will but languishes to be set on fire by the ardor of His ecstatic love? Daniel is called in Scripture the man of desires. Most beautiful of appellations! as if he yearned so eagerly for God, that he should pass into an honorable proverb to the end of time! How beautiful the sight if we could see with the eyes of some sublime intelligence, how this desire of God is the whole beauty and the whole order of His vast creation, drawing onwards to Himself across the spiritual realms of angelic holiness, or over the land and sea, the mountains and the vales, of earth, numberless created intellects and wills, and by as many various paths as there are intellects and wills to draw. The tide of all creation sets in with resistless currents to the throne of the Creator. It is this desire which saves and justifies, which crowns and glorifies. It is this love which is

heightened and made more exquisite by the tremulousness of holy fear. Oh, glorious constraints of this heavenly concupiscence! It is a love which makes us not only desire God, but desire Him supremely above all things. It makes us desire Him only, Him always, and Him intensely; and it allures us with untyrannical exclusiveness to seek Him in all things here, and to long for Him as being Himself our sole sufficient and magnificent Hereafter. By this love both high and low are saved; and without it was none ever saved that were saved. A Saint, if such an one could be, fit to be canonized for all things else, for the want of this love would be lost eternally; and the death-bed penitent, who has never known a higher love, will be saved by this alone.

And do we really desire aught else but God? Or at least can we desire aught but subordinately to Him, and far below our longing for His unspeakable recompense, which is Himself? There is nothing to satisfy us but God alone. All things weary us, and fade. He alone is ever fresh, and His love is daily like a new discovery to our souls. O sweet thirst for God! Fair love of supernatural desire! Thou canst wean us better far from earth, and teach us better the nothingness of human things, than the cold, slow experience of wise old age, or the swift sharp science of suffering, loss, and pain!

There is still another love. We hardly know whether to call it a child of heaven or of earth. It is the *love of adoration*. It is a love too quiet for benevolence, too deep for complacency, too passive for condolence, too contemplative for gratitude; but which has grown up out of the loves of preference

and desire, and is, besides, the perfection of all the other loves. It is too much possessed with God to be accurately conscious of the nature of its own operations. It finds no satisfaction except in worship.

It comes so near to the vastness of God that it beholds Him only obscurely, and instead of definite perfections in God, sees only a bright darkness, which floods its whole being and transforms it into itself. It is passive; God gives it when He wills. We cannot earn it. Efforts would rather backen it, if it was near, than bring it on or win it into the soul. It waits rather than seeks. God is as if He were all Will to it. His power, His wisdom, His sanctity, they all melt into His will; and all that comes to this love is His will, and except of that Will, it can take no distinct cognizance of anything either in heaven or on earth. Self goes out of it, and enters into that will, and is only contemplated in it, although it is eternally separate and essentially distinct. It is oblivious of itself, as being one with God. Its life is wonder, silence, ecstasy. The operations of grace are simplified into one, and the power of grace which is concentrated in that one is above words; and that single action is the production of an unspeakable self-abasement. It cannot be told. But such was the humility of the Sacred Heart, and such the strange loveliness of the sinless Mother, who so mightily attracted God and drew Him down into her bosom. As the morning sky is all suffused with pearly hues from the unrisen sun, so is the mind, though still on earth, in this love of adoration, all silently suffused, and flushed, and mastered by a most exquisite repose, which can come

alone from that Beatific Vision which has not risen yet upon the soul.

These are the seven loves whereby the creature man can love His beneficent Creator. These are the seven liturgies, ancient, authentic, universal liturgies of the human heart. Truly it is little we can do for God, and yet how immeasurably more than we have done for Him as yet. A treatise might be written to reduce these loves to practice, and to illustrate them copiously with the examples of the Saints. But that is not our object now. Has earth any pleasure, of an intellectual, moral, or material sort, to compare with the fruition of a repentant life passed in the occupations of these various loves?

The penitent seeks peace, and the end of all love is peace, peace and languishing desire, peace in the assured hope of the soul, and pining for the ever-coming, still delaying Face of Jesus in the eastern clouds: that east from which He will one day come. Before the dawn of day, a huge toppling mass of unwieldy cloud came up from the west horizon. With incredible swiftness and the loud roaring of sudden wind, it covered like a pall the brilliant moonlit heavens, and deluged the earth with slanting columns of whirling rain. It passed on. A star came out, and then another, and at last the moon; and then the storm drove onward to the east, towards the sea, murky and purple, and all at once a lunar rainbow spanned the black arch of heaven; and it seemed as if Jesus should have come, beneath that bow, and through that purple cloud that was barring the gates of the sunrise; but the wind was lulled, and all was still, by the time the moon had built that bow upon

the cloud. And what is all this but a figure of our lives, one of nature's daily parables, of which we might make so much? Ours is a pilgrimage, a pilgrimage by night, beneath the gentle moon, from west to east, from the sunset to the sunrise; it is not like our natural life from east to west, from youth to age, from our rising to our setting; and we shall best beguile the way, and let the storms go unheeded over, if we make God's "justifications our songs in the house of our pilgrimage," and relieve our weariness by the various magnificence of these seven canonical services of our supernatural love.

These are the loves we were made for. They are our means of loving God. If we think too much of their magnificence, we may forget the exceeding loveliness of God. Look at a Saint who has loved heroically with these seven loves, for even the love of desire may be heroic, and see how little with all of them he has done for God. He has not paid one of the least of the commonest of God's countless benefits. This is a sad thought, and for us, who are not saints, a grave consideration. For remember how few Saints there are, and also how far off from their love is ours! Oh, the majesty of God! how it is left desolate, and unrequited! Yet think again of the mysteriously huge price which God puts upon even our little love, and upon the least of our little love! How can it be? What can it mean? When once we go deep into this subject of Divine Love, mysteries thicken more and more. God alone can give an account of His own love, and of how His unerring wisdom comes to mistake the real price of ours. O beautiful Goodness of God! why are we not really beside ourselves with love of Thee?

CHAPTER IV

OUR ACTUAL LOVE OF GOD

A VOLUNTARY thought and a deliberate desire are not less actions in the sight of God than the words of our mouths or the operations of our hands. How wonderful, therefore, is it to reflect on the countless multitudes of strong and vigorous acts which are rising up before the majesty of God from the unsleeping world of Angels. Their active intellects with incredible swiftness vary their love and praise, their wonder and admiration, almost incessantly.

They sweep all regions of creation with instantaneous flight, and bring back on their wings the odor of God's glory and His goodness, to present as worship before His face: though in their boldest flights they have come nigh no limits of His all-embracing presence. Another while, they plunge deep down and out of sight in some one of His mysterious and profound perfections, and rise again and scatter gladness round them, while their thoughts are as showers of light falling beautifully before His throne. Or again they return through the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, like laborers wending homeward in the evening, bringing with them troops of human souls, dug out of the fires of Purgatory, or

disentangled from the briars of earth. In every one of their bright actions there flashes forth, as an additional beauty, their joyous dependence on the Sacred Humanity of Jesus, and their placid obedience to His Human Mother. There is harmony too in the immense diversities of their unnumbered acts, and they all make one vast unutterable concord of spiritual music in the ear of God. And all is sinless there. No taint, no spot, no venial fault, in all that universe of abundant energy and of lightning-like activity. Its exuberance of sanctity is unflagging and everlasting. God be praised for His goodness in securing at least thus much worship for Himself!

A heart that loves God is often fain, for very weariness and sorrow, to rest upon the thought of that angelic world, and to talk of it in secret colloquies with its own affectionate and faithful guardian Angel. Yet the heart cannot rest there long; it cannot rest there finally. For, in truth, no one act of that angelic worship is altogether worthy of the Most High. The whole concourse of marvellous adoration, taken as one grand act, falls short of the exceeding majesty of God, and simply falls short infinitely. God is very good, to rejoice in it with that abounding complacency. But it is only another of His condescensions. It is only another proof that He is, in some mysterious manner, wisely beside Himself with love of His finite and imperfect creatures. If they have been proclaiming His praise in their transcendent hymns for millions and millions of ages, they have not yet paid Him, they never will have paid Him, for the single creation of any one,

the humblest, of their countless hosts. And what they give Him, is it not all His own already? Did He not evoke them out of nothing, beautiful and radiant as they are? Is He not pouring bright streams of being into their deep, wide natures, with assiduous munificence, each moment of a never-ending immortality? Yet man, poor man, may well rest awhile his tired and shamefaced heart upon this angelic world of beautiful obedience, and the ravishing tranquillity of its energetic love.

The world of human actions is much more limited; especially if we regard only the inhabitants of earth. Nevertheless, to our apprehension, it possesses immense capabilities for the worship and the love of God. Each one of those seven loves which we considered in the last chapter, is capable of almost as many changes and as many distinct peculiarities, as there are souls on earth. Take away the hours spent in sleep, the years before the use of reason, the dotage of extreme old age, and the amount of insanity in the world, and still, what a vast number of human actions call for God's concurrence, and are performed in His sight in the four-and-twenty hours? Yet none of these actions need be indifferent, in the individual case. All of them can glorify God, and the least of them attain successfully a supernatural end. There are the hundreds of thousands collected in the great manufacturing cities of the European nations, with all the sleepless activity of mind and heart which characterizes them. There are the wandering hordes of the desert or the steppe. The crowded cities of the east, the masses of Africa, the swiftly growing pop-

ulations of the new world, the well-peopled islands of the broad ocean, and those who dwell near the arctic snows. If we bring before ourselves hill and vale, the riverside and wood, the sea-shore and the pastoral plain, and remember how vast and various are the experiences of human joy and sorrow which are going on in almost every one of the numberless inequalities of the earth's surface, we shall be overwhelmed by the calculation of the human actions which are ever being performed.

Now each one of these actions belongs to God by four different titles, and may be referred to Him by as many different sentiments of gratitude and love. His dominion over us is founded on His having *created* us, on His continuing to *preserve* us, on His *redeeming* us, and on His being our Last End, our final cause. These are not so much four separate actions, four distinct mercies, the one separable from the other, as the prolongation and perfection of one Divine action, namely our creation out of nothing. Preservation, as we have already seen, is indivisibly one act with creation. Redemption is the preservation of our supernatural life, without which the preservation of our being would seem, not imperfect only, but hardly a benefit. While the tie, which binds us to God as being our Last End, is at once the cause of creation and its effect, the crown and consummation of the whole work of God.

We may be almost said to belong more entirely to God by this last relationship than by any other. But all the four ought to enter more or less into every human action. We have no right to eat, or drink, or recreate ourselves without seeking with more or less

determinate intention the fourfold glory of God as our Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Last End: and a mere mental reference to Him by a loving heart is sufficient thus to ennoble our most trivial doings, and to fasten it firmly to the throne of God.

Perhaps we have not as much devotion as we ought to have to that relation in which God stands to us as our Last End. We think of Him as our Creator and our Father, and these titles so abound in sweetness that they flood our souls with delight, and we cannot tear ourselves away from such heavenly contemplations. Or when our spirits are all freshly bathed in the cold fountains of holy fear, we look up to God with childlike and well-pleased awe, as our all-holy judge and omnipotent irresponsible king. It is less common with us to meditate upon Him and to worship Him as our Last End, and it seems as if our spiritual life sometimes suffered from the omission. For this relation of Last End brings God before us in a manner peculiarly Divine, and to which no earthly or heavenly relationship can furnish either parallel or similitude.

It puts the whole of practical religion in a clear and undoubted light. It explains all difficulties and answers all objections. There is no satisfaction short of God, no completeness out of God, no support but in God, no rest but upon God, no breathing-time or halting-place except on the Bosom of our Heavenly Father. He is the end to which we are travelling. Like a stone falling on the earth, so are we evermore falling upon God. Creation is not solid ground. It lets us through, and we do not stop until we come to God. He is not one of our ends, but

the end of ends, our only end. There is none other end but He. All things else are means. It is this truth which simplifies our lives, and which simplified the lives of the Saints until they were pictures and reflections of His own simplicity. So also if God be our Last End, He is our only home.

We are strangers everywhere else but in God. All things are foreign to us except God; and thus all our love of home and country, of kith and kin, melts away into the single love of God. He is the home where our welcome is certain, and surpasses all our expectations. He is our rest where alone we can lie down without fear, and sleep sweetly. He in His inaccessible splendor is the beautiful night wherein no man works, but when the weary laborer reposes from his toil in everlasting bliss. He is the cool and fragrant evening, in whose endless sunset creation clothes itself with its final beauty, and reposes in its golden beams, and all sounds of work and all sighs of care are suspended, and all cravings satisfied, and all created spirits filled with an ecstatic life, so full, so glorious, so far-reaching, that the most untiring energies of earth are but as dreary indolence compared with its magnificent tranquillity.

But we must return to the world of human actions. Who could number, at any one given moment, the multitude of such actions on the earth, the pains endured, the sorrows borne, the anxieties combated, the temptations resisted, the words spoken, the thoughts thought, the actions done, all of which the heart of man can multiply and vary and complicate well-nigh a hundred times a minute? All these things are the raw material of our love of God, and

all can enter into those seven kinds of loving worship which we considered in the last chapter, and all can have a different character of supernatural holiness impressed upon them, according to the four different titles under which we may refer them to God, as our Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Last End. But alas! is not this beautiful human worship like a fair dream of some possible creation, which may be, but has not been yet? How much of these treasures of our hearts does our Heavenly Father actually receive? Truly the tribes of men are like a wilderness, capable of cultivation, where corn and wine and oil might come abundantly from the bosom of the earth, and flowers bloom, and tall forests grow, and cattle feed, but which now is little else than sand, and stony plain, and low bushes, wearying the eye by the very expanse of its cheerless monotony.

Yet when in our love of God, and fretted with the feebleness of our own worthless endeavors, we turn to the world of angelic actions, and feed ourselves upon its fragrant and refreshing fulness, we not only soon come to feel how far below the majesty of God is even that transcendent worship, but we rest at last on human acts as after all the sole exclusive adequate worship of the Adorable Trinity.

Our eye lingers on the fertile heart of the Virgin Mother, but there is no rest for it even there; and what we seek for God, in our sympathy and affection for His slighted goodness, we find only in the human actions of the Incarnate Word, in the countless known and unknown momentary mysteries of the Three-and-Thirty Years, and in the multiplied

lives, the daily births, and daily crucifixions, of the altar and the Tabernacle. There we behold the Incomprehensible Majesty of the Most High compassed with a worship equal to Himself, as deep, and broad, and high, and bountiful as His own blessed Self. There we see His infinity worshipped infinitely, with an infinite worship almost infinitely multiplied, and infinitely repeated, in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We would almost rather be men than Angels because these are human actions, and that is a human Heart. Jesus is man, and not an Angel. But then He is God Himself; and so it is after all to Himself, and not to His creation, that He owes this beautiful sufficient worship. Shall we sorrow then, and cry alas! because nowhere is God rightly loved and adequately worshipped, and because the service of the Sacred Heart turns out to be in fact His own? Oh, no! rather let us bless Him again and again that He is such a God that none can worship Him as He deserves, that all which is good is at last discovered to be either Himself or at least His own, that all beautiful things come out of His goodness, and go into it again, and are inseparably mixed up with it, and that we only lose ourselves more and more inextricably in the labyrinth of His sovereign goodness the deeper we penetrate into that dear and awful sanctuary.

But we must strive to enter more minutely into the labyrinth of our own manifold unworthiness. We have seen, in the last chapter, in what ways and to what extent it is in our power, with the aid of His grace, to love Almighty God. That inquiry was but a preface to this further one. As a matter

of fact, how do we actually love Him? What is the positive amount of our love of God? From all this world of human actions, what sort of proportion does He receive, and with what dispositions is the tax paid? Let us try to make ourselves masters of the statistics of the kingdom of God. Even if it be little in amount which we pay to God, yet much depends on the spirit with which it is paid. Little things are enhanced by the manner in which they are done, and the intention out of which they spring. Let us see, then, how our generosity ennobles the meanness and enriches the poverty of our love.

THREE CLASSES IN GOD'S SERVICE

If we look at mankind with reference to their service of God, we may divide them into three classes, comprising two extremes and a mean. The one extreme is occupied by the *Saints*, the second by the *great mass of men*, and the mean by *ordinary believers*, such as we ourselves may be. By studying each of these three divisions, we shall obtain something like a clear view of the actual love of creatures for their Creator.

The first thing which strikes us about the *Saints*, is the extraordinary fewness of them. Those who are canonized bear no sort of proportion, in any one generation, to the numbers of the baptized; and if we multiply their number a hundred times, so as to include the hidden Saints whom it is not God's will that the Church should raise upon her altars, still, the grievous disproportion will scarcely be perceptibly diminished. Let us grant the largest

probable allowance for extraordinary sanctity hidden in the silent cells of the Carthusians, or in other lives, cloistered or not, of singular abasement and abjection, nevertheless, we may suppose the number of Saints in any age to fall far below the number of baptized infants who die before the use of reason, and perhaps not to equal the number of death-bed conversions. If we love God really and truly, surely this consideration cannot help but be a painful one. And yet it seems so easy to be a Saint! Graces are so overwhelmingly abundant, and God Himself so unspeakably attractive, that it appears harder to be ungenerous with Him than to be generous; and where perfection is made to consist simply in the fervor and purity of our love, there is almost an intellectual difficulty in comprehending why it is that the Saints should be so few.

But it is not only the fewness of their number which we must consider. We must think also of the immensity of the graces which they receive. We often get a sight, in times of recollection and prayer, of the fearful way in which our own practice falls short of the graces we receive. Nothing makes us feel our own baseness more keenly or more lastingly than this. Perhaps the disproportion between the practice of the Saints and the graces which they actually receive, may be almost as large as it is in our own case. At any rate, we cannot read their lives without being struck with the unused and unemployed profusion of grace by which their souls are deluged. Now all this is God's own outlay.

It is what He spends in order to obtain Saints; and if we measure extraordinary heights of sanctity

by the greatness and variety of the graces given, we shall see that even the holiness of an Apostle will seem to be but a poor return for so prodigal an expenditure of grace. Our Lord once spoke of virtue going out of Him, when a poor woman touched Him that she might be miraculously healed. So we may almost define a Saint to be one who drains God's abundance more than others do, and costs God more. He is but crowning His own gifts, when He vouchsafes to crown His Saints. So is it always when we come to look into the interests and affairs of God's glory. It is at His own expense that He is served. He furnishes the banquet to which He is invited. Like earthly fathers, He must give to His children the riches out of which they may make their offerings to Him. His liberality supplies the means, while His condescension stoops graciously to receive back again what was His own in its first fullness, but which has wasted and faded not a little in the transfer through our hands.

But even at the best, if we make the most of the generous and heroic love of the Saints, it is absolutely vile as compared either with *its* object or with *their* grace. It is not enough that the little which they give is already rather His than theirs; but it is also in itself unworthy of His transcending greatness and surprising goodness. Even the Saints are unprofitable servants. The chosen Apostles of the Incarnate Word were taught so to look upon themselves. Yet these Saints are the good extreme among men. From them, if from any, may God look for a plentiful harvest of glory. Their purity of intention, their intensity of love, their generosity

of self-sacrifice, are the pastures in which His glory is to feed. Yet even here how poor, how scanty, how irregular is the return of the creature to the All-merciful Creator! He has all the work to do Himself which He pays them for doing; and when they have somewhat marred the beauty of His design, He accepts their work as if on the one hand He did not perceive its imperfection, and on the other did not recognize that all the goodness and the beauty of it were His own. How then must our Heavenly Father condescend to value the worship and the loyalty of a free created will! And how true it is that even the magnificence of the Saints is after all but meanness, in respect of the boundless majesty and overwhelming holiness of Him upon whose grace they live, and by whose Blood they are redeemed!

If we turn from the Saints to the other extreme, the *mass of men*, the vision which we are constrained to look upon is truly of the darkest and most disheartening description. By the side of the multitude, the heroism of the Saints does indeed appear falsely magnified into the most gigantic dimensions. Can anything be said of men's ignorance of God, but that it is boundless, universal, incredible? Could the lives of men be what they are, if they had so much as the commonest elements of the knowledge of God? Do not millions act and speak and think, as if God was of a lower nature than themselves? Do they not attribute to Him an indifference to right and wrong, which they would consider revolting in a fellow-creature? Or again, do they not so completely overlook Him as to forget

His existence, and to live as if there were no one to consult but themselves, no will to satisfy except their own? With many it would almost be doing God too great an honor to be at the pains to deny His existence; and others only advert to His perfections to dishonor them by their unmanly superstitions. Indeed in such complete ignorance of God do crowds of men live, that we could not have credited the possibility of it, if our own observation had not presented it to us as a fact which no reasonable man could doubt.

Moreover it by no means appears that, with the appalling corruption of our nature, the knowledge of God is sufficient to secure for Him even our esteem. Horrible to relate, aversion to God is far from being uncommon among His creatures. There are many bold and impenitent sinners who are devils before their time, to whom the Name of God or His perfections are not so much terrible as they are odious. When they come in sight of His Commandments, or of some manifestation of His sovereignty, or even some beautiful disclosure of His tenderness, they are like possessed persons. They are so exasperated as to forget themselves, until their passion hurries them on to transgress, not only the proprieties of language, but even the decorum of outward behavior. There seems to be something preternaturally irritating to them in the very mention of God, quite irrespective of the absolute dominion which He claims over them as their Creator. There are others, whose habitual state of mind, when they approach religious subjects, is to be on their guard against God, as if there were some dangerous sub-

tilty in the greatness of His wisdom, or some artful overbearing tyranny in the condescensions of His majesty, or some dishonest concealed purpose in the invitations of His mercy. With these men the probabilities are against God. He is not likely to mean well. It is safest to distrust Him. Discretion must beware of Him. Moderation must not be excited by Him. We must not let Him throw us out of our wise sobriety. He has come to bargain with us, and we must be vigilant, or we do not know to what we may be induced to commit ourselves. With such men their first thought of God is to dishonor Him; for how shall a son doubt his father without doing him dishonor?

There are others who are not by any means to be reckoned among the mass of men, and who serve Him truly with a holy fear, but who seem not to have escaped altogether the contagion of this aversion to God. With them it shows itself in the shape of uneasiness, perplexity, and doubt. They entertain suspicions against the perfections of God's justice or the universality of His compassion. When they hear of certain things, jealousy of God starts up as it were unbidden in their hearts. It is not so much that they have definite intellectual difficulties in matters of faith. But they have not that instantaneous and unclouded certainty, that all is right, and best, and exquisitely tender, where God is concerned, which is the pure sunshine and invigorating air of the atmosphere of faith. Nay, have we not all of us moods, in which an allusion to God makes us impatient; and is not this fact alone the

nearest of any fact to a deep-sea sounding of our corruption?

It is hard to see what God has done to deserve all this. It seems most unkind, most cruelly disloyal to the immensity of His goodness, and to the unalterable bounty of His compassionate dominion. Truly, He is our King as well as our Father, our Master as well as our Friend. But are the relations incompatible? It is the very necessity of our case as creatures, that we must be under a law; and could we be under laws less numerous, less onerous, than those under which we are laid by the unchangeable perfections of God? Easy laws, few laws, and laws which it is our own interest to keep—these are the characteristics of the dominion of God. Why then are we restless and uneasy, and not rather happily lost in amazement at the goodness of our great Creator? It seems wonderful that He who is so great should also be so good; and it is the joyous lesson which the sands of life teach us, as they run yearly out, that His very greatness is the only blessed measure of His goodness.

But ignorance of God and aversion to God are not of themselves a sufficient description of the religious condition of the great mass of men. There are multitudes also who are simply indifferent to God. It sounds incredible. The mere knowledge that there is a God should be enough to shape, control, revolutionize, and govern the whole world.

And this, quite independent of the minute, infallible, and touching knowledge of Him which revelation gives us. But when that is added, surely it should be enough to strike indifference out of the list

of possible things. Surely every human heart should be awake, and alert, to hear the sound of God's voice, or discern His footprints on the earth. Our Creator, our Last End, our Saviour, our Judge, upon whom we depend for everything, whose will is the only one important thing to us, whose Bosom is the one only possible home for us—and He to be regarded as simply the most uninteresting object in His own world! Is this really credible? Alas! we have only to look around and see. Does a day pass which does not prove it to us? Nay, very often, to our shame be it spoken, is it not a considerable exertion even to us to interest ourselves in God? And this indifference, can we be quite sure that it is less dishonorable to God than positive aversion?

These are melancholy results. Yet somehow they spur us on to try to do more for God ourselves, and to love Him with a purer and more disinterested love. Alas! if the Saints are few in number, those who are either ignorant of God, or indifferent to Him, or have an aversion to Him, are countless multitudes. Many fair regions of this beautiful world are peopled by idolaters. The sacred places of Scriptural Asia are tenanted by the followers of Mahomet. Heresy and schism usurp whole countries, which boast of the name of Christian; and even in Catholic lands, it is depressing to think how many thousands there are, who must be classed with those who are not on the side of God. These are very practical considerations; for if there is the least honesty in our professions of loving God, they must greatly influence both the fervor of our devotion and the amount of our mortification. They

bring home to us that suffering and expiatory character, which, by a law of the Incarnation, belongs to all Christian holiness.

But we shall find considerations even yet more practical, if we turn from these two extremes to the mean, that is, to ordinarily pious Catholics, such as we humbly hope we either are ourselves, or are endeavoring to become. We distinctly aim at making religion the great object of our lives. We are conscious to ourselves of a real and strong desire to love God, and as we grow older the desire grows stronger, and, to say the least of it, it bids fair to swallow up all our other desires, and become the one single object of our lives. The four last things, Death and Judgment, Hell and Heaven, are often before us, and fill us with a holy terror. We fear sin greatly, and we sometimes think we almost hate it for its own sake, because it is an offence against so good a God. We have times and methods of prayer. We examine our consciences. We hear Mass often. We visit the Blessed Sacrament. We are devout to Our Lady. We frequent the Sacraments. Who can doubt but that all this is the way of salvation? We are happy in the grace which enables us to do all this. We shall be happy indeed in the grace which will enable us to persevere. We are happy also in the thought that there are thousands and thousands in the Church who are thus serving God. But let us look a little more closely into this, and examine our lives first as to the *amount* of love of God which they exhibit, and secondly as to the *manner* in which we show our love.

There are twenty-four hours in the day, so many days in the week, and so many weeks in the year. We have various occupations, and manifold ways of spending our time; and the most careless amongst us must have some confused and general notion of the way in which his time is distributed. Now we know that the service of God is the grand thing, or rather that it is the only thing about us which is great at all. What amount of our time then is spent upon it? How many hours of the day are passed in prayer, and spiritual reading, in hearing Mass, or visiting the Blessed Sacrament, or in other direct spiritual exercises? Of the time necessarily expended upon our worldly avocations, or the claims of society, how much is spent with any recollection of Him, or with any actual intention to do our common actions for His glory? Can we return a satisfactory answer to these questions? Furthermore, we know that it is essential to our love of God, that we should appreciate Him above all things. Does our practice show that this is anything but a form of words with us? Would strangers, who looked critically at our daily lives, be obliged to say that, whatever faults we had, it was plain that we put no such price on anything as on God? When we look into the interests and affections of our busy, crowded hearts, is it plain that, if the love of God does not reign there in solitary, unmingled splendor, at least it takes easy, obvious, and acknowledged precedence of all our other loves? This is not asking much; but can we answer as we should wish?

Again, our actions are perfectly multitudinous. If we reckon both the outward and the inward ones,

they are almost as numerous as the beatings of our pulse. How many of them are for God? I do not say how many are directly religious, but how many are at all and in any sense for God? How many in the hundred? Even if we are quite clear that a virtual intention has really got vigor and vitality enough to carry us over the breadth of a whole day, and to push its way through the crowd of things we have to think, to say, to do, and to suffer,—and this is a very large assumption—is this virtual intention in the morning to absolve us from the necessity of any further advertence to God, and must it not also have been made in the morning with a very considerable degree of intensity, in order to propel it for so long as twenty-four hours through such a resisting medium as we know our daily lives to be? To use our national word, are we quite *comfortable* about this? Are we sure of our view about virtual intention, and without misgivings, and have we found our theory work well in times gone by?

God does not have His own way in the world. What He gets He has to fight for. What is true of the world at large, is true also of our own hearts and lives. Though we love God, and most sincerely, He has to struggle for our love. He has to contend for the mastery over our affections. The preferences of our corrupt nature are not for Him, or for His concerns. Thus it happens almost daily that His claims clash with those of self or of the world. We have to choose between the two, and give the preference to the one over the other. We are forever having Christ and Barabbas offered to the freedom of our election. Now do we always give the

preference to God? Or if not always, because of surprises, impulses, impetuosities, or sudden weaknesses, at least do we never wilfully, deliberately, and with advertence, prefer anything else to God, and give Him the second place? And of the innumerable times in which this conflict occurs, in what proportion of times does God carry off the victory? And when He does, is it an easy victory? Or has He to lay long siege to our hearts, and bring up reinforcement after reinforcement of fresh and untried grace, until at last it looks as if He were almost going to throw Himself on His omnipotence and overwhelm the freedom of our will? Or again, let us look at the degree of application which we bestow on what we really do for God. Let us confront the carefulness, and forethought, and energy, and perseverance, which we bestow upon our temporal interests or the earthly objects of our love, with those which characterize our spiritual exercises. And will the result of the examination be altogether what we should desire?

All these are childish and elementary questions to ask ourselves. Yet the results are far more melancholy than when we contemplated the ignorance, aversion, and indifference of the great mass of men. More melancholy, because we profess to be God's champions; it is as it were our place to be on His side. We live encircled by His grace, which flows around us like the plentiful bright air. Our minds are illuminated by the splendors of heavenly truth, and our hearts led sweetly captive by the winning mysteries of the Incarnation. Our lives are charmed by great Sacraments, and we are each of us the

centre of a very world of invisible grandeurs and spiritual miracles. And in spite of all this, I will not say it is sad, it is really hardly credible that our love of God should amount to so little as it does, whether we regard it as to the time spent upon it, or as to the appreciation of Him above all things, or as to the proportion of our numberless actions which is for Him, or as to our preference of Him when His claims clash with others, or as to the degree of application which we bestow on what we really do for Him.

Oh, look at all this by the moonlight of Gethsemani, or measure it with the Way of the Cross, or confront it with the abandonment of Calvary! Turn upon it the light of the great love of Creation, whose prodigal munificence, and incomparable tenderness, and seemingly exaggerated compassions we have already contemplated! Oh, can it be that this is the creature's return to his Creator, when the creature is holy and faithful and good, and that such is to be God's strong point in the world, the paradise of His delights, the portion of His empire where allegiance still is paid Him? Merciful Heaven! can we be safe, if we go on thus? Are we really in a state of grace? Is not the whole spiritual life a cruel delusion? And are we not after all the enemies, and not the friends, of God? Oh, no! faith comes to our rescue. All is right, though truly all is wrong. We are certainly in the way of salvation. Then we say once more, as we find ourselves saying many times a day, what a God is ours, what incredible patience, what unbounded forbearance, what unintelligible contentment! Why is it that very shame does not sting us

to do more for God, and to love Him with a love a little less infinitely unlike the love, with which, do what we can, we cannot hinder Him from loving us?

So much for the amount of our love of God. It is little; so little that it would be disheartening, were it not always in our own power, through the abundance of His grace, to make that little more. Let us now, at any rate, console ourselves by looking at the manner and spirit in which we pay to God this little love. Love, like other things, has certain rules and measures of its own. It has certain habits and characteristics. It proceeds upon known principles, which belong to its nature. It acts differently from justice, because it is love and not justice. It does not obey the same laws as fear, simply because it is not fear but love. Every one knows the marks of true love. They are readiness, eagerness, generosity, swiftness, unselfishness, vigilance, exclusiveness, perseverance, exaggeration. In all these respects, except the last, our divine love must at once resemble and surpass our human love. In the last respect it cannot do so, because God is so infinitely beautiful and good, that anything like exaggeration or excess in the love of Him is impossible. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the model of Divine Love. The Immaculate Heart of Mary ascertains for us the amazing heights of love which a simple creature can attain by correspondence to the grace of God. The Saints are all so many samples of divine love, in some one or more of its special characteristics and departments. We know, then, precisely the manner and spirit in which we are to love God. Let us see how far our practice squares with our theory.

PRACTICE AND THEORY

Is the following an unkind picture of ourselves? We serve God grudgingly, as if He were exacting. We are slow to do what we know He most desires, because it is an effort to ourselves. We cling to our own liberty, and we feel the service of God more or less of a captivity. Our whole demeanor and posture in religion is not as if we felt God was asking too little, or as if we were most anxious to do more than He required. We serve Him intermittingly, though perseverance is what He so specially desires. We have fits and starts, pious weeks or devout months, and then times of remissness, of effort, of coldness; then a fresh awakening, a new start, and then a slackening again. It is as if loving God went against the grain, as if we had to constrain ourselves to love Him, as if it was an exertion which could not be kept up continuously, as if human holiness could never be anything better than endless beginnings, and trials which are always falling short of the mark. Thus we also love God rarely, under pressure, on great occasions, at startling times, or when we have sensible need of Him. All this looks as if we did not love Him for His own sake, but for ourselves, or for fear, or because it is prudent and our duty. There is, unmistakably, a want of heart in the whole matter.

Have we ever done any one action which we are quite confident was done solely and purely for the love of God? If we have, it has not been often repeated. We are conscious to ourselves that there

is a great admixture of earthly motives in our service of God. It is astonishing what an amount of vainglory and self-seeking there is in our love of Him. We are also perfectly and habitually aware of this; and yet, which is even more astonishing, we are quiet and unmoved. It breeds in us no holy desperation, nor does it inspire us to any vehement and determined struggles to get rid of the desecrating presence of this unholy enemy. Nay, it almost appears as if we should never have dreamed of loving God, if He Himself had not been pleased to command us to do so; and therefore we do it just in the way in which men always do a thing because they are told, and which they would not have done if they had not been told. Many of us, perhaps, have already given the best of our lives to the world, and now it is the leavings only which go to God. Oh, how often is He asked to drink the dregs of a cup which not the world only, but the devil also, have well-nigh drained before Him! and with what adorable condescension does He put His lips to it, and dwell with complacency upon the draught, as if it were the new wine of some Archangel's first unblemished love!

Then, again, we exaggerate our own services, in thought if not in words; and this shows itself in our demeanor. True love never thinks it has done enough. Its restlessness comes from the very uneasiness of this impression. Now, this is not at all our feeling about God. We do not look at things from His point of view. It is only by a painfully acquired habit of mind that we come to do so. Half the temptations against the faith, from which men suffer, arise from the want of this habit, from not

discerning that really the creature has no side, no right to a point of view, but that God's side is the only side, and the Creator's point of view the creature's only point of view, and that he would not be a creature were it otherwise. Another unsatisfactory sign is, that, ordinarily speaking, we have so little missionary feeling about us, and are so unconcerned whether sinners are converted, or whether men love God or not. It is quite impossible for true love to coexist with an unmissionary spirit.

But we all of us have times when we love God more than usual, times of fervor, of closer union with Him, of momentary love of suffering, transitory flashes of things which are like the phenomena of the Saints. They neither last long enough nor come often enough to form our normal state. They are simply our best times. Now we need not dwell either upon their rarity or their brevity; but we would fain ask if even then we love God altogether without reserves. Is nothing kept back from Him? Is our renunciation of self ample and faultless? Have we no secret corner of our hearts, where some favorite weakness lurks in the shade, and which the strong light of heavenly love has not blinded to its own interests? I am afraid to go on with the picture, lest I should have to ask myself, at last, What is left of the Christian life? But we have seen enough to confess, of our love of God, that not only is what we give very little, but that even that little is given in the most ungraceful and unlovelike of ways. Surely this is a confession not to be made by words, which are not equal to the task, but only by silent tears, while we lie prostrate before the Throne of Him, whom,

strange to say, we really do love most tenderly, even while we slight Him!

