

OUR OWN WILL.



*REV. J. ALLEN, D. D.*

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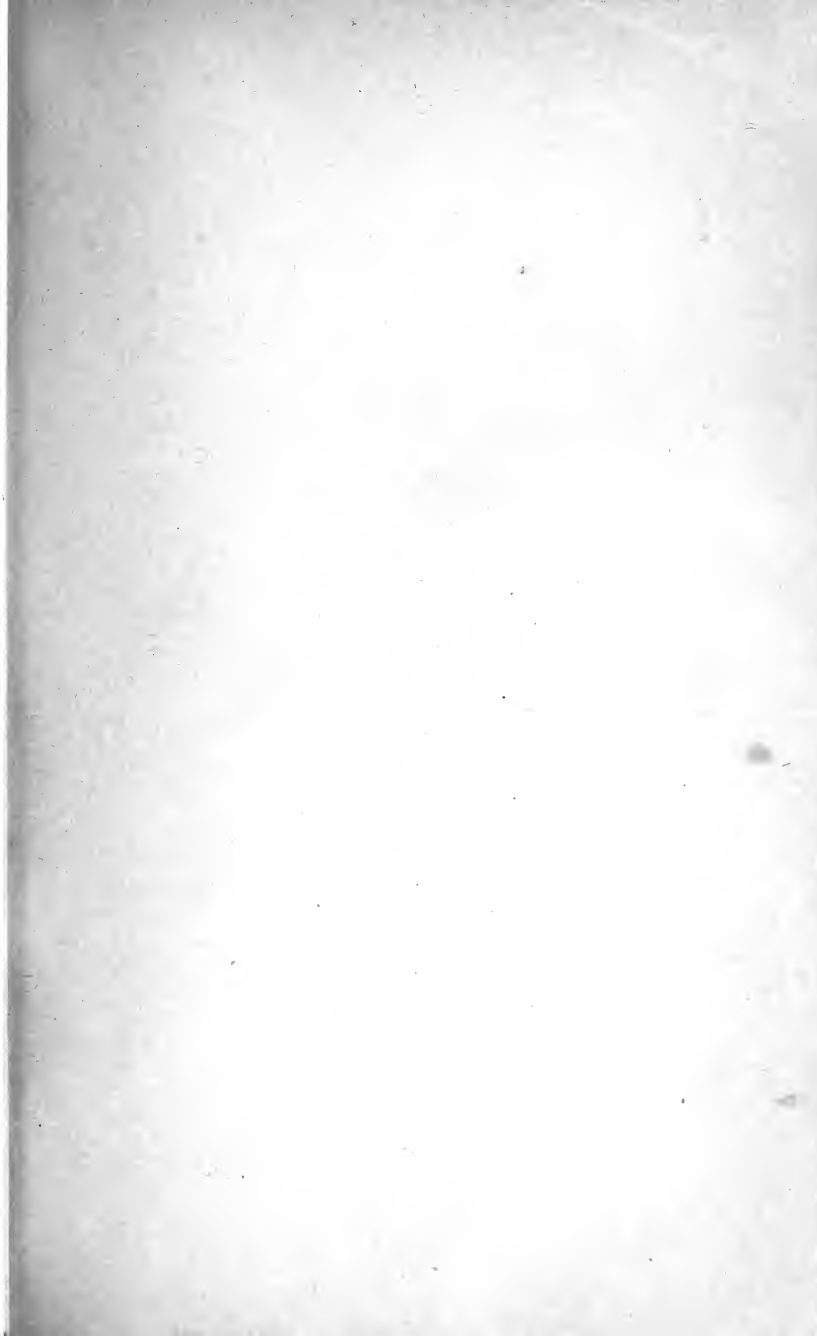
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# THE HISTORY OF THE

REPUBLIC OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

FROM 1776 TO 1876

BY

W. D. HOWLAND

NEW YORK

1876

# OUR OWN WILL

AND

## How to Detect It in Our Actions:

OR,

### INSTRUCTIONS

INTENDED FOR RELIGIOUS.

Applicable also to all who Aim at the Perfect Life.

BY THE REV. J. ALLEN, D.D.,

*Chaplain of the Dominican Convents of the Sacred Heart in  
King Williamstown and East-London, South Africa.*

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With a Preface

BY RIGHT REV. J. D. RICARDS, D.D.,

*Bishop of Retimo, and Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern Vicariate of  
the Cape Colony.*



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THE author of this treatise submits it completely to the judgment of the Holy Catholic Church. He does not wish to enter on any of the questions regarding grace that are freely disputed by theologians, his sole desire being to help those who are striving for perfection over some of the difficulties that arise from natural faults and weaknesses.

KING WILLIAM'S TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA,  
July 29, 1884.

1875

### MEMORANDUM

TO THE HONORABLE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

FROM THE COMMISSIONER OF THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE

SUBJECT: [Illegible]

[The remainder of the text is illegible due to extreme fading.]

## PREFACE.

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THIS little book, which we have read with much interest and attention, seems to us to supply a great want, and we therefore wish it a large circulation. Though written chiefly for Religious, and those who aspire to the perfect life, it is full of plain and practical lessons for all who are in earnest in the service of God. There are books almost innumerable on the state of perfection written from the earliest days, when Christians abandoned the world to serve God in all simplicity under the direction of a Rule of life sanctioned by the Church, down to the present time; yet there are few comparatively suited for the English-speaking public. The style of those we possess, translated from the languages of continental Europe, is often too exalted, or it may be too polished

and refined, to satisfy the demands of a healthy appetite, and the grain of sound teaching is generally so much involved in sweet phraseology and gilded sentiment, carefully elaborated, no doubt, so as not to shock the delicate taste, that it passes through the mind without salutary fruit. The book before us is free from these defects. The author, like a good physician, having made a satisfactory diagnosis of a serious evil that affects many earnest souls, applies himself with a skill and determination that recognize no mere foolish sentiment to root it out effectually. No one can follow him in his simple and plain analysis of the symptoms that is not impressed with the conviction that he has made the study of the will a subject of long and careful consideration. His attention is never diverted by trifles from the object of his pursuit. He sees it in all its deformity and probable results. In watching with what ease he flings aside the poor disguises which so frequently deceive the afflicted patient, one is often urged to exclaim,—how true! how unmistakable! and so is prepared to admire without a murmur the stern treatment.

There is, we believe, no other way than this straightforward course of detecting and out-rooting the delusions of self-love in the spirit-

ual life. Nothing but the clear perception of the evil and its dangers on the part of the Director can dissipate the suggestions of morbid scrupulosity, or give the deceived soul strength and courage to ask of God the grace to bear with docility the repulsive remedy. Who is there, however earnest in the divine service, who is not liable to be led astray by his own will? It lurks under the fairest forms. It will be found at the root of the most noble and generous purposes. Serpent-like, it will dart forth unexpectedly, and poison the best intentions. We are not to imagine, that because we may easily recognize the glittering foe in the case of others, even under an accumulation of rosy flowers of eloquent self-abnegation and apparent humility, that we should therefore at once distinguish it in our own. Unreality, it is well known, reveals itself to the eyes of children. They seem to know by a sort of instinct as surely as the well-bred hound, who really cares for them, and to distrust the affected kindness and honeyed words that cover the approaches of false friends. Yet these little ones do not attempt to veil their desire to grasp the tempting object that is held out to win their caress, any more than the dog will divert his longing eyes from the bone that is offered to secure his favor. The ease with which we see the beam

in the eye of a neighbor, and the straining necessary to catch a glimpse of the mote reflected in our own, has, if we may venture to alter the position of the words of Sacred Scripture, been pointed out by infallible wisdom. We may smile within ourselves as we listen to the self-depreciating words of vanity patiently fishing for a stray compliment, and yet never heed the unflinching estimate which others form of our narrow-minded and over-sensitive jealousy. How few have the courage and the Christian charity to help us with gentle care to see ourselves as others see us!

This is one of the great blessings which a Religious enjoys in a well-regulated community. The Novitiate and the Chapter prepare her to hear the truth with patience, and dispose her to profit by the wise admonitions of the good Mother, who has devoted her most earnest solicitude to lead her spiritual children to the feet of God.

It is because we believe that this work of Father Allen will greatly help on this practical perfection of the Religious life, that we wish it to be largely read. And it is because we are convinced that it will open the eyes of good Christians living in the world to many defects of character, unsuspected by themselves but painfully glaring to the eyes of others, that we

desire for it a much larger circulation than that afforded by the cloister.

A chapter of "Our Own Will, and How to detect it in our Actions" will be a most useful meditation to all who desire "to live holily with Jesus Christ." Outside the walls of a Religious house one rarely meets with any who are much concerned with our spiritual progress. Provided we are what is usually called "good," even our most intimate worldly friends are perfectly satisfied. How seldom is it our happiness in the busy paths of life to find that "pearl beyond all price," the brother in Christ, who for the great love of God will tell us kindly of our faults. There are many enough to ridicule and to mimic them, plenty to assail them in our absence with unpitying scorn or unqualified censure, some who find a malignant gratification in trampling rudely on those weaknesses of character to which we are most sensitive. Self-love and wounded feelings too often prevent us profiting by the hard lessons of instructors such as these.

The little book full of practical wisdom which, in our quiet meditation, helps us to know ourselves, fulfils the noblest task of Christian charity, so far as it can be discharged by a mute guide, and is like the real friend—who patiently, and at much self-sacri-

fice, and it may be the risk of grave offence, tries with a firm but gentle hand to remove the dross that renders the pure gold of honest purpose unworthy of the favor of heaven.

✠ J. D. RICARDS,  
*Ep. and Vic. Ap.*

GRAHAMSTOWN, SOUTH AFRICA,  
August 6, 1884.



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# OUR OWN WILL.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.

THE Catholic Church teaches that no one can be eternally lost, except by his own fault, and that, no matter in what circumstances a man may be placed, he must never try to accuse Divine Providence of carelessness or neglect in his regard, or to say that it allowed him to be too severely tempted, because there is no power in existence great enough to overcome the strength that we get by God's grace, to resist temptation; that is to say, no power outside of ourselves, for we know that God never allows our free will to be interfered with. This Catholic truth is so evident, where it refers to mortal sin and final impenitence, that we wonder how there can be any one so stupid or so depraved as to deny it; and it is just as clear where it refers to venial sin and to the efforts made or neglected to avoid it. In other words,

just as it is our own fault if we commit mortal sin, die impenitent, and are lost eternally, so it is our own fault if we commit venial sins, make little or no effort to avoid them, and thus die, although in the state of grace, yet without having reached the degree of perfection appointed for us by God from all eternity.

The connection between this dogma and that of our free-will is self-evident and necessary; for he who denies either the one or the other is guilty of either denying the unity of God or of making Him the author of evil. Horrible as this error is, it has had many adherents in past ages; and who can say how many it numbers now, when, outside the Catholic Church, the civilized world is divided between the most whimsical and varied forms of heresy, and the most revolting and brutalizing blasphemies of materialism and infidelity? Anything, therefore, that approaches to a wrong conception of these two dogmas is exceedingly dangerous, and any idea or opinion regarding our free will or God's goodness that places bounds upon our powers of resisting temptation or conquering passion, with the help of grace, is a decided foe to progress in spiritual perfection.

Now such wrong conceptions and erroneous ideas or opinions cannot arise, at least so as to have any appreciable influence, in a soul that,

being fully penetrated with the spirit of Catholic faith, values its will only in so far as it is conformable to the Divine Will, and consequently makes unceasing efforts to mortify and crush out every desire of corrupt nature that is opposed to the will of God. In other words, if we try to make our will belong to God, we shall get His grace and assistance ; if, on the contrary, we reduce our will to be a mere slave to our corrupt natural desires, and thus make it, as it were, our own property, to be used solely for selfish ends and without any reference to God's glory, then we forfeit every claim to the Divine assistance, and must take the consequences of being left to our own devices amongst the many enemies that threaten our souls.

Hence the great object of the Religious's life ought to be the mortification of her own will. To this end are directed the Rule and Constitutions of her order, the commands, advice, and warnings of her Superiors, as well as the influence which the virtues, nay, even the very faults and imperfections, of her sisters should have on her. Yet it is not an easy thing to mortify our own will. It is born with us, it lives with us, it leaves us only when the soul leaves the body ; it has a wonderful cunning in intruding itself into our actions and motives ; it is in reality the offspring of the

devil, and it often puts on the appearance of an angel of light ; we think we have conquered and prostrated it, when some unexpected circumstance makes it start up again, full of vigorous self-assertion, impudent and rebellious. It tries to interfere with our holiest actions, it intrudes itself between us and God in the moment of tenderest confidence, and, no matter how sublime an act of virtue may be, no matter how severe a mortification we may inflict on ourselves, we must be always on our guard, lest our own will should come and, like a thief, rob us of all the merit and God of all the glory.

There is no doubt, then, that a good Religious will be ever on her guard against the insidious attacks of her own will, that she will welcome every opportunity the Religious Life offers her of conquering and subduing it, and that she will submit all her actions to rigorous daily scrutiny, in order to see, as far as possible where her own will has tried to prevent her from doing the will of God.

This self-examination, so necessary to the state of perfection, cannot of course be made without God's grace. Therefore fervent prayer is necessary, as well as blind obedience to her Rule and Constitutions and to her lawful Superiors ; and where those two conditions are fulfilled, there can be no doubt that the good

Religious will be able to mortify her own will to such an extent, that it will not hinder her from attaining the perfection God has destined for her. But in order to pray fervently we must earnestly desire the spiritual good we ask from God, or cordially abhor the spiritual evil from which wish to be freed; and in either case it would be of great assistance to us to have such a knowledge of the good or the evil as would help us in our self examination, and serve to render more intense the desires implanted in our souls by God's grace.

The object of this treatise is to show the devout Religious where she can detect the work of her own will in her actions, so that by seeing clearly the harm that will does, she may learn to detest it, and be inspired with an ardent desire to live only according to the will of God.

## CHAPTER II.

## THEOLOGICAL VIEW OF THE SUBJECT.

THE great question of our salvation has been solved, finally and completely, by the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ and its attendant mysteries. We can imagine no work of God, outside His own essence, more perfect, or more adapted to meet any call that could be made on it, through countless ages, by countless myriads of creatures. For no degree of human wickedness can exhaust the infinite merits of the Man-God. More than that: not only are those merits sufficient for the salvation of all the children of Adam, but also they suffice, amply and superabundantly, for their perfection. The merits of Christ, left to themselves, not interfered with in their working, and allowed to exercise their proper influence on those for whom they were gained, ought to close Hell and extinguish the fire of Purgatory. How is it, then, that so many souls are lost? that so many appear before God full of imperfections and venial sins, which prevent them from the imme-



diate enjoyment of the Beatific Vision? It is through our own perverseness; it is because we foully misuse a most precious gift of God, bestowed on us by Him to enable us to receive the full benefits of Christ's plentiful redemption; because we reduce our free-will to the slavery of our sinful nature, instead of elevating it, by corresponding with God's grace, to that glorious liberty which finds its full expression in the Blessed in Heaven.

This wonderful faculty of will, intended by God to be the instrument of so much good, perverted by us into a means of so much evil, gives us a power of election, a freedom of choice. It is seated so deeply, or rather so loftily, in our nature that no mere external force can reach it; nay, not even a spiritual force, though naturally greater or more powerful than we are, can conquer or subdue our free-will—save and except God alone—unless with our own consent. So that, presupposing what the Incarnation has merited for us, our free-will leaves us absolute masters of our destiny; no virtue required of us by God can be too difficult for us to practise; no temptation to sin, no evil habit, too alluring or too strong for us to overcome; so that, if we fail to reach perfection, such as is possible for us in this life, before we die, it is our own fault; if we fall

into mortal sin and die in that miserable state it is our own work—*perditio tua opus tuum*.

Nearly every form of heresy has assailed this doctrine of free-will, with the design of rendering us unaccountable for our acts, and thus removing the restraint which the law of God obliges us to place on those desires which spring from our corrupt nature, and which would certainly tend to our utter destruction if allowed to work unchecked.

The importance of our free-will is, then, easily gathered from the fact that it is, in the present arrangement of God's providence, the only source of merit or blame in His sight. I say *in the present arrangement of Providence*, because it is evident that we cannot merit in any way without the help of God's grace. No matter how good an act may be, if it is performed without any relation to our free-will it is, as far as merit is concerned, worthless; no matter how bad an act may be, if our free-will has nothing to do with it, it is completely harmless. The acts of persons who are asleep or in the delirium of a fever are merely material acts of themselves, and deserve neither praise nor blame, because the free-will is wanting to them. Therefore it is the will that gives character to our actions, stamps them as human, and gives them a significance which they themselves, in their mere

material existence, could never have. Further, the influence of the will is so great that its degree modifies the outcome, the result of every action, as far as merit or blame is concerned. A half-deliberate act can never be, of itself, either a very good or a very wicked one.

Taking all this in connection with the fact that no created power can compel or force our free-will, it is evident that God gave a mighty engine to man when "He placed him in the hand of his own counsel," and that He placed a mighty power under the control of each and every one of us who has the use of reason. But since this power sways our whole nature, it must have its seat in the noblest part of our being, for otherwise there would be no proportion between the influence it exercises and the position occupied by it. The will, therefore, is seated in the reason; that is to say, in such a position that it can command the noblest aspirations and the meanest desires that we can form. Hence it is of itself above all storms of passion and all attacks of temptation; nothing of this kind can reach it, unless it deliberately lowers itself, and yields to the passion or temptation. Thus we can understand how it is that the saints, although they suffered much, both mentally and physically, were always contented and happy, for they kept the will free

from the miseries and failings of nature, and directed all its efforts towards God, giving in that way a supernatural and divine character to their lives which expressed itself in their wonderful peace and contentment.

Further, the different faculties and powers of body and soul that we possess must act, each in its own way, according to the impulse and direction given it by the will. So that it is the will that gives character to the different acts we perform, while the powers themselves that we make use of in the action must be regarded as the servants of the will, bound to do its behest. And if at any time any faculties or powers of body or soul act without waiting for the command of the will, or in disobedience to it, such an act cannot be looked upon as human, and is not attributed to us either to praise or blame. In the moral order, therefore, not only is the will absolutely free, but it has under its command all the other powers we possess, and to such an extent that it can nullify, intensify or hinder the act of those powers, whether they are commenced with or without the command of the will. For instance, I may recite vocal prayers aloud, intending that others should hear me and praise me for my piety and devotion. There is no doubt that in such a case the use I make of the faculties of memory and

speech is a good one in itself, nor is there any doubt that this good act is completely nullified and rendered bad by the perverse direction given to it by my will.

Besides this powerful and mighty will which resides in the reason, in the superior part of our nature, there is another power in us, resembling the will in its mode of action, although widely different from it in every way, as far as excellence and active influence are concerned. This power is seated in the lower part of our nature, and forms what is called the sensitive appetite, or, less properly, the sensitive will. From this spring natural feelings and desires; that is to say, all the inclinations and tendencies of our being which seek to satisfy themselves with what is merely natural, transitory, and animal. So that we might compare it to the instinct of animals, because it is quite capable of acting without any reference to reason. It is self-evident that we can suppose many occasions on which this sensitive will engages in bitter conflict with the rational will.

## CHAPTER III.

## ASCETIC VIEW OF THE SUBJECT.

IN the last chapter we have explained certain abstract truths regarding the nature and power of the faculty of will, as they are taught by Catholic theologians, and we have alluded also to the existence of a sensitive appetite in us, the desires of which are often opposed to those of our rational will. We have now to consider those truths in the concrete, applying them, that is, to our own conduct, so as to have some means of noting, understanding, and even of analyzing the different spiritual phenomena of which our nature is the theatre. But since it is evident that this analysis, to be useful, must be practical, we can declare briefly the subject of the present chapter by saying that we have now to take the *ascetic* view of those truths, which in the former chapter we considered solely in their relation to moral science.

Here we must again repeat that our free, rational will is always in our power, and that

nothing can force it or compel it to act in any given direction unless the Almighty Power of God. Now, since we know that God desires a free, rational service from us, we can easily see that He, as a general rule, does not so compel us to serve Him by supernaturally meritorious acts that we could not, *if we wished*, perform or desire the contrary of those acts. I say, *as a general rule*; because in some exceptional cases the influence that God brings to bear upon the will is so powerful, that the will is fixed immovably in the love of God, as was the case with the Blessed Virgin Mary, and with St. Paul after he was confirmed in grace, although it is quite evident that this influence does not take away liberty of action from those in whose favor it is exercised. Nor is it necessary for us to enter into any of those abstruse speculations which occupy theologians regarding the nature and efficacy of divine grace in its relation to our faculty of free-will. Such questions, however good and useful otherwise, would be out of place in a treatise like this, in which our object is simply to apply certain well-known truths to our own conduct, so that we may be able to detect the weak points in our nature, our disposition or our character, and thus be always on our guard against any ideas, opinions or prejudices

that would hinder us from living as real Spouses of Christ should live.

What we must therefore always keep before our minds is this cardinal truth, that as reasonable beings we must be responsible for every act, thought, and word of ours that has any title to merit or demerit, to praise or blame, supernaturally. And this truth holds good, no matter what may be the diversities of personal character or disposition. The Religious who is naturally good tempered, and she who is of a morose, suspicious disposition, are both responsible before God for their deliberate acts. The degree of responsibility may certainly be effected by natural disposition, but not immediately; for it is only by that natural disposition working on the will that the moral character of an act is lessened or intensified. Thus the naturally good-tempered Religious may sin more grievously by giving way to anger, than one who is of a passionate, irascible temperament, but who tries to conquer her disposition by the force of the will, assisted by grace. And in the same way, the virtue of patience in the good-tempered Religious may not be so meritorious as it would be in one who can practise that virtue only by hard fighting against herself.