On all sides of us there are mysteries. Our relations to God are full of them. Our coldness and His love, His forbearance and our petulance,—we hardly know which is the most strange, the most inexplicable. If we consider attentively how little we love God, and in what way we show it, honesty will compel us to acknowledge that we men should not accept such service at each other's hands. We should reject it with scorn. We should regard it as an injury rather than as a service. A father would disinherit his son; a friend would put away from him the friend of his bosom, if his love were requited as we requite the love of our Heavenly Father. Yet it is the ever-blessed God, who is what He is, to whom we, being what we are, dare to offer this mockery of worship. Will He open heaven, and cast His fiery bolts upon us, and annihilate us for ever, that we may be no longer a dishonor to His beautiful creation? Or will He turn from our proffered service with anger, or at least with a contemptuous indifference? We cannot easily understand how it is that He does not. Yet on the contrary He vouchsafes to accept and reward our pitiful affection. And His very rewards and blessings lead us astray; for we begin to put a price upon our merits, according to the greatness of His recompense, not according to the reality of their lowness; and we think we have treated Him with great generosity, and that His reward is to us only the proof of our generosity; while on the contrary we consider Him to be asking

very much of us; and our minds do not see His rights, and our hearts do not feel them.

And God sees this, and makes no sign. It is not so much as if He seemed insensible to our ingratitude; it is rather as if He did not see that it was ingratitude at all. No love can be conceived more sensitive than that of Him who has eternally predestinated, and then called out of nothing, the objects of His choice and predilection. Yet God does not seem to feel our coldness and perversity. Rather He appears to prize what we give Him, and to rejoice in its possession. He wished it otherwise. He made very different terms at the outset. He asked for far more than He has got. But He makes no complaint; and not being able to have His terms allowed, He takes us on our own.

Is it possible that it can be God of whom we are daring thus to speak? Oh, why do not all we, His children, league together to make it up to Him? O Angels of Heaven? why is your worship of that Blessed Majesty aught else but tears?

CHAPTER V

IN WHAT WAY GOD REPAYS OUR LOVE

WHEN Angels offer the prayers of men with incense in their golden thuribles, there are none which rise up before the throne of God with a sweeter or more acceptable fragrance than the murmurs and complaints of loving souls, because God is not loved sufficiently. Everywhere on earth, where the true love of God is to be found, there is also this peaceful and blessed unhappiness along with it. In many a cloister, by the sea-shore, or on the mountain top, in the still forest or the crowded city, there are many who in the retirement of their cell, or before the Blessed Sacrament, are sighing with the sweet grief of love, because men love God so coldly and so unworthily. There are many amid the distractions of the world, and who appear to be walking only in its ways, who have no heavier weight upon their hearts than the neglect, abandonment, and unrequited love of God. Through the long cold night, or during the noisy day, incessantly as from a tranquil holy Purgatory, the sounds of this plaintive sorrow, this blessedly unhappy love, rise up into the ear of God. Some tremble with horror of the sins which are daily committed against His holy

law. Some are saddened because those who by their faith know God so well, love Him with such carelessness and pusillanimity. Some, who are wont to make His resplendent attributes the objects of their daily contemplation, murmur because they see nowhere on the earth, not even among the Saints, anything worthy to be called love of so great and infinite a goodness. Others with meek petulance expostulate with God, because He hides Himself, and does not constrain souls to love Him by open manifestations of His surpassing beauty: while others mourn over their own cold hearts, and pine to love God better than they do. There are even innocent children who weep because they feel, what as yet they can hardly know, that men are leaving so cruelly unrequited the burning love of God.

All these sighs and tears, all these complaints and expostulations, all this heavy-hearted silence and wounded bleeding love,—all is rising up hourly to the Majesty on high, not unmingled with the sharper sounds of active penance and expiatory mortifications. It is at once intercession and thanksgiving and petition and satisfaction, and our Heavenly Father loves the sweet violence which this beautiful sorrow is doing to Him.

Meanwhile God Himself vouchsafes to appear contented, and even more than contented with the poverty of our love. He seems to be satisfied with that in us, which is very far from satisfying ourselves. Whether it is that His clear view of our exceeding nothingness stimulates His compassion to make allowances for us which we have no right to make for ourselves, or whether to the incompre-

hensible affection of a Creator there is some inestimable value in the least and lowest offering of the creature's love, so it is, that His magnificence repays our love with rewards of the most overwhelming grandeur, while at the same time His justice and wisdom contrive that these immense rewards should be in exact and varying proportion with our merits. He alone seems to be above the feeling of that which His servants feel so deeply, their own coldness and ingratitude to Him. Yet we know that none can measure so unerringly the hatefulness of our iniquity; none can estimate so truly the glorious abundance of strong celestial grace which is hourly conferred upon us; none can know Him as He knows Himself, and therefore none can abhor sin as He abhors it, or comprehend, as He comprehends it, the insult of our lukewarm love. Does it not even come to ourselves sometimes in prayer, when we have been dwelling long upon some one beautiful attribute of the Divine Nature, to ask ourselves in amazement, how it is that God can possibly forgive sin, and forgiving it, can look so completely as if He had forgotten it as well, and even seem to esteem us more when we rise from a shameful fall, than if we had stood upright in His grace and our integrity all the while? And yet our best notions of God are unspeakably unworthy of Him.

When we get views of His perfections which thrill through us like a new life, and throw open to our minds grand vast worlds of truth and wonder, these rays of light are full of dust and dimness, and do not approach to the real beauty of the Creator. Thus it is that we cannot take a step in this land of Divine

love, but mysteries start up around us far more hard to solve than the deepest difficulties of scholastic theology. We are getting new graces every day, crowning our correspondence to the grace we had before. We are continually drinking fresh draughts of immortal life in the Sacraments which we are allowed to repeat and renew day after day. But we are so accustomed to all this, that we can scarcely realize the miracles of compassion and love, of which we are incessantly the objects. All this continuance of grace is a manifestation to us of God's contentment with us. Not that He would not have us better than we are, and is not always stimulating us to higher things. But He takes gladly what we let Him have; and with loving eagerness, not only furnishes us with instant means to serve Him better, but almost anticipates with His rewards our little services.

For the recompense full often comes before the deed, and as our good works are not sufficiently numerous to gratify His liberality, He is crowning all day long a thousand good intentions which He knows will never issue in results. And why? because it is not so much works, as love, for which He craves. Oh, the mystery of the Divine Recompenses! how is it to be unriddled except by the satisfaction of the Precious Blood of Jesus? And then how is that adorable Blood-shedding itself to be unriddled? If the mystery of a contented God, with His blessed wrath appeased and His all-holy justice satisfied, can only be explained by the Cross of the Incarnate Word, it is only removing the difficulty one step backward; for then by what is the Cross itself to be explained?

Are we not for ever obliged to take refuge in Creation as the grand primal act of love, the fountain-head of all the Divine compassions, and to acknowledge that the classes of mysteries, which of all others are the most unfathomable, are those which concern the nature, the degree, and the perfections of Creative Love? O beautiful Abysses, in which it is so sweet to lose ourselves, so blissful to go on sounding them to all eternity and never learn the depths, and in musing upon whose precipitous shores a loving heart finds heaven even while on earth! It is a day to date from, when we first come to see, that the very fact of God having created us is in itself a whole magnificent revelation of eternal love, more safe to lean upon than what we behold, more worthy of our trust than what we know, more utterly our own than any other possession we can have.

WHEN GOD REPAYS

But let us study in detail the way in which God repays that poor and fitful and ungenerous love of which we ourselves are more than half ashamed. Let us inquire when He repays us, with what He repays us, and in what manner He repays us. We shall find fresh motives of love at every step in the inquiry.

First of all, when does He repay us? He does not keep us waiting for our recompenses. We know well that one additional degree of sanctifying grace is of more price than all the magnificence of the universe. The objects upon which we often fasten our affections or employ our ambition, during long years

of concentrated vigilance and persevering toil, are less worthy of our endeavors and less precious in the possession, than one single particle of sanctifying grace. Yet, let us suppose that a momentary temptation has assailed us, and we have resisted it, or that we have lifted up our hearts for an instant in faith and love to God, or that for the sake of Christ we have done some trifling unselfish thing, scarcely has the action escaped us before then and instantly the heavens have opened invisibly, and the force of heaven, the participation of the Divine Nature, the beauty, power, and marvel of sanctifying grace, has passed in viewless flight and with insensible ingress into our soul. There is not the delay of one instant. Moreover, these ingresses of grace are beyond number, and yet, if we correspond and persevere, the influence and result of each one of them is simply eternal. Each additional degree of sanctifying grace represents and secures an additional degree of glory in heaven, if only we correspond thereto, and persevere unto the end. At the moment in which we receive each additional degree of sanctifying grace our soul is clothed before God in a new and glorious beauty which a moment ago it had not got.

The communication of sanctifying grace to the soul is itself a marvellous and mysterious disclosure of the Divine magnificence and liberality. It is assuredly most probable, if it is not certain, that each additional degree of sanctifying grace is given the very instant it is merited by our actions, and is not reserved as an accumulated reward to be bestowed upon us when we enter into glory. But each addi-

tional degree of sanctifying grace is not a mere enriching of us with the created gifts of God, but it is a real and new mission to our souls of the Second and Third Persons of the Most Holy Trinity, together with the 'unsent coming to us and dwelling with us of the Father Himself. It is not only that the Three Divine Persons are always in us by essence, presence, and power; but by sanctifying grace.

They are in us in a new and special and most real, though deeply mysterious way, and in the case of the particular graces of the Sacraments. They are with us for particular ends, effects, and purposes. By an invisible mission this real indwelling of the Divine Persons assumes a new mode of existence at every one of the multitudinous additions and degrees of sanctifying grace, a new mode of existence which it is hardly possible to explain in words, as on the one hand it implies no manner of change or motion in Them, while on the other there is from Them some contact with the soul more personal, more intimate, more real, than that which existed but a moment before. If we are to allow some theologians to say that where the gifts of grace more concern the intellect, there is a mission of the Son, and, where they more concern the will, a mission of the Holy Ghost, yet we cannot hold any mission of the Son which is not also a mission of the Holy Ghost, nor any mission of the Holy Ghost which is not also a mission of the Son, nor any mission of the Two, apart and separate from the coming and indwelling of the Father.

If it is hard to understand this, it is also extremely beautiful, and ought to fill us with fresh love of God,

and a more loving wonder at His bounty towards His creatures. This doctrine of divine mission with each degree of sanctifying grace shows us how sanctifying grace is a substantial and real anticipation of heaven, that even now it is Himself, and not His created gifts only, that God gives to us, and that He is our own God, our own possession, from the very first moment of our justification. Moreover there is something to overawe us with the sense of the Divine intimacy with us, and to make us glow with love even in our awe, to reflect that this inexplicable operation, this celestial mansion, in our souls, this new and ever new mission of the Divine Persons, which we cannot explain and can only dimly apprehend, is actually being reflected in us many, many times a day, while we are in a state of grace, and seeking in our actions the glory and the will of God. Nay, so substantially are the Divine Persons present to the soul by Their invisible mission, that if by impossibility they were not present to us by Their immensity, They would be so by reason of sanctifying grace.

Moreover all through life our mere preservation of the gift of faith entitles us always to have the grace of God at hand when it is wanted, preventing and anticipating the rapid and subtle movements of our spiritual enemies; and even when it is not especially wanted, because we are not under the pressure of circumstances or in critical occasions, it is most likely that we are always insensibly receiving grace, except when we sleep; so that we live in a world of grace, and breathe its atmosphere unconsciously, thinking as little of it as of the air we breathe in

order to support our natural life. The Creator is, as it were, bound to assist His puny creatures: but He is not bound, unless by the excess of His own goodness, to be always near us, in the Christian sense of His being nigh unto all them who call upon Him. This nearness is His present and instantaneous reward for our unworthy service of Him.

Joy and sorrow have, each of them, their own wants and trials and peculiar laws; and who has not experienced the ready goodness of God in both of them? Life and earth and the world abound with joy, even to running over. Happiness sweeps the whole earth with its gay illuminations, just as the strong swift sunshine throws its unimpeded mantle over hill and dale, and land and sea. We are too happy. Our happiness runs away with us. Its superabundance will hardly let us sober ourselves, or steady our views of this transitory world. Joys are thousandfold; we cannot count them; their name is legion; we can hardly class them by their kinds. They run out from beneath the throne of God, and electrify millions of souls the world over at the same moment.

Our very life is joy, if we will only be honest enough to acknowledge it to God and to ourselves. The unhappiest man on earth has from sunrise to sunset more satisfaction than unhappiness. It is seldom he would even give up his own self and take another, still less forfeit the pleasure of living altogether. What a Creator must ours be, in whose world merely to live is a stronger joy than any misery, however unparalleled, which can befall us! And how marvellously God multiplies His graces

upon us in our joy, opening our hearts to love Him more generously, enlightening our minds to see Him more clearly, quickening our gratitude, giving us a surprising elasticity in our spiritual exercises, and taking away the dangerous alluring beauty of earth's idols by the very strength of the gladsome, disenchanting light which He throws upon them. But, above all, in joy we full often receive a double portion of that dear grace, which is well-nigh all our salvation, the grace of true contrition; for there is no contrition, which, for strength, vividness, and endurance, is like the contrition of a joyous man.

Sorrow too, when borne even with ordinary patience, has its own rewards from God at once, rewards both of nature and of grace. What can be more beautiful than the way in which He calculates our weakness, and then measures out our sorrows, and then rains vehement storms of grace upon our fainting wills! But we only see this now and then, and in dusty indistinct perspective. In eternity we shall behold our past life in God, and what a thrilling revelation it will be! But is not this undeniably true of ourselves, so far as we have gone in life, that we have had far less sorrow and pain than we are quite conscious we could bear, that our powers of bearing have been sensibly augmented while the cross was on us, that we can look back upon chapters of our past life about which we distinctly feel that with our present grace we could not live them over again, that the fruits of sorrow have always been tenfold brighter in the issue than the darkness was ever deepened in the process, and finally that in the retrospect the very sorrows themselves have been

full of joys, exotic joys whose large leaves and waxen blossoms and long-lasting perfumes show that they were grown in heaven and not on earth?

Yet these are only the present rewards of grief, the earthly blessings of those who mourn! But look into the wonderful faces of those rings of Saints who encompass the throne on high; feed your soul on the grave intellectual beauty which is depicted there, the winning look of blameless purity, the impassioned intensity of their celestial love. With most of them it was sorrow that chastened them into that transcendent loveliness, sorrow that piloted them to that happy shore, sorrow that put those jewelled crowns upon their heads, sorrow, keen and deep and long, that unveiled for them the ever-beaming countenance of God! O magnificent Creator! where hast Thou left room for our disinterested love, when everywhere it seems as though Thou hadst made our interests take precedence of Thine own?

Look at death, which is a simple punishment! Can a created intelligence conceive of anything more terrible than to fall into the hands of God for the single solitary purpose of being punished? And we might have thought that death would be like this, being the first-born child of sin, from which not even the Immaculate Mother might be exempt. Yet how should we have miscalculated the love of God! The deaths of His servants are among the most valued jewels of His crown. They are among the best possessions which He holds in right of His creative love.

We know but little of the sights and sounds, the tastes and touches, of that last dark passage. There is a shroud of seeming dishonor as well as mystery

thrown around that dread event. But we know that in it men live whole lives in one short hour, and accumulate experiences which pass our understanding both for number, rapidity and truth. We know that grand act has peculiar needs, peculiar distresses, and that the invisible and visible world forget their boundaries at the death-bed, and war together in dread conflict, of which for the most part the dying eye is the sole spectator. If we think long on death, we shall come to wonder how it is that any one can die calmly; the interests at stake are so terrific, the moment so decisive, the horrors so thickly strewn, the natural helplessness so complete.

A whole world is sensibly sinking and giving way under us, and there is nothing but blackness, space, and the arms of God. Who can dare to fall through without a shudder? Yet when are God's graces and indulgences more numerous, more triumphant, more accessible, than in that dreadful hour? Grace makes a very sunset of what to nature is the most impenetrable darkness, and the plaintive strains of the *Miserere* merge in spite of our humility into songs of triumph; for the walls between the dying soul and the heavenly Jerusalem are so nearly fretted through, that the loud alleluias mingle with and distract the contrite love whose eyes are closing on the Crucifix. The creature's change is very dear to the Creator. Precious in the sight of the Lord are the deaths of His Saints.

Now all these are present rewards, ways in which God repays on earth our love of Him. They are but samples of what is incessant, abundant, superfluous, all through life. Every one's mercies are so great

that they are, to him at least, rightly viewed, strange, wonderful, and unexpected. God tries our faith, and seems to delight in trying it, by the very reduplication of His benefits. But after all, this life is not the time of His recompenses. He does not profess to give us our wages here. He warns us not to expect them. Is it then that His love is so great, that He cannot help Himself, and that His Nature is under the blessed necessity of loving and of giving? Or is it that these mercies are only the casual drops which are spilled from the overflowing cup prepared for us in heaven? Oh! even the most desolate of men may be so sure of His paternal love, that they may remember that eternity can be no long way off, and will repay the waiting.

WITH WHAT GOD REPAYS

But if the promptitude of His payment is in itself a proof of the greatness of God's love, still more strongly is that consoling fact brought out when we consider with what He pays us. The blessings of nature, the gifts of grace, the rewards of glory,—who is sufficient to declare the number, the beauty, the greatness, and the wonder of these things?

There are three vast kingdoms, three magnificent creations, for so they might be called, which are simple expressions of the vastness of the Creator's love. They cannot enrich Him. They are not needed to His bliss. They add nothing to what He possessed already. His mercy contrives to reap some little harvest of accidental glory from them, but it is at the expense of endless outrage, not only of His

justice, but even to His compassion. They are the product of His love of the creature, our property rather than His, almost more our dominion even than His own.

In the kingdom of nature there are three vast provinces or separate worlds, which are full of the most exquisite enjoyment to the creature, and we speak only of enjoyments, which, if through our frailty they are dangerous as stealing our hearts from God, are yet altogether without reproach of sin. The *physical world* is full of God's rewards. Life is itself a joy. But what shall we say of the abounding sense of health and vigor, which they who enjoy it the most abundantly can hardly value at its legitimate price? Yet to one, whose head is always aching, whose limbs have always in them some lurking pain, and whose languor and feebleness is all day long playing the traitor to the activity of his mind or the energy of his will, the sense of health, when it comes, is almost like a miracle. There is the surpassing beauty of scenery, the grandeur of the mountains, the sublimity of the sea, the variety of fertile landscape, the rain, the wind, the sunshine, and the storm. Every sense is an avenue of perpetual pleasure, which, if we will, can raise the mind to God, and inflame our hearts with love. If we except the irregularities which sin has introduced into the physical world, and which manifestly form no part of the system, the whole of it is simple pleasure and enjoyment, an emanation from the everlasting and inexhaustible gladness of the Most High.

But the pleasures of the *intellectual world* are yet more wonderful. Can any pleasure be more ex-

quisite than the sensible exercise of our mental faculties? The variety, the multitude, the depth, the rapidity, the interweaving of our thoughts, are full of boundless enjoyment, leading us through realms and realms of truth and beauty, and charming us at every turn with some enchanting discovery. Through some minds the pure delight of poetry thrills, with feelings of the most indescribable nature. With others, the sweet, skilful strains of music wind into the uttermost recesses of their souls, with a beauty which is sometimes so gifted, as almost to win back the reason that has already deserted its throne.

To others, form and color, painting, statuary, and architecture, are like copious fountains of power and enjoyment, streaming into them abundantly for ever. With many, the labor of composition is only a pain because of the very excess of the pleasure, which is more than they can bear. The investigation of truth is only at times weary and irksome, because our tyrant minds are demanding of the body what it cannot give. No more can be said of the pleasures of the intellectual world, than that they are marvellous shadows of the incomprehensible joys of God Himself.

If the *moral world* seems to afford a less variety of enjoyment than the intellectual, it far transcends it in the vividness and power of its enjoyments. The will is an inexhaustible mine of joys, which our nature seems to prize beyond all others. Our affections are complicated instruments of the most amazing and unexpected and diversified pleasures, which possess our whole nature, and fulfil it with satisfaction, in a way which no other pleasures do. Human

love sits upon a throne above all other human joys, and there is no one who ever dreams of questioning its rights or of abating its prerogatives. Indeed, the joy of love is too great for life. It breaks its bounds, runs riot, and makes wild work even with the strong framework of society and the destiny of kingdoms. It fills every depth in our nature and then runs over, deluging mind and will, duty and even passion.

There is no abyss sufficiently capacious to hold the torrents of love which one heart is able to outpour, except that sea without horizon, bed, or shore, the ever-blessed Being of God Himself. The Holy Ghost, the eternally proceeding Spirit, is the jubilee of the Father and the Son; and His shadow lies for evermore upon the moral world, the vast reflecting waters of the human will. As the physical world, with its joys of substance and being, appears to be a transcript of the Person of the Eternal Father, and the intellectual world, with its light and laws, to be an illuminated shadow of the Person of the World, so does the moral world, the fiery, thrilling world of love and will, represent Him who is the coequal limit of the Godhead, the third Person of the Ever-blessed Trinity.

And yet these three worlds, the physical, the intellectual, and the moral, are one world; and in their unions, blendings, borrowings, comparisons, and intersections, we have so many fresh sources of the most delightful enjoyment, above and beyond those which these worlds furnish in their separate capacities. Oh! why do we not worship more constantly and more intelligently, in common daily things, the

wisdom of God, thus lending itself to the strong will of His goodness, in every department of creation.

Every orb in the immeasurable fields of indistinguishable star-dust, lies in the light of God's outpoured and everflowing joy. Every created intelligence drinks its fill of the fountains of His gladness. Every instinct of animals beats with a pulsation of Divine enjoyment. Every tree uplifts its head and flings out its branches, every flower blooms and sheds sweet odor, every mineral glances and sparkles, just as the clouds sail, and the waters flow, and the planet turns, in the excess of the happiness of God. His blessedness lies over the whole world, serenely shining, like the waters of a spiritual sea, beneath whose transparent depths all creation with beautiful distinction lies. Thus, in God's wide world, there is no room for sin, no provision for sorrow, not a corner for unhappiness. Sin is a stranger, an intruder, an enemy, as little at home on earth as it would be in heaven. It is we who have introduced it into the bright and happy world, we who, by the freedom of our wills, which were left at large that we might love God the more magnificently, have broken down the cloister of His Paradise.

It is not altogether man's ingratitude which makes him forgetful of the benefits of God. He Himself, blessed be His Holy Name! throws His own mercies into the shade, as well by multiplying them beyond our powers of counting, as by surpassing and excelling them by others. Thus it is with the kingdom of nature. It is lost in the splendor of the kingdom of grace. A while ago, it looked so bright and beautiful, with all its features so smiling and its outlines

so soft and ethereal, and now, like a mountain-side which the sunbeams have deserted, it looks cold and bare, rugged and uninviting. We have already seen how, in the kingdom of grace, God rewards our efforts instantaneously, by fresh supplies of greater grace. Let us look for a moment at grace itself.

The gulf between God and ourselves seems infinite and impassable; yet grace bridges it over, and passes it with a rapidity to which the speed of the electric spark is weary slowness. By sanctifying grace He is incessantly, habitually, powerfully, superabundantly, pouring into us marvellous communications of His Divine Nature. Each undulation of it, as it reaches and informs our souls, is a greater miracle than the creation of the universe.

One touch, and we pass from darkness to light; one touch, and all our eternity is changed. He endows our souls, even before reason dawns, with mysterious infused habits, which make such utterly new creatures of us, that the process can only be described as a being positively born again. Besides this, He plants, even in the unconscious infant at the font, seven wonderful gifts of the Holy Ghost, seven distinct heavens of the most beautiful splendors and unearthly powers, in which lie hid the possibilities of the very highest sanctity. Thus our souls are made, as it were, a musical instrument, worthy that the hands of God should play upon it, and out of which He can evoke such melodies of holiness, such strains of the exquisite music of perfection, as could ravish the Angels of heaven, even as the Human Soul of Jesus is ravishing them this hour. Neither is this instrument to remain unused. The impulses of the

Divine Will, the pressure of actual grace, is ever varying the music which they draw forth, as the rapid touch of the Creator's hand flies over the many keys of the complex heart of man; and all the while one grace is leading to another in wonderful progression, one the prophecy of what is yet to come, and another the crown of what has gone before, with such a vista of graces in the prospect that no man ever reaches to the term. The day will never dawn when he must not aspire to more and more; there is no term which is the limit of the grace which God intended him to reach; and, however long it may be delayed, death will find him full of beginnings, laying the foundations of a new and better, a more lofty and spacious, fabric than he had built before. Most wonderful too is it to behold how all this grace elicits and magnifies the freedom of the will, and, while it supports and strengthens and almost constrains it, makes it all the while more undeniably, because more spiritually, free.

But all these blessings of nature and of grace are only in an imperfect and improper sense the rewards of the Creator. The kingdom of glory is the theatre of His recompense. It is in order to extend that kingdom, that the grace given us is so ineffably beyond what is due to our nature. But how shall we hope to measure the kingdom of glory, when it is to be measured only by the Divine Magnificence? Both a prophet and an Apostle join in teaching us that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor man's heart conceived, what God has prepared for them that love Him. When the bodies of the just rise at the general resurrection, with their senses spiritualized and ren-

dered capable of pleasures which do not fall within their province now, and with perhaps many new senses developed in the immortal body, which were unknown in its mortal days, the pure pleasures of these glorified senses must be something quite beyond the power of our imagination to picture to itself. He who knows the blameless exultation of his soul when the eye has conveyed to it a landscape of surpassing beauty, or whose ear has thrilled with some inspiriting or subduing strain of music, or who, when he heard a passage of magnificent poetry, felt as if an immediate and extraordinary accession of bold intellectual power was given to him as he listened, may at least indistinctly guess the exquisite delights of the glorified senses of the risen body, or which is perhaps more true, understand how their delicacy and charm must be beyond our power of guessing.

Yet the heavenly joys of the illuminated understanding far transcend the thrills of the glorified senses. The contemplation of heavenly beauty and of heavenly truth must indeed be beyond all our earthly standards of comparison. The clearness and instantaneity of all the mental processes, the complete exclusion of error, the unbroken serenity of the vision, the facility of embracing whole worlds and systems in one calm, searching, exhausting glance, the Divine character and utter holiness of all the truths presented to the view,—these are broken words which serve at least to show what we may even now indistinctly covet in that bright abode of everlasting bliss. Intelligent intercourse with the angelic choirs, and the incessant transmission of the

Divine splendors through them to our minds, cannot be thought of without our perceiving that the keen pleasures and deep sensibilities of the intellectual world on earth are but poor, thin, unsubstantial shadows of the exulting immortal life of our glorified minds above.

The very expansion of the faculties of the soul, and the probable disclosure in it of many new faculties which have no object of exercise in this land of exile, are in themselves pleasures which we can hardly picture to ourselves. To be rescued from all narrowness, and for ever; to possess at all times a perfect consciousness of our whole undying selves, and to possess and retain that self-consciousness in the bright light of God; to feel the supernatural corroborations of the light of glory, securing to us powers of contemplation such as the highest mystical theology can only faintly and feebly imitate; to expatiate in God, delivered from the monotony of human things; to be securely poised in the highest flights of our immense capacities, without any sense of weariness, or any chance of a reaction; who can think out for himself the realities of a life like this?

Yet what is all this compared with one hour, one of earth's short hours, of the magnificences of celestial love? Oh! to turn our whole souls upon God, and souls thus expanded and thus glorified; to have our affections multiplied and magnified a thousand-fold, and then girded up and strengthened by immortality to bear the beauty of God to be unveiled before us; and even so strengthened, to be rapt by it into a sublime amazement which has no similitude on earth; to be carried away by the inebriating tor-

rents of love, and yet be firm in the most steadfast adoration; to have passionate desire, yet without tumult or disturbance; to have the most bewildering intensity along with an unearthly calmness; to lose ourselves in God, and then find ourselves there more our own than ever; to love rapturously and to be loved again still more rapturously, and then for our love to grow more rapturous still, and again the return of our love to be still outstripping what we gave, and then for us to love even yet more and more and more rapturously, and again, and again, and again to have it so returned, and still the great waters of God's love to flow over us and overwhelm us, until the vehemence of our impassioned peace and the daring vigor of our yearning adoration reach beyond the sight of our most venturous imagining;—what is all this but for our souls to live a life of the most intelligent entrancing ecstasy, and yet not be shivered by the fiery heat? There have been times on earth when we have caught our own hearts loving God, and there was a flash of light and then a tear, and after that we lay down to rest. Oh, happy that we were! Worlds could not purchase from us even the memory of those moments. And yet when we think of heaven, we may own that we know not yet what manner of thing it is to love the Lord our God.

Meanwhile it is difficult to conceive how the pure pleasures of the glorified senses, or the delights of our illuminated understandings, or the expansion of our souls dilated with immortality, or the magnificences of celestial love, can be of any price at all in our eyes, seeing that they are but the outside

fringes of heaven, the merest accessories of our true beatitude. To see God face to face, as He is; to gaze undazzled on the Three Divine Persons, cognizable and distinct in the burning fires of their inaccessible splendors; to behold that long coveted sight, and endless Generation of the All-holy Son, and our hearts to hold the joy, and not die; to watch with spirits all outstretched in adoration the ever-radiant and ineffably beautiful Procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son, and to participate ourselves in that jubilee of jubilees, and drink in with greedy minds the wonders of that Procession, and the marvellous distinctness of its beauty from the Generation of the Son; to feel ourselves with ecstatic awe, and yet with seraphic intimacy, overshadowed by the Person of the Unbegotten Father, the Father to whom and of whom we have said so much on earth, the Fountain of Godhead, who is truly our Father, while He is also the Father of the Eternal Son; to explore, with exulting license and with unutterably glad fear, attribute after attribute, oceans opening into oceans of divinest beauty; to lie astonished in unspeakable contentment before the vision of God's surpassing Unity, so long the joyous mystery of our predilection, while the Vision through all eternity seems to grow more fresh and bright and new:—O my poor soul! what canst thou know of this, or of these beautiful necessities, of thy exceeding love, which shall only satisfy itself in endless alternations, now of silence and now of song?

These are the rewards of God, these the ways in which He repays our love. To hear them or to read

of them is not enough. Years of continual meditation will not even give us an adequate conception of them. To estimate them rightly we must have a true and profound knowledge of God, and be able to think worthily of His greatness. Without this we can never know the abyss of condescension to which He stoops in order to confer a grace upon the loftiest of His Saints. He has, as it were, to humble Himself even to receive the burning worship of the purest Seraphim. Oh, to what a lowness does He bend Himself in order to accept the love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary! Without repeated meditations on the Divine Perfections we cannot fathom the depth of our own nothingness, the horror of our own baseness, the inconceivable pertinacity of our sin; neither can we realize, not only the littleness of our love, which is so little that the poorest words give an exaggerated impression of it, but also to what extent God is free from obligations to us, and to how little, little at least compared with the immensity of His actual mercies, our nature can lay claim as its due because it is a creature. Yet an accurate spiritual apprehension of all these things is needful, before we can appreciate the mysterious magnificence of the rewards of God. Only let us remember, for life is short and there is much to do, that right down through the abyss of our own nothingness lies the shortest road to the contemplation of the Divine Beauty.

THE WAY IN WHICH GOD REPAYS US

While I stand in the presence of these mighty recompenses of our Creator, I am abashed by their exceeding magnitude, and all things else which I otherwise should love become insignificant and go almost out of sight. I feel that I have no words to tell these great things, no thoughts to think them; and yet it seems to me as if the *way* in which God repays our love was something even more wonderful than the rewards He gives. To see God face to face is the crowning joy of heaven; to be sensibly near Him is the greatest joy of earth; and He never seems so near as in the way in which He deals with us, His demeanor towards us, His manner, His address, His courtesy, if I may for the moment use such words. At first sight it is altogether so unlike what we should have expected; and yet on second thought so right, so suitable, both to His greatness and to our littleness, while at the same time its being right and suitable does not in the least detract from its gratuitous condescension. Nay, it rather enhances it. In truth, God's goodness is unlike any other subject of human contemplation; for the more reasonable it appears to us, the more surprising does it grow, as if, even now and here, it partook somewhat of the eternal freshness of the Beatific Vision.

When the Creator of the world entered it in order to redeem it, in the obscure midnight, in a gloomy cavern, as the Babe of Bethlehem, it was an advent such as took the natural speculations of men by surprise, and was even a hindrance to their belief.

So is it with God's demeanor towards us in the world. He is not like a great king. He is unlike one both in the frequency of His visits, or rather in His abiding presence, and also in the absence of pomp and notice when He comes. There is no attitude of command, no obvious graciousness of condescension.—Blessed be His Majesty! His manner is not that of a master, nor even of an equal; it is rather that of an inferior, mingled with the sweetness and fidelity of an earthly mother. When He blesses us, assists us, gives us graces, soothes our sorrows, or dries our tears, He does it all with an amazing tenderness, almost with a sort of bashful humility, like one whom we are laying under an obligation by accepting His services at all. The attentions of His love are also so minute, that no service, or half-service, or transitory intentions of ours, escape His Divine yet just exaggerations. In our past life there are thousands of forgotten prayers, thousands of resisted temptations; but God has forgotten none of them. He repays them with a mindfulness which, unless it also awakens love, can hardly fail to try our faith. He must indeed desire our love, who tempts us with an eternal reward for a cup of cold water given in His Name. He repays us also variously and with a view to our tastes and desires, so as to enhance to each of us the value of our own particular reward. He repays us superabundantly. At first sight it seems as if there was an absence of all similitude between the service and the reward, both in degree and kind. Nevertheless there is to His wisdom an exact and unerring proportion in His recompense, which,

while the manner of it is a mystery to us, is at the same time an encouragement to us to love Him more, as if He had affectionately and condescendingly put it in our own power to have as much of heaven and of Him as we please. Last of all, throughout the whole proceeding, it is in reality love, and not services, which He repays, not the acts we do, so much as the spirit in which we do them. Can we conceive of a manner more attractive, of an affection more winning, of a solicitude more delightful, of a gratitude more touching, of an unselfishness more sweetly reproachful, of a generosity more overwhelming, of a magnificence more delicate, than this demeanor of the Creator towards His creatures?

And it is none other than the Creator, the boundless Ocean of Being, the abyss of unfathomable perfections, who to the gigantic stretch of His omnipotence can wed these ineffable delicacies of minutest love! And it is to us that all this is done, to us who had no rights to begin with, and who have again and again forfeited all rights we could imagine might be ours, to us who in our secret hearts know ourselves to be what we are, more unspeakably wicked than any one of our fellow-creatures suspects that we can be! And the love which is thus repaid, alas! what a mockery of love it is!

Let us think once more of heaven. How cheerfully the thought of that bright home can humble us! What can be more wonderful than the contrast between man paying God on earth, and God paying man in heaven? We have looked at man's side in the last chapter. We have seen the misery and unworthiness, the scantiness and the meanness, the

coldness, the reluctance, the distraction, and the ungracious delays of the creature with the Creator. And then comes death! A good death is one in which we feel that hitherto we have never done any good at all, but in which we seriously, though with alarming self-distrust, intend, if we survive, to begin to do good. And considering the greatness of God and the vastness of our obligations to Him, this is by no means a fiction even to the Saints. We die, and in 'dying we fall into the hands of His justice, and there, fresh wonder of creative love! we find far more than mercy.

Our guardian Angel could scarcely let us into heaven if he wished, were he the judge. The Mother of Mercy would have to borrow the Sacred Heart of Jesus, before she could see things as He sees them, and award a crown to us. If there could be shame in heaven, how should we be overwhelmed with confusion appearing there with the miserable tribute of our interested love and of our wisely selfish fear! But how does the Creator, the King of kings, receive His tribute? He bursts forth all divinely into triumph, because a half-converted sinner has condescended to accept His grace. He bids the Angels rejoice, and hold high feast through all the empyrean heaven, not because He has evolved some new and wonder-stirring system out of nothing, not because He has called into being some million-worlded nebula, and cast upon it such an effulgence of His beauty as throws all the rest of His creation into the shade,—but because one wretched, unworthy, offensive man has, after an immense amount of Divine eloquence and pleading,

consented to take the first step towards not being damned, one outcast of human society, who has drunk his fill of every vice, has graciously condescended for fear of hell to accept heaven! These are the Creator's triumphs, these the ovations of everlasting and of all-wise mercy. And God can do nought unworthy of Himself. He cannot demean Himself. Abasement is impossible to Him. Nothing can sully His incomparable purity. Nothing can He do which is not infinitely worthy of Him, worthy of His power, His wisdom, and His goodness. And therefore this triumph, this feast of Angels, over one sinner that does penance, is altogether worthy of the adorable majesty of the eternally blessed God! Oh, who would not weep over the wonders of creative love, mystery after mystery, at every turn giving out fresh treasures of tenderness, compassion, and magnificence?

Watch that soul which is now just entering heaven. Can anything be more amazing than the caresses which God is lavishing upon it? Heaven itself has almost grown brighter by its entrance, and the anthems of the redeemed have sounded forth with a more full sonorous melody. Mary on her throne has been filled with joy, while an exulting thrill of sympathy ran through all the angelic multitudes. And why do they rejoice? Because there is a new joy for God, another glory for His complacency to rest on. It is the salvation of that soul which has just entered heaven. Some fifty years of the full use of reason it lived on earth. The world was its delight, wealth almost its idol. It drank its fill of various pleasures, and thought not

of His goodness out of which they come. Many times the Divine law came across that man's path, and when it did he straightway, and with little reflection, transgressed it. He loved luxury, denied himself nothing, and was not over-bountiful to the poor. He was surrounded by comforts, as a city is compassed by its walls. He had sorrows and troubles, who has not? But they were light and infrequent. The world smiled upon its votary. He was popular with his fellows. He had all that his indolent ambition cared to have; and, best of all, he was blessed with almost unbroken health. There was at last almost the weariness of satiety about his undeviatingly prosperous fortune. Disease came, and his old joys ceased to be joys at all.

He had nothing then to tempt him from God, but everything to draw him nearer to Him. Fear also, with the belief of hell, wrought strongly upon him; and by the help of priest and Sacrament, together with the grace of a very moderate sorrow, he put together in some ten days the dregs of half a century spent in the service of the devil and the world; and he has now gone through a very circuitous path in Purgatory to heaven to offer God this refuse of his probation. And heaven keeps feast for this! And the great Creator takes almost with avidity the leavings of the world, counting for chivalry the querulous helplessness of a sin-enfeebled soul. There is not one word of reproach, one look of discontent. Coupled with His extraordinary mindfulness of minutest services, God is seemingly forgetful how all good is but His own grace. Moreover He is, as it were blind, to the fact that the man was after all

doing what was best for himself, and when he could hardly help himself, and even then with amazingly little of self-indignation or of righteous zeal. See! His arms are round that death-bed penitent. He is telling him the secrets of His love. He is sealing for him with a Father's kiss the eternity of his beatitude. That man will lie for ever bathed in the beautiful light of the Godhead!

Is this credible? Should we dare to believe it, if it were not of faith? Oh, wonderful, wonderful God! of whom each hour is telling us something new, making premature perpetual heaven in our hearts! It is an old history, that love makes the Creator seem to put Himself below His own creatures: it is an old history, yet it surprises us almost to tears each morning as we wake. So here we come to a Servant-God, like the Incarnate Servant-Saviour, Jesus Christ. And yet there are men to whom God is a difficulty! There are men who think hard thoughts of Him, whose only trial of us is in the prodigious excesses of His love, which wearies and outstrips at times the slowness of our faith. O Heavenly Father! it is the greatness of Thy goodness which bewilders our humility by mocking our knowledge of ourselves; and that is the only difficulty we find in Thee. Oh, let it grow still more difficult, still more beyond our grasp, for therein is our eternal life!

What then is the conclusion to which we come about this repaying of our love by God? It is simply this. In the first place, He has made His glory coincide with our interests. Secondly, from a privilege He lowers love into a precept, and this

one act is a complete revelation of Himself. Thirdly, He so puts our interests into His, that it is hard to look at His interests only, without falling into heresy. Do these conclusions solve the five questions we have been asking? No! but they lead to the one answer of all the five, only that, ending as we began, the answer is itself a mystery. St. John states it; no one can explain it; earth would be hell without it; Purgatory is paradise because of it; we shall live upon it in heaven, yet never learn all that is in it;—GOD IS LOVE!

BOOK III

Objections Considered

CHAPTER I

THE EASINESS OF SALVATION

THE result of the preceding inquiry has been at the very least to satisfy us as to the fact that God loves us, and as to the nature and character of His love. We have seen that Divine love is at once creative, redeeming, sanctifying, uncreated, and without respect of persons. As creative it was not content to call Angels and men out of nothing, but it constituted them at the outset in a state of grace, which was not connatural to them, and was in no way due to their nature. As redeeming, it pursued men when they fell; and at no less an expense than the Incarnation of One of the Divine Persons, and with every circumstance of attraction and prodigality, it bought them back again when they had sold themselves as slaves to evil. As sanctifying, it is incessant in its visitations of grace, and marvellous in the heights of sanctity to which it can raise those

whom sin had sunk so low. As uncreated, it is especially astonishing and adorable, and naturally includes, and while it includes surpasses, all created ties and all diversities of human love. As without respect of persons, it enables us to repose our trust, not only on the all-efficacious power of God, but upon that beautiful justice and exquisite fidelity which are the true foundations of our love.

In this love of God we have already passed an eternity. In this love we have lived without beginning. He has never seen His glorious Word, but He has seen us in Him, and the mutual love of Father and of Son from the first has scattered its brightness on our foreseen lives. There is something awful in such enduring love, something which overshadows the spirits of creatures so capricious and inconstant as ourselves. It frightens us that we should have been loved eternally. At the same time what must be the necessary efficacy of an eternal love? Here is a very mine of golden consolation. He who has not ceased to love us from for ever, will not lightly withdraw His love. He will not easily surrender to His enemies a creature whom He has borne in His bosom like a nurse from the beginning. Into the least of His blessings He pours an endless love. There are no infirmities which He disdains, no prayers which He disregards. He cannot love otherwise than with an overflowing love, rewarding the most trivial actions, canonizing the most transitory wishes, and placing around every step of life such a retinue of graces, such an attendance of Angels, such an apparatus of Sacra-

ments, that the self-will must be strong indeed which can break away from God and lose itself.

He apparently consults our interests rather than His own, by making, in reality, the last identical with the first. His first thought for sinners is to make repentance easy and light; and strange indeed are the things to which His wisdom can persuade His justice, or His goodness bend His sanctity. By His own order, our liberty seems to take precedence of His law, while the whole of creation is apparently disposed for the convenience of our salvation. The increase of this love depends upon ourselves. On this side the grave we can have it when we will, and there is always grace to enable us to ask it and to will it. The more we ask the more He will give, and reckon the obligation to be on His side rather than on ours. All that is wanted of us is, to take God's side, to love what He loves, to hate what He hates, and, to sum up all in one word, *to belong to Jesus Christ*.

This is a summary of the results at which we have arrived, and it brings us to the conclusion of the second division of our treatise. In the first, we inquired what it was to be a creature, and what it was to have a Creator, and we saw that creation meant and only could mean love. Full of the knowledge we had thus acquired, we proceeded to ask five questions, concerning the principal mysteries of this Divine love, which, from its eternal hiding-place in God, came into sight at creation; and we saw that our position as creatures made it important to us to have these questions answered. But it may be objected, All this is so much special pleading for

God. It does not state man's case fairly, because it does not state it completely. There are certain phenomena which are practical objections to this view, and they have hardly been considered.

This is what may be said. I do not own the justice of it, because as I have said before, if I understand rightly what it is to be a creature, and what it is to have a Creator, I do not see how the creature can have any side at all. It appears that God's side is also the creature's side, and that he can have no other. If we imagine for ourselves an immensely benevolent despot, in possession of the most legitimate claims upon our obedience, but bound, by the rectitude of his own character, as well as by our rights, to the exercise of commutative justice, and call him the Creator, under such a being we should obviously have a side of our own, and a point of view belonging to us. But that is no adequate description of God. It is only an uneasy intellectual creation of our own. But, if there be a chance of gaining any more love for God from the hearts of His creatures, most willingly should we engage in the task of meeting these objections; the more willingly, because the soil to be turned up is so rich, concerning, as it does, the Creator's love of His creatures, that it will bloom with fresh and fresh blossoms, almost before the plough has furrowed up the surface.

Our object, however, is strictly a practical one. Hence, we are not going to enter into any of the abstruse questions about the origin of evil, or the existence of hell, or the permission of idolatry, or the eternal destiny of those outside the Church. We

are speaking to the children of the Church; and, however dark such questions may be to them, or however worthy of their most vigorous intellectual research, they have no right to be practical difficulties to a Catholic in the pursuit of holiness. Strictly speaking, we have no right to have any difficulties at all; for a speculative difficulty can hardly become a practical one to men who take the teaching of the Church on faith; and men who do not, how shall they dream of attaining holiness at all? Nevertheless, there are some questions which, if not without fault of ours, at least without grievous fault, tease and molest us, and become, not unfrequently, sometimes the sources, and at other times the hotbeds, of temptation. Of these, we may select three, especially, because, in handling them, we shall implicitly and indirectly answer many more. The first is, *the difficulty of salvation*; the second, *the ultimate fate of the great multitude of the faithful*; and the third, *the perplexing question of worldliness*; and these will occupy this and the two following chapters.

It is objected, that all that has been said of the creative love of God would lead to the conclusion, that it is easy to be saved, or that, if it is not easy, the case has not been stated in its entirety.

To this objection it does not seem a sufficient answer to say, that God is not less good, but that the awful malice and corruption of man's will are too strong even for His will to save us. For, though it is true that God cannot both leave us free and constrain us to be saved, yet His redeeming love might be expected to make such allowances for the unhappy degradation of man by sin, as to make his salvation

not a work of more than ordinary difficulty. Surely, these allowances are implied in the very notion of redemption. If heaven be not easy of access, neither its beauty, nor the generosity with which it is offered, are such motives of love as they would be on the contrary supposition. The most perfectly satisfactory answer to the objection, if it be true, is, that salvation is easy. We are speaking only to and of believers, and are not concerning ourselves with a secret which God has reserved for Himself, and into which we do not attempt to penetrate, even by guesses, because it has no practical bearing upon our own service of God. To a believer, salvation is easy; so easy, in fact, that, to each individual soul in the Church, the chances are greatly in favor of his salvation. This may not be true of him at any given moment, as when he has just relapsed into sin, or when he is enfeebled by a long, wilful captivity to sinful habits, but, looking at his life as a whole, and considering things in the long run, it is true that the chances are greatly in favor of his salvation; and I have my misgivings that I am even thus understanding his prospects of success. His life must be a life of efforts; but the efforts are easy—easy in themselves, easy in their auxiliaries, easy in both the prospect of a future and the enjoyment of a present reward. What else is the meaning of our Lord's words: "Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet, and my burden light" (Matt. xi. 28-30). Or, again, what can be more dis-

inct than the words of St. John? “For this is the charity of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not heavy. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith” (1 John v. 3, 4).

EASINESS OF SALVATION IN ITSELF

The first point, then, for us to consider, is the *easiness of salvation* in itself. Let no one be afraid that, if the affirmative of this proposition be proved, it will make any of us sluggish and indifferent in the pursuit of Christian perfection. Divine truth is continually exerting an influence and putting forth an attraction, which baffle and deride the guesses and predictions of our human criticism. If the view be true, it will lead men to love God who do not love Him now, and it will lead those who love Him already to love Him more. It is not the fear of hell which draws men to aim at perfection, nor is it the ambition to be saints which buoys them up through mortification, weariness, and prayer. It is the beauty of God, which has touched them and taken them captive; and whatever discloses more of that beauty, will be but a stronger attraction enabling them to scale higher summits. So while our inquiry will give us sweet and hopeful views of sinners, it will also humble, edify, and stimulate ourselves, if we are trying to advance in the ways of God.

Let us then trace from the first the process by which God vouchsafes to save a soul. Not many days elapse after a child of Catholic parents is born,

before he is carried to the baptismal font. There by the almost momentary action of pouring water in the Name of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity, the child is regenerated. Nothing can be more easy, or more instantaneous. Yet let us consider all that is involved in an infant's Baptism. Not only are the eternal consequences of the fall to his particular soul in one instant destroyed, but the child becomes entitled to the most stupendous privileges and inheritance, which would not have been due to him naturally, even if Adam had not fallen. He is at once raised to a far higher state than one of pure nature. He is the child of God. The Divine Nature has been communicated to him by sanctifying grace. Extraordinary possibilities of spiritual developments and earnestness of everlasting life have been implanted in him by certain mysteriously infused habits of the theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity, perhaps of the other virtues also. Seven other supernatural habits, standing in the same relation to the actual impulses of the Holy Ghost as the other infused habits stand to actual grace, and which bear the name of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, are also infused into him, containing in themselves spiritual provisions for the greater occasions of his life, for his more intimate intercourse with God, and, if so be, for the magnificent operations of heroic sanctity. Meanwhile, if he dies before the use of reason, there is secured to him the eternal vision of God, with all the intellectual glories of an immortal spirit, whose intelligence had never been developed upon earth at all. Now all this haste, if we may so speak, with which the Divine mercy seizes

the infant's soul, refusing to wait for his consent or till he can accept God's great gift by a rational act of his own, implies such a determined and exuberant love on the part of the Creator, that it is not easily to be conceived, that the rest of the process of salvation shall not partake of the same character of Divine impatience and facility.

The baptized child, when he comes to the use of reason, finds himself under a code of laws, the object of which is to secure his salvation by prescribing the conditions on which it is to be obtained. These are the Ten Commandments of God and the Six Precepts of the Church. They are few in number and easy of observance, at least easy under ordinary circumstances, and on the occasions when they are difficult, quite marvellous assistances of supernatural grace are prepared and heaped upon the soul. The man finds himself in a world of many pleasures, and of these comparatively few are sinful; and if the world is full of dangers too, it is always to be remembered that the fatal enemy of the soul, mortal sin, cannot lie in ambush for it or take it by surprise.

Full deliberation and advertence are necessary to the commission of a mortal sin. When we think who God is and ponder His eternal truth and ineffable sanctity, it must be a wonder to us that any sin is venial, that no number of venial sins can make a mortal sin, and that no habits of venial sin, however inveterate, unworthy, deliberate, or against special lights, can themselves destroy the soul. It is wonderful that a man can be graciously visited by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, can feel assured in his own mind that such and such practices or self-

denials are really the desire of God in his case, and yet be also sure that those inspirations are not intended as a law, and the resistance of them therefore not a sin, though all want of generosity with God will ultimately and indirectly work its way to sin. Furthermore the condition of the creature seems to be untruthfulness. Everything is false around us; full of excuse, pretence, and insincerity. Yet falsehood is the very opposite of God, who is eternal truth, and it is equally the characteristic of the evil one whom our Lord Himself has named the father of lies. Nevertheless lying is a venial sin. No number of lies however wilful, so long as they are not sins against justice also, can of themselves destroy the soul. Surely this doctrine is full of difficulty.

The whole subject of sin abounds with truths of this description, which are more trying to the faith than the mysteries either of the Holy Trinity or the Eucharist. Thus the remission of venial sin, one of the most interesting questions in the whole range of theology, appears to be so easy as to be almost unconscious, and to be quite as incessant as its commission. Blessings, holy water, other sacramentals, the Signs of the Cross, the Name of Jesus, passing acts of sorrow, nay, some have said, any lifting up of the mind to God, and behold! the guilt of these sins falls from us like a withered leaf from the autumnal tree. And what hosts of venial sins, forgotten and unrepented of, may not a man possibly take with him into the next world, as matter for the fires of Purgatory, and which can only delay, and not prohibit, his entrance into glory? All this does not look as if God was a taskmaster, or as if heaven

were only for the few. Indeed the way in which He can show all this leniency and make these singular allowances for our infirmity, and at the same time secure purity of heart and real love of Himself, is the most astonishing phenomenon which falls under the observation of those who have to minister to the consciences of men. How men can be so very good at the same time that they are so very bad, it is not easy to explain, while experience leaves us in no doubt whatever of the fact.

What is said of the doctrine of venial sin may be said also of the doctrine of intention. What duty could seem more simple on the part of a creature than a perpetual application of mind and heart to his Creator? We are not our own, and we are not left to ourselves. We are working under our Father's eye, and it is for Him that we are working, and at His appointed work. Hence the road to sanctity is by the way of actual intentions for the glory of God. It should be every one's prime occupation to make his intentions actual. All other virtues will come along with this. Surprising treasures of grace will be unlocked to us if we attempt it. This one practice will turn darkness into light all over our souls, and no sinful habit, however inveterate, can exist in the atmosphere of this most glorious of all spiritual exercises. Yet does any one believe that an actual intention is absolutely necessary to the goodness of an action? Does God get no glory from man's free will, except when man there and then intends it? It may be a question how long a virtual intention lasts, to what extent it can inform and invigorate our actions, and insinuate a supernatural

character into them, or what amount of original intensity is required in the morning's intention to give it momentum enough to push its way through the crowded actions of an entire solar day. All these may be questions. But no one maintains that any such assiduous application to God as is a notable difficulty to our infirm and easily distracted nature is at all necessary to salvation.

Such are the strange relations in which our baptized child finds himself to his Creator as he grows up, and life broadens out before him. But there are graver matters still than venial sins, apparently countless untruths, neglect of inspirations, or the paucity of actual intentions for God's glory. There is the question of mortal sin. It is a fearful thing for the creature to turn away wholly from the Creator, and we can well understand how it should at once destroy the life of grace in the soul. Grace can live with any quantity of venial sin. So long as the eclipse of God in the soul is not total, so long with amazing condescension and as it were a blind love of souls does He continue to dwell within us.

But when the eclipse is total, what can follow but total darkness also? This seems inevitable, and yet it is not so. Notwithstanding the horrible malice of mortal sin, as being fully perceived and deliberately admitted, the grand gift of faith, that almost unfailing power of coming right again, survives the commission of a mortal sin. The life of hope does not become extinct; nay, it requires a fresh, distinct, and most difficult mortal sin to destroy that supernatural habit, which gives the soul the buoyancy and elasticity requisite to its conversion. Now is it quite

easy to see how two supernatural habits, two heavenly powers, two Divine elements, not natural to man, but gratuitously infused into him at Baptism, are not forfeited and expelled by the extinction of the life of grace in the soul by mortal sin? God is eclipsed in the soul; hell has begun in it, hell's worst punishment, the loss of God; and there are two celestial virtues preaching in the darkness still, conspiring against the reign of evil, holding their fortresses with magnanimous patience, it may be for long, long years of siege, and attracting to themselves incessant crowds of volunteers in the shape of actual graces. Is not all this wonderful? Is it compatible with the theory that salvation is difficult? Is not mortal sin itself, against its will, a new revelation of the pertinacious love of God?

But more still. Of the thousands of souls in the world to-day, unhappily immersed in the gulfs of mortal sin, is there one whom a whole multitude of beautiful actual graces is not soliciting to return to God? Oh, such pathetic invitations to come back to Him, such fair lights of God's tender compassion riding over the dark soul like the white sunbeams over a stormy landscape, such sweet remorse, sharp, but very, very sweet, such cold sobering thoughts of future punishment, such wise artful alternations of crosses and consolations, such lifelike speakings of dead books, such barbed words of preachers, such solemn eloquence of the deaths of those we love, such a nameless sensible thralldom of God and grace and heavenly presences, which we never can shake off:—all these, now with a very clamor of assaulting armies, now with low, soft, and

songlike pleadings, are the forces of actual grace, which have never been drawn off from before the gates of the heart however long they may have been obstinately barred against God by a countless garri-son of mortal sins.

But the most remarkable feature of the baptized soul's position with regard to mortal sin is the perpetual, unlimited iteration of the Sacrament of Penance. That there should be such a Sacrament at all, after the completeness and magnificence of Baptism, is a miracle of Divine love. But that the Precious Blood of the Incarnate Word should be always at hand, like a public fountain at a road-side, open, gratuitous, and everflowing, for the convenience of all passers-by, could not be believed, if the Church did not assure us of it. Our sheer inability to comprehend a love so great as God's would make simple Novatians of us, if we had not the Church to inform the littleness of our own conceptions by the magnificence of her dogmas. Is it easy to imagine the mercy which will absolve from different mortal sins the same soul perhaps five hundred times in ten or twenty years, and some thousands of times in the course of life? Yet this is not an extravagant or fabulous case. Then again think of the completeness of the absolution. Each time it destroys the guilt of the sin completely, so that it can never rise again, never bring back, even to the relapsed sinner, its consequences of everlasting punishment, while at the same time it wakens to vigorous life again merits that have been killed a hundred times by sin. How special, how ingenious, how peculiar, how unlike anything human is this

process; and yet on reflection how naturally out-flowing from the Divine Perfections!

No kind, no number, no duration of sins impede the facility of absolution. Its efficacy is always instantaneous. The word is spoken, and the work is done. But what is still more marvellous is the little which is required for absolution, the ordinary fidelity of the confession, the positive imperfection of the sorrow, the moderate resoluteness of the purpose of amendment! Supernatural as all these must be, the confession, the sorrow, and the purpose, and depending for their validity on certain theological requirements, yet are they not among the commonest graces in the Church? Is attrition a romantic flight of generosity, or the purpose of amendment akin to the heroism of martyrdom? Surely these requisites for absolution seem completely within the compass of our infirmity. And after all it is God Himself who is supplying more than half of them Himself by grace. In truth this inquiry into the easiness of salvation is beginning to fill us with fear, because it is carrying us so far! But might it not have been expected that as Penance is more troublesome than Baptism, so each time that the Sacrament of Penance is repeated, the requisites for absolution might have been increased, that the sinner should have bidden higher for pardon after every fall and that there should have been at least so much punishment for his relapses as consists in an increase of his difficulties in winning God back to him again. Yet we know that this is not at all the case. The habitual sinner and he who has once fallen, the sinner of a day and the sin-

ner of half a century—to all the simple requisites for absolution remain the same. Nay even where the confessor exacts from the penitent more convincing evidence of his repentance, it is only the confessor's inevitable infirmity as a creature, and as such unable to read the heart; God leaves the light conditions of absolution just what they were before. If all this were not among God's daily mercies, how inscrutable would it not seem to us; but we are obliged without faults of ours to tread God's common mercies under foot, because He has so profusely strewn the whole earth with them, that there is not room to move.

There still remains a debt due to God from remitted sin, a debt of temporal punishment. This men may be content to bear, seeing that salvation has been made so easy to them, and the malice of their sins has been so great. But God will not suffer this. Straight from the confessional the Church leads her son into the fertile and exuberant region of Indulgences. There the Precious Blood is made to flow even over the temporal consequences of forgiven sin. God would not stop at mere salvation. It is His way to overflow and to exceed. There shall not be a disability in the sinner's path, not a relic of his own foolish covenants with sin, which shall be left to molest him. Nay the relics of sin shall have a strange Sacrament to themselves in the Extreme Unction of the dying. But even this is not enough. Souls must be saved, and the saved multiplied, and the heavenly banquet crowded, even if the constraints of fire be needed to anneal the hastier works of grace. Therefore is it that the

vast realms of Purgatory are lighted up with the flames of vindictive love. Thus a huge amount of imperfect charity shall bring forth its thousands and its tens of thousands for heaven. Redemption shall cover the whole earth, and be plentiful indeed, and the very unworthinesses and shortcomings of the creature shall only still more provoke the prodigality of the Blood of the Creator.

Oh, the mercy of those cleansing fires! what could have devised them but a love that was almost beside itself for expedients? Yet even these fires the sinner can avoid, if he please, and without the difficulties of heroic charity. But they shall be made to cast their light even upon earth before their time, and the Precious Blood shall be turned upon them by Indulgences, and they shall be quenched before their blistering tongues have touched the sinner's soul. Oh, talk of the difficulty of salvation after this! And what was Divine Love doing, when we last caught a glimpse of it at work? Ah! as at first, so at last, there is the Divine impatience, the Divine facility, of a Creator who seems as if He could not do without His creatures. We saw love, and it was bending over Purgatory, over the net which was almost breaking with the portentous draught of unlikely souls which it had taken. Mary was moving on her throne; the Saints were filling heaven with their intercessions; Angels were ascending and descending every moment: Mass bells were ringing all over the earth, and beads being told, and numberless indulgences sealed in thousands of Communions, and alms flowing in to the poor, and penances and pilgrimages being performed; for Divine love called

loudly on Angels, Saints, and souls of mortal men, to do violence to it, while Jesus supplied the means in His daily adorable Sacrifice and the plentiful treasury of His Precious Blood. Our last sight of love showed it to us impatiently shortening the appointed time of those suffering souls, and heaven and earth astir, as if some great catastrophe had happened, because God Himself seemed as if He wished to cut short by swifter mercies that last grand consummate invention of His creative love, the quiet, unreluctant, beautifying pains of that cleansing fire!

When God came to His creatures visibly, He scandalized them. His three-and-thirty years were almost a series of scandals, taken by cold hearts at what appeared the very extravagances of His condescension. What wonder then that a scheme of salvation so easy, so pliant, so accommodating, so full of arrangement, and so exuberant, should be a scandal both to heretics and unbelievers? It is the same Jesus who ate with publicans and sinners, who pleaded with the Samaritan woman, who rewarded the humble petulance of the Syro-Phœnician, who acquitted the woman taken in adultery, who absolved the Magdalen, and who carried off with Him as His first trophy to an instantaneous paradise the thief who hung upon the Cross. And shall we call that process hard, while our Mother the Church is maligned all day long for representing it so easy and so large?

Look at God's side of the question, and what can fall upon us but utter confusion, perhaps, if it were not for His grace, utter unbelief? Let us narrow our view to the mystery of our dearest Saviour's

Passion. Count it all up, measure it in its length and breadth, fathom its depth, handle it and see what it weighs: then pray and suffer for a while, and count and measure and fathom and handle it all again, and see how it all has grown; then pray and suffer more, and then repeat the process; and at the end of a saintly life you will have but a superficial estimation of that astonishing life-giving mystery. From the sacrilegious Communion and treachery of Judas to the little garden of Gethsemani, through the brook up the rugged steep to Jerusalem, through the halls of Annas, Caiphas and Pilate, and the court-yard of Herod, at the pillar of the scourging, in the guard-room of the thorny crowning, along the Way of the Cross, up Calvary, at the nailing and the elevation, to the last cry about the ninth hour—follow the Eternal through this appalling drama, which was all for you, all one excess of His uncontrollable creative love to save your soul: and then put by the side of it the requirements which are of obligation, our necessary amount of love and worship of Him, the prescribed frequentation of the Sacraments, the extent of manly effort entailed upon us, and who can say that salvation is not easy, easy indeed to us, however hard it was upon the shoulders of the Incarnate Word. And then at last, the Beatific Vision! Was there ever such a history? And yet, simple in her faith, and confiding in the inborn beauty and celestial charm of truth to protect itself, this is the Gospel which the unwearied Church is now boldly proclaiming to the corrupt populations of the nineteenth cen-

tury, as if it were a Concordat between the Creator and the Creature.

SALVATION EASY IN ITS ASSISTANCES

Can we say more? Or if there is more to be said, do we need to have it said? Yes! New love, new love, new love of God—we always need to know it, because we always need to love Him more and more. We thought of salvation as easy in itself, let us now look at it as *easy because of its assistances*. It appears already as if the utmost allowance had been made by God for the weakness and corruption of our nature, so as to put salvation within easy reach of us. But to secure it still more, He has formed alliances for us with Himself and the invisible world, and prepared a system of *auxiliaries*, both outward and inward, so ingenious and wonderful, as to be a stumbling block to those who are not of the fold.

First and foremost among these, and entering more or less into all of them, is *Grace*, a various, supernatural, potent, and unintermitting gift, about which enough has been said for the present purpose in the last chapter. There is not a characteristic either of it or of God's way of giving it, which does not bear upon the question of the easiness of salvation. Let us then keep this in mind, as well as what has just been said of the easiness of salvation in itself, while we enumerate some of those incredible aids and consolations which God has devised to make still easier what was already so easy in itself.

What Catholic is there who does not know how the

four great wants, and duties, and worships which the creature owes to the Creator, the petition of his infirmity, the intercession of his brotherly affection, the thanksgiving of his startled speechless gratitude, the intelligent joyous acknowledgment of God's absolute dominion, are supplied to him, with an infinite worthiness equivalent to the worth of the Creator Himself, in the *Adorable Sacrifice of the Mass*? The perpetual Real Presence of Jesus with His faithful, His perseverance in the obscure Tabernacle, and His frequent Benedictions, which preside over the evenings of our toilsome days, just as Mass so beautifully fills the morning with its light and love, so that it is Jesus all day long, courting our society, and mingling with us with an intimacy we get to understand less, and to prize more, the longer it is vouchsafed,—surely this is enough to supernaturalize the whole world, to make hard things easy, and dark things bright, and throw an invisible armor round us which will charm our lives against the weapons and the wiles of hell. But what shall we say of Communion? All ideas of familiarity with God, of intimacy with the invisible world, of the spiritual union of heavenly love, fail us here. The creature, trembling, bashful, eager, backward, frightened, delighted, is bidden to kneel down, and feed, not figuratively or by faith, but with an awful bodily reality, upon his Incarnate Creator. And this eating of the Creator by the creature is the highest act of worship which he can perform! We need not stay to follow out the many-fountained grace of a good Communion, nor to see how it branches out into every faculty of the soul, every

power of the mind, every affection of the will, every delicate sensibility of the conscience, carrying with it secret blessings multiform and manifold, and insinuating even into flesh and blood and bone, the seeds of a glorious resurrection. And this miraculous feast on our very Creator may be, and He loves it to be, our daily bread! And this to us, who, if we rightly appreciated our vileness, should be astonished every morning that our common food and clothing were continued to us still!

All helps must seem little after this; yet as they are all so many fresh disclosures of creative love, we must not pass them over. Loneliness is one of the dangers which we have to fear, because of the inability of our mortal nature to cope with the adverse forces of the invisible world; and, to meet this danger, the provident love of God has given us our *Guardian Angel*. Ever at our side there is a golden life being lived. A princely spirit is there, who sees God and enjoys the bewildering splendors of His Face even there, where he is, nearer than the limits of our outstretched arms. An unseen warfare is raging round our steps: but that beautiful bright spirit lets not so much as the sound of it vex our ears. He fights for us, and asks no thanks, but hides his silent victories, and continues to gaze on God. His tenderness for us is above all words. His office will last beyond the grave, until at length it merges into a still sweeter tie of something like heavenly equality, when on the morning of the resurrection we pledge each other, in those first moments, to an endless blessed love. Till then we shall never know from how many dangers he has

delivered us, nor how much of our salvation is actually due to him. Meanwhile he merits nothing by the solitudes of his office. He is beyond the power of meriting, for he has attained the sight of God. His work is a work of love, because his sweet presence at our side he knows to be a part of God's eternal and creative love towards our particular soul.

How great a joy and how real a support it is in sorrow, to have the prayers of a saintly man! We can hardly exaggerate the value of the blessing. To seek it is a sign of predestination. But look up to heaven! What are good men on earth to the giant spirits there, and how many thousands and thousands are praying to our good Creator that we may not miss of the happy end of our creation. There are our *patron Saints* whose names we bear, the Saints whom we especially love, the Saints of our order, our vocation, or our country, the Saints which were patrons of the holy souls whom we have liberated from Purgatory, those Holy Souls now Saints as well; all these are like so many beadsmen for us before the throne of the Most High. Glassed in Him, as in a pellucid mirror, they see the threads of our lives weaving their variously patterned web. They understand the purposes of God upon us. They are amazed at the diversity and suitableness of His loving artifices and delicately suited vocations. They see the dangers which threaten us, the temptations which penetrate farthest into us, the graces which are weakest in us, the critical moments of life which peril us; and as they see, so do they pray. Oh! if we could but remember in our struggles with sin,

how we are being backed before the throne of God, we should surely spurn the tempter from us in the exulting force of our Christian joy and the superhuman energy of the Communion of Saints.

The *Mother of God!* In what surpassing heights is she sublimely throned! Yet there is not a day passes in which she does not interest herself for us. A thousand times and more has she mentioned our names to God in such a sweet persuasive way, that the Heart of Jesus sought not to resist it. She has been in the secret of all the good things which have ever happened to us in life. She has our predestination at heart far more than we have ourselves. She is ever mindful of that second maternity which dates from Calvary, and how we cost her in the travail of her dolors a price which has no fellow except the Sacrifice of her Son, our Brother and our God. Oh! what a light does it not shed on life, to think that the same love, the nameless love, the inexhaustible love, wherewith the Heart of Mary loved her blessed Son, is for His sake and by His own command being poured out over us this very hour! We are lying now on earth, dear to heaven, because we are suffused with its pathetic splendors. Angels envy us a love which in their case cannot be, as ours is, identical in kind with that which the sinless Mother had for her adorable Son. But it is not the poetry of this thought on which we need to dwell, bright revelation as it is once more of God's creative love, but on the real help, the substantial support, the immense solid advantages, the positive efficacy, of this love of Mary in the matter of our salvation.

Then we have the power of *prayer* ourselves. We dare not dwell much on this. But of how many theological controversies is the grace of prayer the secret and the key! Can prayer mean that God will give up His own will, and accommodate it to ours? "Ask, and you shall have; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The fervent prayer of a just man is of great avail. Intellectually speaking, it is very hard to believe in prayer; but let us spend but one week in the real earnest service of God and the exercise of a spiritual life, and the fact, and far more than we ever surmised to be the fact, will lie before us bright, beyond the brilliance of any human demonstrations. All experience concurs with God's written Word to tell us that the immutable is changed by prayer. The Saints turn aside the great universal laws of nature by the blow of an ejaculation. Even the unexpressed will of a soul in union with God is a power with the omnipotent Creator, and looks like what it cannot be, a limit to His liberty.

And this is always in our reach, instant, lightning-like, peremptory, and efficacious; and on its way to heaven it unites itself with the prayer of Jesus upon earth, with the intercessions of Mary, with the appeals of all the Saints, and the earnest outcries and entreaties of the wide militant Church on earth, and thus, like a beautiful storm of supplication, like a loud-voiced litany of all creation, it breaks round the throne of God with majestic power, and the echo is heard in our hearts almost before the inward prayer is breathed, and the words of blustering temptation are hushed within, and the big drops

of the impetuous rain of grace are falling thick and fast upon us. Ah! it will be one of the joys of heaven to learn the secret of the power of prayer. But now it is a great abyss to the rocky edge of which we climb and look over, and all is sonorous darkness, and we turn giddy, and recover not our senses until we kneel down and adore the one only supreme, infinitely lovely, and unspeakably adorable Will of God.

Even dead things have a wizard life put into them, and help us on our road to heaven. And dumb things have a voice, and inanimate things lay strong hands on us, and turn us round to God. The Spirit of God is hiding everywhere, so that the world is an enchanted place, and all the enchantment is for God. Books, sermons, services, scenery, and the examples of those around us, sorrows, joys, hopes, fears, winds and waves, heat and cold, animals and plants—strange powers are touching them at unexpected moments, and they electrify us with thoughts of God, nay often with keen contacts of His presence. All these things teach us one truth, and that one truth is in itself an amazing help, that it is the will of God to each one of us that we should be saved eternally. And are not all the chances blessedly in favor of the accomplishment of that dear Will?

We have already considered the Sacraments of Baptism, Penance, and the Eucharist. But there are other Sacraments which deserve special notice as auxiliaries to us in the work of our salvation. Just when boyhood is taking us out into the world, and when the first-fruits of our young independence are

at once so dangerous and so dear, the Sacrament of Confirmation steps in, seals up the grace of our Baptism, fills us with the one grace which at that season we need above all others, the gift of fortitude, tries to be beforehand with the world, and enrolls us in the actual militia of God, so that, in addition to our former character of His sons, we have now the further character of being His soldiers, and are placed in a peculiar way under the light, the guidance, and the love of the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity. Nothing can be more opportune or more complete than this Sacrament of force.