In every case, then, the responsibility comes



from the will, and we have not to answer for defects that we cannot possibly avoid, just as we cannot expect a reward for good acts that we do against our will, and without any intention whatever of doing them. This may perhaps help us to understand what is meant by the expressions weak will and strong will. We often hear those words used to denote certain personal characteristics, certain qualities that are found in individuals, but which could not be affirmed of every one, or of the whole human race in general. So that it is evident that these expressions are used to define certain accidental qualities, affecting the will to some extent, but leaving untouched the essential point—the moral responsibility of a human being for his actions. A weak will, then, means one that has every requisite power, including divine grace to practise virtue and conquer temptation, but instead of using its power and corresponding with grace, it gives way at the least difficulty, and yields to temptation, rather than undergo the trouble of combating it. Thus it deliberately and without any compulsion submits itself to passion or feeling, causes the reason to give way before the sensitive part of the soul, and subverts the order established in our nature by the Almighty. A will of this kind is generally found in a Religious

of a melancholy, brooding disposition, who is easily discouraged and put out of sorts at the slightest difficulty; and it is a fruitful source of unhappiness, want of peace, scruples, and discontent. It is also a great mark of worldliness; for it is characteristic of worldly-minded people to yield to every temptation that does not affect their position or prospects in life, because they have not a sufficient appreciation of the value of heavenly things to give themselves any trouble for the sake of securing them.

The distinction between weak and strong will, as it is generally understood by people, does not by any means touch a vital point of the Religious Life. Weak-willed as well as strong-willed people can get the grace of vocation, profit by or neglect it, be good or careless Religious, and so either sanctify their souls or allow them to rot away in tepidity. It is a good thing for Superiors to know which of their subjects are weak or strong-willed, because they must try to have a knowledge of character in order to help the weak and restrain the impetuous. But it should not be a subject of either joy or sorrow to a Religious to have a weak or strong will naturally, provided she corresponds with God's grace. Personal qualities come from God's providence; the good

use of them, or the due restraining of their impulses comes from God's helping grace, and the qualities themselves do not, as such, interfere with the moral responsibility of a human act. The ignorance caused by pride often tempts us to overlook this, and to try to excuse our faults by referring them to some defect or excess in our personal qualities. No excuse is more futile or more opposed to the spirit and teaching of the Catholic Church. If we have confidence in God, or know what it means, we shall easily see and firmly believe that every natural excess or defect in us will be supplied or balanced by God's grace, if we only leave ourselves open to it, and do not try to hinder God's work by impatience or over-anxiety.

Therefore we have no necessity of annoying ourselves about our personal qualities, or trying to find out what they are. We can learn all this from our Superiors, who will certainly tell us everything necessary about ourselves, and who will, besides, tell it to us at the proper time; so that we are under no necessity of hurrying on, or of anticipating the work of God's providence with regard to our understanding or to our will.

But it may be objected that a weak-willed Religious has more difficulty in conquering

temptation than one whose will is strong. That objection cannot stand investigation. We believe as Catholics that we cannot conquer temptation or do anything supernaturally good without the grace of God, and that this grace is always given to us as we need, and of course in the measure in which we need it; for "God is faithful, and makes with temptation issue." So that if we are really desirous of living as becomes our holy state, no personal defects or excesses will prevent us from attaining perfection. Besides, we must remember that we can rarely, if at all, hope to annihilate our passions in this life, so that they can never rise up in us on any occasion whatever. The real subjugation of the passions consists in steady opposition to them, in hopeful resolutions against them, which we must renew a hundred times a day, if necessary, and in heartfelt, confident repentance if we fall. This supposes, too, that we do not grumble because God leaves those passions, those excesses or defects in us, although we are so anxious to get rid of them. There is a saying amongst sailors that if the weather were always fine every old woman might go to sea. It is the storms and exposure to rough weather that try the good seaman and show what he really is; and it is the temptations and personal defects of the

Religious that bring out the strength of the grace of vocation and the goodness and power of God. If by entering a convent we could at once get rid of all our failings, there would not be much merit in our lives, nor would our sacrifice be worth much. St. Bernard says that the Religious Life is a "sweet martyrdom;" and why? Doubtless because the Religious, desiring only eternal things, feels still that the old man of sin is strong, and that the human nature which accompanies us to the grave has much in it that is opposed to the grace of vocation.

What has been said, in the beginning of the chapter, about detecting the weak points of our nature must therefore be understood in this sense, namely, that without annoying ourselves by useless investigations, or trying to find out more than God is willing to teach us, we always leave ourselves open to the action of His grace, or to the advice, warnings, and reproofs of our Superiors, which amount to the same thing, and be content with the knowledge we thus gain. In that way we *practise* confidence in God, and perform a high act of faith.

## CHAPTER IV.

## DESIRES OR ACTS OF THE WILL.

SUPPOSING the importance and power of the will sufficiently explained and proved by what has been said up to this, and considering the many faculties of body and soul that depend on the will for the moral value of the acts performed by them, it is manifestly of great importance to know how to get the most we can out of our will for the glory of God and for our own perfection. If the will had not paid so dearly for sin, this would be an easy task with the help of God's grace; but unfortunately there are many consequences of original sin that render it often a difficult thing to turn the will to God, even with God Himself urging us to do so.

Therefore, since the acts of the will are liable to be influenced, shortened or interrupted by causes that work against divine grace, it is clearly necessary for us to know something about the duration of acts of the will, or what we might call the constancy of a desire.

The proper act of the will, and one that it must perform, as St. Thomas teaches, is to desire happiness. Of course this act is not performed under compulsion, but through a fitness between the movement of the will and the object towards which it tends. Thus the traveller desiring to get to the end of his journey, wishes for a horse, although he is not compelled to do so. It is then through a natural inclination that the will desires happiness. If the happiness, the *good* desired, is true, real, and appointed by God, then the act of the will is holy and supernatural; if not, the act of the will has no claim to be considered as supernatural; for any happiness short of the Beatific Vision, and not tending to it, is incomplete, deceptive, and most unsatisfactory for the faithful Christian. In this way, then, we can distinguish two great classes of acts of the will, two different sorts of desires, which include every act and every desire, without descending to any more specific distinction, and without entering into any question regarding the controversy between theologians about indifferent acts. Of course we do not mean that the will acts in different ways so as to put off its own nature, or that it performs acts unsuited to it considered as a natural faculty; what is meant by the distinction given is, simply, that the *direction* of the act of

the will may be laudable or otherwise, the *good* desired may be either real or only apparent, and the moral character, the value of the desire varies according to its direction. We shall call these two classes of desires supernatural and natural.

It is evident that, if the duration of the desire or act of the will depended only on its object, a supernatural desire would be simply endless, because it tends to the possession of an infinite good, which no amount of desire or fruition could exhaust; so that, if there was nothing to prevent it, the first supernatural direction given to the will by divine grace would call forth an uninterrupted desire, which would last during this life, and be perpetuated in eternity. But we know from sad experience what the will has suffered through sin, how inconstant and inclined to evil it is, and how liable to interrupt its supernatural desires, so that it finds heaven and earth, grace and nature, truth and falsehood, exercising by turns their different influence. Therefore, when we are considering this question of the duration of a supernatural desire, we must remember that we are speaking of a noble faculty, that has been degraded indeed, but still receives such helps from God's grace that it can work in the way and manner, and with the continuity of action designed for



it by God. We have, then, the following state of things to keep before our minds: the will is degraded by sin, but ennobled by grace; it is weakened by sin, but strengthened by grace; it is rendered inconstant by sin, but endowed with firmness by grace; nature inclines it to evil, but grace impels it (without violence) to good. The opposing action of sin and grace, and of nature and grace is carried on during this life without interruption—"the life of man is a warfare on earth;" so that the question of the duration of a supernatural desire assumes a different aspect when we view it in a practical light, from that which it would present if considered simply theoretically. Practically, then, a supernatural desire lasts as long as it is not totally destroyed by mortal sin, or interrupted by venial sin, whether we actually advert to the existence of this desire, or not, for there may be many moments in our lives when we cannot actually remember or represent to ourselves that we have a particular supernatural desire in view, although that desire is really there in our will. Nor do we touch on the controverted question of indifferent acts here; for this treatise is intended for those who, living in a state of perfection, should have their wills constantly turned in the direction of their holy vocation, so as never deliberately to admit any wish or

desire that would even be merely indifferent to their perfection.

The supernatural desire can therefore exist with much opposition on the part of nature and sin; nay more, that opposition tends rather to intensify the desire, because grace is stronger than either nature or sin, and it shows its strength by making use of the enemy's weapons against himself. This fact is brought out strongly in the Holy Scriptures. Because Tobias was pleasing to God, "it was necessary for him to be tried by temptation;" St. Paul was eaten up by the fire of his supernatural desires. We can readily imagine how these desires were increased after he was rapt up to heaven and saw there the hidden things that may not be spoken of by man; and yet what a sore and humiliating temptation he suffered when the angel of Satan buffeted him! In fact, in one way we might measure the sincerity of our supernatural desires by the amount of opposition we find the devil, the world, and the flesh offering to them, provided we overcome the opposition.

We can draw a practical lesson from this that will help to prevent scruples, and will teach us how we are to confide in God, in the fullest sense of the word, and how we are to abandon ourselves to Him, as every Religious should; the lesson is, that we must not expect

impossibilities from ourselves, nor a degree of contemplation or a fixity of desire that cannot be reached under ordinary circumstances in this life. We must take things as we find them, and remember that we are poor, weak, miserable creatures, incapable of any supernaturally good work unless we are helped by God's grace, but that that grace is given to us so generously, that we are enabled to sanctify every act of our daily lives which is not sinful; and so we have much reason to wonder that God has helped us to do so much good, that He is so forbearing as to overlook the unavoidable imperfections of our actions, and that He is so loving as to accept from us even the faintest desire we produce by the influence of His grace. Our task, then, should be to fill ourselves with holy desires, and to make use of everything that happens as a means of lifting up our hearts to God, and to the eternal rewards He has promised us; for in that way alone can we arrive at anything like a real, lasting, uninterrupted act of the will, by which we direct ourselves and everything we have to the glory of God and our own perfection. Nor should this task be a difficult one, generally speaking, for a spouse of Christ. Everything about her reminds her of the special grace of vocation she has received; everything tells her, as plainly as

possible, "that she has not here a lasting city," and exhorts her to place her heart, that is, all her wishes and desires, in heaven, where her only treasure is.

With regard to the duration of natural desires, it is evident that, although they may be lasting in their kind or degree, as opposed to the supernatural, yet their object must be always changed, so that the prevailing character of most natural desires is their inconstancy. Because created things cannot satisfy us, if we gain possession of something we have long coveted, our wish to have it is set at rest, but not the longing after happiness, which prompts us at once to seek for something else. And so continual disappointment causes continual unsatisfied longing. This is the case, not merely with outward, material things, but also with the various opinions and ideas that we form in our minds as individuals possessing certain personal characteristics. The desires that we feel to support those opinions and to carry out those ideas are sure to disappoint and mislead us, if by nothing else, by their very inconstancy. For instance, without any right to do so, I form an opinion of one of my Sisters, and imagine that she should be treated according to that; after a short time, something occurs to make me alter my opinion, and of course I

have to reform my judgment, and to submit to the influence of my own inconstancy—an influence which has often a very depressing effect. We see nothing like this in the lives of the Saints. They had natural desires certainly, for they were human as we are ; but they controlled them, conquered and sanctified them by the intensity of their supernatural desires. We have to imitate their example, and to be courageous in trampling down every wish or tendency of ours that would interfere with the perfection of our holy state. How we are to do this will appear afterward.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE CLAIMS THAT GOD HAS ON OUR WILL.

CONSIDERING the end of our creation, it requires no proof to show that God gave us free-will that we might love Him above all things, and love creatures only in and for Him, so as never to allow them to come between Him and the rights He has over our whole being. For, all creatures belong to God, and He alone has the right to dispose of them absolutely. Now, if a Religious, with all the helps and graces of the Religious Life, is so fully penetrated with this truth that her great and only desire is to use her will, and every other faculty and power of body and soul, in the service of God, there is no doubt that the Almighty will take peaceable possession of His rights in her, and will lead her on in the way best known to Himself, and best suited to her, to the perfection of her holy state. But, if a Religious refuses to acknowledge this truth, or if, believing it, she neglects to act up to its teaching, what happens then? Simply, that

she commits a crying injustice, by usurping for her own selfish purposes the will that God gave her to be employed in His service. For as Father Louis de Ponte tells us in his Meditations (Part I., Med. XXVII.), "Our own will is that which seeks to satisfy our own taste, our own palate, disregarding for the time every other will, whether God's or our neighbor's. It is called our *own* will, because, although God has created it, that I might submit it to His will, I usurp and appropriate it to myself, as if it were *my own* and not God's creature, and therefore use it only for what pleases myself." Here we have the explanation and a sort of general analysis of every deliberate fault committed in a convent; and with the help of this explanation a Religious ought to see and know what she does and whom she offends by every wilful violation of Rule or Constitutions, or by transgressing the commands of her Superiors. It is to prevent this gross injustice being committed against the infinite goodness of God that so much importance is attached in the Religious Life to the complete abnegation and subjugation of our own will. But perhaps this is exaggerated. We know very well that God is absolute master of everything, that our state is a perfect one, and that our Superiors must help us to perfection by every means the Religious

Life affords them. But may we not overdraw the picture? May there not be many little things that we are very fond of doing or possessing, and that God will overlook, although they are not quite in accordance with our Constitutions, or with the arrangements of our Superiors? Our state is one of perfection; but may we not aim too high? Perhaps the Almighty does not *always* urge His claims on our service; perhaps he concedes us the use of our own will in several trivial things, for which He will not exact an account hereafter. Our Superiors must help us on to perfection; but are they obliged to notice every little thing?—Must they correct us for faults that we commit through a little carelessness? Is God so very exacting? Do the graces He gives in religion reach to every little thing we do? To answer all these objections that are made, implicitly at least, by every tepid and careless Religious, we shall have to consider the origin of the claims that God has on our will, and the reason why He has every right to require of us to employ it *only* in His service.

These claims arise, 1st, from the fact that God has created our will. By an act of power that He alone can exercise, He called forth that will from nothing, and He preserves it in existence. He has given to it its manner of being



and action, and He alone can prevent it from losing its power and its existence. So that it is His property by the strongest of titles—creation. And He created it, too, for His own all-perfect purpose; for it would be most absurd to suppose the Almighty God having an ultimate end in view that would be unworthy of His divine perfections, or less perfect than Himself. By this title of creation and preservation the Almighty can claim every deliberate act of our will for His own service; and He *does* claim it too, because otherwise why should He tell us that we must render an account of every idle word? What is meant by an idle word? Is it not every deliberate act that we perform, without in any way taking God into account, to gratify our natural propensities and inclinations at the expense of the Religious spirit? Such an abuse of the will means really that we turn God's own power, as far as it is concerned in creating and preserving our will, against Himself, and that we pervert to our own sole and exclusive use what God has created for His own wise purposes. Truly a crying injustice and a black ingratitude to be guilty of! Yet the Religious who prefers her own will to obedience, even in small things, is guilty of this injustice and ingratitude.

These claims arise, 2d, from acts, other than

creation and preservation, exercised by God on our will, which show forth His goodness and other perfections ; so that, illumined by the light of faith, we cannot doubt that every act of our will should belong to God. These acts of the Almighty Goodness pervade and give a character to our whole lives ; they make us what we are, if we are worth anything at all ; and they enable us to reach the very perfection of our existence in the enjoyment of the Beatific Vision. Hardly had we entered into life when God took possession of us by Baptism. He had a Sacrament ready to meet us at every step ; the magnificent organization of the Catholic Church did not seem to Him too costly to give to us as guide, as teacher, and as friend ; nay, He even raised us above the level of ordinary Christians, and placed us amongst those who are especially dear to Him by the grace of Vocation. And how many helps do we not receive from Him in the convent that we should seek in vain out in the world ! Must we not look upon the advice, the warnings, the reproofs of our Superiors as so many acts by which the Almighty, giving us proof positive of His hatred of evil, endeavors to draw us away from that which is sinful and corrupt in our nature, that His goodness may have more room to display itself in us ? Yet when a Religious is fond of

her own will she disregards all these proofs of God's goodness, and sets up a false goodness of her own making, the creature of her selfish desires, before which she bows down in adoration, like the children of Israel before the golden calf. A worthy act indeed for a Spouse of Christ to perform! Yet it is performed in every deliberate act of disobedience, no matter how small.

These claims which God has on our will arise, 3d, from the acts of the will itself, which finds only misery outside of God. We need only consult our own experience to be fully convinced of this truth. Have we ever heard of any one who found happiness in creatures? Have we ever found it ourselves, although we may have often sought for it outside of God? The fact is, that the very nature of the acts performed by the will requires something infinite to satisfy it fully: there is nothing belonging to us that extends so far as our desires, nor is there any creature that can keep pace with them; and why should God have given such a great capacity to our will if He did not intend to satisfy it, and how could He satisfy it unless by giving us Himself? Therefore, since He has created the will for Himself, His manifest intention is that it should be unable to find any real satisfaction, any positive contentment,

unless in Him. So that He is entitled in strict justice to every act of the will, that is, to every human act we perform during our lives; and if we try to defraud Him of His rights in this respect we are guilty of a crying injustice.

Nor does He forget His claims or neglect to urge them. He has surrounded us with creatures who in their own sphere and according to their different capacities, remind us constantly that God is expecting something from us, that He is disposing of our lives for His own purposes, and that our lives belong by right to the completion of a grand scheme that He Himself has designed and that no one else could carry out. In fact, as far as creatures are considered in their relations to ourselves, we might define them as visible exponents of the Divine Will, by which our Creator intends to claim for Himself all the homage and service that *our* will is capable of rendering Him. Foremost amongst these visible exponents of God's will are our Superiors. They are invested with authority over us by the Catholic Church, the greatest power on earth, in order that they may be able to insist more forcibly on our rendering to God the service due to Him, and to remind us more efficaciously that at every moment of our lives we ought to be serving God. Hence we are

taught that we have not to consider personal qualities or defects in our Superiors, nor have we to obey them because their disposition or manner suits our taste: our respect for them must be founded on the authority they possess "as having to render account for our souls;" our fullest obedience is due to them because they represent the rights that God has over us, and because He has placed our Superiors over us that they may see that we do not neglect to render Him His due.

Besides what we learn from creatures, God Himself often deigns to make known His will to us, and to tell us what He expects from *our* will. Hence come the many graces and inspirations we so frequently receive. Do we not often hear the voice of God speaking to us in no doubtful manner, telling us what we are to do or to avoid? Have we not often reason to wonder at seeing ourselves endowed with unexpected strength in some great temptation? Are we not often astonished that we are able to meet some sudden shock, some unlooked-for trial, with a fortitude that we know we do not possess of ourselves? And we find the first real effect of this strength and fortitude in our will—a fact which shows clearly that all these graces and inspirations are means by which God reminds us of His rights over us,

and strengthens us so that we may give Him His rights.

Hence it is evident that giving the will to God constitutes its greatest perfection, because we cannot imagine any perfection of the will outside of God, since, as we have seen, He has created it for Himself, and is always urging the claims He has to it upon our consideration. So that as God is infinite goodness, and as our will can be satisfied only by an infinite good, we may form some idea of what a wonderful degree of sublimity and dignity God has in store for the will that gives itself to Him, and how far short of that degree everything must fall that is not infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. The perfection of our will takes its form, receives its character, from the divine goodness and omnipotence, and no violence is done to the faculty itself by the help it receives from grace to attain that perfection : so that it is clear that God alone is a worthy object for our will to exercise itself upon ; and since He is infinite, He alone should be the end and aim of every act of the will, of every desire we form. But we cannot secure this proper use of the will unless we give it entirely and without reserve to God ; because, if we keep any portion of it for ourselves, if we have any pet wish, any favorite desires that flatter our nature or suit our

mere natural inclinations, we give a favorable opportunity to the enemies of our souls to defraud the Almighty of His rights; whereas, if our will belongs wholly to God, as far as we can possibly give it to Him by an earnest wish to employ it only according to His good pleasure, then we have every reason to hope that His infinite wisdom and goodness will direct all our desires and actions to the most perfect and noble end they can have. In fact, the whole matter reduces itself to this one principle: our perfection must be the work of God's grace; we can oppose that grace only by our will; let us then give our will to God once for all, and by care and watchfulness and obedience prevent ourselves from taking it back from Him either partially or wholly, and the great work of our perfection cannot fail to be accomplished. But we must be careful not to allow an indiscreet curiosity to interfere with God's work in us. His ways are not ours, He often uses means that are incomprehensible to us, and often leaves us in such a position that we hardly know anything for certain except the truths of faith. Hence we must expect that many spiritual phenomena will occur in us that we shall not be able to explain or understand; many doubts and anxieties may assail us which we can assign to no cause in particular, so that we shall

be a sort of mystery to ourselves; in such cases we must "possess our souls in patience," and obey our Superiors and listen to their advice or reproofs with more humility and submission than ever. We shall thus confirm the gift we have made of our will to God, and prove to Him that we were sincere in making it, and that we do not refuse to face any trial or to bear any cross that He may send us. Would to God that we knew thoroughly and practised sincerely what is meant by abandonment to the will of God! With what giant steps should we not then advance on the path of perfection!



## CHAPTER VI.

## CONSEQUENCES OF REFUSING TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE CLAIMS GOD HAS ON OUR WILL.

WE have seen in the preceding chapter that God has many claims on our will, and that He does not neglect His rights, or allow them to be disregarded by us: on the contrary, where our will is concerned, He shows himself to be really a "jealous God." Now we have to see what happens if we pay little or no attention to these claims of the Almighty.

If a Religious leads a tepid, worldly life, or if she is habitually disobedient in some things, or if she deliberately retains an attachment to certain faults, or certain peculiarities of manner or disposition that she is told to correct, then she denies the Almighty God His just claims, and usurps her will for her own private purposes, although not always, still often enough to interfere seriously with the grace of Vocation, and to render her perfection a matter of impossibility. She has then a good opportunity of studying in her own acts and in her own con-

science what her own will is doing for her ; she can see what it is to turn away from God to creatures, even in little things, and she can learn how unwise, how foolhardy she is to offend the Divine Justice, even in small things. If she examines herself in the spirit of repentance, and with a real desire of amendment, she will have reason also to correct her false judgments with regard to the magnitude and number of her faults, and she will be forced to acknowledge that what she looked upon as a small fault is in reality a very serious matter, and what she thought might be the occasion of a few venial sins here and there, is in fact a spiritual plague-spot, that has taken possession of her soul, and is vitiating and defiling her whole spiritual existence ; thus gradually undermining the life of the soul, and preparing the way for mortal sin and the total loss of grace. And if the Religious is not exactly tepid, in the full sense of the word, if she is only, as she might say herself, a little careless in some things, which do not, she thinks, matter much, because she knows she has a great desire of perfection, although she must acknowledge that this desire is not sufficient to overcome her slothful or careless disposition—such a Religious would find by a sincere and truthful self-examination, conducted according to the spirit

of the reproofs that she must often have received from her Superiors, that her idea of the dignity of her holy Vocation falls far short of the reality, that she is very often guilty of gross ingratitude to God, and that she is incurring a debt with the Divine Justice which it will cost her a great deal of suffering to pay.

Because when we deliberately refuse to give our will to God we create a monster of our own, and, for the moment at least, offer it our homage and devote our faculties to its service. For we must act for some purpose or other; we are rational creatures, who can know what we are doing and why we are doing it; and so we must have an object, an end in view, in all our deliberate—that is, human—acts. The one great end that we are commanded to have in view is God, the one great object for which we *must* strive is happiness, and the only true and real happiness is that given by God, namely, eternal beatitude. God Himself assures us that we cannot find anything but that to make us perfectly, that is, eternally, happy. Now we can gain that happiness only by God's grace, and grace is no use to us if we refuse to work with it, that is to say, if we refuse our will to God. Further, there is a constant fight going on within us between nature and grace. Our natural inclinations, likes and dislikes, our private ideas

and opinions that we form on these inclinations, all strive to confine us within the narrow circle of a mere natural existence, to deprive our actions of all supernatural value, and to entice us to fix our last end in creatures alone. So that when we obey those inclinations, even in small things, it is manifest that we create a monster, that we give undue proportions and a fictitious value to creatures, and that we show by our acts that we doubt the Word of God, who assures us that we are not created for earthly things, and that we can find happiness in Him alone, for whom every act of our lives should be performed.

It is useless, then, to try to excuse our small faults, because they are small, or to say that it is no great matter to refuse the will to God in small things. All faults, no matter how trivial, are in themselves monstrous, and give us quite sufficient reason for heartfelt repentance. It is true that venial sins are easily forgiven, and that they do not deprive us altogether of grace or condemn us to hell; but that is due to the infinite mercy of God, and to His wonderful patience in bearing with us, and not to anything that is good or harmless in venial sin itself.

The tepid or careless Religious may now see what she does when she refuses her will to

God and keeps it for herself, her own inclinations, and her own ideas. Let her consider her act, too, in relation to the perfection to which she has bound herself, by a solemn promise ratified by the Church, and she will learn that that perfection, even as it is possible for her to practise it here in this life, does not admit of a deliberate and habitual transfer of her allegiance from God to creatures, even in small things, and that even an occasional fault or a slight rebellion of the will means unfaithfulness, though momentary, to the obligations of her holy state. If she could be satisfied with being merely a good woman, without any higher aspirations than what ordinary good people in the world have, there might be some excuse for small faults, on account of the many worldly cares that would arise to distract the mind and seduce the will away from God; but in a Religious, a Spouse of Jesus Christ, there cannot be any such excuse, because her whole life in the convent, being arranged according to Rule, or to the commands of Superiors, is brought into immediate relation with God, and if she deprives Him of His lawful influence over any of her actions, by no matter how slight a rebellion of the will, it is evident that her ingratitude to God is much greater than that of ordinary people in the world who commit the same fault.

Therefore, the Religious who is really anxious to give her will to God, so that she may constantly love and desire Him above all things, must not on any account try to excuse her faults, or to gloss over her imperfections or defects, either in character or action. For although we may have many defects that we are ignorant of, and for which we are, consequently, not accountable, once we know of the existence of a defect, our responsibility with regard to it commences, and the very worst way to meet that responsibility is to try to ignore or forget our faults by excusing them. Nor must we avoid merely that gross excess of self-will which fills our mouths with excuses whenever a reproof or warning is given to us by a Superior or a Sister: we must descend into our own hearts, and explore the hidden and secret nooks and corners of our own opinions and natural desires, and see what it is that makes us refuse to give our will to God—what it is that makes us multiply our faults, and when we have found it, we must expose it to our Superiors or our Confessor, and be guided entirely by their advice. Even in making this examination we should take as our starting-point, not our own fancies regarding our faults, but what our Superiors tell us, because, as we have to fight against a very treacherous foe,

our own will, which is subdued by obedience alone, we must begin subduing it by placing ourselves entirely at the disposal of those who represent the claims that God has on us, and we must perpetuate and ensure our victory over it by the same means. It is true that all this requires violence to ourselves, that it is hard to accomplish, and that it is desolating to our nature to look forward to; but "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence"—the violence especially that is required to make a Religious forget herself in order to seek only God and her Sisters for God's sake. And what glorious results may we not expect from our honest endeavors to correspond with grace in conquering our own will! For God will not be outdone in generosity: when He sees that we acknowledge His claims, and do our best to satisfy them, He bestows His graces so largely on us that we are enabled to do the necessary violence to ourselves, in such a spirit of utter submission to the Divine Will, that every little sacrifice we make is increased in value tenfold.

Finally, if we refuse to give our will to God, we may bid adieu to anything like happiness or contentment in the Religious Life; because the only happiness attainable in the convent cannot exist with our own will. Since we are

unable to go through this life without having, at least occasionally, some enjoyment, some pleasure, some feeling of satisfaction, of whatever kind it may be, God's infinite wisdom has so arranged matters that each state of life has its own peculiar sources of contentment, which act like a spur and an encouragement to us to induce us to perform the duties of the state wherein we are placed. Now if by our free-will, helped by Divine grace, we embrace a state which obliges us to despise creatures for the sake of the Creator, and to give up the world that we may gain heaven, we resign at the same time all right to any mere natural contentment or feeling of satisfaction that we could get from using creatures according to our own fancy; but we do not free ourselves from the decree of Providence, which renders it necessary for us to have some consolation in this life. The Goodness of God, then, supplies the earthly comforts or consolations that we have renounced for His sake, by a superabundance of heavenly peace and contentment, which far surpasses anything that mere creatures could give us. So that all our lawful enjoyments or pleasures in the convent become supernaturalized, and are thus raised to the dignity of our holy state, and if they lost that supernatural character by any excess on our part, they



would cease to be enjoyments, and would become the occasion of remorse. The secret, then, of the happiness of the Religious Life, that is such a puzzle to worldlings, is the deep-seated peace of the soul, which results from the complete sacrifice which the good Religious makes of her will to God. This peace is a puzzle even to our arch-enemy, the devil: he cannot understand, he cannot touch it with any of his temptations or snares; it is simply beyond him altogether, and it will remain so as long as our will remains united to God. Hence the Holy Scripture says, "The obedient man,"—obedience being the perfect expression of the union of our will with God in this life,—"the obedient man shall speak of victories." He may be assailed by temptations without number, his passions may continually assault him, his imagination may be tormented by doubts and anxieties, but it matters nothing to him; he overcomes all, and preserves his soul in peace, in spite of the disturbing elements that are raging around him, as long as he gives his will to God. But if he refuses to do so, and usurps his will for his own private ends, then the whole thing is changed, the peace of soul disappears, and can be regained only by heartfelt repentance. It is simply impossible, then, for a Religious to find happiness or contentment

in having her own way, in carrying out her own will; because, by refusing her will to God, she renounces her right to the contentment and consolation that He offered her in exchange for her will; nor can she regain what she has lost until she repents sincerely and makes proper atonement for her fault, according to her Rule and Constitutions, or the orders of her Superiors.

Besides the deplorable consequences that follow directly from refusing the will to God, there is another no less disastrous, that we must not lose sight of, and that is the fearful multiplication of venial sins through habit or negligence. When we accustom ourselves to do our own will in certain things,—for instance, by disobeying some of the Constitutions, or by neglecting to carry out the commands of our Superiors,—although these things do not of themselves bind under pain of sin, yet since we know that deliberate disobedience has nearly always some kind of venial guilt attached to it, we of course place ourselves in the constant danger of sin; and what can we expect but to fall? But even if no sin were committed by the repeated acts of disobedience, these acts must lead to sin. For why do we refuse to obey? Is it not because we prefer doing our own will to the will of God?

Now our own will is the offspring of our natural likes and dislikes, of our passions, and of our evil inclinations; that is to say, of the very things that the devil makes use of to lead us to sin. What else, then, can we expect but sin from following our own will? What a fruitful source of venial sin have we not here! Further, sin and ignorance go together; the one follows the other as surely as darkness is caused by the withdrawal of light: so that, where we habitually follow our own will, the devil has little trouble in drawing the veil of culpable ignorance and spiritual blindness over our understanding, and in thus enabling us to commit countless venial sins without any thought of repenting of them, no matter how our Superiors may remonstrate with us. Is it any wonder, then, that we do not advance in perfection, and that the years and years that we perhaps have spent in the convent have not made us a bit more fervent or more earnest in the Divine Service? What can we expect but sin and misery and ignorance when we reject the will of God, even in small things, and make a law of our own will to be the guide and motive of our actions? We should therefore pray fervently and constantly that God may deign to take our wills into His holy keeping, to make His will the

only motive of all our actions, and, as the Church prays in one of the Collects of the Mass, "Nostras etiam rebellos ad te compelle voluntates," if He sees that we are inclined to rebel against Him in anything, that He may, in His mercy, pour such a large infusion of His grace into our souls that we may have no wish or desire except to do and suffer what is pleasing to Him. This is the only desire that a Spouse of Christ should have, for it is the only one that fits in completely with her holy Vocation, and consequently the only one of whose fulfilment she can have perfect confidence, to her great contentment and satisfaction.

## CHAPTER VII.

WHAT RESULTS FROM FOLLOWING OUR OWN  
WILL.

THE human will is such a noble and powerful faculty, that its influence is sought for by every intelligent being who knows its worth. Even God Himself, who gave us our will, is most pleased with us when He sees that we try to give it back to Him, as it were, by employing it wholly in His service. The angels and saints, too, rejoice at seeing the will of man, on earth, helping them in their glorious task of promoting the honor and glory of God. But besides God and His angels and saints, there are other intelligent beings in the universe to whom the human will is also an object of interest, and who are exceedingly anxious to secure it for their own purposes. These beings are the devil and his angels, who, with their ministers on earth, the world and the flesh, prepare many a snare, lay many a trap to catch the unwary Religious, and to entangle her will in the meshes of vain and fruitless de-

sires that render her perfection impossible and even her salvation doubtful. For where the will refuses to recognize its lawful Lord, it will soon find a tyrant to enslave it and reduce it to the worst and most degrading bondage. Therefore St. Peter says, "Be sober and watch: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour; whom resist ye, strong in faith." It is from the grace of faith that we get true knowledge to oppose to the cunning and deceit of Satan, and it is through the same grace that the efforts we make, with the divine assistance, to avoid his snares are successful. But neither faith nor any other grace will save or sanctify us against our will, and so it behooves us to be watchful. We are carrying a precious treasure, our free-will, in a fragile vase; the demons envy us the possession of that treasure as long as we use it in the service of God, and therefore they spare no effort to induce us to squander it foolishly and criminally on worthless and unlawful things, so that God, whom they hate, may be deprived at least of the glory He would receive from the proper use of our free-will.

If we neglect the advice of St. Peter, and allow our will to become, even in small things, alienated from God, we deprive it of its most

powerful protector and best friend, and leave it unaided and alone to fall a prey to the snares of its worst enemy. For if the devil finds our will unoccupied by God, he can make an easy entrance into it, and do us a great deal of harm. It might be well for us to know, as far as possible, how that harm is effected.

We have every reason to believe that, without a special revelation, the devil cannot have any true knowledge of many acts that we perform: he may form an opinion of what he sees outwardly, and his long experience and great natural powers no doubt assist his perverse will in trying to destroy and corrupt the good acts we perform. And, with regard to a soul in the state of mortal sin, it would be difficult for us to place any bounds to the knowledge which the demon has of the workings, the motives, and the guiding, or rather misleading, influences of that soul, as long as it repels and rejects every movement of grace and repentance. Because the soul in mortal sin belongs to the devil, in so far that, like him, it rejects God as its last end. But when the soul is in the state of grace there must be many things in it that are a puzzle to him, and which, with all his craft and cunning, he cannot find out. For such a soul elicits many supernatural acts of the will by good desires and resolutions,

and especially by acts of the love of God ; its understanding is very often employed with the mysteries of faith in a manner and with a degree of intensity that could come only from the help of divine grace ; and the understanding and will act and react on one another, producing thereby many spiritual acts that redound to the greater glory of God, and help us to the end for which we are created. Now, such spiritual phenomena as these are mainly the work of the Almighty God, and they are intended by Him (in which intention the soul, as we suppose, coöperates) to lead us to a supernatural end, so that such acts are essentially supernatural: they do not belong to the mere natural order as we understand it, nor do they belong to the order natural to the demons, although their nature is in itself higher and more powerful than ours. Their knowledge therefore cannot reach to the full intelligence of such acts, no more than their power can reach to the conquering of our will, as long as we choose to resist that power. We see an example of this in holy Job. The tempter was jealous of the favor which this holy Patriarch enjoyed with the Almighty God ; he was especially enraged at the watchfulness displayed by him in offering sacrifices so regularly, to atone for any sins that might have been committed



by his children in their banquets; for this watchfulness, recommended afterwards by St. Peter, effectually foiled all the tempter's evil suggestions, and forced him to confess himself conquered by the rectitude of will which the holy patriarch displayed. Still he was evidently ignorant of the great degree of resignation to the Divine Will which was Job's chief motive. His natural cunning could not follow up the sublime workings of grace in a will that was thoroughly submissive to God, and so he stopped short at a point that his malice would naturally suggest to him, namely, that the foundation of Job's piety was simply the temporal prosperity with which God had blessed him. Hence came the persecutions and severe trials that God permitted for the greater good of his faithful servant. This example should convince us that we have little reason to dread the severest assaults of temptation, as long as our will remains firmly united to God; for the devil cannot do more against us than his knowledge of our circumstances enables him to do, and this knowledge, as we have seen, is in many instances very circumscribed. No temptation, then, should ever cause us to lose courage, or to doubt that God is turning all our trials into good.

There is, however, one part of our nature of

which we may say that the devil knows even more than we do ourselves, and into which he can nearly always enter when it pleases him: that part is the seat of our natural inclinations, of our likes and dislikes, of those purely natural affections, sympathies, and aversions which even clever and unscrupulous men make use of, for their own selfish ends, in their fellow-men. How often have we not heard of people being made fools of by those who knew how to play upon their natural inclinations! Much more eagerly and with far greater perversity than any mere mortal do the evil spirits play upon our inclinations, excite them if they are bad, turn them away from God if they are naturally good, and use them in every possible way in order to get a hold upon our will. And the tempter shows a great deal of craft in going to work where there is question of misleading a soul that is determined to serve God, and rather to die than commit a mortal sin. He does not propose at first anything grievously sinful, for such a temptation would at once unmask his artifices and ensure his defeat: on the contrary, he tries to enlist the coöperation of our natural inclinations in anything, no matter what, as long as it is something of his own choice, and when he secures that, his effort is to lead us on farther and farther, until we

find ourselves at last so entangled in his meshes that it is only with great difficulty we can break through them. The tempter's object is, then, to work up our natural likes and dislikes, until he gets us to form some decided opinions of our own on various matters. When we allow these opinions to take such hold of us that, for the sake of them, we are prepared to disobey our Superiors, or in any way to prefer our own will to God's will, then it is clear that the tempter will have an easy victory over us, and that he will lead us into many a venial sin, if not even into mortal sin. Thus it is that the Religious who refuses her will to God abandons herself, with all her natural weaknesses, to the wiles of Satan, who is only too anxious to furnish her with opinions of her own against obedience, and to help her to assert those opinions in flagrant violation of the respect due to superior authority. No doubt, as St. Thomas teaches, our bodily temperament or disposition is often the cause of natural opinions, likes or dislikes, and it often puts difficulties in the way of obedience, often inclines us to withdraw our will from God, even without any temptation of Satan being necessary to make us rebel; but it is manifest that such natural inclinations, if we oppose them, as soon as we advert to their attacks, are not sinful, because the authority

of the will is wanting to them and hence the Angelic Doctor lays down, as a general conclusion, that the acts of the sensitive appetite (the natural likes or dislikes, inclinations, etc., mentioned above) are subject to the dominion of reason, although frequently they are produced in a sort of material way, without any reference to reason. (Cf. St. Thomas, 1<sup>ma</sup> 2<sup>dæ</sup>, q. xvii., a. vii.)

It is against these natural inclinations that the true spouse of Christ has to fight, if she is really anxious to keep her will free from the contamination of sin. For, besides leaving her exposed to the attacks of the devil, these inclinations, if not constantly watched and resisted, will tend to fill her with worldly and selfish ideas. It is truly astonishing what a hold the world and its ways have on us. We have fled the world at the call of God, we know that it has nothing fit for a Religious, we learn even to fear and abhor it; and still, if we analyze most of the faults we commit, we shall find some opinion or maxim prevalent in the world at the bottom of most of them. And here I do not speak of excesses or defects of personal character which lead to faults, but of habits deliberately adopted and persevered in, of modes of thinking opposed to the religious spirit, and which we refuse to give up; of a

tendency to judge and criticise, to approve of and find fault with, which show that a Religious can be worldly-minded in many things, although she may have spent years in the convent. But they also prove that a Religious addicted to such faults is careless, and that she does not watch over her natural inclinations sufficiently. Because the Religious Life, being the embodiment of the opposition of Christ to the world, offers every facility for conquering anything like worldliness, and where these facilities are neglected there is an evident want of watchfulness. Therefore a Religious whose hatred of the world is sincere will not shirk the trouble necessary to oppose and overcome all habits and prejudices that render obedience difficult. She will also carefully avoid everything that might tend to foster a worldly spirit. If her duties bring her into contact with lay-people, she must beware of making them her confidants, or of speaking with them on any subject that does not concern the glory of God, the advantage of the Order, or the requirements of Christian charity. Still less should she desire the esteem or the sympathy of people in the world. A desire of that kind, deliberately admitted, would prove to a certainty that she has not the true spirit of the Religious Life, and would be a fruitful source of scandal to good Chris-

tians, who have every right to expect a thorough detachment from earthly things, in all those who receive the grace of Vocation to the Religious Life.

Finally, the Religious who follows her own will may be certain that self-love and self-esteem will gain great power over her, and will place a most formidable obstacle in the way of her perfection. This unfortunate self-love is a consequence of sin, and it bears all the characteristic marks of its origin. For it is a love of self, on account of self; an act, therefore, which excludes God and ignores Him, and by which we often substitute ourselves in place of God. Consequently, it leads us on to claim for ourselves and our own opinions, what really belongs not to us by any title, and thus we inflict a wrong, an injustice, on the Almighty in the persons of our Superiors, His representatives. It is a false love, which concentrates our sympathies, our desires, and our affections on the vain and disappointing things of earth; it is a degrading love, which confines our intentions and aspirations within the narrow circle of a merely natural life, or directs us to seek for supernatural things by absurd and impossible means. As a necessary consequence of self-love, we must also expect that self-esteem will assert its sway over us to such an extent as to

make us look upon ourselves as superior to others. Nothing, then, will have any worth in our eyes unless it is conformable to our peculiar opinions and feelings; we shall give our esteem to no one who does not think as we do, even in worthless and trivial matters. So that our standard of judgment will not be God's eternal truth, but the whims and fancies of our imagination, or the prejudices which for the moment happen to have most influence with us. Thus, our faith is put in the background, our hope depends on the humor in which we find ourselves, and our charity or love of God is grudgingly proved, and is maintained only with difficulty. Nor is there any hope of our enjoying peace of soul under such circumstances, for where we love ourselves foolishly, we cannot bear correction or reproof; nor can we find any happiness as long as we refuse, through self-love and self-esteem, to submit to our Superiors.