There are few sources of grace in life more plentiful than *marriage*, both because of the abundance of its joys, and also because of its innumerable retinue of trials. It makes or mars the happiness of the majority of men, and it is one of the most active powers on earth in fostering or in frustrating the work of God within the soul. Now that we are used to the thought, it seems most natural and fitting that our Lord should have exalted this domestic contract to the exceeding dignity of a Christian Sacrament. Yet, beforehand, who would have dreamed of such a thing? And possibly the souls are countless whom this very Sacrament has saved, and whom the state of life would have been more likely to ruin than to save, had it not been for its sacramental grace. In no respect does religion so boldly encroach upon the world as in making marriage a Sacrament; it is almost the longest reach and the most determined grasp of our sweet Saviour's arm, when He was bent to rescue His

dear souls from the fiery ordeal of the world. Death too with its unknown necessities, must have a Sacrament which it can call its own, as well to finish the demolition of sin, as to anoint the failing warrior with a heavenly unguent for his last dire combat, and enable him in defiance of earthly calculations to elude the hold which the unseen powers of evil lay upon him in that hour. If we ever need help, will it not be in that dreadful agony, for neither earthly love nor earthly power can help us then? With many, doubtless, the battle has gone hard, though they who stood around neither heard nor saw the mortal wrestle, and with many it was the secret strength of that holy oil, the hidden operation of that sacramental grace, which turned the scale, and consigned to the Good Shepherd's arm that sheep which is now His own for ever. Must not God mean us to be saved, when there is not a conjuncture in our fortune, not a winding in the road of life, but at the turn we find Him waiting with some strange beautiful invention of love, the very mechanism of which none but an all-wise artist could have contrived?

The supernatural power, which God confers upon *virtuous actions*, is also a remarkable assistance to us in the work of our salvation. It is like adding power a hundred-fold to the machines and tools of the mechanic. And here again God does not look to the importance or solemnity of the action, but to the purity of intention with which it is performed. Each pious act, however trivial, has three supernatural forces bestowed upon it. There is, first of all, the force of impetration by which, even while we

are unconscious and forgetful of it, our prayers acquire a new vigor and exercise a greater influence over the adorable Will of God. When we consider how much we want from Him, and how almost our whole life must needs be spent in the attitude of petition, even when we are not formally and directly praying, when we reflect how our very vileness is an incessant supplication to the greatness of our Creator, we shall see how this mysterious power of impetration, hung upon our lives, must aid us in attaining heaven. Of ourselves it would seem as if we were the most unlikely creatures to be heard, relapsed rebels against the majesty of God, and even when we return to our duty, surrendering only on jealous conditions, and with a hundred mean reserves. But this power of impetration makes us really worthy to be heard, and is a sort of invisible beauty glowing in our lives on earth, anticipating that consummate loveliness which gives the interceding Saints such power in heaven.

Not less wonderful is the *power of meriting* which grace communicates to our good works, as though the Heart of Jesus were supposed to animate each one of them, and the infinite worth of His Precious Blood were secretly folded up within them. We have seen how magnificent the rewards of heaven are, and yet one obscure and momentary good work, full of the love of God, and fair to look at because of the purity of its intention, has only to settle but for one instant upon the Cross of Christ and thence wing its way to heaven, where its merit has such transcending power as to pass the guards and open the gates of the citadel of the King of kings. See

then in what a condition this places us as regards our salvation. Earth is strewn so thickly with the materials of meriting, that all day long we have nothing to do but to gather them up in armfuls, as the poor gather firewood in the forest, and even with less toil than theirs. Grace is superabundant and incessant and universal. We can hardly get out of the way of it, if we are perverse enough to try. The process of touching our materials with this heavenly grace is so easy and simple, that by use it becomes almost natural to us, and except for the warm feeling of love in our hearts, we should in the great multitude of our actions, be almost unconscious of the process. So that from our waking in the morning till our falling asleep at night, we are throwing up the merest dust and ashes of earth to heaven, and it is stronger than the laws of its own material vileness, and rises thither, and is put into the Divine treasury as the purest gold of Christian merit.

But there is yet another mysterious power infused by grace into our actions, the *power of satisfaction*. Alas! our sins are both tall and broad, and their malice deep and fearful, while the justice of God is sparkling intolerably and flashing with angry splendor in the light of His jealous and exacting sanctity. We have need to be calling every hour on the atoning Blood of Jesus; for nothing short of that can satisfy for the guilt of sins to which eternal death is due. But through the merits of that same dear Saviour our own humblest actions can appease the wrath of God, can give Him real substantial satisfaction, can atone for the temporal punishments in store for our sinful past, and constrain, oh, with

such beautiful constraint! even His justice to give us orders on the treasury of His compassion. It would have been indeed a huge mercy, and to our unillumined sense a perfectly inexplicable one, had our Creator been pleased to let our works of penance, our aching fasts, our cold vigils, our burning disciplines, satisfy in some degree the claims of His high justice. But that we should be allowed to steep the slightest of our ordinary inconveniences, the trouble of getting up in the morning, the coldness of the east wind, the heat of the summer sun, or the insignificant self-denial of a kind action,—that we should be allowed to steep these things in the Blood of the Incarnate Word, and make them strong, vigorous, and heaven-reaching satisfactions for our sins, is marvellous indeed. What then shall we say to the love which has made all our Christian actions, even those in which there is no inconvenience at all, nay still more, even those which are pleasures and privileges, such as Mass, and Benediction, and giving alms, and making the Sign of the Cross, and reading the lives of Saints, into solemn, serious, and efficacious satisfactions for our sins? Surely such a love as this, busy, inventive, ubiquitous, must be bent on saving us, and on saving us as nearly against our wills, as can be with our wills still free!

But He does more. The *power of impetration* gives us influence over Him for others as well as for ourselves. We can thus obtain gifts for them, which we could not give ourselves. The power of meriting is a personal privilege. Our merits are our own; they cannot belong to another. The glory

of heaven is inexhaustible, so that we may go on multiplying our merits, like our Blessed Lady, and yet we shall not drain the rewards of heaven. But strange to say! we may do more than satisfy the justice of God for the temporal punishment of our own sins, whether that punishment consist of the withdrawal of the graces of repentance, or of the sorrows and calamities of life, or of the active fires of Purgatory. We may have satisfactions to spare, satisfactions which may go into the treasury of the Church and supply materials for future indulgences, satisfactions which we may at once transfer to others, and God at once accepts the transfer, and bestows the grace, withholds the punishment, or alleviates the suffering, as the case may be. Nay, if He will, He allows us to alienate the satisfactions which we really need ourselves, and bestow them upon others, as an exercise of heroic charity towards our fellows, or of disinterested generosity towards His glory; so that we may not only save ourselves, but help Him also in His grand labor of saving the world which He created without any labor at all. He multiplies saviours, by making us saviours ourselves, at the very moment when He is also multiplying for us the means by which we are the more easily to save ourselves.

But there is still a finishing stroke left to perfect this work of divinest art. There is what theologians call *satispassion*. In other words, for Christ's sake, and because nothing about men can escape the universal contagion of His redeeming grace, there is in mere suffering, in the simple pressure of pain, in the sheer tortures of mental anguish, in the very

weight of labor and weariness of endurance, a secret underground virtue which is not without its own peculiar acceptableness to the justice of God. It is not that He loves to see His creatures suffer, it is not that His glory can feed itself on mere torments, which are but irregularities we have brought into His glad creation, and formed no part in the primeval plan of Him who is Himself an uncreated ocean of joy, a glorious abyss of unutterable beatitudes. His love gives an inward dignity even to the most inevitable suffering of the creature. Who can doubt that it is because of Christ, and the luminous shadow of His redeeming Passion which falls with a soft light on every human woe and mortal pain, and so mellows them into that beautiful landscape of earth which God once looked at and blessed for its exceeding loveliness? Thus He, who made Mary merit even while she slept, communicates to us wretched sinners some faint similitude of that astonishing privilege. Even while we are concentrated in our sufferings, while pain absorbs us in itself or else distracts us by its vehemence, some sort of dumb sacrifice to the justice of our Creator is rising up from our clouded minds, as if our bed of pain were an altar to His purity, or our broken heart gave out a faint odor of Christ, or our aching limb were as cinnamon burning in the fire.

SALVATION EASY, BECAUSE IT IS OUR INTEREST

But salvation is not only easy in itself and because of its helps; it is *easy also because it is our interest*. What interests us is by a law of our

nature easy, and nothing interests us so much as a thing in which our own welfare is manifestly and deeply involved. This will become evident to us if we compare the pleasures of sin with the pleasures of a state of grace. The pleasures of sin are not lasting. The fires go out for want of fuel. They only burnt brightly and swiftly at first because it was but dry weeds, thorns, and thistles, which supplied them. There is also a want of continuity in sinful pleasures. Sin is not pleasant to look back upon, as a good action is. It lives in excitement and moral intoxication. Its very vehemence makes it subject to relapses. Somehow also the pleasure of sin wastes and devastates the spirit; it blights our human affections; it scorches places in our hearts where green things were wont to grow, and unlike Christian suffering, it does not fertilize hereafter what it is burning now. It leaves behind it remorse which makes our whole life ache, and weariness which turns the very sunshine into a burden. It causes us to be peevish both with ourselves and others; and to a peevish man his own company is more tedious than words can tell. At last bodily health fails, and our spirits give way beneath us; for sin is the twin-brother of sickness. Worldly misfortune not seldom supervenes; and the loss of the respect of others is one of those losses which are almost inevitable to the sinful man. Most sinners also are ambitious in their own line, and they are cramped even in their means of sinning; they cannot fulfil their own dreams of profligacy, nor sin upon the grand scale which they intended. Pain and sickness, which are always hard to bear, are

desperately intolerable to a man who is not in a state of grace. They involve loss of time, waste of life, diminution of pleasures, when all is so fleeting, and sin so longs to catch each moment as it flies. Moreover they are so unmeaning, or what is worse, so purely penal to the wicked man. Then there is the slavish dread of death, or what is hardly a less sickening misery, the wild forced unbelief of the eternity which is beyond. In a word, a downright habitual sinner is in the long run neither loved nor loving; and if he does not lose the present world altogether, as well as the world which is to come, it is because the justice of His Creator pays him here for such natural kindness and moral respectability as he may have shown.

Now contrast all this with the delights of being in a state of grace. Is there any earthly joy like the sense of pardon? How deep it goes down into our nature, unlocking such secret fountains of tears as were far beyond the reach of ordinary hopes and fears! There is also a satisfyingness about it, which seldom accompanies other joys. A void is filled up in our hearts, which had ached before. Peace comes where before there was a trouble of uncertain fears, and *love* awakens with a keener, fresher appetite for its obedient work for God. In prosperity, in adversity, in the love of others, in the enmity of others, in hard work, in old age, in sickness, and in death, the state of grace seems just to add what was needed, to supply that the absence of which was regretted, to throw light upon the darkness or to subdue the glare, to level the rocks or fill in the sunken places, to drain what was marshy or irrigate

what was dry. It has shed upon the whole of life repose, plenitude, satisfaction, contentment. It has positively given us this world, while it was in the act of transferring to us the other. And is not salvation easy, when it is our own present interest, our immediate reward, and downright earthly happiness to boot?

I do not think that, if we kept in view the perfections of God, we should venture to believe, unless the Church taught us, that there was in creation such a place as hell. When it has been revealed to us, we can perceive, not only its reasonableness, but also how admirably it is in keeping with the various attributes of God, and, not least of all, with the exquisiteness of His mercy. There is an awful beauty about that kingdom of eternal chastisement; there is a shadow cast upon its fires, which we admire even while we tremble, the shadow of the gigantic proportions of a justice which is omnipotent; there is an austere grandeur about the equity of God's vindictive wrath, which makes us nestle closer to Him in love even while we shudder at the vision. But to us who live and strive, who have grace given us, and yet have the power of resisting it; who have room for penance, but are liable to relapse; who are right now, but can at any time go wrong; who can doubt that hell is a pure mercy, a thrilling admonition, a solemn passage in God's pathetic eloquence, pleading with us to save our souls and to go to Him in heaven? There is no class of Christians to whom hell is not an assistance. The conversion of a sinner is never completed without the fear of hell. Otherwise, the work cannot be de-

pended on. It has a flaw in its origin, a seed of decay in its very root. It is unstable and insecure. It is short-lived and unpersevering, like the seed in our Saviour's parable, which fell upon a rock, sprung up for a season, and then withered away. Hell teaches us God, when we are too gross to learn Him otherwise. It lights up the depths of sin's malignity, that we may look down, and tremble, and grow wise. Its fires turn to water, and quench the fiery darts of the tempter. They rage around us, so that we dare not rise up from prayer. They follow us, like the many-tongued pursuing flames of a burning prairie, and drive us swiftly on, and out of breath, along the path of God's Commandments. Hell! thou desolate creation of eternal justice! who ever thought of finding a friend in thee? Yet we cannot doubt but that hell has sent into heaven more than half as many souls as it contains itself.

Even to those aiming at perfection, the thought of hell is an immense assistance. The common things of the faith are, in reality, far above all the high lights of the Saints. There is no growing out of or beyond the ordinary motives and old truths of the faith, even for those who are most highly advanced, or are practicing the most disinterested love. There is no habitual state in which the spiritual life can rest and stay itself up in those thin atmospheres. Besides which, there can be no bounds safely set to the self-distrust which the greatest Saints should have, and are the most likely to have, of themselves. This being so, it is extremely desirable that even those who walk by love, and are aiming at perfection, should bring frequently

before their minds the judgments of God, in the terrific severities of hell. There are times when we faint, and are inclined to relax our upward straining, our climbing of the steep mountain of God. Spiritual sweetnesses and periodical absences of temptation often unnerve us for fresh attacks of the evil one. We come to do things in a slovenly and remiss way, from long habit. While we grow in merits, we are getting hugely into debt to the greatness and the multitude of God's mercies, and this at times unsobers us. Moreover, sanctity cannot grow without there being also a growing appreciation of the possible extremities of God's justice. Neither is it an uncommon delusion to think that we are beyond the fears and impressions of the senses, though our softness in mortification ought to teach us better. Next to a very clear and penetrating contemplation of the attributes of God, nothing enables us to get a true hatred of sin more than the horrible nature of its eternal punishments. In all these conjunctures, the frequent thought of hell is nothing less than an impulse heavenwards. The false delicacy of modern times, in keeping back the scaring images of hell, while, in the case of children, it has often marred a whole education, is a formidable danger to the sanctity as well as to the faith of men.

If the terrors of the Lord contribute largely to the easiness of salvation, the attractiveness of His rewards has also saved its thousands and its tens of thousands. It is hard to disentangle the influence of the thought of heaven from the purity of disinterested love, and it is most undesirable even to

attempt it. We want something to put out the beautiful light of earth, and to sully its fair shining. We need a disenchanting power in the midst of a creation so lovely, winning, and specially alluring to our own particular selves, lest it should rob us of our hearts, and leave us nothing to give to God.

We covet some unfading ideal so to possess our souls, that we may walk the world in the pure cold chastity of perfect detachment, so that God may be our all. The coruscations of His throne are sometimes too blinding to our eyes. That lofty region of perpetual thunders will sometimes stun us, when littleness and imperfection have unstrung our spiritual nerves. If we see God now through a glass darkly, sometimes it must be through many earth-tinted glasses that our weak eyes must look at Him. Hence, the need to us of familiarizing ourselves with all that the schools teach us of the joys of heaven. Hence, the power which a simple soul acquires from reposing even on the undeveloped thought of the greatness of his Creator's recompense. And what are all the joys of heaven, but the accidents, the corollaries, the overflows, of the radiant Beatific Vision? So that pure love mingles with our blameless thoughts of self, and heaven is already a power on earth, drawing us with magnetic force into the spheres of its own abounding light; and what is heaven but the locality we give to that dear glory of our Incomprehensible and Omnipresent Father, in whose embrace we long to hide ourselves for love?

I conclude, therefore, that God is bent on saving us, that salvation is easy in itself, easy because of

its helps, easy because of the terrors of being lost, and easy because of the attractiveness of its own rewards. This is my answer to those who object to the picture I have drawn of God's creative love. It is founded upon common truths which everybody knows, truths which strike us the more, the more by assiduous contemplation of His attributes we come to know the God to whom we belong. It is drawn from the distinct statements of Scripture. It is in harmony with the teaching of the Saints. It is the doctrine most full of consolation for creatures. It is the belief most honorable to the Creator.

CHAPTER II

THE GREAT MASS OF BELIEVERS

IT is sweet to think of the web of love which God is hourly weaving round every soul He has created on the earth. If we bring the world before us with all its picturesque geography, the many indentations of its coasts, the long courses of its fertile rivers, its outspread plains, its wide forests, its blue mountain chains, its aromatic islands, and its verdant archipelagos, it enlarges the heart to think how round every soul of man God is weaving that web of love. The busy European, the silent Oriental, the venturous American, the gross Hottentot, the bewildered Australian, the dark-souled Malay,—He comes to all. He has His own way with each; but with all it is a way of tenderness, forbearance, and lavish generosity. The variety of their circumstances, and those are well-nigh numberless, are not so many as the varieties of His sedulous affection. The biography of each of those souls is a miraculous history of God's goodness. If we could read them, as probably the Blessed can, they would teach us almost a new science of God, so wonderfully and inexhaustibly would they illuminate His different perfections. We should see Him winding invisible threads of light and love even round the fero-

cious idolater. We should behold Him dealing with cases of the most brutal wickedness, the most fanatical delusion, the most stolid insensibility, and even for these arranging all things with the exquisite delicacy of creative love. But so astonishing, so overwhelming is the flood of Divine light, such and so vast the very ocean of eternal predilection, which He has poured upon His Church, that all outside looks like utter darkness because of the dazzling excess of her magnificence. This blinds us so that we can not see how what looks so dark to us is after all a true light lightening every man that comes into the world.

Let us turn our thoughts then to the Church. What a comfort it is to think of the vastness of the Church, and of her holiness! There is the incessant action of those *mighty Sacraments*, and the whole planet transfigured with the daily Mass. There is all heaven busy, as if time were too short for it, with a hundred occupations for each Christian soul, set in motion at that soul's request, or self-moved by gratuitous love and pity. Mary, Angels, Saints, and suffering Souls in Purgatory, all are hard at work. God is employed, as if His Sabbath after creation were long since past. There are sorrows to be soothed, temptations to be banished, sins to be forgiven, tears to be dried, pains to be healed, good works to be assisted, death-beds to be attended; and the bright throngs in heaven, like some religious Order of Mercy, are busy at them all. O happy we! on whom all this dear diligence is thus perpetually expended!

What is the fruit of it all? If salvation is easy,

and salvation is preached in the Church of Christ, then it ought to follow that the great majority of Catholics are saved. We need speak only of Catholics. We will not advert, however, distantly to those outside the Church. People tempt themselves about them, and play tricks with their gift of faith for which they ought to be thanking God their whole lives long. We have no business to concern ourselves with God's relations to others: however wistfully the ties of love may make us gaze upon that dark abyss. We are Catholics. Let us be content with speculating about ourselves. We will suppose, therefore, the objection to be made, that if salvation is easy, then practically we ought to find that most Catholics are saved. It is not enough to say that though salvation is easy, the corruption of man is so tremendous that little comes of it; for then it seems a question of words to call salvation easy. Salvation is the saving of fallen man, and, therefore, to be really easy, it must far more than counter-balance his corruption. The question is one of too momentous a character, of too thrilling an interest, for us to be content with mere rhetoric. We repeat, If salvation is easy, most Catholics must be saved. Can we venture to say that such is our belief?

THE SALVATION OF CATHOLICS; VARIOUS OPINIONS

Before answering so abrupt a question, we must be allowed a few words of prelude. You are asking us what we think about one of God's secrets, a secret which He has reserved to Himself. It is one of those questions into which we may venture rever-

ently to inquire, in the hope of finding fresh traces of His omnipresent love: but for no other reason than this. We may inquire that we may love; we may not inquire that we may know. It does not seem that we anger Him by such an investigation, provided we are humble. But we must remember we can decide nothing. After all our surmises, inferences and guesses, the truth remains, as it was before, hidden with God. We have, however, in spite of much natural reluctance, a reason for entering into it, which seems to constrain us to it as to a work of mercy. Outside the Church the dreadful error of the day, which is ravaging the hearts of men, is a forgetfulness that they are creatures.

They seem in a certain way to remember the Creator, but, as was said in the first chapter, in politics, in science, in literature, in all the departments of the world's greatness, they seem not to realize that they are creatures. Now this error reaches faintly and feebly into the hearts of true believers. There is always in the Church a kind of evil echo of the noise which the world is making without. But it is not more than an echo. Hence the spiritual physicians of the times come across an unusual amount of suffering, which good souls feel, from doubts about their relations with God, questionings of His justice and His goodness which will hardly be silenced, and which it were wild work, and almost ruin, to try to silence by main force. Such men find a difficulty in their most intimate religious life, for which we can think of no name. It is not simply temptation against the faith. It is not a disgust with the spiritual life. It does not seem to rest in the will at all,

but in some perversity of the mind which is so humble that it is a shame to call it by so hard a name as perversity. We believe it to be an habitual incapacity of realizing that they are creatures, in the full truth and all the bearings of that idea. The inability might be brought on in these days by much and incautious reading of newspapers, or by an absorbing interest in the politics of the day, or by being mixed up with the existing commercial system of the world, or by not having always been Catholics, or by having misused the first graces of conversion, or from sheer want of generosity with God. But it is a shadow, or an echo, or a taint in the believer's heart, of the prevailing pestilence of modern society.

Just as in the presence of a cognizable plague we have frequently a mild form of some congenial disease, so does the sickness of the times infect even many of the faithful with a languor of a somewhat similar description. It is because I have been called to so many cases of this sort, that I have composed the present treatise, happy if I may be allowed to console one afflicted brother, or to ease one tempted soul, or to enlighten one bewildered mind, more happy than I can say if I can get from one of the creatures, whom He loves so well, an additional degree of love for our compassionate Creator.

It may be said that the view contained in the preceding chapters is taking God's side exclusively, and putting forward only a one-sided statement. But this is not really true; however we are not concerned to argue the point. We look only to a practical result. But what in truth is it which forms the chief part of the suffering to the souls just now described? It

is that they will obstinately look only at one side of the question, and the side which concerns them least, instead of that which concerns them most, as that which God puts before them; and that they will pertinaciously extend the difficulty by bringing in a number of problems, in the solution of which they individually have no interest at all, and which they can hardly investigate, at least in their temper of mind, without forgetting what is due to God.

They seem to have no eye, except for dark possibilities. They have a morbid hankering to climb giddy heights, to loiter on the edge of precipices, to balance themselves on the craters of volcanoes. They who love danger shall perish in it. We had better let God's thunderbolts alone, and not meddle with them, were it even to feel the sharpness of their fiery points. We only ask these poor sufferers now to look at the other side of the question; and not only to look at it, but to pray about it, and meditate on it, and familiarize themselves with it. Mere reading is nothing. A religious inquiry without prayer is a mockery of God. We can define nothing. We can unriddle none of God's secrets. But these souls have fed on gloomy considerations until they are almost poisoned. Now let us invite them to follow us patiently through the brighter considerations which commend themselves to an opposite temper and disposition, and which if not of greater weight than their own views, are at least of equal authority with theirs, besides the additional recommendation of their sunshine.

With this prefatory caution and admonition we may proceed therefore to answer the question thus:

—We are inclined to believe, that most Catholics are ultimately saved. Of course we do not know it, and we do not wish to know it. But as the objection is started, we look attentively at the Church as far as we have the power, and the result of our observations is, that to the best of our belief the great majority of her children save their souls. We will give our reasons, one by one, for this conclusion, begging the reader once more to remember that we are not laying down the law, and that the necessities of many souls have beguiled us into an inquiry, upon which of ourselves, we should never have dreamed of entering.

Thus then it appears, that the question is completely an open one, and that the view, which is to occupy this chapter, is not only lawful, but pious. Nevertheless, if I could persuade myself that the discussion had but little practical bearing on a holy life, I should eagerly avoid entering upon it. It seems, however, as if the inquisitive infidelity of the day had so far touched the faith of many good men, that questions have been started in their thoughts which mere contempt cannot now put to silence, and that in order to restore to their diseased minds a more true view of the fatherly character of God, it is necessary to bring before them distinct considerations, founded upon what we know of Him, in opposition to those darker reflections which keep them back from a cordial surrender of themselves to God, and which even when they are true, become untrue by claiming to be exclusive. Begging then of God to bless this inquiry concerning a secret, which for

our good as well as His own glory He has hidden from us, let us proceed reluctantly upon our way.

OUR JUDGMENTS OF OTHERS, TOO HARSH

We know well that, when men judge others, whether individuals or multitudes, they generally come to an erroneous conclusion, from the mere fact that they judge overharshly. It is part of the evil that is in us, to put the worst construction upon what we see, and to make no allowance for the hidden good. Moreover, we, unwittingly almost, judge by the worst parts of our own disposition, not by the best. We believe our evil to be common to all, and our good peculiar to ourselves. We consider evil a decisive test, while good is only allowed to establish a possibility. This is our rule for others: we reverse it for ourselves. We also find that our judgments get milder in proportion to the increase of our own strictness. The judgments of holy men sometimes astonish us by their laxity, while men, not even frequenting the Sacraments, or in any way professing to be religious, will be scandalized by the least look of worldliness in a priest or a religious.

They will detect, with the most amazing sensitiveness, the slightest inconsistency in the practice of an openly devout person. Thus, we may lay it down as a rule, that the severity of our judgments of others, even where judgments are legitimate and unavoidable, is an infallible index of the lowness of our own spiritual state. The more severe we are, the lower we are. We must, therefore, be on our guard against this well-known infirmity, in the pres-

ent inquiry. There is something in the adorable compassion of God which looks like voluntary blindness. He seems either not to see, or not to appreciate, the utter unworthiness of men; at least, He goes on His way with men as though He did not see it. The Bible is full of instances of this. Now, the more we are with God, and the closer our union with Him is, the more shall we catch something of a similar spirit, which will destroy the natural keenness of our detection of evil, and control more materially our judgments of our fellow-men.

We must be careful, also, to make a distinction which is often forgotten, and which bears directly upon the present question. What we see around us, among Catholics, may be far from satisfactory; and the authentic statistics which reach us from Catholic countries, may contain much that is unhappy and disheartening. Yet we must distinguish, at any given moment, between Catholics not living so as to be saved, and their not being ultimately saved at last. In other words, we cannot go altogether by what we see. Immense numbers are converted, and go to the Sacraments, and persevere in their new life; and then they are less prominent. We do not hear of them. The statistics of Easters, jubilees, retreats, missions, and the like, come less under our notice than statistics of crime or misery.

Sin strikes us, and is startling; whereas, ordinary goodness is a tame affair, and passes unobserved. Then there are multitudes of men who have an exceedingly bad chapter in their lives, some ten or twenty years of wickedness, and then change, as if the volcanic matter in them had burned out. This

is what men lightly call sowing their wild oats. As one set of these men passes into a better state, another is succeeding them; so that the appearance of things is an incessant current of headstrong sin, sweeping all before it, unredeemed by the hopeful features of the case which the succession of sinners hides effectually from our view. Moreover, old age withdraws its thousands of actors from the stage of sin, and so they disappear from view. It is wretched enough to think of these conversions of old age, which seem to have more of nature in them than of grace.

A man's passions are worked out. He becomes a moral wreck. The avenues of sensual pleasure are closed to him, by the aches and pains and dull insensibilities of age. In a number of cases, the very powers of sinning are diminished. And so, what with fear, what with disgust, and what with making a virtue of necessity, the old man gives himself to God, such little of him as is left, and God accepts the gift. It is not for us to criticise this amazing forbearance of God: who knows if we may not one day stand in need of it ourselves? But so it is. It is God's affair; and in His infinite wisdom He is pleased to take the offering, and to save the soul. Multitudes, again, even before old age, fall into sickness, in the prime of life and the middle of their sins, and they pass out of the outer world of men into the inner world of the priest, that world half visible and half invisible, where daily miracles of grace are wrought, and where the weary minister of God is forever drawing those earthly consolations which are more to him than the dearness of domes-

tic affections, and support him sweetly in his incessant toils. God partly admits him to His secrets, and takes him into the inner room of sickness, and shows him the machinery of salvation doing its finest and most hidden work.

While we are gazing at this picture, we must not forget to realize (and it is no easy matter) what we have seen in a former chapter, how little God actually requires as absolutely indispensable to salvation. One confession at the hour of death, ordinary fidelity in confessing, a purpose of amendment which has no temptation *then* to be insincere, a very moderate sorrow, with huge allowances made for the clouded weariness and distracting unsettlements of pain, and the soul that has spent close upon a century of sin is saved, saved because God puts the requisites for absolution so low, saved because by His merciful ordinance faith survived grace for all those years, saved because the Precious Blood of Jesus is such a superabundant ransom, such a mighty conqueror of souls. When a man is converted, he has to make little outward change, so far as the eyes of men are concerned, in his ordinary life. Few will notice that he has begun to go to Mass. Few see him enter the confessional, or kneel at the altar rail. Men are never very sedulous in finding out good, and it will even be some time before it is perceived that habits of swearing, or lying, or intemperance, are gone, or that violence of temper has passed away. Moreover, the convert has relapses, and somehow these are always very much seen and noticed, and they conceal completely the gradual formation of a virtuous habit; and, be-

sides this, a great deal which is externally disagreeable, and also morally unworthy, will remain, and almost hide a man's conversion even from his wife and child. It is not, generally, mortal sin which makes men so unbearable to others. It is more often selfishness, and temper, and churlishness, and ferocity, and coarseness, and such like, which may all be far short of mortal sin, or, in the cases of rude persons, of any sin at all. There is, also, much in the demeanor of a converted sinner which is very puzzling.

He has had certain habits of sin; and, though he no longer falls into the mortal sins in question, he has ways about him which simulate the old habit of sin. He talks as if he were still under its dominion. He omits things which a man would characteristically omit, if he had such a habit. He even falls into venial sins congenial to the old habit; and it may often happen that it shall look as if outward circumstances alone prevented his positively committing the old mortal sin. But it would be endless to enumerate all the things which baffle our judgment of the insincerity of a man's conversion. We may depend upon it, that, in a thousand spots which look desert, waste, and fire-blackened, God's mercy is finding pasture for His glory.

It is very observable that evil is of its own nature much more visible than good, while goodness is invisible like God. Evil, like the world, is loud, rude, anxious, hurried, and ever acting on the defensive; while goodness partakes of the nature of Him who alone is truly good. It imitates His ways of secrecy and concealment, and is impregnated with His Spirit of unostentatious tranquillity and self-sufficient con-

tentment. The infuriated mob that burns down a church, and tramples the Blessed Sacrament under foot, is a much more obvious and obtrusive phenomenon than the dozen Carmelite nuns who have been doing the world's hardest work for it before that tabernacle door for years. The whole priesthood of the Church, busy at its work of mercy, catches the eye much less than a single regiment in scarlet, marching down upon its fellow Christians.

Even in the individual this invisible character of goodness is perceptible, and that not merely in the shy spirit and instinctive bashfulness of great sanctity, but even without a man's intending it, or being aware of it, or taking any pains about it. When we know and love a man, and are in habits of daily familiar intercourse with him, we know his faults almost in a week. We learn where to distrust him, and where he is not unlikely to fail. But the revelation of his goodness is a very slow process. He is continually taking us by surprise with disclosures of virtues which we never dreamed that he possessed. He comes out on great occasions much better than we expected. In little things too and the ordinary wear and tear of life it is only by degrees that we become conscious how much real humility, patience, sweetness, and unselfishness there is about him. There are very few men whom we do not come by experience to respect, if only we continue to love them. If, as Wordsworth says, all things are less dreadful than they seem, so is it true that all men are better than they seem. We must allow very largely for this, when we look at

the lives of Catholics, and pass a judgment on the likelihood of their salvation.

SATAN ACTIVE, GOD MORE ACTIVE

The visible character of evil also brings strongly before us one of the most frightening features of the world, and one which it is hard to dwell upon for any length of time without some amount of gloom passing on our spirits. It is the ceaseless activity of Satan. His activity is appalling: his presence almost ubiquitous: his tyranny universal, overwhelming, and successful. Of a truth he needs no repose. To go and lie down upon his bed of fire would be no rest to him. Thus the world seems to be always in a storm of his creating. One while he is persecuting the good, even in the cloister. Another while he is bent on ruining some man who is doing a notable work for God. Now he is urging on the multitudes of a whole country, and making them drunk with the spirit of anarchy and sacrilege. Now he is quietly weaving webs of unholy diplomacy, with a fair show of equity or patriotism, around the Holy See, that he may cramp its energies for good, and demoralize whole nations. Here he is getting up an intricate slander which shall throw discredit on God's servants, and dishonor the cause of religion. There he is sapping the foundations of a religious Order by the insidious prudence of relaxation, or destroying the stability of some grand work of mercy by leading the founders to seek their own reputation and glory in it instead of God's.

One while he is inspiring the press, and hiding the

poison that he spreads under the rhetoric of morality and right. Another while he is artfully providing for coldness, dissension, and misunderstanding among those whose power for God consisted in the cordiality of their union. Even the chosen of the earth, the holy and the good, are running to and fro upon the earth, till they are weary, doing Satan's work and dreaming it is God's. Who can look on such a scene without disquiet and dismay? But then we must remember the prominent visible character of evil. Satan is active: can we suppose that God is not ten thousand times more active, even though we see Him less? The very reason why we see Him so little is because we do not follow Him, and search out His ways, and trace the footprints of His operations. If we did we should be astonished at the immensity, the vigor, and the versatility of the magnificent spiritual work which He is doing all over the world in every year. Just as science tells us that the earth's surface is never still, but that some portion of it somewhere all day and night is quaking and vibrating with the pulsations of the forces bound up within the centre of the planet, so to the observant and discerning eye of faith the whole natural world of created wills and ways is tremulous and troubled by the forces of the supernatural world, now forcing their way to the surface, now engulfing whole regions, now raising lofty summits of new mountains out of deep valleys, and now altering the very features of civilization by diverting the mighty currents of the mind and purpose of humanity.

If the vigor of God abides with such intensity in every particle of the inanimate world, everywhere

wedding strength to beauty, so that the union might captivate with its exquisite niceties the intelligence of Angels, if in every mineral atom He rules intimately by His presence, His essence, and His power, how much more shall we believe that He informs and controls the world of men by the energies of an all-wise Providence, whose majestic operations have all of them the one single scope and end of love for their blissful accomplishment? We have already seen enough of the doctrine of grace to be aware to what an almost incredible extent it discloses the Divine activity. Temptation is feeble, languid, intermittent, and inert, compared with this. Satan grows weary, even though he cannot rest, while the perseverance of grace is incomparable, like the freshness of that eternal mercy from which it emanates.

Moreover we know that Satan is bound by the coming of our Lord. The little Babe of Bethlehem circumscribed his monstrous empire. If he is as wild and fierce as ever, he has now found the length of his chain, and beyond that his fury is unavailing. Even within his greatly lessened sphere, the Cross of Christ is a perpetual torture, an endless defeat to his malicious wiles. The very presence of the Church is an unbroken exorcism to the baffled prince of darkness. Her Benedictions keep extruding him from one corner of creation after another. Her exorcisms dispossess him even of the hidden spiritual strongholds in which he craves to keep his court. Her holy presences are tortures to him, worse, some of them at least, than the fires of that abyss which is the fallen creature's home. Up and down all lands St. Raphael is for ever binding him in the

upper uninhabitable parts of the spiritual Egypt.

Who then can believe that in God's own cloistered dwelling-place, the sanctuary of His Church, Satan's activity will prevail against His, and that He will be defeated even where His choice most loves to dwell? Satan broke into the first paradise of God, when he was young, and before the Cross of Christ had bound him, and what followed? The saving of Adam and of Eve by a more copious salvation, the superabundance of redeeming grace, the glorious reign of the Queen of the Immaculate Conception, and the total triumph of the Incarnate Word! Much more will like consequences follow now. We must not tremble too much at Satan's power. He is under our feet already. We are stronger far than he. We must remember the story of the servant of Eliseus in the fourth book of Kings. "The servant of the man of God, rising early, went out, and saw an army round about the city, and horses, and chariots; and he told him, saying, Alas, alas, alas, my lord, what shall we do? But he answered, Fear not: for there are more with us than with them. And Eliseus prayed, and said, Lord, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw, and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire, round about Eliseus."