The Religious who desires to avoid all these dangers, and to rise superior to any attack of the devil, the world, and her own self-love, will seek in all her actions to mortify her own will; for it is only by means of our own will that the enemies of our souls can do anything against us. As long as we keep the will firmly united to God, every attack of the Evil One, every al-

lurement of the world, and every movement of self-love will only give us an additional opportunity of showing forth the power and goodness of God, by the victory that His grace will enable us to gain. And since we cannot reach perfection all at once, since the weakness of nature cannot be overcome unless by patience and perseverance, if we commit any faults or forget our good resolutions we must immediately repent, and resolve to serve God with more fervor than ever. And as the author of the *Spiritual Combat* says, we must renew our repentance and resolution a hundred times a day if necessary; for God, who sees the heart, and knows the frailty of human nature, will accept our sorrow and prevent our faults from doing us harm.

As peace of soul is the reward, here below, of giving our will to God, and also a great source of strength to us in the mortification of our own will, we cannot do better than take deeply to heart the following words of the *Imitation of Christ*: "In everything attend to thyself, what thou art doing, and what thou art saying; and direct thy whole intention to this, that thou mayest please Me alone, and neither desire nor seek anything out of Me. And as for the sayings and doings of others, judge of nothing rashly; neither busy thyself



with things not committed to thy care; and thus may it be brought about that thou shalt be little or seldom disturbed. But never to feel any trouble at all, nor to suffer any grief of heart or body, is not the state of this present life, but of everlasting rest." (*Imitation*, b. iii., chap. xxv.)

## CHAPTER VIII.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR OWN WILL.

AS the will, directed to its perfection and united with God, takes, as it were, the form of all its acts from God, so that those acts are looked upon by Him as supernatural and deserving of eternal life; so when we turn away the will from its perfection, and leave it to be swayed by creatures, its acts and desires take their form from the leading influence; but, as we have seen already, natural desires are inconstant and vary with their objects, so that, when we take away our will from God, and use it only to suit our own taste, we must expect to find it assuming different characters, according to the different worthless or evil desires to which we direct it. Our highest idea of perfection is unity; we see at a glance that there can be only one God, for it is impossible that there can be two infinitely perfect beings. Further, any relative perfection that may exist in creatures must, somehow or other, reflect this all-perfect unity of God, for it is in Him-

self that the Creator finds every goodness that He gives to His creatures. Speaking, therefore, of human acts, it is clear that the highest and best act of which man is capable, under any circumstances, must have this character of unity stamped upon it. Take, for instance, any act of Our Divine Lord, during His life on earth, and we shall at once refer it to the great design, which was the final object of the Mystery of the Incarnation, namely, the accomplishment of the Will of His Father in Heaven. During all the various stages and incidents of Our Lord's earthly career this great purpose stamped itself on everything He did. It unified His life, so to speak, and presented it to His Eternal Father as the most perfect of human lives. Now He has left us the same object to strive for, and the same means, the human will assisted by divine grace, to gain it, and He tells us, over and over again, that we must do as He did, and each in our own degree, and according to the measure of the helps given us by God, use our utmost endeavors to accomplish the will of God in all things, that we may approach as nearly as possible to that supreme perfection of which He is our model. Truly there is a vast difference between the fulness of the Holy Spirit, which Our Lord's soul enjoyed, and the graces that

God in His great mercy deigns to bestow on us unworthy sinners ; just as there is between the capacity of our will to correspond with grace, and the uninterrupted union which existed between the human and the Divine Will in Our Blessed Lord : yet it is still true that He worked with His human will and divine grace to fulfil the one object of His life. Following His example, then, we can attain, in our own degree, this perfection of unity by giving our will altogether to God and to His love and service. But when we follow our own opinions and refuse our will to God, it is evident that we recede from this perfection and bring about confusion and disorder in our actions, so that our lives are characterized by inconstancy, discord, and inconsistency. For, where we refuse to follow any guidance but the momentary whim or fancy that possesses us, we cut ourselves loose from the only principle that could impart stability or uniformity to our actions.

Since there is such an endless variety in personal qualities and character, some loving naturally what others detest, some approving of and praising as good what others condemn and avoid as evil, it would be manifestly an impossible task to follow up our own will in all its vagaries, and to describe it under all its differ-

ent shapes ; for the objects on which it can exercise its desires and dislikes are innumerable. Yet, as far as the individual responsibility of each one of us is concerned, we can and must trace the working of our own will in every wrong act we do, for God gives us special graces to that effect, particularly in the warnings and reproofs of our Superiors. In fact, if we distrust ourselves as we ought, we might easily be afraid of finding our own will mixed up even with our best actions. For there is no doubt that it is the one great enemy of our perfection, and that the devil can do nothing to injure us without it. Even if it should happen that we have a difficulty in tracing some fault to its cause, or in finding out where our own will principally asserts itself in any act, we have always our Superiors or our Confessor to refer to, and we can rest fully satisfied with their judgment, knowing that God will protect them from error in a matter of such serious import to us. If we were out in the world, distracted and preoccupied with business cares, we could easily imagine that this would be a difficult task for us, but since God has called us to the Religious Life, He gives us also whatever means of perfection our holy state requires. We have to see, therefore, what are the principal marks by which we may

detect our own will in our actions, so that we may labor all the more earnestly to mortify it.

St. Ambrose (lib. i., De vocat. Gent. c. 2, apud De Ponte. Medit., vol. i.) lays down the following as the principal: Our own will, he says, is *blind* in desires, *puffed-up* in honors, *anxious* in cares, *uneasy* in suspicions, *more eager* for glory than for virtue, *more desirous* of fame than of a good conscience, and *more miserable* when it has the things it longs for than when it is without them, for *experience* increases its *misery*. All these marks bear the evident impress of the lamentable consequences of sin: they show what a miserable creature man is when he presumes to be his own guide and director, even in small things, and they prove, with certainty, that we depend absolutely and entirely on the mercy and providence of God for every good that we have. But is it not going too far when we attribute such characteristics as these to the slight faults that are committed by Religious? How could we say, for instance, when we are guilty of a small act of disobedience, that we are blind in our desires, or more eager for glory than for virtue? Such things might be affirmed of an ambitious worldling who has no thought beyond this life, and whose desires are centred in the honors that the world can give him; but

can they be said of a Religious who has left all in order to serve God and who is really anxious to live in conformity with her holy Vocation? To answer this question we must remember that faults or sins, no matter how small relatively, are all evil, and that the smallest deliberate faults are opposed to the Divine Perfections; consequently, in small offences we have the germs of great ones, and venial sin is the quickest and surest road to mortal sin; so that it is well for us that God's mercy is so great, and that He has such patience with our weakness. Besides, we may affirm of Religious what St. Bernard says of priests: *Nugae in ore secularium nugae sunt, in ore Sacerdotis blasphemiae*—Trifles are only trifles in the mouths of worldlings, but they become blasphemies when uttered by priests, or by Religious who have bound themselves by vow to the service of God. "To whom much is given, from him much shall be expected;" the spouse of Christ receives numerous and special graces in her holy Vocation; it is only right, then, that she should avoid not merely mortal sin, or habitual venial sin, but also every fault and imperfection that savors in the least of the world, or of a love of self. For, must she not immolate herself on the altar of Divine Love every day of her life, by denying herself and living in obe-

dience? Let her see, then, that the sacrifice she offers is an unspotted one, and let her learn not to gloss over or palliate her faults, but to look at them as they are, in all their deformity and hideousness, that she may conceive a proper horror of them.

But this work of analyzing our faults and tracing the evil effects of our own will cannot be accomplished by mere natural means; the greatest intellects that ever were could not undertake it successfully without the help of divine grace. Therefore we must pray, and pray unceasingly, that God may deign to teach us whatever He wishes us to know about ourselves; avoiding at the same time everything in the shape of over-eagerness or anxiety, for are not our fortunes in the hands of the Lord: *In manus Domini sortes meæ?* This and every other act of our lives we must begin and end with confidence in God and mistrust in ourselves, as the Author of the Spiritual Combat tells us, and we may rest assured that everything will end favorably to the greater glory of God, and to our perfection.

In the following chapters we shall consider the characteristics of our own will in detail.



## CHAPTER IX.

## OUR OWN WILL IS BLIND IN ITS DESIRES.

ONE of the most deplorable consequences of original sin is spiritual blindness. The foul and noxious vapors of ignorance and error enveloped the minds of our first parents after their fall and robbed them of the pure light and the clear knowledge and appreciation of supernatural truths, which they enjoyed as long as they persevered in innocence; not altogether, certainly, but to such an extent that the knowledge they had in their fallen state was as ignorance and blindness compared to that which they lost. This blindness was cured partially, and as far as was necessary for their salvation and even, as we may readily believe, for their perfection, by God's promise to send them a Redeemer and to forgive them, through Him, the sin they had committed, if they truly repented of it. But the deep wound inflicted by sin was never thoroughly healed, and so we, the descendants of Adam and Eve, are born in a spiritual blindness that only the

waters of Baptism can remove. That holy Sacrament works so effectually, that original sin is completely taken away, but it does not restore all that we lost through the fall of our first parents, and thus it happens that as long as we are alive, we must fight against the consequences of sin in our own nature, and especially against that darkness of the intellect that dulls and deadens our perception of spiritual and supernatural truths. We could not keep up this fight against spiritual ignorance and blindness even for a moment, without the assistance of divine grace; when we correspond with grace to the best of our ability, we may be assured of victory, but when we shrink from the obedience and submission that God requires of us, and prefer to do our own will, we give ourselves up to the influence of the spiritual blindness, and must only expect to suffer from it. We shall now try to see how it acts in the disobedient or careless Religious.

When she who has vowed to obey her Superiors for God's sake disregards or neglects her obligation, she prefers, for the moment at least, what this world can give her, to the spiritual blessings that God has promised her. Thus she takes her will away from God, refuses to acknowledge the claims He has on it, and her desires becomes merely natural and earthly.

The due restraint of such desires should come from the reason helped by grace, but she has rejected grace, and consequently her reason is unable to exercise any control over her desires. Now we have seen already that natural desires vary and change constantly, on account of the disappointment which their fulfilment is sure to bring with it; the reason ought to learn from such experience that natural desires are unprofitable, but the lesson cannot help it as long as it refuses to submit to grace. Thus the will, instead of turning itself altogether away from things that can only disappoint it, becomes filled with a sort of animal and irrational eagerness to find some happiness or good of its own fancy, of its own creation, and it rushes on madly in pursuit of that fantastic happiness, that imaginary good, blindly ignoring and disregarding the distinction between right and wrong, provided it can gratify its unreasonable desire. While the will is in this state, it acts blindly, because it sees neither reason nor conscience, but allows itself to be dragged along, unresistingly, by some passion or inclination that both reason and conscience must condemn. Besides that, our spiritual energies become unduly biassed by the tyranny which we exercise over them by our own will, not allowing them to work for

God, but compelling them to assist us in our disobedience. The imagination presents us with all sorts of unreal and fanciful pictures, the memory betrays us by distorting facts and attributing them to wrong motives, while the understanding wastes its energies in the pursuit of an unreal and purely imaginary truth. It requires no argument to show that such a state of the soul is a very dangerous one; for it gives the tempter an advantage over us that he is not slow in seizing, by rendering us incapable often of distinguishing between the assaults of passion and the impulses and warnings of right reason. Suppose the case of a Religious who does her own will because she has some dislike to her Superiors. Interpreting everything according to the blind desires that actuate her, she even tries to persuade herself that she is doing right in disobeying, because it is a good thing for a Superior to learn her own faults, to see that she might stretch her authority too far, and to be careful always to suit her command to the taste and inclination of her Sisters. These and similar vain and absurd excuses are suggested in abundance by the devil, who is only too anxious to make use of every opportunity that we offer him of destroying or lessening the influence of faith in our souls. And we know from sad experience

that when we are bent on doing our own will, it is little matter to us that the reasons we bring forward in support of our perversity are founded neither on truth nor justice. Even when compelled by the force of truth to confess that we do wrong by following our own will, the natural desire that attracts us sometimes gains such strength, that this confession of the truth is more material than real; we make it because we cannot help ourselves, wishing all the while that the truth were otherwise. Thus our own will becomes so blinded by its desires that it wages war on truth itself when it can no longer disguise, under the name of truth, the falsehood it longs for.

God has given us reason that we may obey His holy law in a manner suited to our dignity as human beings. As long as reason holds its proper place, assisted by divine grace, no temptations or difficulties that may arise can interfere with the merit of our actions, or prevent them from being acceptable in the sight of God, so that the divine law becomes the ruling motive of our lives, and the various accidents and changes of human existence are only so many steps, by which we ascend to God, and free ourselves more and more from the shackles of passion and earthly vanity. The light of grace then illumines our whole being, and we

get a clear perception of supernatural truths, as well as a wonderful power of appreciating their importance; the consequence of which is, that difficulties, temptations, and natural weakness only increase the firmness of our determination to serve God, and Him alone. But when we degrade the reason to be the mere slave of our own desires, by following our own will, we deprive ourselves of the guidance of this heavenly light, the divine law loses its power over us, and we make a law for ourselves, founded, not on the claims of justice or the rights that God has over us, but upon the whims and vagaries of our own humor, and upon the unjust and unreasonable claims of passion and prejudice. Thus we make our passions the rule of our conduct, and open a wide door to the enemy of our souls, through which he will not fail to enter, so as to trade on our blindness and perversity as far as possible. When this blindness is only transitory, as in the case of a single act of disobedience of which we soon repent, it is in itself bad enough, and could do us a great deal of harm if God were not so merciful and so patient in our regard; but when it is the result of habit, the expression and the effect of an attachment to some opinion or prejudice, which we make little or no efforts to overcome, then there is no doubt that

the enemy will gain many a victory over us, and will so pervert our judgment that in many instances our own opinions will take the place that ought to be occupied by the truths of faith and their consequences.

The effect of this blindness of the will in its desires may be seen in the Religious who is dissatisfied with her Superiors, because, as she thinks, they do not treat her as they treat her Sisters. This case may explain, better than any other, how far the devil can pervert our judgment, when we place ourselves in his power by doing our own will. Every Religious must know that she enters the convent to do the will of God, that she is not to seek for any satisfaction or pleasure except what He gives to her, and that she is to look for no approval, praise, or favor except from Him alone. Her Superiors are God's representatives in her regard, their duty is to see that she satisfies the claims that He has on her love and service, and to this end they must strive to bring all her actions under the protection of the great virtue of obedience. They have, therefore, to prescribe for her what they conscientiously think to be best suited to advance her perfection, and their main object in all their commands and reproofs must be the will of God. Now it is evidently impossible for any Religious to have

either the right or the ability to judge her Superiors or prescribe to them what they should do, either with regard to herself or to her Sisters; neither can she know what sort of treatment is best for herself, or what kind of manner or action on the part of her Superiors is best suited to advance her spiritual interests, otherwise she might have remained in the world and managed her own affairs altogether; so that when she does presume to judge those whom God has placed over her, it is an evident proof that she is suffering from spiritual blindness, that she views things in the wrong light altogether, and that the devil has so befooled her, by means of her own will, that she has forgotten the real reason why she entered the convent, and fancies that she has a right to do as she pleases.

Another instance of the evil effects of this blindness may be seen in the Religious who has become so attached to her own will in some particular thing, that her Superiors are obliged to be very careful in what they say to her, lest they should make her more obstinate or more indisposed to submit to their authority. The difficulty that she has in submitting to anything opposed to her favorite idea makes it often necessary for them to pass over in silence



faults that, in an ordinary case, would merit reproof; this unfortunate necessity, too, tends to strengthen her in her opinion, and when at last something occurs that cannot be tolerated, and her Superiors are obliged to correct her, she gives way to indignation and resents the correction as an injury, thus, by a deliberate rebellion of the will, rendering it useless.

Of course we cannot expect to have such a clear and intuitive perception of supernatural truths as to be able to bear every reproof without feeling any discontent or displeasure at it. St. Francis de Sales, writing to the Nuns of the Visitation, tells them that if they arrived at that degree of perfection a quarter of an hour before death, it would be a great matter indeed; because even good and earnest Religious must be prepared to find their self-will often trying to assert itself. But our duty is to combat and not give way to these attacks; so that whenever we yield to them, we may take it for granted that we are suffering more or less from spiritual blindness. And if we allow this blindness to influence us to such an extent as to cause us deliberately to adopt habits or ways of thinking opposed to the Religious spirit, then we may be assured that we are very far from the perfection of our holy

state, and that we have reason to dread all the dangers that accompany tepidity in the service of God.

Finally, the blindness of the will in its own desires gradually saps and undermines the very foundation of spiritual progress—confidence in God. How can we have confidence in God when we refuse to see how His Providence rules and directs everything for our benefit? Not even the first step to confidence, resignation, is possible for us under such circumstances, because we deliberately place our own desires above the decrees of Providence, and foolishly try to bend the Almighty's Will to our own caprices, instead of submitting to it with all our powers of soul and body. But we cannot do anything for our eternal welfare unless with the help of God's grace, and to get that help we must confess, with all humility, that we stand in need of it; we must ask for it with full trust in God, and we must be willing and prepared to receive it in the manner, measure, and time in which He is disposed to give it to us. If we refuse to see His work in the various incidents and circumstances of our lives, if we are impatient at the way in which He deals with us, if we, implicitly at least, presume to dictate to Him as to the fulfilment of the decrees of His Providence, it is evident

that we forfeit our title to His grace, and that we compel Him, so to speak, to leave us to the miseries that spiritual blindness is sure to entail on us.

To cure this great evil caused by the blindness of pride, we must apply the certain remedy of the blindness that comes from humility—that is, obedience; unquestioning, full, unhesitating obedience. And we must begin by believing what our Superiors and Spiritual Advisers tell us of the state of our soul, no matter what our opinion may be to the contrary. If we find that we are inclined to disbelieve them, and that we attempt to reason with ourselves to prove them to be in the wrong, we may take that as a sure indication that we are far gone in spiritual blindness, and that it is high time for us to commence to cure that dangerous disease of the soul, by practising an obedience, as perfect as we can render, to the commands and warnings of those whom God has placed over us, and to whom He gives abundant graces for our guidance and direction. The cure may be gradual, and it may come all of a sudden, according as God has decreed, but in either case, once we undertake to use the proper remedy with a sincere desire to get rid of the obstacle that hinders our perfection, and continue to use

it with courage and perseverance, and with heartfelt, though hopeful repentance for any incidental faults we may be guilty of, we need not doubt that God will look upon us with an eye of mercy, and will free us, in His own good time, from spiritual blindness.

## CHAPTER X.

## OUR OWN WILL IS PUFFED UP IN HONORS.

THE spirit of the Religious Life prompts us to avoid seeking after honors, or soliciting from others any word or sign that we might construe into approbation or praise of our own excellence. And this with very good reason, because all honor belongs properly to God, and must be referred finally to Him; any act, therefore, on the part of others, that might tempt us to arrogate to ourselves or to terminate in ourselves the honor due to God, is exceedingly dangerous, inasmuch as it might lead us to commit a great injustice. For, in reality, any excellence that is in us, whether of nature or grace, is a pure gift of the divine liberality; by our own unassisted efforts we cannot make ourselves either learned or talented, or devout or mortified; "all our sufficiency is from God;" whatever good we have must, then, be referred to the end of our creation—the greater honor and glory of God. We know how fully the saints were penetrated

with this truth: many of them were placed in very high and honorable positions, kings and emperors sought their advice and the help of their prayers, the faithful flocked around them in thousands to testify their appreciation of the wonderful gifts with which God had endowed His chosen servants, yet those faithful disciples of the great Master of humility never took any honor to themselves, but gave it all to God, so fully and so completely, that they were able to acknowledge, with all sincerity and candor, that they were only useless servants. This they could do, difficult as it seems, because they made a proper use of their will by submitting it entirely to the guidance and influence of divine grace.

As far as great honors are concerned, there is, thank God, very little danger for Religious, generally speaking. The world may respect them, or wonder at their retired and mortified lives; but at the same time it sees in them a steady and determined opposition to itself, and it resents that opposition. We have no reason, then, to be surprised that it should look upon all Religious as foolish people, who abandon and despise what the great majority of men seek for most eagerly. It is only natural for the world to know its enemies and to do all it can to overcome them; but when

it finds them too strong and too well supported by a Power that it cannot reach upon, then it takes refuge in its last intrenchments, and tries to heap ridicule on all who follow the evangelical counsels. This opposition of the world is a great blessing for Religious; it shows them the worthlessness and vanity of what they have renounced, and it teaches them to concentrate their desires in God and in the holy Vocation to which He has called them. Besides, the life of a good Religious is the living expression and a continuation of the warfare that our Lord Jesus Christ commenced to wage, during His life, on worldly maxims and principles.

But though we may leave the great world and its honors outside the gate of the convent, though we may sincerely dread and avoid any sign of honor that would betray us into an exhibition of a worldly spirit, yet we have a smaller world within us which is a miniature of the larger one outside. It is the world of our own hearts, of our own desires and opinions; it has its own code of honor, its own laws and maxims, and its own means too of deceiving and leading us astray.