The very inconceivable magnificence of God would lead us to suppose that the number of the saved, which is one of the greatest glories of His creation, would be something far beyond our utmost expectations. Has it not been so in every experience we have ever had of God? Has He not always outdone His own promises, as well as outstripped our

imaginations? Have not His gifts always come in an embarrassing abundance? Have we ever formed an expectation of mercy or of grace, which has not been fulfilled far beyond our hopes, as if not even our necessities, much less our merits, but His own liberality, were the rule of answered prayer? Is it likely to be less so, or are we likely to find God changed all at once, in a matter, in which not only our happiness, but the honor of His dear Son and the interests of His own wonderful glory, are so exceedingly involved? There is something so uncongenial in the thought, that it surely cannot be received unless it be revealed. There is no word which describes His love of us as our Creator so faithfully as *magnificence*, and will His love as our Last End be less magnificent, less efficacious in the triumph of its glorious attractions?

There is no word to express His prodigal expenditure in our redemption, except *magnificence*; can we conceive, in a Divine work, of a *magnificence* in the design which shall not be equalled by *magnificence* in the execution? No one doubts that hell will be unspeakably more dreadful than we expected; because no one doubts but that our little views will be found foolishly narrow when compared with the transcendent realities of God. So will it be found with our notions of the number of the saved. Yet, when we think of what the Catholic Church is, and of all the privileges involved in being a Catholic, it seems only reasonable to expect that on the whole far more of them would be saved than lost. There is no *magnificence* in this idea. There would be a sense of failure and incompleteness in the opposite

opinion. No one can think steadily and continuously on the matter without coming to this conclusion. But of necessity, because He is Himself, God will go far out of sight of our beliefs in the actual splendor of His accomplishments. So that from what we know of God we should augur that very few Catholics, comparatively speaking, would be lost. The salvation of almost all of them seems to be claimed by the very magnificence of God. He is a bold man, who, without the Church to back him, believes that God's own gift of free will, which He has mysteriously allowed to do Him so much injury in time, shall have a final and complete victory over Him for eternity; and if God is love, which is of faith, then hell will be no victory to Him.

The honor of the Precious Blood would imply and require as much as the magnificence of God. It is a hard saying that the majority of those for whom it was shed should be lost eternally. We are purposely turning our eyes away from all without the Church, saying nothing, defining nothing, hinting nothing, guessing nothing! It is not our concern. But how hard will it be to say that of those souls, who have been actually washed in it again and again, the majority are lost. It has cleansed them in Baptism, and printed an ineffaceable character upon their brows. It has absolved them again and again. It has run through them with thrills of fervor and fortitude in Confirmation. Its red living pulses have beaten with their human life within the heart at Communion. Are we then to say that of those, who of all mankind have most trusted the Blood of Jesus, and have made most use of it, the majority are lost?

What ground is there in dogmatic theology for an assertion so little to the honor of our dearest Lord? One drop is more than enough to redeem all the possible sins of all possible worlds, and yet oceans of it cannot succeed in redeeming the majority of the members of His Church! Who would hesitate at anything which the Church taught him to believe, and who would believe this unless the Church should teach it?

Then again, the action of the Sacraments is probably much greater than we have any notion of. We learn a great deal that is very surprising from theology, enough to set us gratefully wondering at the ingenious excesses of our Creator's love. But what we learn there rather shows us the extent of our ignorance than furnishes us with anything like a complete science. We may follow, first the school which teaches that the operation of the Sacraments is moral, then the school which teaches that it is physical, and we are better and holier, because more loving, men for our researches. But have they not left us at a point beyond which, though we could get no further, we saw that sacramental grace was advancing far beyond us with an operation we could not comprehend, into recesses of which mystical theologians speak in grandiloquent words and with the abstrusest terms. When we discuss the deep of the soul, or the point of the spirit, or whether the character of a Sacrament is set as a signet on the soul or on the faculties of the soul, we are at the end of our mind's tether, and grace has shot miles ahead, and is working grandly out of sight.

All God's works are greater when we get to look

into them, than they seemed at first. Especially must it be so with such supernatural works as His Sacraments. It is conceivable that a clear view of the operation of the Sacraments, both in themselves, and also retrospectively in our own souls, may be a not insignificant item in our future blessedness. One good Communion is enough, they say, to make a Saint. Now think what goes to the making of a Saint, the numberless things, their inexhaustible variety, their positive contradictoriness, their unlikely combinations, the intricate wide-spreading possibilities of their perseverance; and what can the axiom mean, except that, not only the inward power of a Sacrament, but its actual operation, goes farther and deeper than we can follow it? Look then at the numberless receptions of Sacraments, which there are daily in the Church, and can you seriously believe that the result of it all is, that the majority of Catholics are not saved? Oh, be sure you are estimating far too low the glorious efficacy of the Divine interventions, the successful majesty of creative love!

Our ignorance of the last inward processes of death-beds leaves one of the most spacious portions of our lives inaccessible to our notice. *Life is not counted only by material time.* The world, and all its sights and sounds, too often leave little room for God in the hearts of men. But the hour of death is very spacious. It gives God room. It turns minutes into years. It redoubles and redoubles the swift processes of the mind just on the eve of its ejection from the body. It is an hour of truth, and an hour of truth is longer than a century of falsehood.

Heaven draws near to it, to help as well as to behold. It is God's last chance with His creature, and Divine wisdom must know well how to use its chances. A man is freed from many laws, when time and space are visibly melting away in the white light of eternity, or rather he is being brought under wider and larger laws.

He can live many lives within the compass of His agony. We know very little of what goes on then. The thick curtains of the glazed eye, of the expressionless or only pain-furrowed face, and of the inarticulate voice, are drawn round the last earthly audience between the Creator and the creature. But observation and psychology combine to teach us that much does go on, and of a far more intelligent nature, than we should otherwise conceive. "Really, according to my observations," says Sir Benjamin Brodie, "the mere act of dying is seldom, in any sense of the word, a very painful process. It is true that some persons die in a state of bodily torture, as in cases of tetanus; that the drunkard, dying of *delirium tremens*, is haunted by terrific visions; and that the victim of that most horrible of all diseases, hydrophobia, in addition to those peculiar bodily sufferings from which the disease has derived its name, may be in a state of terror from the supposed presence of frightful objects—which are presented to him as realities, even to the last. But these and some other instances which I might adduce are exceptions to the general rule, which is, that both mental and bodily sufferings terminate long before the scene is finally closed. Then as to the actual fear of death; it seems to me that the Author of our

existence, for the most part, gives it to us when it is intended that we should live, and takes it away from us when it is intended that we should die. Those who have been long tormented by bodily pain are generally as anxious to die as they ever were to live. So it often is with those whose whole life has been protracted to an extreme old age, beyond the usual period of mortality, even when they labor under no actual disease.

“It is not very common for any one to die merely of old age:—

Like ripe fruit to drop
Into his mother's lap.

But I have known this to happen; and a happy conclusion it has seemed to be of worldly cares and joys. It was like falling to sleep, never to awake again in this state of existence. Some die retaining all their faculties, and quite aware that their dissolution is at hand. Others offer no signs of recognition of external objects, so that it is impossible for us to form any positive opinion whether they do or do not retain their sensibility; and others again, as I have already stated, who appear to be insensible and unconscious, when carefully watched, are found not to be so in reality; but they die contentedly. I have myself never known but two instances in which, in the act of dying, there were manifest indications of the fear of death.” In the life of Condren there is a very remarkable passage urging on us the duty of thanksgiving to God for the graces He bestows on the dying, inasmuch as “His compassion for them is inexplicable, and He seems to distribute His favors

to them all the more willingly, because they are hardly now in danger of profaning them.”

Beautiful thought! How much of the beauty of God's love is gathered round the dying bed, how much more than we can see, how much more than we believe! We grant that it is unknown ground; but because mercy is so much needed then, because mercy has had so many antecedents with the soul, because it is God's will it should be saved, and finally because God is such a God as we know Him well to be, we boldly claim all that unknown land of Catholic death-beds for the simple sovereignty of the Divine compassion. That hour may explain many inexplicable salvations. The gloomiest mind must admit, that it may have shrouded in it endless possibilities of salvation; and with such a God at such an hour the possibilities grow miraculously into probabilities, and forthwith disappear in those sweet sudden certainties with which the dying child of Jesus has fallen asleep upon its Father's bosom.

When we see a man sinning, we see his sin, but we can seldom see the excuses of his sin. This is a very important consideration in the present discussion, and has already been partially adverted to. The depths of invincible ignorance may underlie no inconsiderable region of a man's moral nature, and each individual character has an invincible ignorance belonging to itself. It is a thing we cannot possibly presume upon for ourselves, because a suspicion destroys it: but we may put much to its account in our neighbor's favor. Again, the violence of the temptation is invisible; and even if we saw it, we could not see the peculiar oppressiveness of it to

another's heart, or its almost irresistible tyranny because of previous habits. Yet surely there are many cases in which the vehemence of the temptation is a mitigating circumstance in punishment, even if it be not actual plea for mercy. We must also have a thorough acquaintance with a man's peculiar turn of mind, the bent of his disposition, the circumstances of his past life, and, most of all, his early education, before we are at all in a condition to form an estimate of what his guilt is in the sight of God. Also men often fall, when they are in a good state, from a momentary self-trust, or a sudden assault of Satan, God permitting it for their greater good and more entire humility; and then a man's sin is an exceptional case, and we cannot argue from it to his habitual state. All these considerations, and many more which might be adduced, very much detract from the value of our observations on the sins of Catholics as proofs that by far the greater number of them are not ultimately saved.

This leads us to a further consideration. It can hardly be denied that men's actions are often worse than their hearts, even when they proceed from the heart; and they have often less heart in them than they seem to have. For instance, a man commits a sin in a sudden outburst of passion, that passion may have felt some peculiar sting in the provocation which another would not feel, and it may have fallen upon him when he was physically agitated or when his nerves were unstrung. For all this the sin may remain a sin, and yet be no fair index of the sinner's heart.

Or, again, men are propelled into sin not un-

frequently by false shame, by human respect, by bad company; and the man's heart may be far better all the while than its outward actions testify. Many a man looks to his neighbors a very monster of depravity, while the priest, who heard his general confession, has been almost touched to tears with the spots of green verdure, the almost feminine sensibilities, the refined kindnesses, but above all with the moral shyness, the ground of so many virtues, which he found in that great rough nature. Are we not learning every day to be less surprised at finding how so very much good can dwell with so very much evil? Then, again, many have so many odd crossings in their minds which tell upon their motives, and hamper the free action of their moral sense; and thus it is that cruelty in war, agrarian murders, and the like, are not on the whole such conclusive proofs of a depraved heart as they are commonly taken to be. Much crime lies at the door of a warped mind; and how much of that crime is sin can be known to God alone. The heart is the jewel which He covets for His crown, and if the heart which we do not see is better than the actions that we see, God be praised! for then the world is a trifle less dismal than it seems.

OUR LORD AND HIS SAINTS LOVE SINNERS

It was perhaps these and similar considerations of human charity, almost infinitely magnified by His Sacred Heart, which made Jesus on earth such a lover of sinners. We know well that His predilection was for them. He came to seek and to save

what was lost, and the more lost a soul was, the more especially He came to seek it and to save it. He seemed to prefer the society of sinners to any other; and all-holy as He was, it is wonderful how He contrived at once to exhibit His holiness and also to put sinners into so interesting a light; and He, which is much to be remembered, is the Judge at last. Those sinners, who came near Him in the Gospel and had intercourse with Him, seem to be almost His chosen souls. There is a poetry thrown around their memories, even in the case of the poor young man who did not follow Him, which is nothing else but the lustre of the Saviour's love. So is it always with the Saints of Jesus. They are characterized by a hopeful view of sinners. They have a positive devotion to them, as our Lord had.

The very power of the religious communities, which have to deal with the reformation of sinners, consists at once in their tender love of them and their supernatural respect for them. Without this last quality even the charity of the spouses of Christ will be but intermittent, and lose the perfection of its beauty, the uniformity of its sweetness, and the power from God to accomplish and bring to a happy persevering issue the glorious work of conversion in the soul. In the place of the steadiness of grace, their works of mercy will have all the characteristics of capricious nature. Oh! it is a Christ-like thing to love sinners. But is not our love of them a piteous horror rather than true love, if our view of them is to be so depressing and overclouded, that we are to believe that the greater number even of Catholics are not to be saved? Does not this peculiar tender-

ness, this almost devotion of our Blessed Lord, point to a far more cheering view? "Pray," said the Carmelite prioress of Beaune to Margaret of the Blessed Sacrament, "pray for this soul, though I cannot hope for its conversion." "O Mother, replied Margaret, wherefore doubt the goodness of our God? Is not this to do Him a dishonor? Who has ever invoked the Holy Child Jesus without being heard? Now let us go and implore of Him the grace which you desire, and three days shall not pass before your wishes shall be gratified."

The Saints look at sinners as Saints themselves in possibility. Their hopefulness is the secret of their charity. Their humility also, which gives them a clear view of the excess of God's grace over the amount of their own correspondence, makes them slow to believe that others, even with less grace, will not surpass their own attainments. Thus they come to believe, what the experience of those versed in the affairs of souls abundantly established, that conversion is one of the most common phenomena of grace. It is the sort of thing to be expected of grace, the ordinary occurrence which comes as a matter of course, just as the sun warms, or the frost chills, or the water wets us, or the fire burns us. Now we have already seen the immense abundance of grace, with which heaven inundates the earth, and if conversion is quite an ordinary occurrence with it, and sinners alone can strictly speaking be the subjects of conversion, it follows that the great mass of apparently unworthy Catholics is the chosen theatre of one of the strongest as well as the commonest of the operations of

grace. Thus it is that Apostolic zeal, with its enlightened love, looks at sinners as the materials for the future triumphs of Jesus, as the harvest yet ungarnered of His Passion and His Cross. Bad Catholics, those who appear bad to us, are but a proportion of all Catholics, and if redeeming grace has yet got to invade that proportion, and according to all its laws must triumphantly invade it, we can hardly think otherwise than that the majority of Catholics will be saved. If we put all our data together, conversion can hardly be common in the Church, unless salvation is common too.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

There is another point, which has already been adverted to, but which must not be omitted in the present enumeration. When men look at a country, or a neighborhood, or a town, and pass a judgment on its religious condition, not only must they necessarily have insufficient data, but they are very liable to fall into an inaccuracy which seriously affects the value of their observations. They do not distinguish between the sinfulness of sin and the deformity of sin, which last spreads out and covers a greater extent of ground than the guilt, infecting the manners, tainting the whole tone and atmosphere, and altogether making a much greater show than the real sin. Much that is morally unlovely is not sin, certainly not mortal sin. And yet it catches the eye, and offends our moral sense, and is extremely odious in the sight of religion. It is, of a truth, an evidence of the existence of sin, but by

no means a measure of its quantity. Very often, a newly converted man is almost as disagreeable and repulsive as he was when in his sins. His moral appearance is not improved all at once. The mellowing, softening, beautifying powers of grace, are long in their operation, and follow with slow steps the sharp decisive movements which effect conversion at the first. As it is absurd for Protestants to measure the truth of the religions of two countries by the success of conquest, the perfection of the monetary system, the extension of commerce, or scientific improvements in agriculture, so is it equally a mistake to decide on the religiousness of a population by the offensive prominences of national character, or by the reigning foibles and unworthinesses of a population, or even by a low standard of moral integrity in some one or other department, peculiar to the country, place or time. In the judging of individuals, it is still more important to distinguish between moral unloveliness and downright sin. Goodness tends to be graceful; but, in this life, there are always to each man a thousand causes which hinder its development.

The extreme severity of the punishments of Purgatory is another consideration which leads the mind to contemplate the immense multitude of the saved, and of those saved with very imperfect dispositions, as the only solution of those chastisements. Purgatory goes as near to the unriddling the riddle of the world, as any one ordinance of God which can be named. Difficulties are perpetually drifting that way, to find their explanation; and the Saints of God have turned so full a light upon those

fields of fire, that the geography of them seems almost as familiar to us as the well-known features of the surface of the earth. The charitable practices of Catholic devotion lead us to spend so much of our day amid the patience of that beautiful suffering, that it has become to us like the wards of a favorite hospital, with its familiar faces, brightening at the welcome words of consolation. It is the same fire as hell. That in itself is a terrible reflection. The revelations of the Saints depict the tortures of it as fearful in the extreme. There is a consent of them, as to the immense lengths of time which souls average under that punishment—a consent fully bearing out the practice of the Church in anniversaries and foundations for Masses forever. The very slightest infidelities to grace seem to be visited there with the acutest sufferings.

God Himself has bidden His Saints to honor, with chaste fear and exceeding awe, the rigors of His justice, and the requirements of His purity, in that land of bitter long delay. Now, does it come natural to us to look at all this system, this terrible eighth sacrament of fire, which is the home of those souls whom the seven real Sacraments of earth have not been allowed to purify completely—does it come natural to us to look at it all as simply a penal machinery invented for the Saints and those most like the Saints, to cut away with its vindictive sharpness the little imperfections which come of human frailty? That it should fulfil this office is most intelligible, most accordant with God's perfections, and most consolatory to souls themselves. But does not the view at once recommend itself to us, that

it was an invention of God to multiply the fruit of our Saviour's Passion; that it was intended for the great multitudes who should die in charity with God, but in imperfect charity; and, therefore, that it is, as it were, the continuance of death-bed mercies beyond the grave; and that, as such, it throws no uncertain light on the cheering supposition that most Catholics are saved, especially of the poor who sorrow and suffer here?

Mention has been made, in previous chapters, of God's unaccountable contentment with so little, as requisite for salvation. Of course, Purgatory goes some way towards accounting for it, but very far from the whole way. Purgatory seems too good for ungenerous souls; and yet they are crowding into it by thousands, and become beautiful amid its flames. The merits and satisfactions of our dearest Lord seem our only refuge, when we see how low it has pleased God to put the terms of our redemption. The charity of Jesus covers the multitude of the sins of His people. God sees the world through Him, not simply by a fiction imputing to us the holiness that is our Lord's, but, for His sake and by the efficacy of His Blood, actually ennobling our worthiness, and giving a real greatness to our littleness, and a solid value to the merest intentions of our love. It is the daily delight of His justice to be limited in the operations of its righteous anger by the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass; and the glory of Jesus is the grand fundamental law of all creation. Yet, even so, God's contentment with so little is an inscrutable mercy, one of those bright lights that are dark because they are so bright, and which

are rising up perpetually from the abysses of creative love. Who shall tell the thousands of souls in heaven at this hour, whom, almost to their own surprise, that marvellous contentment has exalted there?

Are any two Angels exactly in the same degree of glory? Theologians say that the graces of each radiant spirit are unlike. Perhaps, then, their glories are unequal also. If so, what innumerable degrees of bliss there must be in the angelic hierarchies! The Saints we know are ranged in countless ranks. We are not told that those who are in the same rank have all an equal vision. It is of faith that the rewards of heaven differ in degree. It is revealed to us in the parables of the talents and the cities. "In my Father's house are many mansions," saith our Lord. "Star differeth from star in glory," is the doctrine of St. Paul. Now, there can be no exaggeration in supposing that there are at least as many different degrees of happiness in heaven as there are degrees of happiness on earth. We know that there are as many different degrees of glory hereafter, as there are different degrees of grace here; and, as far as we can read the phenomena of grace, it would really seem as if those differences were as numerous as the individual hearts in which it dwells. This would admit of an immense variety of scales of goodness upon earth, the very lowest of which should reach heaven. And would it not be in accordance with what we know of the works of God, if heaven stooped almost down to earth, and well-nigh blended with it, only, which is truly difference enough, that the lowest there would have God's

clear light full upon him, and therefore be bathed in joys which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived? This view would swiftly reach, and that by no circuitous route, the sweet conclusion for which we plead, that almost all Catholics are saved.

Hell teaches the same comfortable doctrine as heaven, although in a rougher strain. Finite evil is almost infinitely punished, limited sin almost illimitably tormented. One mortal sin is chastised eternally. There may be many in hell who have committed a less amount of sin than many who are in heaven, only they would not lay hold of the Cross of Christ, and do penance, and have easy absolution. There is no life of self-denying virtue, however long and however laborious, but if it ends in impenitence and mortal sin, must be continued among the unending pains of hell. One mortal sin, and straightway a death without contrition, and everlasting despair alone remains. Now will evil be more punished than good is rewarded? Will they even be on equal terms? Theology teaches that the chastisements of hell are for the sake of Christ far less than the wretched sufferers deserve. There is mercy even there, whence hope has long since fled, compassion even there where its tenderness seems so wholly out of place, and its forbearance thankless and unavailing. Hell is less than sin deserves. Then, is there no corner of creation where the Divine justice enjoys all its rights? At least it is not in hell; for hell is less than sin deserves. O beautiful ubiquity of mercy! The Gospel nowhere tells us that sinners shall be punished up to the plenitude of their de-

merits; but it does tell us about the reward of virtue, that it shall be "good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over." You see it is in heaven only that justice shall enjoy its royalties! Shall not then God's rewarding of good be in all respects far beyond, in fulness and completeness, His punishment of evil? Shall not a little good, a very little good, be much rewarded? And is not the number who are rewarded a chief feature in the magnificence of the reward? Surely not only will heaven be unspeakably beyond our deservings, but many will go there, whom only the generosity of Divine love and the determination of persisting grace could have made deserving. These are things which we cannot know, and they are not put forward as amounting to arguments; but there seems something easy in the process by which the very existence and extremity of hell leads to the conclusion that most Catholics are saved.

The Providence of God in the lives of men is to each one in particular a private revelation of His love. The biography of every one of us is to ourselves as luminously supernatural, as palpably full of Divine interferences, as if it were a page out of the Old Testament history. Moreover all that is providential is also merciful. The interferences are all on the side of love. Stern-looking accidents, when they turn their full face to us, beam with the look of love. Even our very faults are so strangely overruled that mercy can draw materials for its blessings even out of them. It is true we may easily delude ourselves. But the natural tendency to find a meaning in what happens to ourselves, and to

exaggerate its significance, cannot altogether, or even nearly, account for the providential aspect which our past lives present to us, when we reflect upon them in the faith and fear of God. Our merciful Creator seems to have led us very gently, as knowing how weak and ill we are; yet He has led us plainly towards Himself.

If it is not speaking of Him too familiarly, He seems to have done everything just at the right time, and in the right place, to have put nothing before us till we were ready for it and could make the most of it, to have timed His grace and apportioned it, so that we might have as little as possible the guilt of resisting grace, to have weighed even our crosses before He laid them upon us, and to have waited an auspicious moment each time He would persuade us to something fresh. He has combined events with the most consummate skill, and brought out the most wonderful results, and they have always been in our favor. There are difficulties and seeming exceptions to the ordinary course of this genial Providence. But it is only at first sight that they perplex us. These very exceptions on closer investigation, or longer experience, turn out to be the most striking examples of the general rule of beneficence and love. If we ask each man separately, this is what he will tell us. We have all of us had this private revelation. But are not God's works for the most part remarkable for their efficacy? Do not all these secret biographies of men, with their beautiful disclosures of His assiduous ministering love, bear upon this question of salvation? Has He so waited upon each of us, that we might at any time have

mistaken Him for our Guardian Angel, instead of our God? and yet is not His solicitude in far the greater number of cases to have the one issue which His glory so earnestly desires? Let us dwell on one feature of His Providence, the way in which He vouchsafes to time things. Think of the hour of death, of its surpassing importance, of its thrilling risks, of all those inward processes of which we have already spoken.

Now may we not conclude, or at least with reasonable hope infer, that to most, if not to all, men, the hour of their death is seasonably timed? They die when it is best for them to die. There are some dangers in advance which they avoid by dying then. They die when they are in the best state for dying. Even the deaths of those who are lost may be mercifully timed. When men die young, it is perhaps because they would have lost themselves if they had lived to be old. When men die late, it is perhaps to give them time to correspond to grace, to do penance for the past, and especially that they may get rid of some evil habit which would else be their perdition, and which the mere infirmity of age will help them to abandon. When men die just as they are coming into the possession of riches, or at the outset of a smiling career of laudable ambition, it is perhaps because God sees in their natural character or in their personal circumstances some seeds of future evil, and so He takes them while all that evil lies innocently undeveloped in their souls. Who can think of what death is, and yet doubt that God's wisdom and His love are brought to bear with inexpressible sweetness both on its manner and its

time? If God were pleased to tell us, we should probably be amazed at the numbers of convincing reasons that there are why each of us should die when, and where, and how we do. The very sight of so much legislation and arrangement, on the part of God, about this one final act of our probation is doubtless pouring into the souls of the Blessed at all hours delightful streams of wondering adoration and ecstatic love. Is all this true of each Christian death-bed, and are not then by far the great majority of Christians saved?

FAITH, GOD'S CROWNING GIFT OF MERCY

But what is it which most obviously distinguishes Catholics from all other men? Surely it is the *gift of faith*. This, next to the Beatific Vision of Himself in heaven, is the greatest gift which God can give to His creatures: for in some respects it may be said to be greater than sanctifying grace, because it is its indispensable foundation. It is hard to realize the greatness of a gift which is so intimate to every operation of our lives. But we may gain some idea of its importance when we remember that without faith no Sacraments avail, and that with the loss of faith we lose almost all the capabilities of setting ourselves right when we have sinned. It is a gift, therefore, which we should not only guard most jealously, but which we should increase by exercise; for that it is capable of increase by our own correspondence is one of those many really startling disclosures of Divine love, at which nobody is startled because they are so common. We see or hear of

souls wandering in the darkness, reading, arguing, writing, commenting, collating manuscripts, all in perplexity because they cannot perceive the Divinity of our Blessed Lord, while to every Catholic child that sweet converting truth is plainer than the sunshine on the trees. The little fellow could not doubt it, if he would. He is so sure of it that he would be beaten to death rather than say it was not true.

To others the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity presents difficulties of the most insuperable kind, how God can be One God yet Three Persons, how the Son can be evermore coequally begotten of the Father, and the Holy Ghost be evermore coequally proceeding from the Father and the Son. The Catholic finds nothing hard in it. He cannot explain it, even so far as theology arrives towards an explanation. But he knows it and sees it as distinctly as the writing of a letter or the pages of a book. Bewilder him as you will, you cannot inject a doubt into his mind. He cannot help himself; he is more certain of the Holy Trinity, than he is of your existence who are standing by him and questioning him. O glorious necessity of believing, which is hardly faith, but actual contact with a supernatural world, as if the prerogative of heaven was only to see God, while earth's privilege was to touch Him in the dark with fearless venture and with thrilling love! Heaven must indeed be beautiful, if the Saints can part there with their gift of faith, and not pine to have it back again!

Yet this gift every Catholic receives, not the faith of devils who believe and tremble, but the supernatural gift of Divine faith. It is faith by which so

many, after years of sin, quietly and, as it were, naturally, swing round to their anchors, and die well. By this gift the Catholic sees far up into the unbeginning eternity of God, and beholds his own soul lying there in the lap of that eternal love. By faith he sees the unspeakable operations of the Holy Trinity with its Innascibility, Generation, and Procession. By faith he scans the numberless perfections of God. By faith he sees Jesus, God and Man, in the Blessed Sacrament. By faith he beholds Mary on her mediatorial throne. By faith the joys of heaven, the delays of Purgatory, the pains of hell, are familiar to him as the hills and streams and groves where his childhood played. By faith he sees the lineaments of Jesus in His priests, and beholds the Precious Blood dropping from the hand that is raised to give him absolution. This gift is common to all, so common that it stays with us even when grace has left us, so persevering and so secure of itself that it will lodge with sin and fear no evil; and is there one sign of predestination of which so much can be said as of this transcendent gift, which of its sole self makes a creature of God into a Catholic, and writes upon his brow this plain inscription of his Creator, It is My especial Will that this creature should be saved, and live with Me for ever?

The *Church militant* on earth is the foreshadowing of the *Church triumphant* in heaven. The destinies of the heavenly Church are glassed and mirrored on the earthly Church, and are in some sense anticipated there. The end of the earthly Church is to be transplanted into the heavenly. Is it not a difficulty, unless authority should teach it, to think

that less than the great majority of the earthly plants will not be worth transplanting? Seed is wasted in sowing; yet the earthly husbandman garners the produce of by far the greatest portion of what he sows, even when birds, and blight, and lawless footpaths, and uncertain weather, and waste, and theft have done their worst. Shall the heavenly Husbandman be worse off than they? The Church may seem a failure; but is it likely to be so in reality? God has His little flock of saints, of eminent souls whom we technically call Saints. These He leads by extraordinary paths. He introduces them into a mystical world. He furnishes them with peculiar graces, and endows them with miraculous powers. He inspires them with unearthly tastes for suffering and abjection, deluges them with the most unparalleled afflictions and trials, consigns them for years to the intimate assaults, not unfrequently to the bodily possession, of demons, constantly suspends their common life by mysterious ecstasies, and then again plunges them into such pitchy darkness that they hardly know if they are in a state of grace. He transfigures all their senses, He drives them to the most appalling austerities, He animates them to the most heroic deeds of charitable daring for the good of others, He renews in them supernatural likenesses to His Blessed Son. This is not the way of salvation, nor even the way of perfection.

It is the way of the Saints. No one is introduced into it except by God Himself. He takes the initiative. Every one should aspire to perfection; no one can lawfully aspire to what is technically the way of the Saints, namely, the ecstatic. Now of this little

flock some, as appears from the records of hagiology, fail and come to an evil end. But they are, comparatively speaking, few in number, and chiefly notable, not so much because they are so rare, as because the phenomenon is so terrific. He has two other little flocks, composed of religious, priests, laity, and many simple souls, who by love have worked themselves beyond the common way of precepts into that of counsels and of the inwardly perfect observance of the Precepts. These are two ways of perfection, often combining, often converging, the way of counsels, and the way of perfect interior observance of precepts. Neither of them are like the way of the Saints. We know from the lives of good people, and especially the chronicles of religious Orders, that many of these little flocks go wrong and frustrate the sweet purposes of God. Some fall back into the common way, and others find no way of salvation because they refuse the way in which God has put them.

But surely by far the greater number, as far as we can judge from books, persevere, and not only save their souls, but avoid Purgatory, or are high in heaven. Then God has a fourth little flock, the great multitude of Catholics. It is a very little one compared with the great mass of men on earth, and it is yet more divinely distinguished from them, than even the Saints or the perfect are from itself. A Catholic has more marks of special love multiplied upon him as compared with other men, than a Saint has as compared with an ordinary Catholic. Why may we not think of this fourth little flock, as we think of the others, that the failures are few,

and the successes overwhelmingly numerous, especially as we have more grounds to go upon in this last case than in any of the others, both because the failure cannot be short of eternal misery, and because an equal, if not a greater, amount of Divine predilection has been shown? Of those who were compelled to come to the banquet in the Gospel, there was only one who was without the wedding garment.

It may be urged, that some of the considerations, which have been here adduced, apply also to persons who are not Catholics. God be praised if it is so! The overflow of mercy is surely not an argument against its existence. That were strange logic. Doubtless the mercy of God covers the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. It is one of our best joys to know that its abundance is beyond our gaze, and above our comprehension. But again we turn to those who are before us, to Catholics. If any of these considerations apply to those outside the Church, and if moreover they are true, then *a fortiori*, as logicians say, that is, with tenfold greater force, will they apply to Catholics. And so, whichever way we turn, the same benignant conclusion looks us always in the face.

No one can look forward without very solemn apprehensions to his final judgment. Yet it is the deliberate conviction of our best thoughts and most mature reflection, that we had rather leave our final doom in the hands of the all-holy God than in those of the most merciful of sinful men. Our knowledge of God does not leave us room for a moment's hesitation. Strange to say! inti-

mately as we know our own wretchedness, and appalled as we often are by the vision of our own sins, our sense of security in the hands of God rises in great measure from the fact that He knows us better than any one else can know us. There are so many things by which God will not judge us, and by which men would judge us, that it seems as if our deliverance from these was already half a verdict in our favor. How often in life are we accused wrongly and mistakenly! How are motives imputed to us which we never had! We lose our temper for a moment, and are judged by that fact for years to come. When we do wrong, we often struggle manfully before we give way, but men put not these invisible struggles to our account. Full of want of simplicity as we are, and far from perfect truth, we are on the whole always more sincere than we seem. We often have good motives for imprudent and ill-looking actions. When we often appear careless and unkind, some secret sorrow is oppressing us, or anxiety disturbing us, or responsibility harassing us. Now God sees all this rightly, and man cannot. God does not judge us by any of these things; man must. Hence it is, a strange conclusion for sinners to come to! that God loves us better than men do, because He knows us better.

He judges us by our inward religious acts, which necessarily go for nothing with men. He judges us by the fructifying of His own gifts within us, a very slight portion of which ever becomes visible to men, and even that portion only partially visible. Moreover He judges us as He sees us in His Son. He judges us by the love which Mary, Angels, and Saints

have for us. And finally He judges us with all our good ever collectively before Him, while our evil is interrupted by frequent absolutions, and our sins supernaturally effaced by the Precious Blood, so that by the laws of His own redeeming love He cannot see them in the same way that men see them.

Thus we are most reasonable in preferring rather to be judged by God than by men. The acutenesses of their criticism are far more to be dreaded than the niceties of His justice, when omnipotent love sits by as its assessor. Now if we judge that the great majority of Catholics will not be saved, it is a human judgment; and like all human judgments, it is more rigorous than the Divine, because of the ignorance and the temper of the judge. Therefore we may modestly hope that God's judgment is otherwise, and that the great majority of Catholics are saved. It is only applying to the case of the multitude what we each of us find true in our own, that largeness and allowance in the Creator's judgment, which it is hopeless to look for at the tribunal of the creature.

We are speaking of what we do not know. But it is at least allowable to put all these considerations in opposition to those which, justly or not, give us hard and to our weakness, dishonorable thoughts of God. They are not doctrines. They are not certainties. They are inferences, they are hopes, they are speculations, which are surely more in harmony with what we know of our most righteous and most compassionate Creator, than the opposite view. Even if we are wrong, which the last day alone will show, we shall be better men for having tried to think such thoughts of God as get Him more honor

among men, and more love from ourselves. God knows His own secret. Blessed be His inscrutable judgment! Let the secret rest with Him. Doubt is even better for us than knowledge, when He, who is pure love, has chosen to withhold it from us.

We are speaking of Catholics. If our thoughts break their bounds, and run out beyond the Church, nothing that has been said, has been said with any view to those without. I have no profession of faith to make about them, except that God is infinitely merciful to every soul, that no one ever has been, or ever can be, lost by surprise or trapped in his ignorance; and, as to those who may be lost, I confidently believe that our Heavenly Father threw His arms around each created spirit, and looked it full in the face with bright eyes of love, in the darkness of its mortal life, and that of its own deliberate will it would not have Him.

CHAPTER III

THE WORLD

THE question of worldliness is a very difficult one, and one which we would gladly have avoided, had it been in our power to do so. But it is in too many ways connected with our subject, to allow of its being passed over in silence. In the first place, a thoughtful objector will naturally say, If the relation between the Creator and the creature is such as has been laid down in the first eight chapters, and furthermore if it is as manifest and undeniable as it is urged to be, how comes it to pass that it is not more universally, or at least more readily, admitted than it is? Almost all the phenomena of the world betray a totally opposite conviction, and reveal to us an almost unanimous belief in men, that they are on quite a different footing with God from that one, which is here proclaimed to be the only true and tenable one. There must at least be some attempt to explain this discrepancy between what we see and what we are taught.

The explanation, we reply, is to be found in what Christians call worldliness. It is this which stands in the way of God's honor, this which defrauds Him of the tribute due to Him from His creatures, this which even blinds their eyes to His undeniable rights

and prerogatives. How God's own world comes to stand between Himself and the rational soul, how friendship with it is enmity with Him,—indeed an account of the whole matter must be gone into, in order to show, first, that the influence of the world does account for the non-reception of right views about God, and, secondly, that the world is in no condition to be called as a witness, because of the essential falsehood of its character. This identical falsehood about God is its very life, energy, significance, and condemnation. The right view of God is not unreal, because the world ignores it. On the contrary, it is because it is real that the unreal world ignores it, and the world's ignoring it is, so far forth, an argument in favor of the view.