It is by means of this little world that the devil contrives to give another characteristic mark to our will, when we turn it away from

the service of God. For he persuades us to listen to various suggestions bearing on our self-esteem, and leads us on to adopt and follow the conclusions that naturally follow from them. Thus he gives us an exaggerated idea of our natural powers, and fills us with a spirit of independence, so that we grow more and more in our own estimation, at the expense of the esteem and respect that we owe to our Superiors and Sisters. Obedience soon loses its hold on us, and from being irregular and careless in our outward duties, we begin gradually to put off the spirit of submission, to assert our own ideas boldly, and to put forward our own views, although they in no way harmonize with the Religious Life and its obligations. Having gone thus far, it is easy to go a step farther, and to criticise and condemn everything that does not chime in with the conceited notions we have of ourselves. The influence of faith is thus gradually lessened in the soul, because we substitute for it a creation of our own, the good opinion we have of ourselves, and, as we leave our reason without a proper guide, we must only expect to fall into many gross absurdities of speech and action. "He that exalteth himself shall be humbled;" the Religious who refuses to give her will to God, and who therefore leaves it in the power of the devil,



must learn by bitter experience that pride brings its own punishment, not merely in the next life, but in this also.

But where does the proud Religious get the honor that puffs her up? From herself, nor would she value it half as much from any other source. Her whole idea is self-sufficiency and independence, her whole effort is to strengthen her false position by every argument that self-esteem can suggest: these arguments she draws principally from her own fertile imagination, assisted by the deceits of the devil; whatever help she may get from other quarters, in the shape of praise or flattery, is only a matter of secondary import to her; she values it merely as a confirmation of her own judgment regarding herself. In such circumstances her outward acts betray, by their absurdity and inconsistency, the selfish and unworthy motives that dictate them. For she is filled with herself to such an extent, that she is incapable of looking beyond her own desires, so as to understand the real relations that exist between herself and her Superiors and Sisters. She imagines that they are all inferior to her, that they cannot see things in the proper light, and of course, she suspects them of acting with selfish motives. Any little service she renders is grudgingly bestowed, because she values her

own qualities so highly, that she is certain of her actions not being properly appreciated by others. As the spirit of self-esteem grows upon her, she becomes more daring in her criticisms, more outspoken in her fault-finding, until at last no arrangement of authority can escape her, and, if she once allows the evil influence to become habitual, she gives way to settled dissatisfaction and discontent with her Superiors, wishing herself in their place, so that she might make whatever changes in their administration her wounded and insatiable vanity suggests.

It is a pitiful thing to think that a Spouse of Jesus Christ can descend so low, and make herself the laughing-stock and the tool of Satan, because she does not wish to give up her own will. Yet this degraded state is the natural consequence of rejecting the precious graces of the Religious Life. "To whom much is given, from him much shall be expected;" and if we fail to render to God what He has a right to expect from us, it is only just that our degradation and punishment should exceed that of people in the world, who, generally speaking, are not so richly endowed with supernatural gifts as those who leave the world for God's sake. It is, after all, a surprising thing that we should be so inclined to esteem and honor

ourselves. Our miseries of body and soul are so many that they must obtrude themselves on our notice, no matter how zealously we may strive to forget them. We have been so often disappointed, we have made so many mistakes and suffered from so many failures, that we might well be willing to place ourselves altogether under the guidance of any one who is willing to take the responsibility of directing us; yet, in spite of what reason and experience teach us, we have such a strong inclination to support our own individuality, to look upon our own existence as being perfect and independent in itself, that, when we yield to this inclination, we resent as an injury and an insult every attempt made by others to control our actions, although we have already given them the best and holiest title to that control by the vow of obedience. Certainly the last place in the world to look for self-esteem should be a convent. The community life shows, by its wonderful advantages, how empty and vain is that overweening sense of one's own individuality, and it teaches us how to gain true honor by sinking our own petty desires and trivial fancies in the great designs of God's mercy towards the human race. But, on the other hand, the least act of self-esteem in a convent shows itself in far more glaring colors than if it

were committed in the world, precisely on account of the utter incompatibility between the Religious Life and the uncontrolled pursuit of our own desires. It is a common thing enough for lay-people to criticise their Superiors and not to see any great harm in so doing, because the connection between them is, very often, a mere matter of temporal convenience, which neither seek to refer to a spiritual object; but the relations between a Religious and her Superiors are so sacred, that any violation or disregard of them argues a great perversity of will. So that when a Religious goes so far as to criticise her Superiors, she proves that, whatever she may be worth in her own eyes, she is worth little or nothing in the sight of God or of His Church, because she is too much taken up with herself to be of any use.

Another mark of inordinate self-esteem is given by the Religious who is constantly finding fault with her Sisters. Nothing that they do can please her; she is able to suggest improvements in every act of theirs, and she shows a malicious ingenuity in interpreting their most harmless expressions in some uncharitable sense. A Religious of that kind is so puffed up with the honor that she pays her own fancied excellence, that she makes herself a positive plague to the community. Yet she

is useful in one way, for she serves to exercise the patience and meekness of her Sisters, who have to bear with her fault-finding and conceited manner. Superiors should be careful never to entrust a Religious of that kind with any obedience that would give her authority over her Sisters. She who cannot govern even the meanest tendencies of her nature is surely not fit to have anything to do with the guidance or direction of others; she is even very likely to do a great deal of harm by bad example, for if the unfortunate Sisters who have to submit to her see that she acts through vain and selfish motives, they may very readily learn to imitate her. She should therefore be kept, as far as possible, occupied with some duty that will not give her much time or opportunity for fault-finding, or for spreading the evil influence of her bad example. Nor should any trust be reposed in her until she gives unmistakable signs of improvement and heartfelt repentance, otherwise Superiors will find out to their cost that the devil can easily use such a conceited Religious as a tool to work mischief amongst her Sisters.

As we have seen already, a convent is specially protected by the Almighty God from the assaults of worldly honor and ambition, and if a Religious gets self-conceited it is because she is

guilty of gross carelessness and injustice in refusing her will to God. But, even in the convent, there is a still more privileged position, the very surroundings of which seem to offer an impenetrable barrier to anything like self-esteem—that is, the position of the Lay-Sister.\* She, whose happy lot it is to perform, as an everyday task, the most humble duties of the convent, has it in her power, with the help of divine grace, to live in the closest conformity with the Hidden Life of Jesus. She has no lack of opportunities of practising humility and submission to others for the love of God. With a little care, generally speaking, she can so accustom herself to the mortification of her own will, that instead of following her own ideas and opinions, she finds the greatest comfort and consolation in knowing that she is enabled to “deny herself and to carry her cross” courageously, after the example of her Divine Master. Thus the possession of peace of soul is rendered easy and certain to her; her duties, no matter how trivial they seem outwardly, acquire an immense value in the

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\* This term may seem strange to many of our American readers. Our authority for using it is the universal custom in all European countries, where the Lay-Sister has a recognized position in Religion, and where special provision is made for her in the Constitution of many orders.

sight of God, for they are performed solely with a view to please Him; and the humility which pervades all her actions renders them of the greatest utility, not only to her own community, but to the Church at large. For it is by humility that Christ began the great battle of the Church against the world, and it is by humility that He wishes that battle to be continued. What can He not do, then, what glorious victories may He not gain, in the person of the Lay-Sister who is thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of her holy Vocation! It was to glorify Himself in her that God called her to a state of life, which may be termed, preëminently, the state of humility. It is true that Choir-Sisters are also bound to practise that most necessary virtue, and that they get all the necessary graces to practise it according to the perfection of their state; but they have to do many things that might excite some movement of self-esteem, if they are not very cautious; for they have to teach in the schools, to study profane literature, and, in many instances, they may be obliged to deal with people in the world. Now, although such occupations are absolutely necessary, and are sanctified by the grace of Vocation and obedience, yet the Religious who is engaged in them must be continually on the alert lest

the enemy of her soul should take occasion from them to fill her with proud thoughts and to turn her will away from God. From these dangers the Lay-Sister is free; her position makes it a matter of necessity for her to study the mortification of her own will in all things, so that her position is, to a great extent, a privileged one. She should, therefore, be all obedience, humility, and forgetfulness of self; never should she dream of asserting herself in any way, by putting forward her own ideas and opinions, unless obedience or necessity absolutely requires it; she should look upon it as a great favor to be enabled, by the grace of Vocation, to help and assist those whom God has chosen to do His special work, and she may rest assured that not one of her labors will go unrewarded, and that they will produce abundant fruits for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.

But there is one danger peculiar to her position which the Lay-Sister must guard against — and that is, a servile spirit. She must never forget that she is not a mere hireling, but a Spouse of Jesus Christ, the great King of heaven and earth, and therefore she must not perform her duties in a time-serving spirit, or with the idea of merely gaining the favor and approbation of her Superiors. It is a good



thing indeed if her Superiors approve of her, but she must value their approbation only because they are the representatives of the Almighty; for if she were to seek their favor for any other motive, she would act as any servant in the world might, who hopes to advance her own temporal interests by pleasing her mistress. This time-serving and unworthy spirit is also a frequent cause of jealousy and envy, and is a deadly foe to sisterly charity; it opens a wide door to Satan, who enters by it into the soul of the poor Lay-Sister, takes possession of her will, and fills it with vain and idle desires of honor and distinction, until she becomes "puffed up in honors," in spite of the special protection with which God has surrounded her. Let her then labor to have a proper spirit; she can learn it without education or study; she has only to open her heart and direct her will to receive the divine inspirations, and she will soon learn that there are no worldly distinctions in the convent, and she will understand and appreciate the equality and liberty, greater and more precious than any the world ever had, that ought to reign among the Spouses of Christ.

Quite the opposite to the position of the Lay-Sister is that of the Superioress of a convent. The responsibility for the eternal wel-

fare of others is a very heavy one, and it would be quite unbearable if God did not give Superiors powerful graces to help them. All Superiors, therefore, should remember this, and never trust in themselves or in their own abilities, but solely in the goodness and power of God. And this remark applies to all who have any office or charge in the convent, that makes them responsible, in any way, for the spiritual welfare of their Sisters, or even of the children whose education and training are entrusted to their care.

A certain effect of following our own will is the loss of confidence in God and a vain presumption on our own natural gifts, as if we could attempt and accomplish great things relying on ourselves alone. When, with all our natural faults and weaknesses, we are placed in a position of authority over others, oh! how easily then do we not conceive great things of ourselves, how readily do we not look for the fruit of our industry or our talents in the successes gained by the convent, how impatient and dissatisfied we become, if we see our undertakings fail and our hopes disappointed! And it is so easy to excuse all these miseries, that come from our own will, by attributing them to zeal in the service of God, and to an anxiety to further the welfare of the commu-

nity! That perverse will of ours is very cunning, it knows how to secrete itself in the hidden folds of our natural inclinations, and it is ready at any moment to sally forth from its hiding-place and to seize upon our good actions, to vitiate them, and render them useless in the sight of God. And how Satan rages against us if he sees that we are responsible for the souls of others! How he employs all his wiles and deceits to persuade us to withdraw our will from God, and to use our authority according to our own natural inclinations, solely! For if he succeeds, he can transform even the good qualities of our nature into vices, by leading them on to excess or defect. Thus, if a Superioress who follows her own will, without seeking the will of God, is naturally of a stern disposition, the tempter can easily induce her to be harsh and uncharitable to her Sisters; if she is of an easy, yielding character, he can persuade her to be careless and over-indulgent; and in either case he can make use of her as an instrument to work his wicked will, to relax discipline and to make obedience imperfect in the convent. Superiors, therefore, more than all others, must have a thorough contempt for themselves, they must "empty themselves," after the example of their Heavenly Spouse, and they must look

upon the complete mortification of their own will as the only means by which they can prepare to render a satisfactory account of their stewardship. For, they cannot do any good of themselves, no matter how gifted they may be, and their efforts should be concentrated on the great task of not preventing or spoiling, by their caprices, the good that Divine Providence has elected to do through their instrumentality. Hence they must be suspicious of themselves and afraid of their own will.

But does not this tend to render their action cramped and restrained, so that, instead of giving their Sisters an example of cheerfulness and joy in the service of God, they are likely, rather, to encourage scruples, anxieties, and apathy, by a continual preoccupation of spirit with the dangers of their position? By no means; for, if we are suspicious of ourselves, it is because our whole trust is in God, who will not let us be confounded; if we fear our own will, it is because we love the will of God and seek to accomplish it in all our actions, and "the will of God is our sanctification," and the cause of all spiritual joy and peace; if we direct all our efforts to clear away the obstacles that our nature offers to the work of Grace in our souls, the result must be the mortification of our own will, and consequently the perfec-

tion of our holy state, than which no greater happiness can be conceived. Oh no! it is not the mortified, humble Superioress who lacks energy in the divine service, or gives her Sisters cause for discouragement. It is the worldly-minded, self-willed Superioress, who looks upon the accomplishment of her own will as the great object of her life, so that she is over-indulgent to her Sisters, when their faults chime in with hers, and injudiciously severe with them if they attempt to cross her inclination, even in matters of minor importance—she it is who introduces the spirit of the world into the convent, and discourages her Sisters. But since we all have the germs of worldliness in us, since we all have a great attachment to our natural likes and dislikes, and this attachment often remains with us up to the last moment of our lives, I repeat that every Superioress must be watchful over herself. No matter how long she is in the convent, or what sacrifices she has made, or how well her Sisters are progressing under her motherly care, she must keep a guard over herself and be well exercised in self-restraint, in thought, word, and act, or else she may expect the choicest blessings of Divine Providence to be turned into severe trials and temptations for her, through self-complacency and vanity.

First of all, she must be careful how she deals with her Sisters. If she has not a real motherly and supernatural love for every one of them, despite their faults and imperfections, let her ask it from God with all the fervor possible, and not cease asking until her request is granted; for otherwise she is not fit to be the representative of the loving Jesus, who so highly prizes those whom she cares so little for. She must also open her mind to her Confessor, and follow his advice with the utmost diligence; nothing will help her so much as obedience, because this want of motherly love can easily be traced to pride and self-conceit. Besides loving all her sisters equally, she must respect them: if she fails to do so, she is wanting in proper respect for the position in which she herself is placed by the authority of the Church; and besides, she cannot but expect to be punished by our Divine Lord if she does not treat His Spouses with a due consideration for the dignity conferred on them by Him. Yet she must avoid anything like stiffness or constraint in dealing with her Sisters, for otherwise she will never win their confidence, nor be able to help them in their difficulties. If she is too fond of talking, and too effusive in her speech or manner, she will find it a difficult matter to maintain her authority properly.

She should have a great horror of favoritism and of anything savoring of an attachment to her own will, that would give her Sisters the idea that she cares for some more than for others. If she finds herself naturally inclined to preferences of this sort, she must fight against herself without truce or mercy, if she does not want to introduce the spirit of the world, with its false and hurtful maxims, into the convent.

She must be watchful over herself, too, in her intercourse with people of the world, no matter how holy or how mortified they are. There is an immense gulf between her and such people, which should prevent every approach to confidence or familiarity. She would have just cause for indignation if she saw any of her Sisters fond of talking with lay-people, and forming unnecessary acquaintances with them; she is in the same position as her Sisters, in this respect, with this sole difference, that she has, as it were, to bear the brunt of the battle against the world, and to keep that great enemy of the spiritual life far away from the convent. Hence she must deal with lay-people very frequently. Pious ladies in the world are fond of coming to the convent to get away from the cares of life for a time at least, and to taste a little of the repose that

can never be found in the world; to visitors of this class she can do a great deal of good by a modest and well-restrained cheerfulness of manner, and by not spending too much time with them. For she is not bound to them in any particular way, nor is she responsible for their souls. Her time belongs to her Sisters, and every moment that she spends beyond the ordinary requirements of Christian charity and politeness, with lay-people, she may look upon as lost time, for which she will have to render account. It is certainly a very fascinating thing to be able to have a pious talk with an appreciative and wondering listener, who will be sure to retail the conversation afterward among her friends; but these pious talks furnish such excellent opportunities for the devil to make us "puffed up in honors," that we should avoid them as much as possible unless with our Sisters, with whom there is very little danger of that kind. There is another class of ladies who are, unfortunately, very fond of visiting convents. They are those who fancy themselves pious because they perform certain outward works of piety, while in reality they are filled with self-conceit and worldliness. Such visitors as these come to the convent through a spirit of curiosity and fault-finding: if they are able to detect any fault in the



Superioress or her Sisters, their joy is complete, for they can easily then exalt their own virtue and find new cause for the good opinion they have of themselves. It goes without saying that they find abundant matter for future gossip among their acquaintances in every little fault they discover in the convent, and that such faults are not at all lessened by the charity which they pretend to plaster over them. Such ladies as these are a plague to convents: they cannot be excluded altogether; but one comfort, at least, is that the Superioress will easily detect visitors of this class, so that she can be on her guard against them. Finally, there is the lady of the world, who makes and can make no pretence to piety, and who visits the convent because she has some friend or relative there, or through some reason of worldly *bienséance*. Of course she brings all the tittle-tattle of the day with her, and, if she is encouraged, she is quite ready to discuss the latest scandal. If she sees that her frivolous and uncharitable conversation is listened to, she will come again and repeat the dose with additions, until in a short time the convent will become the best place of all in which to learn everything about other people's business. A wise and prudent Superioress can easily save her convent from a misfortune of that kind, by

showing plainly how distasteful such conversations are to her, and by never allowing her Sisters to be present at them or to take part in them. In fact, she must keep her Sisters away from all unnecessary visits as much as possible, if she desires them to have the true spirit of religion; and she must be particularly strict in enforcing the due observance of the time allowed by her Constitutions or the order of the house for seeing visitors. She has to bear in mind that the convent has nothing to hope for from the world, and nothing to fear from it either, unless the world introduces itself into the convent, in which case there is an end of the Religious Life.

Superiors should therefore look upon themselves as their own worst enemies; they must carefully scrutinize every opinion they form, lest their own will should have too great a share in it, and if they find on examination that their opinion happens to be right, they must give the credit of it to God's grace and not to their own cleverness. Above all, they must not expect that they will never make a mistake. "To err is human," and one of the clearest proofs that we are "puffed-up in honors" is the fact that we never believe ourselves to be in the wrong; for by such a belief we at once place ourselves far above

ordinary mortals, in our own idea. Nor is there any loss of dignity or authority involved in acknowledging that we have been mistaken. On the contrary, there is nothing so pleasing to God and so edifying to our Sisters as the humble confession of our infirmity, coupled with a sincere trust in the infinite mercy of God, who is quite good enough and powerful enough to rectify all our blunders.

A Superioress who does her best to have a pure intention of doing all for the greater glory of God should have great confidence in the grace of state—that is to say, in those precious supernatural helps that God gives, primarily and principally, for the good of her sisters, secondarily, and as it were accidentally, for her own good, provided she corresponds with them. She cannot doubt for a moment that such graces are given to her. How many times has she not been able to solve a difficulty, to overcome an obstacle, to strengthen and console her Sisters, in a manner far exceeding anything she could pretend to by her natural abilities alone! The proper words seem to have come to her lips without any mental effort on her part; the truth was made evident to her with a clearness surpassing anything that she could learn by mere study; her natural dread of consequences disappeared as if by magic, and

gave place to a courageous and almost heroic resolution to do the will of God at all hazards. She must believe that such glorious victories over the infirmities of nature are the result of divine grace, and in particular of the grace of state that God gives to her as Superioress. Let her then trust to that grace, and not offend the Almighty by believing that His arm is shortened, or that He is no longer willing to protect her. To make sure that this confidence is practical, she must accustom herself to reason from the general principles of the faith, so that she may more easily and securely be able to direct her actions according to the spirit of her Rules and Constitutions. Nor is there a profound knowledge of theology required for this. She has the general principles of the faith in her Catechism; let them once sink deeply into her mind, and the faith will soon begin to exercise its proper influence over her. She will then see, clearer and clearer, the connection between her Rule and Constitutions, and the truths revealed by God to His Church; thus she will be saved, not merely from making her own opinions the Rule of her actions, but also from a too worldly prudence, or perhaps we should call it cunning, which looks very bad indeed in one who has left the world to follow Christ. Prudence she must

have, but it should be the prudence of the Gospel, which is often folly in the eyes of the world. Worldly prudence is satisfied to judge from the outside, and to act with a view to please men and to gain their good opinion; it often asks itself, What will people think if I do so and so? whereas the prudence of the Gospel considers the real value of a thing, namely, what it is worth in the sight of God, and it troubles itself little about the praise of men, provided the will of God is accomplished. It is this kind of prudence that gained so many glorious victories for the Catholic Church; it is to this kind of prudence that so many convents owe their existence, and a prosperous one too, in spite of the opposition that bigotry and prejudice placed in their way. Every convent has difficulties to contend with, for we cannot expect the world to allow its deadliest foe, the Religious Life, to escape its attacks. In fact these difficulties are a sign of a vigorous spiritual life in the convent, and they are bound to result to the glory of God and of the Catholic Church, if the Superioress combats them, not with a worldly prudence nor with confidence in her own opinion or her own abilities, but with the prudence of the Gospel, which carefully uses all the means at its disposal to insure success while it expects the

success itself from no other source than the goodness and power of God.

Hence Superiors are bound in a special manner not to allow themselves to be swayed by their own will. Their position renders any attempt at self-esteem very dangerous, because if they once get "puffed up in honors," it will be exceedingly difficult to cure them again, and to bring them to a proper degree of humility. Besides that, they must be careful to avoid any preoccupation of spirit, or any self-seeking, even in spiritual matters, that would hinder them from submitting at once to the graces of state. They know not what exigencies may arise at any moment which their natural abilities are unable to deal with; they must, consequently, always keep themselves free, so that the divine inspirations may find a ready entrance into their hearts. Thus it is evident that without great poverty of spirit a Superioress cannot hope to do much for her community; that is to say, she must have a great desire to know everything that God wishes her to know, regarding herself and her Sisters, while she carefully represses every act of curiosity dictated by selfishness or idle anxiety. May God grant all Superiors the grace never to forget the meek and humble Jesus whom they represent, and His holy and immaculate Mother, under

whose patronage and after whose example they have undertaken to conquer the devil, the world, and the flesh!

It is needless to say any more on this second characteristic of our own will. If we learn from our Superiors or from a divine inspiration that we are "puffed up in honors," both reason and conscience suggest that we should at once set about curing that dangerous spiritual illness, for as long as we suffer from it we cannot attain perfection. A great part of the cure consists in being thoroughly convinced that we require it; if we hesitate in believing the divine inspirations, or doubt what our Superiors tell us, our efforts will be only half-hearted, because they are not founded on conviction, and of course they will be unsuccessful. But when we have obtained the first point of vantage over our self-conceit, by humbly submitting our judgment and confessing our infirmity, we may be certain that God will accomplish what He has so happily begun, and that "the right hand of the Most High" will soon work a wonderful change in us.

There are, however, a few precautions that we must not fail to take. In the first place, we must keep our good resolution alive by considering the danger of self-conceit, and how the justice of God compels Him to punish the ar-

rogant mortal who tries to defraud Him of the honor that is due to Him. The danger is surely great enough, once we see it clearly, to fill us with a desire to avoid it; and the thought of being subject to the anger of God ought to give us a proper horror of deliberate venial sin, which we commit over and over again if we are "puffed up in honors." We cannot overrate the good effect of a sincere resolution to amend our lives. Not only does it come from a proper detestation of past sin, but it immediately suggests heartfelt repentance in case we fall again through weakness, or forget ourselves through force of habit. Bad acts of the will must be cured and corrected by good ones proceeding from the same faculty, under the direction of divine grace; our former determination to seek honor for ourselves must be overcome and atoned for by a firm resolution to seek only the glory of God for the future.

In the second place, we must learn how to make frequent and sincere acts of humiliation. The Rule and Constitutions of the Order will no doubt supply us with many opportunities of humbling ourselves before our Superiors and Sisters; we have to take advantage of every one of these, for if we allow one to escape through carelessness or unwillingness,



it is a sign that our resolution is weak and uncertain, and that we are still attached to self-esteem. "He who humbleth himself shall be exalted," says Our Lord; if we desire to be raised to the perfection of our holy state we must lower ourselves in our own estimation, not merely by inward acts of the intellect and will, but also by outward acts, which give expression to and help to intensify the desire that God has given us to be truly humble. On the other hand, the Religious who deliberately avoids the humiliations imposed upon her by the Constitutions of her Order, or by her Superioress, gives clear proof that she is possessed by the spirit of pride and self-conceit, and she may take it for granted that she will make very little advancement towards perfection until she submits to those humiliations and performs them in a spirit of humility and repentance.

It would be difficult for us to exaggerate the good effect of the little penances and mortifications that are imposed upon us in the convent, when we accept them with humility and obedience. They have, no doubt, an immense power of atoning for the past, because they constantly remind us of the necessity and value of repentance. Now, when repentance, instead of being evoked merely occasionally,

as, for instance, when we are going to confession, or after our daily examen of conscience, becomes so habitual to us that we are imbued with the spirit of it, it is clear that there may be hundreds of occasions during the day on which we make acts of sincere repentance for our sins, and that without any effort, but merely following the ruling desire of our hearts, which prompts us to do what we can to atone for our past sins. But we know that, next after absolute sinlessness, sincere repentance is most pleasing to God; nay, so powerful is it, that in a single moment a sinner may obtain pardon for the crimes of a whole lifetime. What must not, then, be its efficacy in a Religious, a Spouse of Christ, who is so thoroughly possessed by the spirit of sincere sorrow for sin that every act of her life is stamped with it, every deliberate thought reverts to it in some way or other. We have a certain and speedy way of acquiring this precious spirit, by being exact in performing the penances and submitting to the humiliations imposed upon us by the Constitutions, or by the commands of our Superiors. The great want of the world at the present day is penance; the vast mass of humanity is engrossed with the pursuit of honors, riches, and pleasures; there is no thought of mortification, no feeling of com-

passion for the sufferings of our Divine Lord. His Sacred Heart hungers and thirsts after some kindred spirit in which to find sympathy and gratitude, and active, ardent compassion with Its yearnings and longings; but It is very often disappointed. Let not that be the case at least among the Spouses of Christ—amongst those who have vowed to take up the cross after our Lord, and to follow His example by dying to themselves and the world.

Finally, if Superiors find that they are “puffed up in honors,” whether their authority extends over the whole community or over only a part of it, they must take immediate thought for themselves and profit by the divine inspiration without loss of time. To do this, they must remember the trust placed in them by the Church, how the highest authority on earth has sanctioned their position, that they may spread the “good odor of Christ” among their Sisters and lead them on to perfection by every means in their power, and how, in order to accomplish this great task, they must forget themselves and constantly mortify their own will. If, on the other hand, they allow their own will to get the better of them so as to be a habitual motive of their actions, then they violate the confidence reposed in them by the Church, the Mystic Body of

Christ, and use their position and influence only to carry out their own selfish ends, and to gratify their vanity and self-conceit. By so doing, not only do they render their perfection impossible, but they place their souls' salvation in imminent danger, for they despise and neglect the ordinary graces given them by God, and increase their guilt by not using, with a proper intention, the many graces of state they receive. *Potentes potenter tormenta patientur* is the terrible warning pronounced against Superiors who prefer their own interests to the will of God and the spiritual welfare of their subjects: they shall be punished all the more severely, as their responsibility was greater, and their obligation to seek the glory of God more stringent. On the other hand, the Superioress who is faithful to her duty and forgetful of self, who is filled with the spirit of repentance and humility, and who really loves all her Sisters with a supernatural love, and respects and reverences them as the Spouses of Jesus Christ—she indeed may comfort herself with the blessed assurance that the divine promises will be fulfilled in her in due time, and that she will merit to hear from the lips of her Judge the consoling words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant! because thou hast been faithful over few things, I will place thee over many: enter into the joy of thy Lord."

We shall finish this Chapter with the following extract from Father de Ponte (Pars. III. Medit. XII.): "Although this duty," of being the salt of the earth, which may be affirmed of all Superiors, "is a gratuitous gift of God, yet its preservation depends also on our free will: wherefore, he who is once made the salt of the earth, although if he duly performs his office he is worthy of being admitted to the table of the Lord, to His own great honor, yet if he becomes elated by pride, he melts away and loses his savor; so that he must be cast out on the dunghill of the world, away from the protection of God, where to his great disgrace he is trodden under foot by men, and afterwards by the demons in hell. When I think of these things, I must also consider whether that salt is in me, with what savor I serve God, in what manner I perform the office of salt to those committed to my care, and whether I try to render virtue savory and agreeable to all. O most sweet Jesus! make me the salt of the earth, although I should have to pass through fire and water; do not allow me to give scandal to the world, instead of that condiment of salt, or that it should become barren, through my fault, like earth sown with salt, or that I should turn to its detriment the office that you committed to me for its advantage."

## CHAPTER XI.

## OUR OWN WILL IS ANXIOUS IN CARES.

ONE of the first truths that dawn upon us, after we have learned the existence of God, is that there must be some relations between us and the great and infinitely good Being to whom we owe our existence and preservation. With the development of our understanding, these relations gradually shape themselves into form, until we are able to say that God is our Father, our Judge, our Protector and Provider. But more distinctly than all do we recognize that God is our Supreme Ruler, to whom we should belong body and soul, according to whose will our whole lives should be regulated. Nor does it require any mental effort to understand all these relations between us and God. They come to our minds by a sort of intuition, they are strengthened by the voice of conscience that begins to make itself heard with the first dawnings of reason, they are developed and perfected by the subsequent instruction that we receive, until we begin at last to see that as

God is the beginning and the end of our existence, so should He also be the beginning and the end of every deliberate act, thought, and word of our lives. Thus we learn that there is a Divine Providence that arranges all things, and that we have to submit to this Providence, and to adore Its wonderful and all-perfect decrees, with all the love and tender confidence that we owe to a most loving Father and to a most wise and provident Ruler.

These relations between us and our Creator are not necessary to His happiness or well-being, for God did not create us because He stood in need of us; but they are absolutely necessary to us; for what could we do without God? How could we prevent ourselves from falling back into our original nothingness, if His Almighty Arm were not stretched out constantly to save and preserve us and keep us in existence? God could destroy us, if He chose, nor would He be one whit less happy or less perfect if He did so; whereas we cannot live for a moment without Him, nor have we any strength, or beauty, or knowledge that we have not received from Him. Thus it is evident that the Almighty takes an interest in His creatures, and that it is His pleasure to guide and direct their actions and movements, in addition to supplying them with the power to act

and to move. This directing influence of God must necessarily tend to support harmony among His creatures, in spite of the vast and innumerable differences that there are amongst them; it must ensure order, although different creatures have different tendencies and different natures, and it would cause a general and universal well-being, if there were not some creatures who use their powers to counteract the beneficent influence of God's Providence, and to replace good by evil and order by confusion.

Where an Infinite Being uses His power in favor of a certain class of finite beings, we have reason to believe that His power extends to every individual of that class; and so when we see proofs of Divine Providence ruling any earthly creature or event, we may safely conclude that It governs the world, and that nothing can happen without Its command or permission. Further, although this truth is a very sublime one, it is not altogether beyond our grasp; our intellects are suited to understand universal truths, or, at all events, they have a tendency towards the universal. Hence, although we may not be able to explain many particular arrangements of Providence, yet we cannot be ignorant of the general truth that God takes an active interest in the movements



and actions of His creatures. But knowledge brings its obligation with it; every blessing of light and grace that we receive from On High is intended for our sanctification and for the manifestation of the Divine Perfections; so that, when we know that God is doing something for us, our duty is, clearly, to work with Him and to bring our faculties, and especially our will, into conformity with His will. Nor must we desire, when doing so, to know more of His action than He is pleased to declare to us, otherwise we encroach on His province, and deserve to be called presumptuous. Besides, how could we hope to gain any knowledge against the will of God? And if we could gain it, it would not help us, for we cannot control his actions, nor can we take better care of our own interests than He can. Thus the relations between us and our Creator are in no way derogatory to our dignity as human beings, nor do they offer any violence to our reason; on the contrary, they perfect and sustain our dignity, and bear upon them the undeniable impress of the good and the true about which our reason is most concerned. If we listen to reason, therefore, we readily leave the guiding influence to God; we do not wish to interfere with it, but rather submit to it, and are glad that the Almighty deigns to interest

Himself in our affairs. This act of reason calls forth a corresponding act of the will, which we term confidence, and which might be looked upon as a sort of intensification of faith.

There can be no doubt that when we advance so far as to place our fate thus completely in the hands of God, He will take care to fulfil His promises and will not allow us to be confounded. In this way, not only does reason, helped of course by divine grace, show us where our perfection is to be found, but also it points out an easy road to it that will lead us onward safely and surely, and will free us from many a useless anxiety, and from the doubts and perturbations that would surely assail us if we followed any other path. In this confidence, too, we find the explanation of that perfect obedience that brought so many good Religious to a high degree of holiness, and shed such a bright lustre on the Catholic Church. For this confidence leaves the relations between us and God undisturbed; by it we recognize Him as our Ruler, and are satisfied with His guidance, while we carefully remove out of the way anything of our own that might hinder the work of His grace in our souls.

But to secure all these advantages we must employ our will properly and learn to devote

it altogether to the service of God; for, if we are attached to our own will and obey its behests, we disturb the relations that ought to exist between us and God. Hence, another characteristic of our own will is, that it is "anxious in cares." We have now to see how this characteristic manifests itself in our conduct.

The essential object of the Religious Life is to refer us to God, and to impress well upon us that we are responsible to Him for our actions and that we receive from Him whatever helps are necessary to perform those actions properly. Everything that is opposed to the Religious Life and to its object endeavors to withdraw us from God, to refer us to ourselves alone, and to conceal from us, as far as possible, the responsibility for our actions, by representing to us that if these actions suit our inclinations and tastes they are good enough; thus, also, we are at last induced to believe that God is not inclined to help us, or that His help is to be obtained only with difficulty. Hence arise discouragement and anxiety, because we are thrown upon ourselves too much; and we are of course unable, without supernatural help, to conquer the many difficulties and temptations that assail us during life. Nor can the doctrine of Divine Providence

console us under such circumstances, inasmuch as, although as Catholics we believe in it, yet our faith is not lively enough to have a practical and habitual influence over our ways of thought and action. Where the guidance of faith is wanting, we are liable to become the sport and plaything of events; creatures rule our destiny, apparently at least, for we refuse to see the hand of God in anything that happens to us; and of course it will not be long before troubles and anxieties come to disturb and worry us. Thus our own will makes us "anxious in cares."

But where are we to look for cares in a convent? Cares generally accompany worldly business and occupations; how can they be where the world is not admitted? Very easily, for they come in a spiritual form, and are quite as well able to disturb us in that way, and to rob us of our peace of mind, as material anxieties can vex and harass people in the world. Wherever our own will is, there must be uneasiness and care, because the foundation of true confidence in God is destroyed, and we have only ourselves to trust to. Let any Religious who has suffered from anxiety or want of peace consult her own experience, and, if she traces the evil to its cause, she will find that it arose from her ignoring the action of

God in the events that happened to her, because that action did not suit her tastes or inclinations. The ways of God are not always known to us; we must be often content to submit to His arrangements, without knowing any more about them than that He does everything for His own greater glory and for our sanctification and perfection. But, if we give our own will the preponderance over the graces of our holy state, we cannot expect to have spiritual strength enough to overcome the difficulties in our way, or spiritual enlightenment enough to see that those difficulties are permitted by God with the intention, not of interfering between us and the accomplishment of His will, but of rendering our efforts to serve Him more meritorious to ourselves and more pleasing in His sight.

But the self-willed Religious does not see things in that light. She has got her own opinions to guide her, and nothing will convince her against them. It is useless for her Superiors to argue with her; she will not listen to them; and while she is groaning under the spiritual trials that weigh her down, she refuses to make the only sacrifice that would certainly free her from them—the sacrifice of her own will. Thus she becomes “anxious in cares,” and gets so involved in difficulties of her own

making that her life becomes a burden to her, and a fruitful source of discomfort to her Sisters and Superiors. Instead of directing her efforts to bear patiently whatever trials God sends her, she wastes her strength in useless endeavors to fight with circumstances and to control events. Continued disappointment makes her morose and ill-tempered, and her mental agitation prepares the way for scruples. These latter can be cured only by obedience—a remedy that is more distasteful than the disease to the self-willed Religious. As her anxieties multiply, she withdraws more and more into herself, she isolates herself from her Sisters and loses confidence in her Superiors, until she completes her misery by looking upon it as an impossibility to attain the perfection of her state.

While she is in this unhappy condition, she forgets all about the fatherly care with which God disposes of events; she endeavors, by every means in her power, to refer everything to herself, in order to support her own judgments as far as possible, so that she attaches all the importance of an accident or event to the secondary causes that God makes use of only as instruments to do His will. Consequently she must often find herself mistaken, and that so glaringly, that she ought, in reason and com-

mon-sense, to acknowledge her error; but instead of that, if her Superiors or Sisters remonstrate with her, she finds a thousand excuses for her conduct, which she explains away in a manner suited, not to truth, but to her own fancies. If all other excuses fail, if her Superiors press the matter and show how defective her arguments are and how unsatisfactory her explanations, she takes refuge in her last resource, and says that she cannot help it—that she cannot act otherwise. Thus the abuse of her free-will leads her to deny its existence, and to give utterance to a proposition that contains matter enough for heresy, if she only knew and adverted to the full force of her words.

If we always referred events to the Almighty God and submitted to His dispensations we should have little or no cause for uneasiness or anxiety, nor should we have to puzzle ourselves uselessly, seeking for explanations that we can never find. Even if many things occur for which we cannot assign a particular reason, our thoughts, habitually reverting to the First Cause, will find therein knowledge and light enough to prevent doubts and anxieties, and to preserve our peace of soul undisturbed. It is only when we give way to that insane desire of putting ourselves forward and supporting our own opinions that we cause ourselves

trouble and uneasiness. For then the chief thing with us is our own individuality: what belongs to us in any way assumes an importance of vast proportions, so that when we are confronted by events and accidents that we cannot explain, and our fancied excellence is at once upset, we feel indignant and resentful. It is certainly a very disagreeable thing to our self-love to be obliged to acknowledge that we are not of such importance as we imagine, and that there is a Power at work over which we have no control, to which we must submit, whether we like or not.

Still the Religious whose self-will has made her "anxious in cares" may have a certain desire for perfection; she may be even very exact in outward practices of devotion, and in acts of obedience that do not fall foul of her peculiar opinions. What are we to say of her in that case? Does her own will influence even her good acts? Generally speaking, yes—at least to a certain extent; for she transfers the care she ought to have for her soul to the fulfilment of her own will, and thus her religious practices have a great deal of hypocrisy in them: all the time she is engaged in them her greatest cause of anxiety is the fear that she should find herself obliged to give up her own will, or to put up with contradictions or re-



proofs ; the outward show of religion that she makes is in a great measure an attempt to deceive herself, and the different acts of obedience that she performs have, at the best, the negative advantage of keeping her out of mischief, if she does not try to find in them another support for her own opinions. Because her obedience is only partial: so far from being a real Religious virtue, it is only such as she might practise in the world, if she were her own mistress and were free to do just as she pleased. In fact, her desire for perfection is not worth much either, because she looks for an impossible perfection in which she herself and her own will must play the principal parts: it must be a perfection suited to her natural tastes. She will have a great deal to do, and a great many cares and anxieties, before she finds a perfection of that kind. Our sanctification must come from the grace of God ; we have no right to dictate to Him anything regarding it ; we have to co-operate with His grace, to desire what is pleasing to Him, and to trust confidently in His protection and assistance. There we may say that our part of the work ceases, and that God must do all the rest.

There are certain ways in which the evil effects of this "anxiety in cares" show them-

selves in the self-willed Religious. The first is, that she suffers from a continual preoccupation of mind with useless things. Her thoughts are so full of herself and her perplexities, that they have no place for anything else; and, besides, they are so unstable, so unsettled, that any accident may turn them in another direction, provided always that they tend ultimately to her own will. Of course she cannot examine herself properly, nor indeed do anything that requires mental exertion as long as she is thus preoccupied. The different duties of the Religious Life require to be performed with a great deal of care and attention, principally because they are the work of God, and because our perfection depends on the manner in which we perform them, considering our abilities and the graces given to us; the self-willed Religious is not able to devote proper care and attention to them, as long as she is unwilling to apply her mind to anything except the consideration of her own troubles. Hence there can be very little prayer or meditation for her. Her mind is filled with distracting thoughts, which she frequently entertains deliberately; she has no confidence that God will hear her if she asks to be delivered from them; and thus her vocal prayers are mere matters of routine, without heart and without fervor. Nor is it

any better with her meditations: her mind is in a sort of slavery, it is oppressed with a sense of uneasiness and discontent, it is distracted by doubts, and very often tormented by scruples. How could she, under such circumstances, attain to the glorious freedom of mental prayer, in which the soul is enabled by the grace of God to forget for a moment the shackles of the body that weigh upon it, and to unite itself by a free and untrammelled motion with God? Not only is her prayer unable to console and comfort her, but also it loses its efficacy in great part, so that she has to suffer from the constant and wearying disappointment of knowing that her prayers are fruitless. That happens solely because her own will has too much to do with her prayers: it comes between her and God, and spoils both her intention and her action. If she wishes her prayers to be heard, she must first of all submit entirely to the grace of repentance, and then everything else will follow in due course.

Another way, in which "anxiety in cares" shows itself is by a narrowness of spirit which measures out everything that is done for God with a miserly niggardliness. The fear of getting into difficulties with herself, or of increasing those under which she is actually

laboring, prevents the self-willed Religious from serving God with a large-hearted and generous spirit. No matter how eager her desires may be for the supernatural blessings that she wishes for herself, they are very faint and weak where God or His honor and glory are concerned; she cannot, therefore, be generous with God, nor has she, consequently, any reason to expect that He will be generous with her. For she closes her heart to Him, and He will never force an entrance into it. His wish is that we should invite Him, and prepare to receive Him as cordially as we can; if we do so He is only too willing to take up His abode with us, and to shower down upon us lavishly the greatest treasures of His love. But the poor Religious, who is a trouble to herself, and who finds a fertile source of uneasiness in her own will, to which she obstinately adheres, is blind to the liberality of God, and deaf to His gentle invitations; or rather, she expects Him to be liberal with her in an impossible way, and she accepts His invitations in such a half-hearted manner, that she shows more fear than love, more anxiety than confidence.

A Religious in this state is very much to be pitied. The splendid opportunities that the Religious Life offers her of gaining merit in the sight of God by glorious victories over His

enemies are mostly thrown away, and her energies are wasted on petty, miserable fancies, her spiritual strength is exhausted by fighting useless battles with mere chimeras, and her courage oozes out and melts away at the bare apprehension of imaginary dangers. Nor will she be convinced of her folly in attempting to prescribe a manner of action to Divine Providence. She often asks herself, Why did God do this, why has He placed me in such a position, subjected me to so many trials, overwhelmed me with so many cares; and all the while the cares and trials come from herself, that is to say, they find their power of disturbing her peace of mind only in her own will. It is a painful thing to think that one who is so highly gifted by God as to have the grace of Vocation to the Religious Life should sink so low as to remonstrate with the Almighty, because He does what He pleases. Who are we that should dare to put our puny desires against the eternal decrees of the Great King of heaven and earth? What right have we to complain of His actions with regard to us? Can anything come from the Most Holy but what is good and profitable and useful for us? Surely we are honored by any and every thing that God does for us. The very chastisements that He inflicts upon us to recall us to His

love are far more valuable than the greatest rewards ever bestowed by earthly sovereigns.