But not only does this question of worldliness present itself to us in connection with the whole teaching of the first eight chapters; it is implicated in the two objections which have already been considered, namely, the difficulty of salvation and the fewness of the saved. If it is easy to be saved, whence the grave semblance of its difficulty? If the majority of adult Catholics are actually saved, because salvation is easy, why is it necessary to draw so largely on the unknown regions of the 'death-bed, in order to make up our majority? Why should not salvation be almost universal, if the pardon of sin is so easy, grace so abundant, and all that is wanted is a real earnestness about the interests of our souls?

If you acknowledge, as you do, that the look of men's lives, even of the lives of believers, is not as if they were going to be saved, and that they are going to be saved in reality in spite of appearances, what is

the explanation of these appearances, when the whole process is so plain and easy? To all this the answer is, that sin is a partial explanation, and the devil is a partial explanation, but that the grand secret lies in worldliness. That is the chief disturbing force, the prime counteracting power. It is this mainly, which keeps down the number of the saved; it is this which makes the matter seem so difficult which is intrinsically so easy; nay, it is this which is a real difficulty, though not such an overwhelming one as to make salvation positively difficult as a whole. Plainly then the phenomenon of worldliness must be considered here, else it will seem as if an evident objection, and truly the weightiest of all objections, had not been taken into account, and thus an air of insecurity will be thrown, not only over the answer to the two preceding objections, but also over the whole argument of the first eight chapters.

This inquiry into worldliness will, in the third place, truthfully and naturally prepare us for the great conclusion of the whole inquiry, namely, the personal love of God is the only legitimate development of our position as creatures, and at the same time the means by which salvation is rendered easy, and the multitude of the saved augmented. For it will be found that the dangers of worldliness are at once so great and so peculiar, that nothing but a personal love of our Creator will rescue us from them, enable us to break with the world, and to enter into the actual possession of the liberty of the sons of God.

Oh, it is a radiant land,—this wide, outspread, many-colored mercy of our Creator! But we must

be content for a while now to pass out of its kindling sunshine into another land of most ungenial darkness, in the hope that we shall come back heavy laden with booty for God's glory, and knowing how to prize the sunshine more than ever. There is a hell already upon earth; there is something which is excommunicated from God's smile. It is not altogether matter, nor yet altogether spirit. It is not man only, nor Satan only, nor is it exactly sin. It is an infection, an inspiration, an atmosphere, a life, a coloring matter, a pageantry, a fashion, a taste, a witchery, an impersonal but a very recognizable system. None of these names suit it, and all of them suit it. Scripture calls it, "The World." God's mercy does not enter into it. All hope of its reconciliation with Him is absolutely and eternally precluded. Repentance is incompatible with its existence. The sovereignty of God has laid the ban of the empire upon it; and a holy horror ought to seize us when we think of it. Meanwhile its power over the human creation is terrific, its presence ubiquitous, its deceitfulness incredible. It can find a home under every heart beneath the poles, and it embraces with impartial affection both happiness and misery.

It is wider than the Catholic Church, and is masterful, lawless, and intrusive within it. It cannot be damned, because it is not a person, but it will perish in the general conflagration, and so its tyranny be over, and its place know it no more. We are living in it, breathing it, acting under its influences, being cheated by its appearances, and unwarily admitting its principles. Is it not of the last importance to us that we should know something of this huge evil

creature, this monstrous sea-bird of evil, which flaps its wings from pole to pole, and frightens the nations into obedience by its discordant cries?

But we must not be deceived by this description. The transformations of the spirit of the world are among its most wonderful characteristics. It has its gentle voice, its winning manners, its insinuating address, its aspect of beauty and attraction; and the lighter its foot and the softer its voice, the more dreadful is its approach. It is by the firesides of rich and poor, in happy homes where Jesus is named, in gay hearts which fain would never sin. In the chastest domestic affections it can hide its poison. In the very sunshine of external nature, in the combinations of the beautiful elements,—it is somehow even there. The glory of the wind-swept forest and the virgin frost of the Alpine summits have a taint in them of this spirit of the world. It can be dignified as well. It can call to order sin which is not respectable. It can propound wise maxims of public decency, and inspire wholesome regulations of police. It can open the churches, and light the candles on the altar, and intone *Te Deums* to the Majesty on high. It is often prominently, and almost pedantically, on the side of morality. Then, again, it has passed into the beauty of art, into the splendor of dress, into the magnificence of furniture. Or, again, there it is, with high principles on its lips, discussing the religious vocation of some youth, and praising God and sanctity, while it urges *discreet* delay, and less self-trust, and more considerate submissiveness to those who love him, and have natural rights to his obedience. It can sit on the benches of

senates and hide in the pages of good books. And yet all the while it is the same huge evil creature which was described above. Have we not reason to fear?

THE WORLD ; WHAT DOES IT MEAN ?

Let us try to learn more definitely what the world is, the world in the Scripture sense. A definition is too short, a description is too vague. God never created it: how then does it come here? There is no land, outside the creation of God, which could have harbored this monster, who now usurps so much of this beautiful planet, on which Jesus was born and died, and from which He and His sinless Mother rose to heaven. It seems to be a sort of spirit which has risen up from a disobedient creation, as if the results, and after-consequences of all the sins that ever were, rested in the atmosphere, and loaded it with some imperceptible but highly powerful miasma. It cannot be a person, and yet it seems as if it possessed both a mind and a will, which on the whole are very consistent, so as to disclose what might appear to be a very perfect self-consciousness. It is painless in its operations, and unerring too; and just as the sun bids the lily be white and the rose red, and they obey without an effort, standing side by side with the same aspect and in the same soil, so this spirit of the world brings forth colors and shapes and scents in our different actions, without the process being cognizable to ourselves. The power of mesmerism on the reluctant will is a good type of the power of this

spirit of the world upon ourselves. It is like grace, only that it is its contradictory.

But it has not always the same power. If the expression may be forgiven, there have been times when the world was less worldly than usual; and this looks as if it were something which the existing generation of men always gave out from themselves, a kind of magnetism of varying strengths and different properties. As Satan is sometimes bound, so it pleases God to bind the world sometimes. Or He thunders, and the atmosphere is cleared for a while, and the times are healthy, and the Church lifts her head and walks quicker. But, on the whole, its power appears to be increasing with time. In other words, the world is getting more worldly. Civilization develops it immensely, and progress helps it on, and multiplies its capabilities. In the matter of worldliness, a highly civilized time is to a comparatively ruder time what the days of machinery are to those of hand-labor. We are not speaking of sin; that is another idea, and brings in fresh considerations: we are speaking only of worldliness. If the characteristics of modern times go on developing with the extreme velocity and herculean strength which they promise now, we may expect (just what prophecy would lead us to anticipate) that the end of the world and the reign of anti-Christ would be times of the most tyrannical worldliness.

This spirit also has its characteristics of time and place. The worldliness of one century is different from that of another. Now it runs towards ambition in the upper classes and discontent in the lower. Now to money-making, luxury, and lavish

expenditure. One while it sets towards grosser sins; another while towards wickedness of a more refined description; and another while it will tolerate nothing but educated sin. It also has periodical epidemics and accessions of madness, though at what intervals, or whether by the operation of any law, must be left to the philosophy of history to decide.

Certain it is, that ages have manias, the source of which it is difficult to trace, but under which whole communities, and sometimes nations, exhibit symptoms of diabolical possession. Indeed, on looking back, it would appear that every age, as if an age were an individual and had an individual life, had been subject to some vertigo of its own, by which it may be almost known in history. Very often, the phenomena, such as those of the French Revolution, seem to open out new depths in human nature, or to betoken the presence of some preternatural spiritual influences. Then, again, ages have panics, as if some attribute of God came near to the world, and cast a deep shadow over its spirit, making men's hearts quail for fear.

This spirit is further distinguished by the evidences which it presents of a fixed view and a settled purpose. It is capricious, but, for all that, there is nothing about it casual, accidental, fortuitous. It is well instructed for its end, inflexible in its logic, and making directly, no matter through what opposing medium, to its ultimate results. Indeed, it is obviously informed with the wisdom and subtlety of Satan. It is his greatest capability of carrying on his war against God. Like a parasite disease, it

fixes on the weak places in men, pandering both to mind and flesh, but chiefly to the former.

It is one of those three powers to whom such dark preeminence is given, the world, the flesh, and the devil; and, among these three, it seems to have a kind of precedence given to it, by the way in which our Lord speaks of it in the Gospel, though the line of its diplomacy has been to have itself less thought of and less dreaded than the other two; and, unhappily for the interests of God and the welfare of souls, it has succeeded. It is, then, preeminent among the enemies of God. Hence the place which it occupies in Holy Scripture. It is the world which hated Christ, the world which cannot receive the Spirit, the world that loves its own, the world that rejoices because Christ has gone away, the world which He overcame, the world for which He would not pray, the world that by wisdom knew not God, the world whose spirit Christians were not to receive, the world that was not worthy of the Saints, the world whose friendship is enmity with God, the world that passeth away with its lusts, the world which they who are born of God overcome, or, as the Apocalypse calls it, the world that goes wandering after the beast. Well then might St. James come to his energetic conclusion, "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God." It is remarkable also that St. John, the chosen friend of the Incarnate Word, and the Evangelist of His Divinity, should be the one of the inspired writers who speaks most often and most emphatically about the world, as if the spirit of Jesus found something

especially revolting to it in the spirit of the world.

It is this world which we have to fight against throughout the whole of our Christian course. Our salvation depends upon our unforgiving enmity against it. It is not so much that it is a sin, as that it is the capability of all sins, the air sin breathes, the light by which it sees to do its work, the hot-bed which propagates and forces it, the instinct which guides it, the power which animates it. For a Christian to look at, it is dishearteningly complete. It is a sort of Catholic Church of the powers of darkness. It has laws of its own, and tastes and principles of its own, literature of its own, a missionary spirit, a compact system, and it is a consistent whole. It is a counterfeit of the Church of God, and in the most implacable antagonism to it. The doctrines of the faith, the practices and devotions of pious persons, the system of the interior life, the mystical and contemplative world of the Saints, with all these it is at deadly war. And so it must be. The view which the Church takes of the world is distinct and clear, and far from flattering to its pride. It considers the friendship of the world as enmity with God. It puts all the world's affairs under its feet, either as of no consequence, or at least of very secondary importance. It has great faults to find with the effeminacy of the literary character, with the churlishness of the mercantile character, with the servility of the political character, and even with the inordinateness of the domestic character. It provokes the world by looking on progress doubtingly, and with what appears a very inadequate interest, and there is a quiet

faith in its contempt for the world extremely irritating to this latter power.

The world on the contrary thinks that it is going to last for ever. It almost assumes that there are no other interests but its own, or that if there are, they are either of no consequence, or troublesome and in the way. It thinks that there is nothing like itself anywhere, that religion was made for its convenience, merely to satisfy a want, and must not forget itself, or if it claims more, must be put down as a rebel, or chased away as a grumbling beggar; and finally it is of opinion, that of all contemptible things spirituality is the most contemptible, cowardly and little. Thus the Church and the world are incompatible, and must remain so to the end.

We cannot have a better instance of the ungeniality of the world with the spirit of the Gospel, than their difference in the estimate of prosperity. All those mysterious woes which our Lord denounced against wealth, have their explanation in the dangers of worldliness. It is the peculiar aptitude of wealth, and pomp, and power, to harbor the unholy spirit of the world, to combine with it, and transform themselves into it, which called forth the thrilling malediction of our Lord. Prosperity may be a blessing from God, but it may easily become the triumph of the world. And for the most part the absence of chastisement is anything but a token of God's love. When posterity is a blessing, it is generally a condescension to our weakness. Those are fearful words, "Thou hast already received thy reward"; yet how many prosperous men there are, the rest of whose lives will keep reminding us of

them; the tendency of prosperity in itself is to wean the heart from God, and fix it on creatures. It gives us a most unsupernatural habit of esteeming others according to their success. As it increases, so anxiety to keep it increases also, and makes men restless, selfish, and irreligious; and at length it superinduces a kind of effeminacy of character, which unfits them for the higher and more heroic virtues of the Christian character. This is but a sample of the different way in which the Church and the world reason.

Now it is this world which, far more than the devil, far more than the flesh, yet in union with both, makes the difficulty we find in obeying God's Commandments, or following His counsels. It is this which makes earth such a place of struggle and of exile. Proud, exclusive, anxious, hurried, fond of comforts, coveting popularity, with an offensive ostentation of prudence, it is this worldliness which hardens the hearts of men, stops their ears, blinds their eyes, vitiates their taste, and ties their hands, so far as the things of God are concerned. Let it be true that salvation is easy, and that by far the greater number of Catholics are saved, it is still unhappily true that the relations of the Creator and the creature, as put forward in this treatise, are not so universally or so practically acknowledged as they ought to be. Why is this?

Sin is a partial answer. The devil is another partial answer. But I believe worldliness has got to answer for a great deal of sin, and for a great deal of devil, besides a whole deluge of iniquity of its own, which is perpetually debasing good works, hindering

perfection, preparing materials for sin, assisting the devil in his assaults, and working with execrable assiduity against the Sacraments and grace. The world is for ever lowering the heavenly life of the Church. If there ever was an age in which this was true, it is the present. One of the most frightening features of our condition is, that we are so little frightened of the world. The world itself has brought this about. Even spiritual books are chiefly occupied with the devil and the flesh; and certain of the capital sins, such as envy and sloth, no longer hold the prominent places which they held in the systems of the elder ascetics; and yet they are just those vices which contain most of the ungodly spirit of the world. The very essence of worldliness seems to consist in its making us forget that we are creatures; and the more this view is reflected upon, the more correct will it appear.

When our Blessed Lord describes the days before the Flood, and again those which shall precede the end of the world, He portrays them rather as times of worldliness than of open sin. Men were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage: and He says no more. Now none of these things are wrong in themselves. We can eat and drink, as the Apostle teaches us, to the glory of God, and marriage was a Divine institution at the time of the Flood, and is now a Christian Sacrament. In the same way when He describes the life of the only person whom the Gospel narrative follows into the abode of the lost, He sums it up as the being clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasting sumptuously every day. Here again there is nothing directly

sinful in the actions which He names. It surely cannot be a mortal sin to have fine linen, nor will a man lose a state of grace because he feasts sumptuously every day, provided that no other sins follow in the train of this soft life. The malice of it all is in its worldliness, in the fact that this was all or nearly all the lives of those before the Flood, of those before the days of anti-Christ, and of the unhappy Dives. Life began and ended in worldliness. There was nothing for God. It was comprised in the pleasures of the world, it rested in them, it was satisfied by them. Its characteristic was sins of omission.

Worldliness might almost be defined to be a state of habitual sins of omission. The devil urges men on to great positive breaches of the Divine Commandments. The passions of the flesh impel sinners to give way to their passions by such dreadful sins, as catch the eyes of men and startle them by their iniquity. Worldliness only leads to these things occasionally and by accident. It neither scandalizes others, nor frightens the sinner himself. This is the very feature of it, which, rightly considered, ought to be so terrifying. The reaction of a great sin, or the shame which follows it, are often the pioneers of grace. They give self-love such a serious shock, that under the influence of it men return to God. Worldliness hides from the soul its real malice, and thus keeps at arm's length from it some of the most persuasive motives to repentance.

Thus the Pharisees are depicted in the Gospel as being eminently worldly. It is worldliness, not immorality, which is put before us. There is even much of moral decency, much of respectable observance,

much religious profession; and yet when our Blessed Saviour went among them, they were further from grace than the publicans and sinners. They had implicit hatred of God in their hearts already, which became explicit as soon as they saw Him. The Magdalen, the Samaritan, the woman taken in adultery,—it was these who gathered round Jesus, attracted by His sweetness, and touched by the grace which went out from Him. The Pharisees only grew more cold, more haughty, more self-opinionated, until they ended by the greatest of all sins, the crucifixion of our Lord. For worldliness, when its selfish necessities drive it at last into open sin, for the most part sins more awfully and more impenitently than even the unbridled passions of our nature. So again there was the young man who had great possessions, and who loved Jesus when he saw Him, and wished to follow Him. He was a religious man, and with humble scrupulosity observed the Commandments of God; but when our Lord told him to sell and give the price to the poor and to follow Him, he turned away sorrowful, and was found unequal to such a blessed vocation. Now his refusing to sell his property was surely not a mortal sin. It does not appear that our Lord considered him to have sinned by his refusal. It was the operation of worldliness. We do not know what the young man's future was; but a sad cloud of misgivings must hang over the memory of him whom Jesus invited to follow Him, and who turned away. Is he looking now in heaven upon that Face, from whose mild beauty he so sadly turned away on earth?

NEGATIVE CHARACTER OF THIS WORLD

Thus the outward aspect of worldliness is not sin. Its character is negative. It abounds in omissions. Yet throughout the Gospels our Saviour seems purposely to point to it rather than to open sin. When the young man turned away, His remark was, How hard it is for those who have riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven. But the very fact of our Lord's thus branding worldliness with His especial reprobation is enough to show that it is in reality deeply sinful, hatefully sinful. It is a life without God in the world. It is a continual ignoring of God, a continual quiet contempt of His rights, an insolent abatement in the service which He claims from His creatures. Self is set up instead of God. The canons of human respect are more looked up to than the Divine Commandments. God is very little adverted to. He is passed over. The very thought of Him soon ceases to make the worldly man uncomfortable. Indeed all his chief objections to religion, if he thought much about the matter, would be found a repose on his apprehension of it as restless and uncomfortable. But all this surely must represent an immensity of interior mortal sin. Can a man habitually forget God, and be in a state of habitual grace? Can he habitually prefer purple garments and sumptuous fare to the service of his Creator, and be free of mortal sin? Can he make up a life for himself even of the world's sinless enjoyments, such as eating, drinking, and marrying, and will not the mere omission of God from it be enough to constitute him in a state of deadly sin? At that rate

a moral atheist is more acceptable to God than a poor sinner honestly but feebly fighting with some habit of vice, to which his nature and his past offences set so strongly, that he can hardly lift himself up. At that rate the Pharisees in the Gospel would be the patterns for our imitation, rather than the publicans and sinners; or at least they would be as safe. Or shall we say that faith is enough to save us without charity? If a man only believes rightly, let him eat and drink and be gaily clothed, and let him care for nothing else, and at least that exclusive love of creatures, that omission of the Creator, provided only it issues in no other outward acts than his fine dinners and his expensive clothes, shall never keep his soul from heaven. His purple and his sumptuous feasting shall be his beatific vision here, and then his outward morality shall be God's mercy hand him on to his second Beatific Vision, the Vision of the beauty of God, and the eternal ravishment of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity! Can this be true?

Yet on the other hand, we may not make into sins what God has not made sins. How is this? Oh, it is the awful world of inward sin which is the horror of all this worldliness! It is possession, worse far than diabolical possession, because at once more hideous and more complete. It is the interior irreligiousness, the cold pride, the hardened heart, the depraved sense, the real unbelief, the more than implicit hatred of God, which makes the soul of the worldly man an actual, moral, and intellectual hell on earth, hidden by an outward show of faultless

proprieties, which only make it more revolting to the Eye that penetrates the insulting disguise.

The secret sins moreover of the worldly are a very sea of iniquity. Their name is legion; they cannot be counted. Almost every thought is sin, because of the inordinate worship of self that is in it. Almost every step is sin, because it is treading underfoot some ordinance of God. It is a life without prayer, a life without desire of heaven, a life without fear of hell, a life without love of God, a life without any supernatural habits at all. Is not hell the most natural transition from such a life as this? Heaven is not a sensual paradise. God is the joy, and the beauty, and the contentment there: all is for God, all from God, all to God, all in God, all round God as the beautiful central fire about which His happy creatures cluster in amazement and delight. Whereas in worldliness God is the discomfort of the whole thing, an intrusion, an unseasonable thought, an inharmonious presence like a disagreeable uninvited guest, irritating and fatiguing us by the simple demand His presence makes on our sufferance and our courtesy. Oh, surely such a man has sin in his veins instead of blood!

WORLDLINESS A LIFE OF SECRET SINS

Worldliness then is a life of secret sins. It is such an irresistible tendency to sin, such a successful encouragement of it, such a genial climate, such a collection of favorable circumstances, such an amazing capability of sin, that it breeds actual sins, regularly formed and with all the theological re-

quirements, by millions and millions. If we read what the Catechism of the Council of Trent says of sins of thought, we shall see how marvellously prolific sins can be, and what a preeminently devastating power sins of thought in particular exercise within the soul. In numberless cases open and crying sins must come at last. Still we must remember that on the whole there are two characteristics which always distinguish sins of worldliness from sins of the passions, or sins of direct diabolical temptation.

The respectability which worldliness affects leads it rather to satisfy itself in secret sins. Indeed its worship of self, its predilection for an easy life, would hinder its embarking in sins which take trouble, time, and forethought, or which run risks of disagreeable consequences, and therefore would keep it confined within a sphere of secret sins. And in the next place its love of comfort makes it so habitually disinclined to listen to the reproaches of conscience, or the teasing solicitations of grace, that it passes into the state of a seared conscience, a deadened moral sense, with a speed which is unknown even to cruelty or sensuality.

A seared conscience! (1 Tim. iv. 2.) This is a fearful possibility, and yet to use the Apostle's expression, "the Spirit manifestly saith" that there is such a thing. It is according to St. Paul one of the marks of heresy. It belongs also peculiarly to worldliness. To have gone on for such a length of time doing wrong that we have at last ceased to advert to its being wrong, to sin and for the monitor within to be silent, to forget God and not to remember that we are forgetting Him,—all this is

surely far worse than to be a savage or an idolater. But this is to have a seared conscience. This is the tendency of wordliness, a tendency which it can develop with incomparable swiftness. And then where is the power of coming right again? We have drifted away from all the sweet facilities of repentance. We have hardened ourselves against the ordinary impetus of grace. We have made ourselves so unlovely that grace would shun us if it could. We have sold ourselves to the devil, and he has got us safe before the proper time. With most men it is enough to say that if they erred, at least they had a good conscience about it, or that their conscience told them it was wrong, and they are sorry they gave way. But if we have a seared conscience, neither of these things avail. We have forgotten and pretermitted God: we did so contumeliously at first; but now our habitual contempt has superinduced oblivion: it seems as if He were going to retaliate, to pay us back in our own coin, and for the present at least to pretermitt us. We no longer know when we are in danger. We have lost our chart. We can tell nothing of our latitude and longitude. No land is in sight: nothing but a waste of boundless waters. The sun is hidden, and we can take no observations. The night is so grim and murky, that not a star will give us an indistinct notion where we are; and the needle is snapped, and we know neither north nor south, nor east nor west.

What are our chances of safety now? There has come upon us the fatal woe of Isaias, "Woe to you that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness

for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (v. 20). There is nothing to compare with worldliness for vitiating the moral taste. There are some possibilities on earth which we cannot bear to think of without shuddering. It is generally God’s merciful ordinance that we should not know them in the individual cases, even when we see them. One of these is the possibility of a man’s going hopelessly out of his mind, when he is in a state of mortal sin.

If he is to have no intermission of his madness, no lucid interval before his death, if he was actually in mortal sin when the last step of his aberration was completed, and reason had abdicated her throne entirely, then he is as it were damned already. He walks about the earth a living part of hell. His fate is sealed while the sun still shines upon his head, and the flowers grow beneath his feet, and the birds sing as he passes. He smiles, but he is lost. He sings, but he is the hopeless property of God’s great enemy. Kindness touches his heart, but grace has ebbed from it for ever. He belongs to the dismal centre of the earth; it is only by accident that he is walking on its radiant surface. This is one of earth’s fearful possibilities. And the seared conscience of worldliness is a desperately near approach to this. Faith is still there, and reason also, and a miracle of grace can rouse them both. But are worldly people the likely subjects of God’s miracles? Ah! the sweet miracle of conversion haunts the company of publicans and sinners, not the undoubting self-sufficiency of this world’s Pharisees! O poor worldling, maliciously and guiltily unsuspect-

ing now of thy real state, that man who went mad in mortal sin is thy shadow, thy brother, and thy type!

THE WORLDLY FORGET THEIR CONDITION OF CREATURES

Now every one of these phenomena of worldliness may be resolved into a forgetfulness that we are creatures. There is no look about the life of Dives that he remembered he was a creature. There might be, mingled with his characteristic good nature which made him love his brothers so much and give alms to Lazarus, some confused notions of duty to a Creator; but any abiding sense of his being a creature there was none. He solved the problem of the possibility of these two forgetfulnesses being separated, that of having a Creator and that of being a creature. It is this forgetfulness which is the fountain of almost all sins of omission. A worldly man never looks like a man who so lives as having to give an account of himself to a higher power.

Anything, which should evince a sense of an invisible world, would be incongruous in his ordinary conduct; and if from early associations or natural timorousness of character he should betray any such sense, it would instantly take the form of superstition rather than that of religion. When the devil tempts a man to a great sin of passion, such as murder, or sensuality at last beguiles a man to relapse into his intemperance, in neither of these cases does he forget that he is a creature. Indeed it is his advertence to the law of his Creator which gives the malice to his sin. But there is no struggle in

worldliness. It is a false faith, a false religion. It does not recognize the rights of the Creator, nor occupy itself with the duties of the creature. It begins with self and ends with self, and if compelled to lodge an appeal outside itself, it appeals to the judgments of human respect. Wherever there is worldliness, there is this forgetfulness that we are creatures; and wherever there is this forgetfulness that we are creatures, there also is worldliness.

When a man's sympathies are with a disloyal State rather than with the Holy See, there is worldliness. The world is preferred before the Church. When men object to the doctrine of religious vocation, and without other reasons than a certain instinct, try to hinder their children from entering religious Orders, there is worldliness. The one work of the creature, to do the Creator's will, is overlooked or unacknowledged. When men are ashamed of their religion before heretics, especially of its distinctive practices and unpopular doctrines, there is worldliness. The creature forgets himself, and makes himself the standard of truth. Wherever men, who are not to their own sensible cost taking up the cross daily and following Christ, inveigh against religious enthusiasm or the want of moderation in piety, there is worldliness. The creature wants to limit the service of the Creator. When men do not give alms, or give them scantily, or give them in an eccentric and peculiar way, there is worldliness. The creature either claims as his own what he only holds at the good pleasure of his Creator, or he claims to satisfy his own whim and caprice in the way in which he pays it back to his

Creator. Indeed, all developments of worldliness exhibit some obliquity in a man's perception of the true relations between the Creator and the creature. Ought we not, then, seriously to ask ourselves, if we have any right to be so little afraid of worldliness as we are? If an evil is universal, if it is almost imperceptible, if it is generally fatal, if we know it to be in the middle of us, and if not suspecting that we have it, is, or may be, one of the worst symptoms of our having it, does not prudence suggest to us almost an excess in caution, almost a nervousness of fear, almost a fancifulness of apprehension? Is it well that we should be so calm and cool? Is it certain that our calmness and our coolness are not actual proofs of the disease? Worldliness only requires one condition for its success, that we should not fear it. He who fears God must also fear the world, and he who fears the world need never fear that he has lost the fear of God.

It is hard to live in a place and avoid the spirit of it. It is hard to live in the world and avoid worldliness. Yet this is what we have to do. The world we cannot leave till God summons us; but worldliness, which is the spirit of the world, should not be allowed to infect us. As the smell of fire had not passed upon the garments of the three children in the burning fiery furnace, so must the odor of worldliness not pass upon our souls. But to the avoiding of worldliness, no help is more efficacious than having a right and fixed view of the world.

There are two views of the world which Christians may take, two views which are actually taken by those who are striving to serve God and to love

Him purely. Which of the two views a man takes, depends partly upon his early associations, partly upon his natural character, and partly upon the circumstances of his vocation; and his spiritual life will be found to be considerably modified by the particular view which he is led to take. Some take a very gloomy view of the world. To them it seems altogether bad, wholly evil, irredeemably lost. Everything is danger; for there is sin everywhere. All its roses have thorns under the leaves. There is a curse upon everything belonging to it. Its joys are only other forms of melancholy. Its sunshine is a mockery: its beautiful scenery a deceit: the soothingness of its domestic affections a snare. Its life is an incessant death. We have no right to smile at anything. The world is so dark that it is even a perpetual partial eclipse of God. If the present is miserable, let us delay upon it; for in misery we shall find food for our souls. If it is joyous, let us rush from it into the forebodings of a future, when all this world and the fashion of it will be burned up with fire. Let us speak low, lest the devil hear us, and use his knowledge to our destruction. Let us live as ancient monarchs lived, in daily fear of poison in every dish. A funeral on a wet day in a disconsolate churchyard, this is the type of the minds who take this view.

The other view is the very opposite of all this. It is the bright view. Those who take it see all creation lying before them with the lustre of God's benediction on it. It is the earth on which Jesus was born, and where Mary lived. It marvels at the number of exquisite pleasures with which it is

strewn, so very few of which comparatively are sins.

The innocent attachments of earthly love are to such men helps to love God better. Natural beauty supernaturalizes their minds. The sunshine makes them better men. God's perfections are seen everywhere written in hieroglyphics over the world. Kindness is so abundant, nobility of heart so plentiful, the joys of home so pure yet so attractive, the successes of the Gospel so infinitely consoling, all things, in fact, so much better on trial than they seemed, that the world appears a happy place, and missing but a little, so little it is sad to think how little, of being a holy place also, holy from the very abundance of its pure happiness. At every turn, there are radiant fountains of joy leaping up, to meet us. Each day, like the cistus, has a thousand new blossoms to show: it lays them down when evening comes, and the next morning it has as gay a show of flowers as ever. Even adverse things are wonderfully tempered in the present, while in the past they have such a pathetic golden light upon them, that the memory of them is one of our best treasures, and we would not for worlds not have suffered them; and, as to any evil in the future, there is such an inextinguishable light of joy within us, that we simply disbelieve it. The clouds fly before us as we go. Music sounds around our path. And as to cares, they find themselves so little at home with us, that, when we come to the night, "they fold up their tents like the Arabs, and as silently steal away."

St. Bernard may be called the prophet of the first view, St. Francis of Sales of the second. The

first seems more safe for human presumption; the second more cheering to discouragement. One leads through holy fear to love; the other through holy love to fear. The one disenchants more from the world; the other enchants us more with God. The one subdues; the other gives elasticity. The one seems more admonitory to man; the other more honorable to God. Both can make Saints; but Saints of different kinds. Both are true: yet both are untrue. Both are true as far as they go, and both are untrue when they exclude the other.

They are partial views; and one is more true to each person than the other, because it is more suitable for his character and temper to dwell upon what is prominently dark, or prominently bright, as the case may be. The great thing is, whichever view we take, to have it clearly before us and keep to it consistently, because of the irresistible influence which these views exercise upon the spiritual life. They make men pray differently, and act differently in their secret relations with God. They foster different graces. They give birth to different vocations. They supply different motives. The subjects for meditation, the subjects for particular examination of conscience, have to do with the dark or bright view men habitually take of the world. The question between an active or a contemplative life is often decided by them. They have each their own class of temptations, and their own rocks on which they may strike and go down. They have each also their own graces, their own beauties, their own attractions, their own blessings, and their own short roads to heaven. The strange thing is, that no one

seems to be able to take in impartially the whole view of the world, the true view, the bright and dark together. Intellectually they may do so; but practically they must lean either to the dark or bright, exaggerate their own view, and do the other view injustice. No mind leaves things uncolored. It is our necessity; we cannot help ourselves. The grand thing is to turn it all to God, and to begin straightway to manufacture heavenly love both out of our darkness and our light.

It is dangerous to talk of general rules in such subject matters. But, as upon the whole we find the darker view taken by cloistered Saints, and the brighter view by secular Saints, it may not be an error to suppose that the brighter view of the world is the best for those who live in the world. The dark view may readily become gloomy, and gloom leads to inaction, to concentration upon self, to the judging of others, to a discontentment with the state of things around us; and the fruit of all this is pride, sourness, want of zeal, and self-righteousness.

Men with a frustrated vocation to religion, and living in the world, where they have no right to be, are mostly uncharitable men. Reformers good and bad, have for the most part emanated from the cloister. Luther was an Augustinian; Savonarola a Dominican. A monk has beautiful examples of the highest virtue constantly before him, which not only urge him on in his heroic love of God, but also counteract what there might be depressing or unnerving in his melancholy view of the world. To him in his circumstances it is a powerful stimulus to sanctity. But it would require very peculiar cir-

cumstances indeed to make it such to persons aiming at perfection in the world. They are good; they love God; they frequent the Sacraments; they make a mental prayer; they practice voluntary mortifications; they live under spiritual direction; their interests and tastes are in spiritual things.

Yet for all this they enjoy the world. Many of its blameless pleasures are real pleasures to them. They love many persons, and many persons love them. Their home-circle is bright and tender; and if it does not lead to God, there is no appearance of its leading away from Him. Now what will happen if we force them to believe that all is misery around them, and that they ought to be miserable themselves, and that it is very imperfect of them not to be so?

The fact is, they are not miserable, and they cannot see why they should be so: and moreover they actually cannot be miserable, even if they try. Consequently if we persist in forcing upon them a view which does not suit them, and is against the grain, they either become perplexed and scrupulous, seeing sin where there is no sin, and believing the detection of sin to be the highest spiritual discernment, and so farewell to their serving God for love; or they start away from a devout life altogether, in disgust and impatience, as an unreality, which is based upon a false theory, and so worth nothing at all, or as an inflated pedantic imposture, which even those who talk big about it do not themselves believe. Then as a matter of fact the number of things which are sinful is much less than this view would lead us to suppose; and a man aiming at perfection in the

world is much more exposed than others to occasions of sin. Indeed this is one of his chief difficulties, the difficulty which in all ages has so blessedly filled the cloisters and recruited the congregations of Apostolic men. But this very fact makes any exaggeration of the matter extremely dangerous, as both discouraging and unsettling; and every one knows that in the world, where there is neither rule nor vows, discouragement and unsettlement are the two most fatal enemies of the spiritual life. The bright view is doubtless a better basis for perfection in the world. Meanwhile it must guard itself against laxity, and love of pleasure, and an inadequate notion of sin, as much as the darker view must shun discouragement, self-exaltation, and uncharitableness, to which of its own nature it is prone. The dark view must not be querulous with God, nor the bright view make too free with His perfections.

AVOID THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD

Whatever view we take of the world, we must be upon our guard against its spirit. Of that spirit Christians can have but one view. Inspiration has fixed it for ever; it is the enemy of God. No cloisters can hope to keep it out; for it has the gift of subtlety. There is air enough in one heart for it to live, and thrive amazingly! But much more are those who live in the world exposed to its dangers. It looks so moral, and sometimes, but not often, even generous, in order to deceive us. It can talk most reasonably and well. It can praise re-

ligion, and take its side, though there is always an ulterior purpose in view. We see its influence in society. Faith deciphers it for us there. We behold a system of proprieties with no self-denial in them, a number of axioms of doubtful morality gaining ground and passing current, a humility which consists in our ruling ourselves by the opinions of others, an inventiveness of amusements which bewilder our notions of right and wrong; and in all this we can prophesy evil and suspect dangers, while it is hard for us to name the evil and to put our finger on the danger. When we look at people outside the Church, we see how insinuatingly worldliness prevents their coming into it. We can see clearly, what the sufferers themselves cannot see at all. We can watch its influence on sinners, how artfully it entices them into deep places, how strongly it holds them down, how cleverly it throws suspicion upon the advances and offers of grace, how variously it contrives delays, and when it fails, how hypocritically it can rejoice in a man's conversion, how successfully it can lay hold of his fresh vigor and high spirits, and how mercilessly it can lead him backwards and blindfold into a relapse! But the sinner sees nothing of this himself. If it were told him, it would sound in his ears as a romance.

We can trace the influence of worldliness upon pious people. Their frequentation of the Sacraments, their church-going, their almsgiving, their interest in Catholic plans, contrast strangely with their anxiety to get into society, with their hankering after great people, with their excitement about marriages, with the perpetual running of their con-

versation on connections, wealth, influence, and the like, and their unconscious but almost gross respect for those who are very much richer than themselves, or very much higher than themselves. It would never do for them to sit for a picture of Catholic devotion. Yet they do not see all this, and they are really full of God, always talking of Him, always planning for Him, always fidgety about His glory.

Sometimes a step further is taken, and we see a most portentous union of piety and worldliness, really as if one person were two persons, one person in church, and another person out of church, one person with priest and religious, and another person with worldly company. These people make the oddest compensations to themselves for their pious self-denials, and again with such grotesque earnestness penance their worldliness in revenge for its inroads upon their piety, that they remind us of the stories Protestants tell us of the Italian bravos, who, before they commit a murder, most devoutly recommend it to the Madonna. Yet God and the world keep the peace so unbrokenly in their hearts, that they have hardly a suspicion of the incongruous appearance they present to others, still less of the horrible reality of their spiritual condition. Now if we can see all this in others, is it at all likely that we are free from it ourselves? Oh, depend upon it, there is no freedom but in excessive fear, no security but in a weary vigilance! It is heavy work always to be keeping guard. But there is no sleep in the enemy's camp, and we are in a war which knows neither peace nor truce. The night is both

cold and long, and if Divine love keep us not awake, what else is there that will?

It may very naturally be now objected that the conclusion of this chapter tends to destroy the conclusion of the last, that if worldliness accounts for the widely spread denial of those relations of Creator and creature which have been shown to be true, so it will not allow us to suppose that the majority of Catholics are saved, when worldliness is at once so universal, and so deadly to the soul. But this by no means follows. What has been said of the obtrusiveness of evil and the hiddenness of good, and of the graces which visit old age, sickness, and death, applies as well to worldliness as to sin. No! the conclusion, which might seem to follow from this doctrine of worldliness, would be, that very far from a majority of the rich among Catholics would be saved. But the rich are a mere handful compared to the multitudinous poor. So that, even allowing the stern conclusion to be drawn that very few rich persons are saved, even among Catholics, the conclusion of the preceding chapter would remain unshaken. Many writers have taken this startling view. Lacordaire, in making up his majority of the saved, lays the chief stress on children, women, and the countless poor. Bossuet, commenting on the words of the seventy-first Psalm, "He shall judge the poor of the people and he shall save the children of the poor," draws a picture similar to that of Lacordaire. Fromond, in his commentary on the Catholic Epistles, enters upon the question of the number of the saved when he is explaining the thirteenth verse of the second chap-

ter of St. James, and one of the arguments which he brings forward in support of the more gloomy view is, that "although perhaps a majority of the faithful do not die without the Sacrament of Penance, yet very many worldly people (*plerique mundani*) do not receive the fruit of the Sacrament"; and the reason he gives for this opinion is, that their appreciation of riches, honors, pleasures, and other earthly goods is too high and fixed for their sorrow for sin easily to rise to that appreciation of its malignity, which theology requires even in the adequate attrition for absolution.

Palafox in his book on *Devotion to St. Peter*, teaches the same doctrine in his comparison of the prodigal son, and the young man who went away sorrowful. It was his appreciation of riches which hindered his appreciation of God, and it was the prodigal's freedom from this which on the other hand facilitated his conversion. There is no doubt that our Lord's woes pronounced upon the rich are among the most painful and terrific mysteries of the Gospel, and should drive rich men into that facile, prompt, various, unasked, abundant, and self-denying almsgiving for the love of God, in which alone their safety consists. But, so far as the present question is concerned, I express no opinion as to whether a very small minority of rich Catholics are saved; I do not know enough of the world to form a judgment, and my little experience of the rich would go the other way: I only say that even if this melancholy belief be true, it by no means destroys the previous conclusion that the numerical majority of Catholics are saved.

CONCLUSIONS

But to conclude, there are certain things which it is important to note with regard to worldliness, and which cannot be too often repeated. The first is, that even spiritual persons for the most part greatly underestimate its danger. They have not a sufficiently intelligent belief in its universality, in its subtlety, in its power of combining with good in the most imperceptible quantities, and then spoiling it, or in its peculiar aptness for fixing itself just upon the very persons who consider themselves decidedly free from it. Spiritual discernment is a rare gift, and one which belongs only to those whose hearts are all for God. It is the great art of the world to persuade men that it is not so dangerous as it is described, and that with monks it is a sort of pious fashion to abuse the world, while with preachers it is simply an affair of rhetoric. This persuasion is its triumph. Nothing more is needed. When you have underestimated its danger, you are already its victim.

In the second place, as men are very apt not to know worldliness even when they see it, and as it is not an easy matter always to be paying attention to the atmosphere we breathe, it is of great importance to have well-ascertained principles. It is astonishing how few men are in possession of such. An almost incredible amount of excellent effort comes to nothing great, because it is at random, and by fits and starts, and operating inconsistently with its antecedents. The really powerful man in the world is the consistent man, the man of ascertained

principles and of adjusted views. The world, like a suspicious potentate, is always proposing concordats. We are asked first for one compromise, then for another. We do not know when we have passed the line which involved a principle, and so we discover, that we have committed ourselves to something, in which it is impossible for us to keep our word without surrendering our independence altogether. Now with ascertained principles we have settled all this at the outset. Even when we get beyond the extent of our knowledge, or the sphere of our experience, we know what to suspect and where to be upon our guard. Our instincts are right, and what is practically of greater importance, they are consistent also. Thus we do not fall into the world's power, and are never taken unawares, and have not to give offence by having to retrace our steps. Thus when we change our state of life, or enter upon a new department of duty, or come to a crisis in life, our relations with the world are more or less altered; and if we have then to hesitate and linger, settling our future mode of operations and mapping out the country before us, because we have no ascertained principles, every step we take (and we cannot stand still, this is not a world for that work), we are putting on record some precedent against ourselves. An inconsistent great man is an impotent creature in practical matters, while a consistent moderate man does the work of a great one. Above all a man should have ascertained principles of practical religion, if religion is to be the business of his life. It is deplorable for the cause of God on earth, that such men are so few.

In the third place, if ascertained principles are of such importance to us in this respect, and if the power of our faith depends materially either on its simplicity or its intelligence, and if our faith is "the victory which overcometh the world," it is of great consequence that we should know and study our religion well. In these days there is an immense amount of information, floating in society, regarding the controversies of the Church and the world.

They are now daily coming more into collision, in questions of politics, in systems of beneficence, in the statistics of crime, in the doctrines of progress, in the discoveries of science, in the quarrels of the metaphysical schools, and in the new shapes of old controversies between the Church and the dissident sects around her. The world has a power and a purchase in the anti-Church side of all these questions; and it is so tempting to be moderate, so pleasant to yield, so hard to prove, so weary to argue, so unnatural to confess our own ignorance, that an educated modern Catholic who does not study the doctrines of his religion, as carefully as the subject-matter of his profession, will hardly escape betraying God sometimes, and getting on the wrong side without intending it. Even a study of theology, at least to some extent, is of considerable utility, in this particular light, as a safeguard against worldliness. It is proverbial that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing; but this is less true of theology than it is of any other science, because the least acquaintance with it deepens our view of our own ignorance, and it breathes such an odor of God that intellectual bashfulness would seem to be

its special gift, increasing as our studies penetrate nearer and nearer to those Divine abysses, into which knowledge may not descend until it has been metamorphosed into love. A man, who has finished his education in these days without having acquired a profound intellectual respect for his religion, is the most likely of all men to become the prey of an unbelieving and ungodly world, and to betray his Lord without intending it, and then to grow angry, and turn away in proud dislike from Him whom he has thus betrayed.

In the last place, it is honestly to be confessed, that all these things do but form an armor against the spirit of the world. They are not a victory over it. Moreover it is an armor which is by no means invulnerable. The weight of the arms and the weariness of the fight have laid many a warrior low, from whom no blood had flowed, but whose very bones the heavy fall had cruelly broken. Many a spear, that could not penetrate the cunning joints of the suit of mail, has unseated the rider, and left him lifeless beneath his charger's feet. So all these helps, which have been here suggested, are not infallible; nay, they are but auxiliaries for a season; and for all their worth, the world may, and most likely will, take us captive in the end. There is no redemption for the creature but in the service of the Creator. There is no power to counteract the manifold spirit of evil but one, and that is the desire of God, the craving to see His Face, the yearning for His beauty. There is no specific against worldliness but God.

CHAPTER IV

OUR OWN GOD

THE Creator is the creature's home. Neither spirit of Angel nor soul of man can rest short of God. They can anchor nowhere save in the capacious harbor of His infinite perfections. All things teach us this beautiful truth. All things that find us wandering lead us home again, to the Bosom of our Eternal Father. The three distinct orders of nature, grace, and glory, if the two last may indeed be called distinct, all in their own respective ways, at once teach us this comforting and saving truth, and help us also to practice what they teach. The natural joy of beautiful scenery, the strong grace of Christian holiness, and the thrill of glory which passes through our souls from the unveiled Face of God, all, in degrees almost infinitely apart, draw us home to God, or keep us there. God is our Last End as well as our First Cause. Oh, that the day were come when we shall be securely at His Feet for ever!

God is included in the idea of creation as our Last End as well as our First Cause. It is as our Creator that He is both the one and the other. We have seen that creation was simply love, a love which called our natures out of nothing, a love which gave

them all that was due to them, a love which gave them grace which was not due for them, a love which in matter of fact destined them to a glory which is far beyond our natural capacities. All the three orders of nature, grace, and glory were represented in the act of creation, nature from the very necessity of the case, grace because as a matter of fact God created both Angels and men in a state of grace, glory because it was for His glory that we were necessarily created, and, as a matter of fact, in the exuberant goodness of His decrees, for the special, but not necessary, glory of the Beatific Vision.

The Angels were created all at once, and because of their excellent perfections, and especially the perfect knowledge which they had of themselves, they rapidly exercised their free will, completed the course of their probation, and entered into the rest and enjoyment of the Creator's beauty. Men are created slowly and by successive generations, and from the great inferiority of their rational nature to the vast intelligences of the Angels, they require the revolution of many centuries before their numbers are completed, their destinies fulfilled, and the whole of the elect enter into the everlasting joy of God. Both these creations of Angels and men were created simply for God's own glory; but His glory was the creature's bliss, because His glory was to have rational children who should be like Himself and be made participators of His beatitude. But as we cannot be participators of His joy by any natural beatitude, however exquisite and satisfying, and as His very first intention in creation was that we should participate in His own beatitude, it follows

that His very intention in creation already involved both grace and glory; and this is the explanation of the beautiful and touching mystery of our being created in a state of grace originally. So nature involved grace, not necessarily, but in the designs of creative love, and grace looked on to glory, and prophesied of it to free-will, and more than prophesied of it, for it was the capacity of glory and its beginning.

Because God is infinitely good and infinitely perfect, He is by His nature, so to speak, bent upon the communication of Himself; and this communication of Himself is, as theologians tell us, twofold, a natural communication, and a free communication. The natural one, as it is altogether necessary, is eternal. It is that by which the Father communicates to the Son His whole essence, power, wisdom, goodness, and beatitude, and the Father and the Son to the eternally proceeding Spirit. It takes place in the production of the Word through the intellect, and of the Spirit through the will; and each of these processions is so perfect and full, that by it the whole good, which is communicated, is as perfectly possessed by Him who receives as by Him who communicates it. The free communication of God is temporal, and takes place in creation, and creation is in order to it, and it takes place first, and foremost, and eminently, in the Hypostatic Union, and then in the gifts of grace and glory; and God's communication of Himself, which in the act of creation was not supernatural, was with a view to what was supernatural, and, as a matter of fact, was not disjoined from it in act. To this, therefore, says Les-

sus, did God of Himself incline; that is, of His own goodness, setting aside all merit and all necessity of the creature. This communication begins in this life by the gifts of grace, especially faith, hope, and charity; by which virtues we are not only made like to God, but God also is united to us.

It is perfected however in the next life by the gifts of glory, namely, the light of glory, the vision of the Divinity, beatific love, and beatific joy. For by these we attain our highest possible similitude to God, and become perfectly the sons of God, and deiform, shining like the Divinity, and exhibiting in ourselves the most excellent image of the Holy Trinity. For by the light of glory we are made like the Father; by the vision of the Divine Essence and Divine Persons we become like the Son; by beatific love we are made like the Holy Ghost; by joy we become like the God-head in beatitude, and the participation of the Divine beatitude is completed in us.

When we speak of God's glory we may mean one or more of four things. First of all, His glory may be either intrinsic or external; and then each of those may be of two kinds also. God's own excellence, His own beauty, the infinity of His perfections in Himself, is as it were the objective glory of God, which is intrinsic to Himself; whereas His own knowledge of Himself, His own love of Himself, and His own joy in Himself, which are also intrinsic, are what theology terms His formal glory. The beauty of creation, the perfections of creatures, their loveliness, their number, their adaptations, even their color and form, are the external glory of God, represented objectively, whereas the knowledge of Him,

the love of Him, and the joy in Him, which His rational creatures have, is His formal external glory. It is necessary to put these hard words together, in order to understand the practical conclusions to which we shall be coming presently.

Now we say that God is necessitated to do everything for His own glory, and that though the creation of the world was perfectly free, yet, granting that it was to be created by God, it must of necessity be created for His glory. This is almost venturing to say that He could not help Himself, at least as to the end for which He created. But oh! what joy the creature will find at last in this very necessity, which God is under, of doing everything for His own glory! That God has created the world is a fact. It is contradictory not to His wisdom only, but to every one of His perfections, that He should have created it without an object at all. It is impossible to Him, as God, to have any other end but Himself. It is contrary to the plenitude of His self-sufficiency, that He should have created it in order to gain from it conveniences which He has not now, or joys which He does not already possess; for these are intrinsic to Himself. But it is possible for Him to have a glory extrinsic to Himself, over and above that which is intrinsic. On the other hand, it is impossible for Him to have anything else extrinsic to Himself, which creation could give Him, except glory.

Even then the glory is not necessary to Him, and does not make Him more blessed or more self-sufficient than He was; at best it is only congruous to His Divine Majesty to have it. Thus it is that God is necessitated to do all things for His own glory.

He is limited to this by the very plenitude of His perfections. As nothing exists in the world without the influx of His omnipresence, supporting it and keeping it above the abyss of nothingness, into which of itself it is falling back evermore, so also nothing exists in the world, which is not involved in and depending upon God's glory. Even the permissions of sin glorify Him, for without them the wills of His creatures would not be free.

While God was thus under the necessity of creating all things for His glory, if He created at all, much more is the creature under the necessity of glorifying God in all things. But it was not necessary for God to raise the creature to the special glory of the Beatific Vision. It was not due to his nature, not to the highest angelic nature. It was beyond it; and it was beyond it not in degree only, but in kind also. It belonged to another order than that of nature. It was superadded to nature. Nature had to receive another order, that of grace, before it could be capable of the third order, that of glory. Wonderful things had to be done to it, in order to habilitate it for such a possibility as the sight of God. But the remarkable thing is, that these things were done in the act of creation.

The orders both of nature and of grace started in that one act of Divine benignity. It was sin only, which separated what God had put together. The rebellious Angels sinned, and so lost their primal grace, and having no fresh trial given them, forfeited thereby forever the order of glory. Man sinned, and in him also the two orders became separated, and the whole magnificent apparatus of redeeming

love is God's invention to unite them again, so that men may become capable of the order of glory. Not that this is the sole reason or the whole explanation of the Incarnation, but only of redemption. Thus, it is absolutely necessary, when we are thinking of creation, to bear in mind the fact, that God created Angels and men in a state of grace, and not in a state of pure nature. We are not concerned with other possible creations, but only with our own creation; and the creations of both those angelic and human families of rational creatures, united in the Church under the single headship of Jesus, were accomplished in a state of grace; and they were so, because glory, and the especial supernatural glory of a participation in His own beatitude, entered into God's first intention and original idea, as Creator. We shall never understand creation, if we let this fact out of sight for a moment.

HOW CREATURES GLORIFY GOD

The inanimate and irrational creations glorify God by the very splendor of the beauty in which He has clothed them. They glorify Him by their adaptation and subservience to man. Their abundance in their kinds, and their many kinds, which are over and above what are necessary to man, is another glory of their Creator, by being in some sort a picture of His copious magnificence. They glorify Him, also, by bearing on themselves the seal and signet of His Divinity, and even of His Trinity in Unity, and their degree of goodness depends on the degree in which they adumbrate the Divine per-

fections. But much more does the rational creation glorify its Creator. By its very existence it represents God, as the inanimate and irrational creations do. But by its intelligence it knows God, and with its knowledge loves Him; and by its will it loves Him, and with its love enjoys Him. Thus, the knowledge, love, and joy of the rational creatures, the three things by which they chiefly shadow forth the Holy Trinity, *praise and admire and worship* the Divine Nature, all which is the rendering glory to Him. By these three things, they, as it were, enter into God and rest in Him, through the gifts of grace and glory.

But let us hear Lessius. In these three acts resides God's chiefest glory, which He Himself intended in all His works; and so likewise in the same acts reside the highest good and formal beatitude of men and Angels. By these acts, the Blessed Spirits are elevated infinitely above themselves, and, in their union with God, become deiform, by a most lofty and supereminent similitude with God, so that the mind can conceive no greater one. Thus, like very Gods, they shine to all eternity as the sons of glory and the Divine brightness. By those same acts, they expand themselves into immensity, so as to be coequal and coextensive, as far as may be, to so great a good, that they may take it in and comprehend it all. They will not linger outside, as it were, upon the surface of it, but they go down into its profound depths, and enter into the joy of their Lord; some more, some less, according to the magnitude of the light of glory communicated to each.

Immersed in this abyss, they lose themselves

and all created things; for all other goods and joys seem to them as nothing, by the side of this ocean of goods and joys. In this abyss there is to them no darkness, no obscurity, such as hangs about the Divinity to us now; but all is light and immense serenity, although they are not able fully to comprehend it. There is their eternal mansion, with a tranquil security that they shall never fail. There is the heaven of heavens, in comparison with which all creation is but dross. There is the fulfilling of all their desires; there the possession and fruition of all things that are desirable. There nothing will remain to be longed for, or sought for more; for all will firmly possess and exquisitely enjoy every good thing in God. There the whole occupation of the Saints will be to contemplate the infinite beauty of God, to love His infinite goodness, to enjoy His infinite sweetness, to be filled to overflowing with the torrent of His pleasures, and to exult with an unspeakable delight in His infinite glory, and in all the goods which He and they possess. Hence comes perpetual praise, and benediction, and thanksgiving; and thus all the Blessed, arrived at the consummation of their desires, and, knowing not what more to crave, rest in God, as their Last End.

Thus does creation come home, like a weary bird to its roost, to rest in its Creator. And then all movements cease, all vicissitudes, changes, progresses, aspirations, discoveries; and all is rest within, without, around, the kingdom of eternal peace. Then the Son gives up the kingdom to His Father, as the Apostle speaks (1 Cor. xv. 24); and the subjection of His Human Nature, which had been, as

it were, veiled in the government of the Church and in the pomp of judgment, becomes more apparent; and then, as if this last act of unspeakable subjection on the part of that Created Nature, which is the Head and First-born of all creatures, were the crowning beauty of creation, God the Creator becomes all in all, and the chronicles of this creation close. Beyond that, all is lost in the indistinguishable radiance of eternity. Such is the history of creation, as theology ventures to conceive it lying in the Divine mind. It is a work of simple love, of gigantic dimensions, with the most beautiful proportion in all its parts, and the most exquisite finish in every detail. Love is the life of it, from first to last; and its result is an abiding, immortal, created counterpart of the eternal, uncreated, and undivided Trinity.

If we have taken the pains to master this somewhat difficult account of creation, we shall see that it is, as it were, the frame within which all the relations of the Creator and the creature, which have occupied the preceding chapters, are enclosed. It will make some things plain, which perhaps were not plain before; and it will itself be the easier to understand from what has gone before. Even the horror of worldliness will now become more apparent, and its danger more alarming. But what is the conclusion to which it all leads? That religion must necessarily be a service of love; that the easiness of salvation comes of its being a personal love of God; and that the only security from worldliness is also in a personal love of God. It is neither the wonderful character of its doctrines, nor the pure simplicity

of its precepts, nor the supernatural power of its assistances, which make religion what it is, but the fact of its being the creature's personal love of the Creator. This is an obvious thing to say; and yet such consequences flow from it that it must be still more insisted on.

That all holiness should consist in a personal love of God flows out of the very tie of creation. Creation was an act of love, forestalling or including all other loves whatever. The creature was at once put by the act of creation into various personal relations to the Creator, all of which were of the very tenderest and most intimate description. It flows also out of the knowledge which the creature has of the Creator, and the motives for his personal love of Him increase with the amount of that knowledge. Each perfection pleads for love. Each puts a price on love, and on nothing else but love. Love is the one want of all God's attributes, if we may call it want, and the supplying of that one want is the sole worship of the creature. The easiness of salvation showed that all religion must be a personal love of God. It was easy just because this was all. The end of all its Sacraments and graces was to infuse or to elicit that love, and the more of it they infused and the more of it they elicited, the more did they contribute to the facility of the triumph. Sin teaches us that all is nothing-worth but personal love of God, both because its forgiveness is the sweetest preacher of Divine love on earth, and because the horror of its punishment is the total loss of love in that dark godless hell which is its end. The personality of the evil spirit drives us

also into personal love of God, as our security and refuge. The dangers of the world are to be met in no other way than by the personal love of God. It is only the love of Him which can kill unworthy love. It is only the desire of Him which can turn the soul away sick, and dispirited, with the perishable goods of earth. It is only the light of His beauty which can dim and dishonor the flaunting, garish beauty of the world, or make us secretly and sweetly discontented with its lawful, natural, and blameless loveliness.

But most of all does this necessity of a personal love of God flow out of the fact, that God Himself, and not any of His created rewards, is our Last End. God Possessed, our own God, that is creation's home, that is our last end, there only is our rest. Oh, that the winds of grace would blow that we might sail more swiftly over this broad sea to our eternal home! Another day is gone, another week is passed, another year is told. Blessed be God then, we are nearer to the end. It comes swiftly; yet it comes slowly too. Come it must, and then it will all be but a dream to look back upon. But there are stern things to pass through; and to the getting well through them, there goes more than we can say. One thing we know, that personal love of God is the only thing which reaches God at last. Other things,—they look wise, they begin well, they sound good—but they wander; they are on no path; they go aside, or they fall behind, but home they never come. To love, the way is neither hard to find, nor hard to tread; for so it is that love never comes home tired. It gets to God through the long-

est life more fresh, more eager, more venturous, more full of youth, more brimming with expectation, than the day is started amid the excesses and inexperience of its first conversion.

TWO SCHOOLS OF SPIRITUALITY

No one denies this doctrine of the necessity of personal love of God. It could not be denied without heresy. But there are two different schools of spirituality which treat it very differently; indeed whose difference consists in their different treatment of it. All are agreed that as the proof of love is the keeping of the Commandments, so the sense of *duty*, the brave determination to do always and only what is right, and because it is right, must go along with and be a part of personal *love* of God.

Personal love of God without this would be a falsehood and a mockery. They who dwell most strongly on the sense of duty do not omit personal love of God; and they who lay the greatest stress on love both imply and secure the keen sense of rightfulness and duty. But much depends on which of the two we put foremost. It is possible by dwelling exclusively on love to make religion too much a matter of mere devotions, an affair of sentiments and feelings, highly strung and therefore brittle, overstrained and so short-lived. It is possible, on the other hand, that by laying all the stress on duty, especially with young persons or again with sinners, the true motive of duty may not have fair play, and the peculiar character of the Gospel be overlooked or inadequately remembered. We must pursue such

and such a line of conduct because it is commanded, because it is right, because it will win us respect, because it will enable us to form habits of virtue, because it will edify, because we cannot otherwise go to Communion, because we shall be lost eternally if we do not pursue it. This is quite intelligible, and it is all very true, but not particularly persuasive, especially to those whom youth makes ardent, or those whom sin has made invalids. We must pursue such and such a line of conduct because it is the one which God loves, and God loves us most tenderly, and has loved us from all eternity, and God yearns that we should love Him, and He catches at our love as if it were a prize, and repays it with a fondness which is beyond human comprehension, and it grieves His love, and He makes it a personal matter, if we swerve from such conduct, and if we only love, all will be easy. This also is intelligible, and very true, and also very persuasive, and has a wonderful root of perseverance in it. But it comes to pass that, while both views are very true, they nevertheless form quite different characters. So that it is one of the most important practical questions of our whole lives, to settle whether we will love God because it is right, or whether we will do right because God loves us and we love Him.

Strange to say, while both these views are true, they look, as we examine the working out of them, like two different religions. The fact is, that for some reason or other, it is very hard to persuade a man or for him to persuade himself that God loves him. The moment that fact becomes a part of his own sensible convictions, a perfect revolution has

been worked in his soul. Everything appears different to him. He has new lights, and feels new powers. Faculties in him, which were well-nigh dormant, wake up and do great things. He is a new man. It is a kind of conversion. However good he was before, however regular, however conscientious, however devotional, he feels that the change which has passed over him is in some sense a veritable conversion. He is on a new line, and will henceforth move differently. Many go to their graves without at all realizing practically the immense love which God has for them. It has been a want in them all through their lives, and they would have been higher in heaven had they known on earth what heaven has now taught them. A theologian says that it is one of the weaknesses even of the Saints, that they cannot believe in the greatness of God's love for them. It is related in the chronicles of the Franciscans, that, until her director with some difficulty undeceived her, St. Elizabeth of Hungary thought that she loved God more than He loved her. In truth the very immensity, the excesses, the apparent extravagancies of God's love, stand in its own light, and hinder men from believing it as they should. They hardly dare to do so; for it seems incredible that God should love us as He is said to do. It is the grand date in everybody's life, when the knowledge that his Creator loves him passes into a sensible conviction.

LOVE FIRST, DUTY SECOND

If all the evil that is in the world arises from the want of a practical acknowledgment of the true relations between the Creator and the creature, it is equally true that from the same want comes all that is deficient in our spiritual lives; and furthermore, the true relations between the Creator and the creature are more readily appreciated, more lovingly embraced, and more perseveringly acted out, on the system which puts love first and duty second, which does right because God loves us, rather than loves God because it is right. Religion, no doubt, comes to persons in different ways. Different parts of it attract different minds. Men begin in various places in religion. There is not exactly any one normal beginning of being pious. We should never think therefore of condemning, or throwing the slightest slur, on any method which succeeded in securing the continuous keeping of God's Commandments upon supernatural motives. This must be borne in mind, together with the full admission both of the safety and soundness of the other principle, while we state the reasons for preferring that school of spirituality, which puts forward most prominently the personal love of God, and dwells upon it to all persons and at every turn. It seems of the two the most likely to advance the Creator's glory, first by saving a greater number of souls, and secondly by swelling the ranks of those who generously aim at perfection.

Love sharpens our eyes, and quickens all the

senses of our souls. Now when we dwell very exclusively on the sense of duty, and urge people to learn to do right just because it is right, we seem often to be wanting in the delicacy and fineness of our spiritual discernment. We are not always on God's side, because we do not instantaneously and instinctively apprehend on which side He is. We do not prophetically see the evil, which is as yet invisible and implicit in some line of action.

Our spiritual tastes are blunt, sometimes inclining to be gross. We do not at once detect worldliness in its first insidious aggressions. Love has a specialty for all these things; and conscientiousness often runs aground in shallow places, where love sails through, finding deep water with an almost supernatural skill. The duty principle, if it is allowable so to name it shortly for convenience' sake, is more apt to grow weary than love. It is always against the grain of our corrupt nature, and consequently we are obliged to be always making efforts, in order to keep ourselves up to the mark; and when times of dryness or seasons of temptations come, these efforts are not easy to sustain. Love on the contrary is a stimulant. It has a patent for making things easy. It invigorates us, and enables us to do hard things with a sensible sweetness and a religious pleasure, when mere conscientiousness would fail through the infirmity of its own nature. Thus perseverance is more congruous to the conduct which proceeds on the principle of love, than to that which looks prominently to duty. Moreover where there is effort, there is seldom abundance, while it is the characteristic of love to be prolific.

It is necessary for us when we act entirely from a sense of duty to go through many more intellectual processes than when we act from love. We have to investigate the character of the action, to ascertain its bearings, to inform ourselves of its circumstances, to guess its consequences. All this takes time and makes a man slow, and as life runs rapidly, he is apt to be taken by surprise, and either be guilty of some omission, or act in a hurry at the last. This is the reason why slow men are often so precipitate. Any one who observes will see instances of this daily, in the habitual impetuositities of timid men. The duty principle, also, only sails well in fine weather. It does not do for storms. It wants elasticity and buoyancy, and so, when it has fallen into sin, it recovers itself with great difficulty, and is awkward in its repentance, as if it were in a position for which it never was intended. It soon despairs. Sin seems a necessity, and a few serious relapses are enough to make it give up the spiritual life altogether. There are cases of men who never could recover one mortal sin; and we should be inclined to suspect that they were mostly cases of men who acted from conscience in preference to love.

It also has a propensity to concentrate us upon ourselves, and so to hinder charity. Self must come in, when we are always looking at self and self's behavior, and when even the Object of faith presents itself habitually to us in the light of self's rule. In this way it not unfrequently hinders the more beautiful exercises of charity; for charity is not the doing only our duty to our neighbor. That

does not take us much beyond justice. The habit of mind of mere conscientiousness seems different from the habit of mind of exuberant charity.

It is not moreover genial to high spiritual things, such as voluntary austerities, the love of suffering, the practice of the evangelical counsels, the sorrow because God is so little loved and so much offended, and the willing renunciation of spiritual consolations and sensible sweetnesses. A merely conscientious man may be intellectually convinced that he ought to aim at perfection, but the chances are immensely against his succeeding; and for this reason, that he has not sufficient momentum. His impulse dies out, and he stops short of the aim. Doing what is right because it is right is not a sufficiently perfect or robust motive to carry a man all the way to perfection. Love alone can do that. It sounds almost like an absurdity to talk of observing the counsels from a sense of duty, or of aiming at a more perfect interior observance of the precepts than it is our duty to aim at, because we have determined to make a duty of it.

This principle, too, although it is thoroughly Christian, and leans on Christ, appears to have but a weak tendency to produce that nameless indescribable likeness to Christ, which is the characteristic of the Saints. It has not enough of self-oblivion in it, and is very deficient in its sympathies with the mystical operations of grace. Moreover it has not the same blessings as love; not that it is not an ordinance of God, and one which no one can with safety forget or depreciate; but there is an air about it of the Old Testament rather than the New. It

likewise keeps men back by leading to scruples. It never lets conscience alone. It wastes in a fruitless *post-mortem* examination of its actions the time that might have been spent in acts of heroic contrition or of disinterested love. Nay, it will even disinter again and again those actions, which have already passed the ordeal of so many examinations, and it will dissect, and meddle, until it has acquired an inveterate habit of stooping, and contracted a disease of the eyes. This is its immoderation, the excess to which it tends, and to which it must tend with all the more determination the higher it rises in the spiritual life, where common rules are less clear in their application, and the processes of grace more intricate and unusual. Yet while it breeds scruples, this same principle also ministers to self-trust, because of its habit of examining actions for itself, and then of going by what it sees. It is very rare to find a man, who habitually does what is right only because it is right, who is not at the same time quietly self-opinionated, and dangerously free from all distrust of his own decisions.

Then again there seems in such a principle of action no real rehearsing for heaven. The Blessed in heaven do not act from a sense of duty. They contemplate and love. Surely there must have been some habit formed on earth, to correspond to and anticipate that celestial habit of keeping the gaze fixed on the beautiful object of faith. A conscientious Seraph is a very difficult idea to realize. In truth there is nothing supernatural about this principle, except the amount of love which it contains. It borrows from love all about it that is worth much,

and yet keeps love in the lowest place, as if it were a dependent and inferior. Thus we are not surprised to find those, who habitually act upon it, somewhat out of harmony with the lives of the Saints, with new miracles, with popular devotions, with apparitions, pilgrimages, taking vows, and other supernatural things. For the principle does not take kindly to the supernatural, grasps it nervously, and so is perpetually letting it slip because it cannot hold it.

Neither is it an attractive principle to others. It deprives goodness of much of its missionary character and converting influences. It does not draw people round it, or make sinners wonder enviously at the sweetness of Christian sanctity. It is dry. It repels. It speaks shortly, and makes no allowances. It is unseasonable, and is proud of disregarding circumstances. Time and place are out of time and place to it. It has a propensity to preach, and dictate, and be tiresome. And in all these respects it plays into the hands of the natural foibles of those to whose character this principle is most likely to commend itself. Then, which sounds a privilege but is in truth a disability, it is a rarer gift than love. It is often a growth of natural character, whereas God pours love out on every one. It thus embraces fewer souls: because fewer are capable of walking by it. It is love, and walking by love, that swells the grand multitude of the number who are saved. Conscientiousness could never fill half so fast as love. So that it neither manufactures the high Saints, nor yet throngs with happy crowds the outer courts of heaven.

It is also less directly connected with the gift of final perseverance than love. As was said, it is a life of efforts, and it is the nature of efforts to be complete in themselves, and not enchained one with another; and the doctrine of habit is a poor thing to trust to in the supernatural affairs of grace. God Himself acts from love, that is, from conformity to Himself, and not from a sense of duty. God's life is love; and thus love has the blessing of exuberance, of fruitfulness, of speed. It is venturesome, overflowing, Divine.

All that is good about the other principle is liable to constant error from a want of moderation; and in pointing out the reasons for preferring the principle of love to the principle of duty, as an habitual motive-power in the spiritual life, it has been necessary to touch upon some of the exaggerations to which the exclusive principle of duty may lead, but does not necessarily lead. This must not be misunderstood. The principle of duty is holy and strong. The principle of love disjoined from the principle of duty is a thing which will save no man. Doing right because it is right is a course which every one ought to pursue, a habit which all should cultivate. All that we have been arguing for is, that the spiritual man who looks at love primarily and prominently, and at duty secondarily and subordinately, will sooner be a thoroughly converted man, or a saint, or a higher kind of saint, than the spiritual man who reverses the process, and looks at duty primarily and prominently, as the solid part of his devotion, and love secondarily and subordinately, as the sweetening of his duty.

CONCLUSION: PERSONAL LOVE OF GOD

Personal love of God! this then is the conclusion of the whole. To love God because He desires our love, to love Him because He first loved us, to love Him because He loves us with such a surpassing love, to love our Creator because He redeemed us and our Redeemer because He created us, to love Him as our Creator in all the orders of nature, grace, and glory, and finally to love Him for His own sake because of His infinite perfections, because He is what He is,—this, and this alone is religion; this is what flows from the ties between the Creator and His redeemed creature; for what is redemption but the restoring, repairing, and ennobling of creation?

To love our Creator as our First Cause, as our Last End, and as our Abiding Possession,—this is the whole matter. He in His mercy has made the love of Him a precept, and therefore those who do right because it is right really love Him, and go to Him at last, as well as those who only love Him or chiefly love Him out of love. But this last way is the most easy for ourselves, and the most honorable for Him. This is why I said at the outset that the beginning of the whole process was rather in God's touching and mysterious desire for our love than in His love of us. That desire of His seems the handle by which loving souls take hold of their religion, and in which they find the key to their own position of creatures, and to the rights and attractions of the Creator; and this desire of God for our love leads

straight to our desire for Him, our desire not so much for His love as for Himself, that gift of Himself, which, though inseparable from His love, is yet much more than love, more precious, and more tender.

What then is life, but the possession of God, and the beauty of God drawing us ever more and more powerfully to the fuller possession of Him, until at length in heaven we come to the fulness of our possession? Let us emancipate ourselves for a while from earthly thoughts, and look up to heaven, while the Angels, who rejoice over one sinner that does penance, are keeping the feast of All Saints. That day might be called the Feast of the Magnificence of Jesus; for the spirit of the Feast is a spirit of magnificence; it is the feast of the heavenly court of the great King of our salvation. Yet what is the sight which we behold there? Ah! if we look into heaven, we shall learn much about creation!