Finally, an effect of useless "anxiety in cares" is to weaken our mental powers with regard to spiritual things, so that we are incapable of appreciating them at their proper value. This is the great fault of the world, and consequently, one diametrically opposed to every principle of the Religious Life. The world is taken up with what it can hear and see, it values what it can lay its hands on, it desires everything that ministers to the comfort or well-being of the senses, or to the cravings of self-love and self-esteem. Thus spiritual things do not come within its domain; it attaches no value to them, because it does not see in them any power of supplying its wants or of gratifying its favorite inclinations. The world, therefore, does not think or speak of such things, nor allow them in any way to influence it, because all its powers are employed on objects that can be perceived by the senses. This great mistake is the cause of an unspeakable amount of misery, unhappiness, and falsehood; for spiritual things depend for their value, not on the appreciation of creatures, but on the perfections of God Himself; so that every neglect of them is an insult to the Divine Majesty, and brings down the

anger of God on the perverse and sinful world that despises His choicest benefits.

And there is no doubt that the world would suffer far more severely than it does were it not for the prayers and good works of so many holy men and women who serve God in the Religious Life, and to whom spiritual things are the only ones that possess any value. *They* see very clearly that this life is worth nothing, except in so far as we use it to gain eternal life; they look upon earthly things as dust and ashes, while they would give everything they have of this world for even the least supernatural favor that God can bestow on them. Thus, if it were in their power, they would give away the greatest treasures of earth for one act of the pure love of God, and they would willingly renounce the greatest honors for the sake of one act of sincere and genuine humility. Because when they received the grace of Vocation God enlightened their minds, and showed them the real standard by which to judge of the value of things, and when they act on this grace He keeps their minds from error, so that they see the truth without difficulty and embrace it with joy. And what a wonderful thing that grace is! What a change it makes, almost instantaneously, in the fortunate recipient! How

different worldly things appear to us when we learn to despise them! how different heavenly things when we know their real value! Praise be to God that there are so many in the Holy Catholic Church who have received this great grace, who live according to it, and who thus give great glory to God!

But this supernatural light, this excellent grace, does not work in us along with our own will. It requires the co-operation of a will that is submissive to God, and that desires, with all its might, to please Him; it cannot tolerate one that is self-seeking and conceited in its desires. So that we can easily see what becomes of the grace of Vocation in the self-willed Religious. She puts it out of sight as far as possible, she thrusts it away into some obscure corner of her heart, where it may not annoy or trouble her by remorse, in her efforts to please herself and to satisfy her own inclinations. Thus she begins already to undervalue spiritual things, and to prefer temporal things to them; she places herself on a level with the world, by adopting its false standards and acting on its lying maxims. The natural consequence of following our own will is to weaken our spiritual powers, by withdrawing them from the influence of divine grace and placing them at the service of the devil and the



world. Our fear and love are then excited by the leading influence, and as this latter tries to keep us far away from God, we do not look to Him when we are judging between the spiritual and the temporal, but to ourselves. Therefore we often deliberately sacrifice supernatural graces to secure some wretched thing that we have set our heart on, or to carry out some absurd idea that we have adopted. A Religious who gets into this state must be miserable indeed. She falls from a great height when she takes the world as her guide instead of God. Many and grievous must be the anxieties that harass her when she abandons the only source of consolation and strength. She must see, too, that by undervaluing spiritual things she is guilty of great injustice to God, who gives her spiritual gifts because they were purchased for her by the blood of His Only Son; to the convent, because it has a right to expect help from her in the great work of furthering the glory of God and the salvation of souls; and to the Church at large, because it naturally expects all Religious to wage war on the world without truce or intermission, after the example of its Divine Founder. The commission of an unjust act does not help us to perfection; quite the contrary; so that the self-willed Religious must

often fall into grievous mistakes and commit many deliberate venial sins of which she has, perhaps, no idea of repenting; at least, her repentance, while under the influence of her own will, must be very imperfect and insincere. No wonder, then, that she is ready to give up spiritual things to secure the object of her desires or to obtain a temporary relief from her anxieties. Let us see, now, how she goes to work. She has determined, we suppose, not to obey in a certain point, commanded by the Rule or Constitutions, or by her Superiors. She knows that this determination is wrong and displeasing to God, and that whenever or wherever she attempts to carry it out, she has Him against her; nor does this knowledge leave her, even when she is performing other actions which, in themselves, are good and praiseworthy. Now it is not a very comforting thing for a Religious to think that God is looking on her with displeasure, least of all when she is resolved not to give up what displeases Him, and so the poor victim of her own will grows anxious in everything she does; scruples begin to torment her very soon, and she gets into such a state that she would do anything to escape the trouble she has brought on herself—anything except giving up her own will; if she did that, her trouble would cease at

once. Hence she tries to persuade herself that the obedience placed upon her is the cause of her anxiety, and she immediately begins to scheme and plan, in every possible way, how to get rid of that obedience. Thus she sacrifices spiritual things for temporal; because a moment's reflection ought to convince her that she can gain immense merit in the sight of God by doing what is disagreeable to herself for His sake.

But the evil goes farther still, and vitiates, although it may not positively destroy, her whole spiritual life. A necessary means of tending to perfection is to have a great spirit of repentance for all the sins and imperfections of our whole lives, so that this repentance does not consist so much in a series of transitory acts, but rather in a habitual tendency of the will to be sorry for having ever offended God. When the will is already taken up with something that has no reference to God, it has no room for a repentance of this sort; and therefore the self-willed Religious, involved in countless troubles of her own making, cannot have the proper habitual sorrow for sin that belongs to her holy state. Nay, even the occasional repentance she elicits is faulty and imperfect, because there is a great deal of hesitation about it: it has very little hope connected with it and

too much bitterness; its sorrow is in a great measure selfish, and it is wanting in that thoroughgoing confidence in God which inspires fresh courage and renewed determination to avoid offending Him for the future. Thus her resolution is hampered, for she does not value spiritual things enough to sacrifice her own will to secure them.

All these troubles are certainly serious enough in themselves, and can occasion much uneasiness and disquiet. Yet they are insignificant enough in their cause, generally speaking; for, as a rule, they arise from some absurd idea, some crotchet, that the self-willed Religious gets into her head, and keeps there, in spite of obedience. Otherwise she could find very little in a convent to annoy or torment her, beyond the daily crosses that every one must bear who desires to conquer nature and follow the law of grace. Even if there are great trials sometimes, they are always of such a kind that obedience can render them not only easy to bear, but even sweet to the spiritual palate, for they come from God, and are to us a precious means of laying up treasure in heaven. When we are once thoroughly impressed with the necessity of mortifying our own will, we need not be afraid of any troubles or anxieties that may come upon us.

There is one very efficacious cure, and we may say it is the only one for this "anxiety in cares" and its attendant evils. That cure is abandonment to the divine will. Once our will has taken the right direction, we cannot push it too far in that direction; that is to say, there should be no bounds to our wishes and desires, since there are none to the divine liberality from which we expect the fulfilment of these desires. Hence when we wish for anything that we know to be pleasing to God, we should wish for it with all our power, according to the decrees of Providence. Now if we have been "anxious in cares" through self-will, and we desire to repent and live more in accordance with our holy Vocation, we must get rid of the foolish cares that have disturbed us. But who can take them from us? God, and He alone. Who can prevent these cares from coming upon us again? God, and He alone. What other desire, then, can we form but that He should show us His mercy, forgive our sins, and since we cannot trust in ourselves for a single day, that He should take upon Himself the whole charge of our lives for the future, so as to save us from ourselves? Thus by an act of the will we can abandon ourselves to God and secure His powerful protection in every act we do. We free ourselves from all

personal troubles and cares, by confiding them beforehand to the Divine Providence, so that we have nothing to trouble ourselves about but doing the will of God as perfectly as we can. Thus abandonment to the divine will, instead of superinducing quietism, or spiritual laziness, or sentimental piety, is the very thing that will make us really active in the divine service and really devoted to the honor and glory of God. For it is not what we do ourselves, but what we do not prevent God from doing in us, that will bring us to perfection. When we give ourselves completely to Him, He will know how to use us to the best advantage.

We may attain to the practice of abandonment to the divine will by fervent desires. Since such desires come from grace, God will not fail to fulfil them for us, according to His own wise decrees, and in the time, place, and manner that are most pleasing to Him. Let us only form the desire, and He will not allow it to be fruitless; that is the only thing we need care about; if we get anxious about the circumstances of time, place, or manner, under which God will give us this thorough abandonment to Himself, then we contradict ourselves, and our desire is not quite a pure one, there is too much of self in it. We can also use different accidents in our lives as means of prepa-

ration for the perfect practice of abandonment to the divine will. For instance, we often labor under some depression of spirits, imagining that something disagreeable is about to happen, or that some trial is in store for us. That is a fine opportunity for us to show that we have really no care for anything but the accomplishment of the will of God. We must conquer the depression as far as possible, and then fully convince ourselves that if the worst thing we dread were really to happen, we should have grace and strength to support it, no matter what our present weakness may be, and that, if trials of the severest nature should fall to our lot, God will enable us at the proper moment to bear them with profit to our souls. In this way we can train ourselves to look at suffering, whether mental or physical, in a Christian spirit, so that no suffering need ever make us unhappy. Although nature is afflicted and cries out against the burden, the will, strengthened by grace, rises superior to nature and asserts the just sovereignty of God over our whole being; the supernatural life that is in us rules over and controls every motion of the animal life, and thus through the mercy of God, the words of St. Paul may in time be verified in us: "I live, no, not I, but Christ liveth in me." Let us once give ourselves to

God, and submit humbly to His representatives, our Superiors, and we need never fear that our own will will make us "anxious in cares."



## CHAPTER XII.

OUR OWN WILL IS EASILY DISQUIETED BY  
SUSPICIONS.

THERE is a peculiar feature in the relations of human beings to each other, which proves the destructive power of sin and its deadly hostility to happiness: that feature is the tendency that men have to judge each other harshly, where private interest is in any way concerned. We have already alluded to an inclination that we naturally have, of asserting ourselves, making much of what we are and what we possess, and measuring everything by the standard of our own individuality. This inclination expresses itself by the harsh judgments that we pass upon our neighbor's conduct, either outwardly or merely in thought. Thus the original design and strict command of Almighty God are constantly interfered with and violated, while human happiness receives a deadly blow from the very circumstance that was intended to promote and intensify it. We are created to live together in this world and

in the next ; we have special faculties given us to maintain the social relations ; and as far as the supernatural life is concerned in its means and in its end, we can reach the perfection of our being only as members of the Mystic Body of Christ, the Holy Catholic Church ; that is, we must belong to that society, instituted by Our Divine Lord, which has the Pope as the visible bond of unity between its members here on earth. If we receive any natural blessing, it is given to us as children of the great human family ; if a supernatural grace is bestowed on us, we receive it and profit by it as Catholics ; nor is there any visible bond of union between us and God which exempts us from the obligations of the great Christian and social contracts imposed upon us by Him. Of course we can approach to God by prayer without considering any one but God and ourselves, but such prayer is not intended to make us forget our brethren ; on the contrary, it rather draws tighter the bond of union between all who love each other supernaturally and for God's sake, and it constantly reproduces in the Catholic Church those magnificent examples of self-devotion that excite the astonishment of the world and puzzle its limited understanding. The seven Sacraments explain to us the nature and the necessity of Christian love and charity :

they prove that we cannot afford to look upon ourselves as isolated units of humanity, or to separate our happiness and well-being from that of the Church at large. The life of the Catholic Church is the perfection of all the social relations which it preserves from the corruption and taint of sin, and raises to a great extent above the reach of the evil consequences of sin: that is to say, when we live according to the true Catholic spirit, we are in peace with our neighbor, outwardly and inwardly; but whenever we refuse to submit to the Church, when we are carried away by the idea of acting according to our own inclinations, then nature, corrupted by sin, holds sway in us, our relations with our fellow-Christians become disturbed, and we give way to all the suspicions and rash judgments that an overweening sense of self-importance can inspire.

Now we have no special faculties or powers that could help us to find out the real motives of the actions of others, so that we might compare them with some acknowledged and unchangeable standard of truth, and pronounce confidently upon them; that is, as a general rule, because God may place some under special obligations, which bind them to observe the conduct of others, to form a certain judgment of it, and to act upon that judgment. In

such a case God always gives special helps and graces of state ; this He does with all Superiors. Otherwise, since we must confess our natural inability to judge others, according to the proper standard, when our nature cuts itself adrift from the influence of grace, it is obliged to invent a standard of its own on which to found its judgments. This is always some favorite idea, some opinion which springs from or helps to support a great idea of self, and its great source of strength is our own will. Hence self-will and a strong inclination to suspicions and unjust judgments must always go together, for they are a mutual help to each other. We see, then, how our own will can be "easily disquieted by suspicions," and what a source of unhappiness it is to those who refuse to live according to the spirit of the Church.

Where the life of the Church is most vigorous, there we see its characteristics best displayed and its power of doing good most clearly exemplified. But the Religious Life is a state of perfection ; it is the intensification of every work that the Church does on earth, it is the source whence she derives her most valiant warriors, and therefore the Religious Life is the most vivid expression of the supernatural energy of the Church. Consequently, whatever faculties we had, as good Christians

in the world, for fulfilling the obligations of charity towards one another become increased and strengthened by the grace of Vocation, which calls upon us to practise a charity far beyond what we could practise in the world. If God, in His wonderful goodness and mercy, has placed us amongst the chosen and favorite members of His Mystic Body, He will certainly give us the means of supporting our dignity properly; He will supply what is wanting and cut off what is excessive in our natural qualities, or at least He will place those qualities under the control of reason, by His grace, that we may bear our dignity with honor to Him and profit to ourselves. This is a priceless blessing, even in this life; for it develops our social qualities and guides them in the right direction. If we ask, then, how is it that, as a general rule, Religious who have given up the world and their own nature so completely that they seem to have renounced all natural happiness and not to concern themselves in any way about it—how is it that they, after all, are the happiest people to be seen everywhere? Must we conclude that the more you fly from happiness, the more surely you attain it? In one sense, indeed, this paradox is true, because the Religious who seeks only supernatural things, lives much happier and more contented

than the worldling who seeks to satisfy every inclination of his nature. It is beyond a doubt that our greatest well-being is secured by our allowing to reason, assisted and enlightened by grace, the control over all our actions, and when the will, the motive-power of our faculties, is itself moved and inspired by the Almighty, the actions proceeding from it do not suffer from the evil consequences of sin and must tend to our happiness, if not immediately, at least so certainly that the short interval becomes quite supportable to us, buoyed up as we are with a lively hope, founded on the divine goodness, and looking forward to the divine Omnipotence for its realization. Thus the Religious who is true to her Vocation knows how to keep in check any unruly inclinations that would dispose her to give way to suspicions or harsh judgments of her Sisters or Superiors, and she is freed in that way from a great deal that makes the world unhappy and miserable. Further, her relations with her Sisters become supernaturalized; she has for them, not so much a natural love, based upon their personal qualities or character, as a heavenly charity, firmly established upon the love of God, and supported and fed by the flames of that fire which Christ came on earth to kindle. In other words, the social relations

which the Almighty wishes His rational creatures to have with each other, and the beneficent results which follow from them, are to be seen in their highest degree of earthly perfection in a convent.

But the graces of the Religious Life, powerful as they are, do not take away our free-will; we can accept or reject them, just as we choose. If we take the latter course, we place ourselves outside the influence of the grace of Vocation—at least as to its direct work upon our souls, and of course we must expect to find ourselves judging by false standards, and disturbing the relations of supernatural charity that should unite us with our Sisters and Superiors. In that way a Religious may become “easily disquieted by suspicions,” and may commit many faults that are very prejudicial to her perfection. In fact, a Religious who gives way to suspicions, despises great graces, and acts unworthily of the high dignity conferred on her, so that there is a special deformity in her action which is not found in similar faults of lay-people. She makes an exception of herself amongst her Sisters, and therefore the evil effects of her suspicions are brought out more prominently. Consequently, it is not a difficult matter to analyze the conduct of a Religious who allows herself to get into this state.

The whole evil has its root in self-will, and it would be a great mistake to seek for it in personal qualities, or in individual excesses or defects. It is quite possible for a Religious who is naturally of a suspicious disposition to work so well with grace, that she rarely, if ever, entertains an unjust or harsh opinion of her Sisters; while, on the other hand, one who is of an easy-going character, and slow to take offence, may become so attached to some idea of her own that she looks upon all who in any way interfere with it as being actuated by some unworthy motive. The very essence of our own will is selfishness: it never takes into account the duties of Christian charity, nor does it try to maintain the social relations in their integrity by not violating their supernatural character. Its end and motive is self, it selects its means without any reference to the divine will, and it is quite satisfied to obtain what it seeks without any glory accruing therefrom to God, or any advantage to souls. It forms its plans for itself alone, utterly disregarding the obligations and duties that it finds in its way; while it grows indignant at every act of others which tends to remind it of its duties or to enforce its obligations. Then it pronounces harsh judgments and gives way to suspicions, which have no foundation ex-



cept in selfishness, for our own will discards the true standard of right and wrong, and establishes a moral code suited to its own peculiar views and desires. Hence, if our pet idea is opposed, we experience a disagreeable sensation, something similar to the act of reason by which we renounce sin; that is, we abhor sin so much when acting under the influence of divine grace, that we are ready to do and suffer anything rather than commit it, and when our own will sways us, we abhor everything that opposes it, to such an extent, that we look upon such things as evil and reprehensible. Besides, when we once give way to suspicions, since they are all intended as a support to our own will, we are very often obliged to extend them to acts of others that do not in any way concern us; for although our conduct is inconsistent in the highest degree, yet we try to give it some color of consistency by finding fault with everything that is done by those who are the objects of suspicion to us. Aversions and unreasonable dislikes frequently arise from this cause, to the great detriment of the practice of sisterly charity.

There are many occasions when we are so convinced of our own utter helplessness, that we have to seek aid and consolation from

others ; this may happen by a special decree of Divine Providence, who wishes to teach us that we cannot trust in ourselves, and that we must often be content with the support and consolation that He gives us by means of mortals like ourselves. Such trials are evidently very useful, and since they greatly enhance the merit of obedience, we have good reason for believing that they are of frequent occurrence in a convent. Besides that, the bond that unites the members of the same religious community is not a mere sentimental affection, but a real and substantial outcome of divine charity, so that as Religious are more closely connected than by mere ties of flesh and blood, they must have a deeper sense of their dependence on each other, and learn to see in each other a help and a certain means of arriving, with God's grace, at the perfection of their state. Every phase of the supernatural life that tends to develop and perfect this mutual esteem and charity, must therefore be looked for in a convent. But what is the Religious to do who is "easily disquieted by suspicions," when such experiences fall to her lot? She sees herself in need of the good works of others, she wants advice or consolation from them, she is utterly unable to explain matters to her own satisfac-

tion, and she requires the help of her Sisters to understand things rightly, or she gets annoyed by some scruple which only her Confessor or her Superiress can explain away properly. Her obvious course, in such circumstances, would be to surrender herself and her private views entirely to the direction of those whom she thinks God has chosen to help her, and her confidence in them would redound to the glory of God and to her own great advantage. But the suspicious Religious does not see things in that light. She has no confidence in any one but herself, and when she is forced to abandon that and to seek help from others, she has more confidence in her own suspicions regarding the motives of those whom she asks to help her, than she has in the help or advice they give her. She is thus a perpetual torment to herself, for she is constantly on the look-out for impossibilities, or imagining that she has a right to complain if impossibilities do not occur. To satisfy such a Religious and put a stop to her suspicions, a convent should be filled, not with weak, sinful mortals who are trying to attain perfection, but with angels or saints who have already attained it. She forgets that faults and imperfections are so incidental to every state of humanity in this life, that they are often unavoidable, and consequently without

sin; that if we see a fault in our Sisters or Superiors, whom we ask for advice or help, we have no reason therefore to scorn their advice or to suspect them of selfish motives in helping us. On the contrary, Christian charity and prudence tell us, when we see or think we see faults in others, to suspect ourselves, to scorn our own opinion, and to give ourselves up with full confidence to those whom God has chosen as the ministers of His grace to our souls.

The Community Life, which is such a blessing and help to those who give up their own will in the spirit of their holy Vocation, only aggravates the trouble and unhappiness of the suspicious Religious. She is in daily contact with her Sisters and Superiors, she has every opportunity of observing their actions and studying their lives, and she uses the opportunity, too, in a way of her own; she carefully examines every little fault she finds in her Sisters, she nurses it in her mind and cherishes the recollection of it, until at last, long after the fault has been forgiven by God and forgotten by her Superiors, she succeeds in magnifying it into something enormous, upon which she commences to lay the foundations of a lasting aversion and dislike. An aversion thus commenced is sure to ripen into hatred,

unless it is speedily checked by a total subjugation of self-will, which alone can remove finally all cause of unjust and uncharitable suspicions.