Let us put aside, not in forgetfulness, still less for lack of burning love, the empire of the Angels, our elder brothers, and look only at the human family which is there. Around the altar of the Lamb, by Mary's maternal throne, there are various rings and choirs and glorious hierarchies of the Saints. They lie bathed in splendor, beautiful to look upon, but it is a splendor which is not their own. Each soul is beautified with an infinite variety of graces, the particular combination of which is distinctive of that particular soul, and is a separate ornament of heaven, so that not one Saint could be spared without heaven missing a portion of its beauty. Yet those graces are not their own. They were gifts

to begin with, and they must remain gifts to the end. Their exceeding joy is such a vision of delight that we could not see it now, and live. In truth there is not one of their gifts, not the least and lowest of their rewards, but they might well joy in it with a surpassing joy. But it is not so. Their joy is not in their own beauty, or their own perfections, or their bright rewards. It is entirely in something which is not their own. It is the beauty of Jesus which is their magnificence and joy. And the eternity of their joy depends, not in any inward impossibility of their own to fall away, but in the ceaseless attraction of that unfading beauty.

Look at the tranquillity of that vast scene, outspread before our eyes! It is creation in its Father's house, creation in its home of glory. Its wanderings are over, its problems solved, its consummation gloriously accomplished. Yet the completion and elevation of its nature, the expansion and coronation of its graces, and no less also the actual exuberant and joyous life of its eternal glory, is not in itself, but in its possession of the Creator. It has left itself, and taken up with something else, and so it is perfect, complete, at home, at rest; for that something else is God, its all in all, its own God.

But let us look back again to earth, into the ages past, and see the processes by which God made His Saints, by which He drew all these multitudinous rings and choirs and hierarchies of the Saints, out of the thick of the world into His Bosom, where just now we saw them lying. The same beauty, which, seen, is their eternal life, unseen and believed in, drew them over earth to heaven.

The ways were many, the ways were strange, the ways were unlike each other, but this was the one invariable process. It was not a mere sense of duty, nor a grand conscientiousness, however bright and strong, which carried them heroically through opposing obstacles, right up to the highest seats in heaven. It was a secret attraction, a drawing at their hearts, a current sucking them in, at first faint and feeble, slow and uncertain, then steadier, and now swifter, and at last turbulent, and then suddenly they were drawn under and engulfed for ever in the beautiful vision of their Creator. It is the characteristic of God's greatest operations on earth to be invisible. So is it for the most part with His process of making Saints. When it does come to view, it is so unlike what we should have expected that it scandalizes us by its strangeness. Can we point to the life of any one Saint, at whom people did not take scandal while he was being sanctified? Why do we not remember more continually this fact, and the lesson it teaches us? When men saw Jesus too near and too openly, they judged Him worthy of death. So it is with ourselves. When His shadow crosses us in a Saint, we judge him to be anything rather than a Saint, and worthy of condemnation.

The immense variety of ways in which the Saints are drawn to God is greatly to be noted. Climate, rank, date in the world's history, sufferings, circumstances, education, vocation, national character, all these have had so much to do with it, and yet so little. They account for much, yet not for all, and for the main thing not in the least; for the same

things, which look to be helping Saints forward, are visibly keeping other souls back. There is plainly a secret spell at work, a spell on the world, on life, on sorrow, on darkness, on trial, and even on sin. It is working in them. It is strengthening itself in different souls by contradictory circumstances. But it is a spell, nothing else than a spell. It is none other than the beauty of Jesus, which is the life and light of heaven. Heaven is heaven, because God is so beautiful in the light; and earth is the factory of Saints, because God is so beautiful in the darkness.

See how the spell acts, even against the huge, almost resistless, power of the world. Who are they whom it affects? Ah! look at them, lying on God's breast, gleaming there, bright trophies of redeeming grace. They are young, delicate, highborn virgins, in the fires, under the pincers, among the teeth of lions, boy and girl martyrs, like Venantius, Agatha, Agnes, Lucy, Catherine, and Cecilia. They are children, Saints in childhood, whose reason was anticipated that they might love Jesus; they were little things who tore their flesh with scourges, who prayed hours at a time, who had ecstasies and worked miracles, who had mysterious sufferings, and lived in a mystical world, and were incomprehensibly like Jesus. They were kings and queens, who put away their crowns, took up the cross, and bared their feet, and went off after God. They were gallant soldiers, like St. Ignatius, or lawyers like St. Alphonso. They were freshly converted sinners, with all their habits of sin still strong upon them. Or they were ordinarily good men in the world who loved permitted liberty and blameless pleasure, but

over whom by degrees a sort of dream seemed to pass, and noiselessly they were led out of the crowd dreaming of the beautiful God, and there was a cold touch of death, and they woke up, and found it more than true.

These were the persons on whom the spell worked. Now see from what it drew them. There were first of all the exquisite sinless pleasures of all the senses. And the Saints are so far from being insensible persons, that none can rival them in the keen susceptibilities of pleasure, or in the refined vivacity of their sensitiveness. It is this which enables them to suffer so acutely, as if they had first been flayed alive and then bid to walk through the thorny world. There was the external beauty of the earth, in which they could read more plainly than other men the sweet enticing loveliness of God's perfections. There were the ties of the most holy and tender love. Children deserted their parents, who loved those parents with such a love as common children do not know. There were mothers walking into convents over the bodies of their sons. There were mothers watching their sons writhing in the excruciating agonies of a ferocious martyrdom, and encouraging them with tearless eyes to suffer more and more. There were fond husbands and doting wives parting of their own accord for all the term of life, and the cloister-door closing upon well-known faces as if it had been the hard cold slab of the very tomb. There were joys from which the Saints voluntarily turned in order that they might indulge in sorrow, and so catch just a little look of Christ. And under their

sorrows, when heaven rained crosses on their heads, and earth burned their feet as they walked, oh, then was the magic of the potent spell! with what elasticity they rose up under their load, and how they sang, like Angels, as they went! And it was liberty which they all gave up, the liberty out of which God gets all His creature's love, the liberty which, alas! refuses Him so much! They gave up their liberty for the sweet captivity of personal love of God; but it was the free surrender of their liberty which made it beautiful to God's eye, and sweetness to His taste, and music in His ear. What a spell to have drawn such myriads of souls from such attractions, what power, what pleading, what persuasiveness, what versatility, and yet withal tranquil as the beautiful God Himself!

BEAUTY OF GOD WINS SOULS ON EARTH, STILL MORE SO
IN HEAVEN

All these wonders are done by the beauty of God acting on the soul. In heaven it is more intelligible; for there the blessed Vision is eternal, unchanging, and in the full blaze of glory. But the strange and touching thing is, that on earth it is the merest glimpses of God which work all these wonders. A chance text of Scripture falls upon the ear, in church or out of it, and a touch of power comes with it, and with the power a flash of light, and a Saint is made. There are brief sweetnesses in prayer, which come now and then in life, like shooting moonbeams through rents on close-packed cloudy nights. They lit up the cross upon the

steeple and were gone. But the soul fed on them for days. There are the first moments after Communion, an unearthly time, when we are like Mary, carrying the Lord of heaven and earth within her, and we feel Him, and have so much to say that we do not speak at all; and the time passes, and we seem to have missed an opportunity. But the work was done, and a supernatural health is dancing in our blood, and straightway we climb a mountain on the road to heaven. Then there are sudden gushes of love, and along with the love, light also; and we know not why they come nor whence. Heaven is all quiet above us, and makes no sign. Circumstances are going on around us in the old tame, languid way. What can it be? Certainly it came from within, as if a depth of the soul had broken up, and flooded the surface; and we remember that, within us, in one of those depths, in which perhaps we have never been ourselves, and till eternity dawns never shall be, God deigns to dwell, and now we understand the secret. Then there are momentary unions with Him in times of sorrow, which were so swift that they looked like possibilities rather than actual visitations.

But they were true embraces from our Heavenly Father, and they have healed us of diseases, and they have infused a new strength into us, and they were so close that we have been tingling ever since, and feel the pressure at this moment still. Then there were flashes from the monstrosity, which showed us we know not what and told us we know not what. Only they made the darkness of the world very thick and palpable, like lightning on a

moonless night. But they did a work; for we felt ourselves laid hold of in the solid darkness which followed the sudden light, and hurried on over stocks and stones and up high places, and then we were left, lonely, but behold! so much nearer than we had ever seen it before, a pale streak, which was the dawning of the heavenly day. Nay, one sight of God's beauty at death, such a sight as the dying have sometimes, and which we cannot explain, is enough in the way of sanctity to do all life's work in one short hour. Oh! then, if God be all this in time, what must eternity be like? O happy, happy, Saints! for a while longer you shall be in His beautiful light, and we be far, far away: for a while—yet but for a while, and then we also shall be with you, with the same glad light of that Divine Face shining full upon our ransomed souls!

Meanwhile, even upon earth God is our possession, and we are entering upon our inheritance by degrees. Jesus is the Creator clad in the garments of redeeming love, and we have Him here on earth already all our own, while we are sadly but sweetly striving to be all for Him. Already the attributes of the Creator are fountains of joy and salvation to the creature. Why do we not gaze upon them more intently? There is no earthly science which can compete in interest with the science of God. It is a knowledge which quickly leads to love, and love is at once conversion, perseverance, and salvation. The Divine perfections support us by their contrast with what we see on earth. They relieve our minds. They increase our trust. They actually out of their own abundance supply our deficiencies. They feed

our souls by their grandeur, and exercise an awful mysterious attraction upon us, drawing us towards themselves, yet, into themselves.

They affect our souls variously and medicinally. Justice gives us the gift of fear, while mercy emboldens us to the grace of familiarity. Omnipotence is what our weakness wants, and omnipresence what our discouragement requires. Our ignorance consoles itself in omniscience, and our fears lean and rest themselves on Providence. And all our wants and all our weaknesses and all our wrongnesses carry their manifold burdens to God's fidelity, full certain that they will be lightened there. All these perfections are deeps, into which we are ever descending now with most surpassing contentment both of mind and will, and in which we shall be ever sinking, delightfully deeper through all eternity. They satisfy us, and they delight by satisfying; and again they do not satisfy, and by not satisfying, they delight still more, because of the delightful hunger which they leave behind, and which is in itself a marvellous, insatiable contentment. They are a rest, and out of them there is no rest, they are a home, and short of them, all is wandering and banishment. They are our own. They belong to us.

The Creator has made them all over to us to be our possession and our joy, as if He kept them Himself only to bear the weight of them, so that to us they might be nothing else but joys. Even His eternity is ours; and though we are but sons of time, yet, possessing God, we enjoy in Him eternity, and our religious minds even now, much more our glorified spirits hereafter, run forth up the backward ages

and again down the countless ages yet untold, and ever lose themselves, and ever find themselves, in that ocean of everlasting life. Oh, there is no devotion like devotion to the attributes of God! O blessed, O beautiful inheritance of the creature! They are eternal, and will never fail us, immutable and will never change, immense and always leave us room. O space! thou must widen thy gigantic shadowy limits, else wilt thou be a very prison for our immortal joys!

If earth be such a heaven to believing souls, what sort of heaven must the real heaven be? What is that incomparable beauty which the Blessed are gazing on this very hour? We have no words to tell, no thoughts to think it. What is it that that beauty is doing to their capacious, serene, and glory-strengthened souls? We have no words to tell, no thoughts to think it. What is that Divine torrent of love which bursts forth from it, and threatens to submerge and overwhelm their separate created lives? We have no words to tell, no thoughts to think it. Whither reaches that white glistening eternity through which it will endure, and which seems to brighten in the far-off prospect rather than to fade away—whither does it reach? We have no words to tell, no thoughts to think it.

THE BEATIFIC VISION

Look how the Splendors of the Divine Nature gleam far and wide, nay infinitely, while the trumpets of heaven blow, and the loud acclaims of the untiring creatures greet with jubilant amazement

the Living Vision! See how Eternity and Immensity entwine their arms in inexplicable embrace, the one filling all space, the other outliving all time; the one without quantity or limit, the other without beginning, end, or duration. See how Mercy and Justice mingle with and magnify each other, how they put on each other's look, and fill each other's offices. Behold the Understanding and the Will, the one for ever lighting up with such meridian glory the profound abysses of God's uncircumscribed Truth and illimitable Wisdom; the other enfolding for ever in its unconsuming fires the incomprehensible Life of God, His infinite oceanlike expanse of being, and every creature of the countless worlds that from His life draw their own. Look at the divine Immutability and Liberty, how they sit together like sisters, deep enthroned in that marvellous life, and how God is free because He is immutable, and immutable because He is so free. See how the Son and the Holy Ghost know all the Father's knowledge, and yet He alone by His understanding produces that coeternal Word who is His Son. See how the Holy Ghost has all the love both of the Father and the Son; and yet They alone by Their will produced that blessed Limit of Themselves, that uncreated Sigh, that sacred Jubilee of Theirs, that everlasting Bond of union, who is the Holy Ghost. And thus is the loving light of the Divine understanding ever on fire with Love; and thus is the living love of the Divine will ever gleaming with the magnificence of uncreated Light.

And all this life, and all this assemblage of perfections, and all this royal vision, and all this eternal

intertwining of uncreated beauties, is itself a simple act, and its simplicity and its actuality are the crowning beauties of it all. God is. He possesses actually all the plenitude of being, without admixture of privation, without dilution of possibility; for not only are all things possible in Him, but all possibilities are actual to Him. He never yet has been able to be: He never will be able to be: He will never be able not to be. He simply is. Beginning, end, succession, change—they come not nigh Him. They breathe no breath upon Him. He is a Pure Act. As St. Gregory Nazianzen says, He is all things, and yet He is nothing, because He does not belong to things at all. He is, and He is eternally, and He is necessarily, and He is of Himself. And it is this Simplicity, this Actuality, which passes over the Grand Vision with incessant soft flashes from end to end, and again from end to end, of that endless nature, and which is to the Face of God what expression is to the face of man, at once its charm and its identity, its beauty and its truth. As we know each other by our looks, so we know God by His Simplicity.

O happy souls of the Blessed, and what of you? It is all written in the Holy Book (and it needs no commenting). “On the third day she laid away the garments she wore, and put on her glorious apparel. And glittering in royal robes, after she had called upon God, the ruler and saviour of all, she took two maids with her. And upon one of them she leaned, as if, for delicateness and overmuch tenderness, she were not able to bear up her own body. And the other maid followed her lady, bearing up

her train flowing on the ground. But she with a rosy colour in her face, and with gracious and bright eyes, hid a mind full of exceeding great fear. In going in she passed through all the doors in order, and stood before the king, where he sat upon his royal throne, clothed with his royal robes, and glittering with gold and precious stones, and he was terrible to behold. And when he had lifted up his countenance, the queen sank down, and her colour turned pale, and she rested her weary head upon her handmaid. And the king's spirit was changed into mildness, and all in haste he leaped from his throne, and holding her up in his arms till she came to herself, caressed her with these words: What is the matter, Esther? I am thy brother, fear not. Thou shalt not die: for this law is not made for thee, but for all others. Come near then, and touch the sceptre. And as she held her peace, he took the golden sceptre, and laid it upon her neck, and kissed her, and said, Why dost thou not speak to me? And she answered, I saw thee, my lord, as an angel of God, and my heart was troubled for fear of thy majesty. For thou, my lord, art very admirable, as thy face is full of graces! And while she was speaking, she fell down again, and was almost in a swoon. But the king was troubled, and all his servants comforted her" (Esther xv. 4-19).

Such is the picture of the Creator and the creature. It is a history of the truest love that ever was: nay of the only love that was ever truly true. And what is the end of all? We are God's own creatures, and God is our own God. All else will fail us, but He never will. All is love with Him, love in

light and love in darkness, love always and everywhere. There are many difficulties left unexplained, many problems yet unsolved. Would it not be strange, if it were not so, seeing that He is infinite and we finite, He is Creator and we but creatures? But the difficulties are only difficulties of love. There is nothing cold in them, nothing frightening, nothing which goes one step towards disproving that sweet truth that He is our own God, our very own. There is no difficulty in wondering why we are not in heaven already. The wonder and the difficulty are, that such as we know ourselves to be should ever enter there at all. This is the great difficulty, and it is a difficulty for tears. Yet when that difficulty looks up into the face of God's Fidelity, then that sweetest and most soothing of all our Creator's grandeurs wipes the tears from its eyes, and hope comes out from behind her cloud, and shines softly, and the heart is still. Our own God? And so beautiful!

A theologian said that if one lost soul could reunite in itself all the rage and hatred of all the lost against God, and that it could root, fortify, and confirm all this gigantic rage and hatred in itself for millions and millions of years, until it had become a new, ineradicable, and preternatural nature to him, one little ray of God's beauty falling gently on him for a single moment would change his whole being that instant into such respectful love and utter adoration, that he would not feel the fires that burned him, because of the greater fires of his transported love. And we are free, and we are in earth's fair sunshine, and our heart is full of a little but

most true love of God, and a whole world of God's blessed love is resting on our single heart,—and shall we doubt, shall we hesitate, shall we tremble, shall we be chilled in the midst of all these fires of love? O my Creator, my Eternal Love! O my Father, my Heavenly Father! weary yet full of trust, worthless but truly loving Thee, on earth still and very far from heaven, my home and my rest are still in Thy Fidelity! *In Te, Domine! speravi, non confundar in æternum!*

THE END

INDEX

- Absolution, 290.
- Actions, 217, 287.
 - multiplicity of, 220.
 - of the Incarnate Word, 227.
 - power of good, 304.
 - outward, often worse than the heart, 341.
- Adam, created in a state of grace, 30.
- Adoration, love of, 213.
- Air, the, 140.
- Alphonso, St., 427.
- Angels, the, sin of, 1.
 - created in a state of grace, 29, 32, 79, 127, 402.
 - watch over men, 45.
 - fall of, 63.
 - guardian, 66.
 - diversities of, 187.
 - worship of, 218.
 - joy of, over penitents, 272.
 - glory of, 349.
- Animals, necessary to man, 48.
- Annihilation, 35.
- Armor, against the world, 400.
- Asceticism, 19.
- Atheism, in literature, 4.
 - in politics, 8.
 - in physical science, 10.
- Austerity, 85
- Aversion to God, 230.
- Baianism, 29.
- Baius, 28-30.
- Balance of power, 10.
- Baptism of infants, 129.
 - what is involved in, 284.
- Beatitude, 133.
 - price of, 134.
 - of the glorified soul, 264.
- Benevolence, love of, 204.
- Bernard, St., 388.
- Bible, the, 125.
- Body, the glorified, 263.
- Books, scientific, 2.
 - spiritual, 100.
- Borgia, St. Francis, 100.
- Bossuet, 395.
- Brodie, Sir Benjamin, 338.
- Catholics, aims of ordinary, 233.
 - great majority of, are saved, 319, 333.
 - test of worldly, 386.
- Cerintus, 102.
- Character, formed, by the Church, 12.
 - by the world, 13.
- Charitableness, 324.
- Charity, spurious, 101, 104.
- Childlike, 111.
- Church, the, 103.
 - treasury of, 308.
 - graces of, 318, 356.
 - counterfeited by the world, 372.
- Civilization, monomanias of, 6.
 - work of, 369.
- Communication of God, 403.
- Communion, 297.
- Compact with God, 75.
- Complacency, love of, 206.
- Condolence, love of, 208.
- Condren, 339.
- Confession, 129.
- Confirmation, Sacrament of, 129, 303.
- Considerateness of God, 193.
- Conscience, a seared, 381.
- Conscientiousness, 419, 421.

- Contemplation, 100.
 Controversies of the day, 399.
 Conversions, 289.
 death-bed, 226.
 numerous, 325, 344.
 Converts, 20.
 Creation, mystery of, 64, 107.
 definition of, 113.
 valued by God, 116.
 in a state of grace, 122.
 glorifies God, 407.
 history of, 409.
 Creator, purposes of the, 40.
 revelation of, in the Old Testament, 69.
 idea of, 73, 77, 83.
 service of, 87.
 Creatures, evil effects of forgetting that we are, 13, 24.
 what are, 33.
 home of, 36, 409.
 true dignity of, 43.
 condition of, 46.
 meaning of, 59.
 bound to serve the Creator out of love, 62.
 influence of, 67.
 relation of, to the Creator, 70.
 desire God, 72.
 God loves the, 141.
 holiness of, 163.
 happiness of, 252.
 sufferings of, 309.
 Cross, the, mystery of, 247.
 Death, when it comes, 44.
 a punishment, 254.
 a good, 271.
 hour of, 337.
 Deformity of sin, 345.
 Dependency of man, 50.
 on grace, 79.
 Desire, love of, 212.
 Detachment, 207.
 Devotions, Catholic, source of objections to, 104.
 Devil, 58.
 Difficulties, 281.
 about the salvation of heretics, 320.
 Dignity of man, 11, 85.
 Diplomacy, irreligious, 8.
 religious, 181.
 Discernment, spiritual, 396.
 Dives, 376, 384.
 Dolors, the Seven, 209.
 Dominion, 37.
 characteristics of God's, 231.
 Duty and love, 413, 420.
 Earth, mother, 124.
 Election, 122, 195.
 Eliseus, 333.
 Elizabeth, St., of Hungary, 415.
 Embraces of God, 430.
 End of man, 34, 36, 42, 59, 80, 88.
 England, state of, 103.
 Enthusiasm, 96.
 definitions of, 97.
 what men mean by, 98.
 Errors, dangers of popular, 14.
 Espousals, the Divine, 95.
 Esteem, love of, 207.
 Eternity, 45.
 Faith, the temptations against, 145, 240.
 gift of, 251.
 outlives mortal sin, 288.
 greatness of the gift of, 354.
 certainty of, 355.
 Fallacies, popular dangers of, 15.
 Falsehood, 286.
 Fall, the, 52, 63.
 of the Angels, 127.
 Fear, holy, 213.
 Fervor, times of, 241.
 Fidelity of God, 434.
 Forbearance of God, 191.
 Forgiveness, profusion of, 190, 193, 199.
 Francis, St., 100.
 Francis of Sales, St., 100, 388.
 Friendship, 193.
 Fromond, 395.
 Gifts of the Holy Ghost, 284.
 Glory, gifts of, 404.
 light of, 408.
 God, forgetfulness of, 1, 7.
 ignored, 2, 90, 95, 320.
 requires a special service from every man, 42.
 Providence of, 52.
 object of man's thoughts, 54.
 end of man, 55, 79, 220, 401.

- God, how men use, 63.
 desired by creatures, 72.
 rights of, 75, 76.
 will of, 75, 76.
 concurrence of, 77, 84, 152.
 never fails us, 80.
 His own end, 84, 156.
 must be served by the whole man, 93.
 wrong notions about, 95.
 inadequate views of the love of, 105.
 worth of the Creation in the sight of, 116.
 joys of, 118.
 successive revelations of, 124.
 patience of, 132.
 longs for our love, 136.
 love of, unimaginable, 141.
 long-suffering of, 155.
 holiness of, 162.
 loves us, why, 173.
 object of our love, 178.
 government of, 191.
 paternal tenderness of, 194.
 liberality of, 226.
 man's ignorance of, 228.
 unrequited love of, 242, 244.
 recompenses of, 248, 255, 268.
 glory of, 404.
 Goodness of God, 99, 131, 185, 269.
 known by degrees, 328.
 Gospel, the, 295.
 Grace, sanctifying, 78, 249, 296.
 our dependence on, 79.
 kingdom of, 125.
 of the Saints, 226.
 abundance of, 238, 249.
 effects of, 262.
 universality of, 306.
 struggles of, against sin, 289, 331.
 state of, 311.
 of the Sacraments, 336.
 lost by Angels and men, 406.
 Gratitude, love of, 210.
 Guardian Angel, 299.
 Habits, supernatural, 284.
 Hatred of God, 229.
 Heart, the Sacred, 342.
 Hearts, reserved for God, 116.
 Heathen, picture of an honest, 13, 62.
 Heathens, how regarded by the Fathers, 101, 102.
 Heaven, 262, 270.
 hierarchies of, 349.
 Hell, 312.
 the thought of, 314.
 teaching of, 350.
 Helplessness of man, 48.
 Here and hereafter, 88.
 Heretics, how regarded by the Fathers, 101, 102.
 Holiness, 60.
 first principles of, 63.
 order of, 85.
 of God, 162.
 of the creature, 163.
 wherein it consists, 411.
 Humiliation of pardon, 53.
 Ideas peculiar to the Church, 19.
 Ignatius, St., 427.
 Ignorances of man, 47, 48.
 invincible, 340.
 Imitation, the, of Christ, 16.
 Impetration, power of, 305.
 Incarnation, the decree of, 41.
 Thomist account of, 106.
 Scotist account of, 106, 128.
 results of, 201.
 Indifference about God, 231.
 Indulgences, 292.
 Infants, baptized, 115.
 Influx of God, 77.
 Inheritance of man, 44.
 Innocence, the state of, 30.
 Insects, 49.
 Intention, 235.
 doctrine of, 287.
 Interest, 85.
 Irreligion, 7.
 common, 11.
 Isaias, woe of, 382.
 Jansenism, 28, 31.
 Jansenius, 28.
 John, St., 102.
 of the Cross, 17.
 Johnson, Dr., 97.
 Joy, the service of God, 91, 92.
 of God, 118.
 sources of a natural, 258.

- Joylessness, 387.
 Judgment, the final, 360.
 Judgments, erroneous, 324.
 Justice, original, 31.
 of God, 160.
 Knowledge of God, envied by
 Adam, 64.
 not common, 86.
 results of the loss of, 228.
 Lacordaire, 395.
 Lazarus, 384.
 Lessius, 134, 403, 408.
 Liberty, 86.
 Lies, 286.
 Life, bound up with creatures, 68.
 of God, 68.
 waste of, 88.
 a pilgrimage, 215.
 Literature, irreligious, 9.
 of the Church, 16.
 Loneliness, 298.
 Love, God must be served in,
 23, 62.
 effect of God's, 78.
 the service of God, 94.
 difficulties of creative, 109,
 110.
 why God seeks our, 112, 113.
 place of, in repentance, 114.
 sole desire of God, 136.
 explains mysteries, 139.
 depths of Divine, 142, 146.
 eternal, of God, 146.
 precept of, 178, 194.
 personal, 183, 184.
 seven kinds of, 204.
 of the Saints, 227.
 our, 233, 238.
 marks of true, 238.
 never satisfied, 240.
 creative, 277.
 of God, fills the earth, 317.
 life of creation, 409.
 person, of God, 413, 423.
 Loveliness, of God, 165.
 of Our Lady, 214.
 Luther, 390.
 Man, created in a state of grace,
 28, 32.
 fall of, 31, 127.
 ignorance of, 34, 38, 47.
 Man, consequences of birth of, 34.
 history of, 38.
 predestination of, 39.
 God's love for, 40.
 mercies surround, 41.
 helplessness of, 48, 52.
 dependent on the lower ani-
 mals, 48.
 must not criticize his posi-
 tion, 55.
 sole pursuit of, 56.
 end of, 59, 220.
 nothingness of, 149.
 guiltiness of, 152.
 meanness of, 158.
 littleness of, 149, 173.
 subject of God, 189.
 raised above the Angels, 195.
 unworthiness of, 229.
 loved from all eternity, 278.
 has no rights, 280.
 Margaret of the Blessed Sacra-
 ment, 344.
 Marriage, the spiritual, 197.
 Martha, 210.
 Mary Magdalene, St., of Pazzi,
 167.
 Mary, 187, 209, 210, 293.
 intercession of, 300.
 Matrimony, Sacrament of, 130,
 303.
 Meanness, 158.
 Meditation, 100.
 Mercy, humbles, 54.
 of God, 144, 171.
 minister of the Precious
 Blood, 172.
 overshadowed, 260.
 Meriting, power of, 305.
 Metaphysics, 48.
 Middle life, 80.
 Mission, Divine, 251.
 Motives, earthly, 239.
 Mysteries, five, 111, 112.
 Nativity, the, 268.
 Nature and grace, 29, 406.
 distinct, 32.
 Nature, the Divine, 74.
 kingdom of, 119, 257.
 Nothingness, 101, 268.
 Notions, false, among Catholics,
 17.

- Obedience, 189.
 Obligations of man, 179.
 Omnipresence of God, 406.
 Order, Sacrament of, 130.

 Palafox, 396.
 Papacy, the, 201.
 Passion, the, 295.
 Patience of God, 242.
 Penance, Sacrament of, 53.
 unlimited iteration of, 292.
 Perfections, foundations of, 23.
 of God, 120.
 Persons, the Divine, 250.
 Pharisees, 376, 379.
 Pleasures, sinful, 310.
 Politics, irreligious, 8.
 Power of God, 168.
 Prayer, grace of, 301.
 Predestination, of man, 41.
 a sign of, 356.
 Preference, love of, 207.
 Presence, the Real, 297.
 Preservation, 71, 220.
 Principles, 332.
 Progress, theories of, 5, 6.
 Propositions, condemned, of
 Baius and Quesnel, 32.
 Propriety of man, 7, 56.
 Prosperity, dangers of, 373.
 Providence of God, 353.
 Purgatory, souls in, 162.
 mercy in, 171.
 fire of, 293, 348.
 multiplies the fruits of the
 Passion, 348.

 Queen of the Angels, 187.
 Quesnel, 28.
 Questions of children, 109.

 Redemptions, 333.
 denied to the Angels, 406.
 Reformers, 390.
 Relapses, one effect of, 327.
 Religion, practical basis of, 61,
 62.
 what is it, 207.
 Remission of venial sin, 286.
 Repentance, a death-bed, 274.
 made easy by God, 337.
 Respectability of worldliness,
 381.

 Responsibilities, 24.
 Revelation, Providence of God, a
 private, 351.
 Reverence of God for His crea-
 tures, 83.
 Rich, the, difficulties about the
 salvation of, 396.
 Riches, 377.
 Rights of God, 75.

 Sacrament, the Blessed, 145.
 Sacraments, the graces of, 336.
 Saint, what is a, 16, 60.
 prayer of a, 299.
 hopeful about sinners, 343.
 how made, 426.
 Salvation, 281.
 easy, 282, 315.
 conditions of, 285.
 Sanctity, 12.
 motives of, 283.
 Satan, activity of, 332.
 Satisfaction, power of, 306.
 Satispassion, 308.
 sacrifice of, 309.
 Saved, the, opinions about the
 number of, 323.
 Savonarola, 390.
 Science, influence of, 11, 86.
 Scruples, one source of, 420.
 Secrecy of good works, 328.
 Seculars must aim at perfection,
 21.
 Self-abasement, 82.
 Self-concentration, whence it
 comes, 418.
 Senses, the, power of, 123.
 Servants, 191.
 Service of God, our, 153.
 the one thing, 234.
 Sin, forms of, change, 1.
 danger of trying to do no
 more than avoiding mor-
 tal, 22.
 forgiveness of, 246.
 doctrine of, 285.
 pleasures of, 310.
 eternal punishment of, 312.
 of worldliness, 377.
 interior, 379.
 Sinners, succession of, 325.
 the predilection of Jesus for,
 342.

- Society, dangers of, 15.
 Sorrow, 253.
 Souls, love of, 45.
 Spirits, realms of, 66.
 Spirituality, not peculiar to religious, 21.
 why people object to, 24.
 Suffering, voluntary, 180.
 Suicide, 35.
 Systems, philosophical, 10.

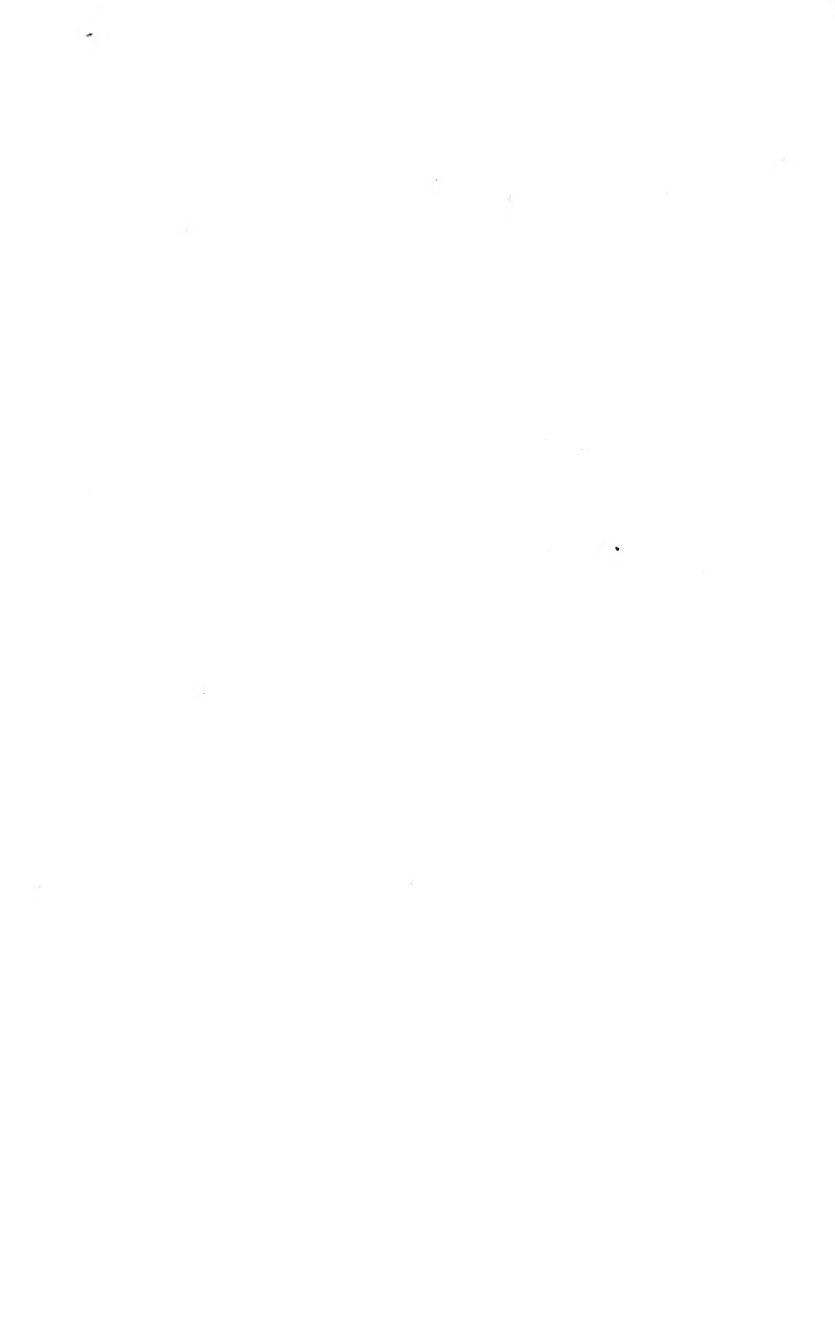
 Temptation, 341.
 Teresa, St., 17.
 Testament, the Old, 69.
 Thauler, 79.
 Theology, importance of, 7.
 teachings of, 66.
 study of, 399.
 Thief, the good, 135.
 Thomas, St., 119.
 Thomists, 7.
 Thought, sins of, 380.
 Trent, Catechism of the Council of, 381.
 Triumph of God, 271.
 Truth, religious, 137.
 the beauty of God, 169.
 investigation of, 258.

 Unction, Extreme, 130, 292, 304.
 Union with God, 93, 94.
 Unseen, the, 37.
 Untruth, 170, 286.

 Views, rigid, do harm, 361.
 bright, 387, 392.
 Vision, the Beatific, 133, 136, 215, 264.
 what earns, 136.
 grandeur of, 274, 431.
 eternal, 429.

 Wickedness of man, 150.
 Will of God, 75, 76, 302.
 Wisdom of God, 166.
 World, the, not man's, 37.
 the only account of, 80.
 morality of, 87.
 an imaginary, 177.
 the moral, 258.
 an influence, 366.
 evil power of, 368.
 the supernatural hated by, 372.
 spirit of, 336, 392.
 Worldliness, 363, 369.
 peculiar evils of, 365.
 effects of, 374.
 definition of, 387.
 a life of, 378.
 sears the conscience, 381.
 effect of, on good people, 379.
 not sufficiently dreaded, 397.
 Worlds, fourteen, in the life of God, 120.
 Worship of God, 91.

 Years, the three-and-thirty, 223, 294.



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Faber, Frederick

William, 1814-1863.

The creator and the
creature, or, The

AJH-4740