Therefore, the Religious who is "easily disquieted by suspicions," and who, having found out her misery, is tired of it and wishes to be freed from it, must honestly and candidly confess her fault in the sight of God, and, with all humility, beg of Him to restore to her her peace of mind and to deliver her from the unhappiness she has caused herself. She must not give way to the foolish pride of wishing to continue in her misery, lest her Sisters should notice that she is repentant, for, by doing so, she would reject the grace that God gave her in opening her eyes to her wretched state, and she would prove to her Sisters that a miserable vanity has more power over her than the grace of Vocation. The humble confession of our faults before God is the first step to obtain forgiveness, and it is such an efficacious one, that the Religious who has made it, no matter how much she may have been disquieted by suspicions, may, with all confidence in the mercy of God, prepare to use the means best adapted to bring her life more into conformity with her holy state.

The first of these means is to conceive an

earnest, heartfelt desire of salvation and perfection. If we have tried the force of our will on selfish and miserable things, and found that it has power enough to make us unhappy and untrue to our Vocation, surely we have reason to hope that, when we use it in conformity with the divine will and with the help of divine grace, we shall be able to do more for our happiness and contentment than we formerly did to make ourselves miserable; for God is far more powerful for good than we are for evil, and not even the greatest of our sins is able to stand up against the least of His graces, once we freely accept that grace and correspond with it. And have we not a thousand reasons for desiring to save our souls with a most intense and constant desire? They are so plain and so convincing, that it is unnecessary to insist upon them, least of all to a Spouse of Christ, who, though she has allowed herself to be blinded by her own will, yet has never, as we suppose, lost the wish to be happy with her Heavenly Bridegroom for all eternity. Still she must confess that while she was "disquieting herself by suspicions," her desire of salvation was not near so intense nor so constant as it should have been. She must acknowledge that she voluntarily admitted many things that could have placed her salvation

in great danger, if God were not so merciful. She has now to remedy all this by wishing for nothing so much as for the grace of holy perseverance and a happy death. But her desires in that direction must go beyond her natural strength, and therefore she must beg of God by earnest prayer to strengthen and increase them, so that no mere natural wishes of hers may ever be able to weaken or interfere with them. Thus the acts of her will must eventually acquire such supernatural vigor, that she will really aim at perfection, and will be quite pleased to sacrifice anything and everything that is opposed to it. Nay more: when she once gets into this happy state, she will find that the recollection of her former miseries, far from discouraging her, will only increase her earnestness in the divine service; for she will say to herself, "It is time for me now to do something for God. I have lost opportunities enough of giving Him honor and glory, I have defrauded the Church of my services to which she has a just title, I have wronged my Sisters and placed difficulties in the way of my Superiors; I am heartily sorry for having done so, and I know that God, who has given me this sorrow will also help me to serve Him in earnest for the future, so that I may attain perfection before I die." As the Apostle tells us,

everything helps those who love God ; even in past faults we can find a motive for increased energy and for a more self-sacrificing love, by virtue of an intense desire to atone for them, and to make good, as far as we can, the wrong we have done to God, whom we love so much.

The second means of avoiding suspicions is to examine, calmly and dispassionately, the cause of them. We shall find this, almost invariably, to be some passion or unworthy inclination, or some frivolous desire that tries to enslave our will. Having found the cause, it is easy for us to overcome it, not merely once or twice, but a hundred times, if necessary ; for we know not but that it may be the will of God to leave that cause in us for a long time, even to the end of our lives, that we may have the opportunity of combating it, and so of gaining glory for Him and profit for ourselves. We have seen already, in this chapter, that the real root of suspicions is our own will : the passions and evil inclinations are merely the outward causes, as it were, which try to determine the will to act on its own account and to overlook the claims that God has on it. Now, since our will is always in our power, as far as deliberate acts are concerned, it is evident that presupposing the grace of God, which is never



wanting, we can overcome every temptation to be suspicious, no matter how strong it may be. For instance, it can happen that I am inclined to suspect a Sister of speaking of my faults; the thought comes into my mind, and with it the idea that the Sister is uncharitable. If I am satisfied to take all this for granted, I shall easily give way to the suspicion; but if I am determined to find out the cause of it, before giving way, I shall examine myself, and with a little trouble find self-love or self-esteem hard at work within me, trying to bend my will and to steal it away from God. Profiting by this discovery, I cannot be deceived by the hypocritical suggestions of self-esteem, for I know that my suspicions are founded, not on the fear that my Sister may be guilty of uncharity, but on the dread and dislike that I have to be thought little of. When I know where the disease is seated, the remedy is easily applied, and each successive victory that I gain over myself gives me a habit of conquering and a greater confidence in God.

Thus through the divine mercy I can use the very faults in my character, the very weak points in my nature, as means of displaying the perfections and infinite power of God, and at any moment, no matter what I have been

in the past, I can begin to serve God with renewed vigor and fresh energy, until I shall be able to say, with St. Paul, "I live, no not I, but Christ liveth in me."

## CHAPTER XIII.

OUR OWN WILL IS MORE DESIROUS OF GLORY THAN OF VIRTUE, AND LOVES REPUTATION MORE THAN A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

ALTHOUGH the human will is a natural faculty and necessary to the completion of our nature, yet it has a peculiarly vigorous way of acting, it possesses a certain energy of its own, that it can find nothing to correspond with exactly in any mere created thing that it desires. No matter how fully we may possess or enjoy any creature, there is still such an immense power of desiring left behind in the will that nothing short of infinity can completely satisfy it; therefore, the enjoyment that mere creatures can give us is short-lived, and the satisfaction that we derive from them is soon swallowed up by the vast amount of energy that is stored away in the will. Hence the very nature of the human will enforces the great truth, revealed to us by God, that we are not made for ourselves nor for other creatures, but for Him alone.

Now it is manifest that we, of ourselves, have no power of controlling and guiding, in the proper direction, a faculty that nothing created can satisfy. Of course we have our will in our own power; we can vary its acts, and turn them hither and thither just as we please; but we cannot supply material enough for it to work upon: no amount of created things can occupy its energy to the full extent, and our natural power does not go beyond what this world gives us. It is impossible for us, then, to employ the will properly and to the full extent of its energy, without the help of divine grace. That alone can direct our desires to a fitting object, and supply them with material which can neither fail nor disappoint them. Hence we have many noble aspirations, many supernatural impulses, which come to us from the Almighty, and elevate our desires far above creatures to fix them on the Creator. Nor is it astonishing that such noble aspirations should exist in us simultaneously with the countless miseries to which our nature is exposed, for the will, in which they are seated, has its own peculiar fashion of acting, and can hold itself aloof from all interference on the part of the lower faculties of our nature, with which the miseries of life come into immediate contact. Thus I may suffer intense

bodily pain, and be outwardly the most miserable of mortals, while if I am at the same time fully resigned to the will of God, I perform in my own degree the highest act of which human nature is capable, and I am impelled to it by the noblest aspiration that can animate the human heart; that act is the love of God above all things, the aspiration is the desire to prove that love by suffering for God's sake. In the same way spiritual trials and temptations, as well as the countless doubts and perplexities that at times assail us, have no power to degrade the will or to deprive it of the noble aspirations implanted in it by God, as long as we subject ourselves to the influence of grace.

Thus, while He leaves our human nature intact, God, in His mercy and goodness, surrounds us with so many helps and fills us with so many supernatural and heavenly desires, that we need never be at a loss for a worthy object, on which to employ all the force and energy of our will, without any fear of disappointment or dissatisfaction. Nay, even the very evils of life are a powerful help to this ennobling of our nature. The tendency of evil is to degrade and lower, but where it is opposed by good, it is powerless to work mischief, or rather it becomes a means of intensi-

fying the good. We see this every day of our lives in the temptations that we overcome by the grace of God. Not only are those temptations unable to harm us, but the very fact of our resisting them, with the help of grace, proves that no evil is able to withstand the goodness of God, and that He can draw from the evil a good far greater than the harm originally intended; for we know that there is nothing that strengthens our virtue like frequent trials and temptations.

But, it is mainly by the will, assisted by grace, that we have to overcome the evils of life; nor can we do it in any way but in that marked out for us by our Divine Lord. He gained a glorious triumph over evil, not by flying from it, but by submitting to it, as far as He could with patience and love. In spite of the struggle of human nature in Him, in the garden of Gethsemane, His human will refused not a single pang, not a single torment, mental or bodily, of His bitter passion; and therefore His victory over suffering and death was a complete and perfect one, inasmuch as, by a perfect act of the will, He gave Himself altogether to His Eternal Father. The Religious who has the spirit of her Vocation must imitate the example of her Heavenly Spouse. She should be incapable of desiring, at least

deliberately, anything but what is pleasing to God, or makes her pleasing to Him. So that her life must be formed and characterized by the virtues of her holy state, her desires must tend to the acquisition of those virtues, nor must she admit any wish that might drag her down to earth, or interfere with the heavenly desires of her will strengthened by grace. Least of all should she seek for any temporal reward or earthly consolation for her good actions. God certainly gives such rewards very often, but then they are more heavenly than earthly, and they are able to produce an eternal effect, inasmuch as they are intended to help to sanctify our souls. The really spiritual Religious fixes her treasure in Heaven; she desires God, and is not satisfied with anything less. She loves Him for His own sake, and not for his consolations; and therefore, since her will is an obedient servant of her Lord and Master, it is always prepared to follow the guidance of divine grace, so that it knows how to receive consolations and how to do without them.

On the other hand, the Religious who is fond of her own will often seeks earthly things and deliberately makes them the end of her actions. Owing to her want of mortification, the love of God and the desire to possess Him do not

occupy her completely, so that she has room for many more loves and desires, which she admits into her will just as it suits her fancies and natural inclinations. I do not mean to say that a mortified Religious, and one who hates her own will, may not feel many desires that are quite different from what the love of God would inspire; but she fights against them, she wishes not to have them, and, if she is taken by surprise and gives way for a moment, she is sorry for having done so immediately after, and thus she prevents those desires from getting into her will, and from having any very perceptible influence upon her actions. But the unmortified Religious retains those desires, and finds so much pleasure in them, that she is unwilling to fight against them. Consequently where they are, her love of God grows weak, and her life loses in great measure its supernatural character. She is often so eager for earthly consolations, that she loses sight of her eternal reward, and thus it is that her own will confines her to earth, deprives her of heavenly desires, and fills her with the idea of doing as other people do, who make no secret of looking for earthly consolations as the reward of their actions.

We can easily see from this how it is that our own will makes us "more desirous of glory



than of virtue." In the old pagan times, people were generally persuaded that the noblest object for which man could strive was glory. This idea is so attractive to our nature, that it had no difficulty in finding numbers of adherents in every age. It was not till our Divine Lord came down upon earth that men knew that it is a good thing to be despised and persecuted and calumniated. Even now, after we have learned at least the first principles of the great lesson of Christian humility and self-sacrifice, we must still keep fast hold of divine grace, or the old idea of earthly glory will come back upon us in some shape or other, and will do all in its power to make us yield to its influence. It seems almost ridiculous to say that a Religious who has bound herself to live in poverty and obedience should be on her guard against earthly glory; and yet the warning is by no means unnecessary, for, if a Religious does not mortify her own will, she must only expect to suffer as other people do, in whom nature often gets the upper hand of grace. When the supernatural is sacrificed for the sake of following our own will, there must be a proportionate degradation of our actions, which affects, not merely the acts themselves at the moment of performance, but also their results or consequences. These results, in

which the supernatural element is wanting, are transitory, uncertain, and unable to satisfy the longings of the will; yet the will, during its period of perversity, persists in seeking them, because it has narrowed itself down to mere natural things, it forms only natural desires and directs its own acts and the acts of the other faculties merely to self-gratification. Thus it happens that, no matter how little a Religious can hope for in the way of earthly glory, the desire of that glory may easily become the motive of many of her actions, when she ceases to mortify her own will. Her life then becomes a constant hypocrisy. With the outward appearance of desiring only to please God, she is in reality doing all she can to earn the praise of men; the virtues of the Religious Life have no value in her sight, except in so far as they can help to gratify her inordinate vanity, and she takes all the good out of them by the unworthy motive that she has in practising them. If she is apparently strict in the outward practice of poverty, it is not that she may heap up treasure in heaven, but that she may enjoy the good opinion of her Sisters and Superiors here on earth; if she is regular at prayers and in choir, she conceives a great esteem of herself, and expects that others should look upon her as very virtuous; in a word, her desire of glory

is sufficient to spoil her best actions and to render them worthless in the sight of God. Besides that, she is guilty of a great injustice by using the choicest gifts of God as a means of robbing Him of the praise and glory that are due to Him alone. The virtues of the Religious Life are the outward expressions of the special love of Jesus Christ for those to whom He gives the grace of Vocation. He places all His Spouses on earth in such a position that they may practise every day the virtues which are most pleasing to His Sacred Heart. The vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience furnish to the Religious Life an unceasing source of supernatural motives, by which the soul may be adorned with countless acts of virtue that would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible in the world. Who shall say how much the Almighty God foresaw in the foundation of the Catholic Church, that His external glory would be increased by the practice of the virtues of the Religious Life? If there was anything that could bring consolation to the afflicted soul of our Divine Lord in His agony in the garden, it must surely have been the foreknowledge that, to the very end of time, there would be always in His Church some faithful souls whose whole desire would be to imitate Him as perfectly

as possible, and who would, to that end, cut themselves off from every earthly tie in order to devote themselves completely to His service. Surely we can easily imagine that He, in the midst of His bitter agony, looked forward to the many faithful Religious who would follow in His footsteps, by means of the virtues of their holy state. These virtues must, then, have a special value in His sight; they must represent the most precious fruits of His passion and death, and therefore, they must have quite a special part to perform in increasing the external honor and glory of God. The acts of a good and mortified Religious have about them a peculiar flavor of the earthly life of Jesus Christ, and they take a place in the scheme of Divine Providence that no act of any other rational creature can occupy.

The selfish and unmortified Religious, who is fond of her own will, robs the Almighty of all this honor and glory, as far as she may do so, and seeks to secure for herself an empty glory, which can do her no good, and which will only serve to make her more inclined to follow her own will. But how is she to know that she is in this state? We are all, generally speaking, tempted to vainglory, and few of us are able to repress altogether a feeling of satisfaction if others praise our conduct. Even good Reli-

gious who are doing their best may feel temptations in this direction ; how are we to distinguish between temptation and sin, between an evil natural inclination that we keep under by divine grace and by a right use of the will, and an evil habit, contrary to the spirit of the Religious Life and its virtues, that we deliberately admit? Very often, indeed, the distinction is a difficult one to make, and we are forced, fortunately for ourselves, to submit altogether to the judgment of our Superiors and our Confessor. I say, fortunately, because that submission is sure to keep us from practical error, while it relieves us of a great deal of responsibility. But there are certain signs of an unmortified will which seeks its own glory, that Superiors can easily detect in the outward conduct of their Sisters.

One of these signs is a constant thirst for praise, which betrays itself, in spite of all efforts to conceal it, by a spirit of indifference and carelessness in our actions, because we think that our Superiors and Sisters do not take sufficient notice of us, or that they are not concerned enough about our welfare. When this spirit takes possession of us, we try to push ourselves forward on every possible occasion, we cannot bear to be left in the background, we are extremely and inordinately

sensitive to the least sign of neglect ; and as in such circumstances we are never out of trouble, we find a secret pleasure in talking of our troubles, we make much of them, cherish them, turn them into a grievance, and lay the whole blame of them upon others. In this way we pander to our thirst for glory, by getting a good opinion of ourselves, looking on ourselves as martyrs suffering from unjust treatment, and by putting ourselves at last into such a state that we force our Superiors or Sisters to take special notice of us. Hence we get affected and unnatural in manner, while our piety dwindles down into mere sentiment, that cannot long withstand the rude shock of temptation.

Another sign of a will that is "more desirous of glory than of virtue" is its impatience of reproof. This impatience is something more than the mere outcome of inborn pride, from which every descendant of Adam suffers : it is that outcome of pride fostered by self-will and by the neglect of many precious graces by the help of which it might have been overcome. In fact, the self-willed Religious resents reproof as an injury ; she will not be persuaded that it is necessary for her, or, if she is forced by the light of reason to acknowledge its necessity in general, she always makes an exception of each

particular instance in which reproof is administered to herself; she easily persuades herself that her Superiors have some grudge against her, that their corrections are not made in the spirit of charity, or that they are mistaken with regard to her faults. Thus corrections do her no good, and she deprives herself of the good effects of one of the greatest external graces that God bestows on those who devote themselves to the Religious Life. Under these circumstances the thirst for glory goes on increasing, its signs become more manifest, and the poor Religious who gives way to it goes farther and farther away from the perfection of her state; for how could she attain perfection when she is more anxious to secure the praise of men than to please God by practising the virtues of her state with a pure intention?

Finally, the thirst for glory manifests itself by consequences, fraught with danger to the peace and well-being of the community, which sooner or later are sure to follow. When a Religious gets a wrong and distorted idea of her position, when she forgets her obligations to God and to the Church, and gives way to her foolish desires for praise, she finds herself, in a short time, isolated, as it were, from her Sisters; she must be conscious that she has not the same object in view that they have, and

that the spirit of community has lost its hold upon her. Even if there were several members of the community affected with the same inordinate desire, the sense of isolation must still, in the beginning at least, force itself upon them, because when we seek ourselves in any shape or form, we practically separate ourselves from our fellow-mortals, by setting ourselves up on a pedestal of fancied superiority, and expecting all creatures to bow down and do us homage. But this sense of isolation is not a satisfactory one; it throws us too much upon ourselves, and leaves us no refuge from our own weakness. So that we are forced to look for consolation and support from others. It goes without saying that we value only that particular kind of consolation and support that chimes in with our own ideas, and helps to satisfy our thirst for praise. Thus it happens that, when a Religious becomes "desirous of glory" through following her own will, she will be quite prepared to act the hypocrite with her Superiors and to get up parties amongst her Sisters. This she can do by the help of that natural cunning which our unfortunate pride easily arms itself with; and if her Sisters and Superiors are not careful, she will succeed in cajoling them or playing upon their weaknesses, until she gains her point—often a very worthless, in-



significant point, some petty idea, some opinion that she attaches value to, for no earthly reason but because it is her opinion. Pity it is that a Spouse of Jesus Christ, who is called by Him to do great things for the Church, who is under the special protection of His Virgin Mother, should let herself sink so low as to employ the weapons of vain and frivolous women of the world for vain and frivolous objects!

To cure this inordinate thirst for glory, a Religious must remember that it is founded on falsehood and that it leads to rebellion. Nothing has less foundation than the excellence we fancy we possess of ourselves; nothing so weakens the power of lawful and salutary authority over us as to imagine that we are better than our Superiors, or that they, although lawfully appointed, are not good enough to direct us. When we are possessed by a desire for glory we cannot bear to think that we have faults, nor can we listen to the admonitions of those who would show us our faults and help us to correct them; so that we are likely often to resist authority and to entail upon ourselves the dreadful consequences of despising God in the persons of our Superiors: "He that despiseth you, despiseth Me," says Christ. What more foolhardy thing can there be than to dare the anger of God for the sake of human praise?

And what is human praise worth to a Religious? It is certainly the most useless thing she can desire. She is not in the way of being benefited by any worldly advantage; the greatest treasures of earth could not make her one bit richer or happier; she cannot aspire to a high position in the world, nor can she hope to be invested with any great earthly dignity. Why then should she offend God and follow her own will for the sake of an empty breath of air; for all human praise is nothing more to a Spouse of Christ. Let her then strive to please God alone, whose praise is all in all to her, and when her Superiors or Sisters encourage her, by showing her where grace has helped her to overcome the difficulties and slowness of nature, let her give all the glory to God, and He, in His infinite goodness, will give her all the merit.

Another evil characteristic of our own will, closely connected with the one we have just been considering, is that it "loves reputation more than a good conscience." When self-will rules in us, we are not satisfied with mere praise, we wish to stand high in the opinion of others; the spirit of falsehood takes such possession of us, that we wish to infect others with it in the same degree as ourselves, so that the excellence we fancy we possess may ap-

pear real in their eyes. This perversion of the will vitiates our motives and intentions to a very great extent. It goes rather deeper into our motives than the mere thirst for praise. When we wish others merely to praise us, we may often be contented with a few outward signs of approbation ; but when self-will strikes deeper root in us it prompts us not to be content with mere outward praise unless it is sincerely meant, nor to be satisfied with mere external signs of approbation, unless we see that they come from one whom we have succeeded in persuading of our excellence. It matters not that this excellence has no real existence in us, as long as we can believe that others look upon us as good, or talented, or pious, we trouble little about the reality, for our principal motive is, not to please God, but to gratify ourselves, not to do His will, but to satisfy our own so as to make the opinions and ideas of others subservient to it.

A Religious who gets into this state lives a life of continued hypocrisy. She constantly strives to appear what she knows she is not, and, as she devotes herself to cultivating the mere outward appearance of goodness she loses gradually all desire for the real, substantial and interior goodness which alone is pleasing to God. As a consequence of this hypocrisy,

she often sacrifices her peace of mind to gain the good opinion of others, she is guilty of many abuses and breaches of Religious discipline, in matters that cannot help her inordinate self-love, and, if a strict watch is not kept over her, she allows herself to fall into many worldly habits and customs, that will, by degrees, sap and undermine her spiritual life, until at last she becomes a Religious merely in name and garb.

A beginning of this dangerous form of self-will may be traced in those who, habitually and not from mere forgetfulness, refuse to acknowledge their small faults in chapter, or who try to escape the various little humiliations and penances enjoined upon them by the Constitutions of their order, or by the command of their Superioress. The founders of Religious Orders knew well what a foe to perfection our own will is, and how ready it is to seize upon every opportunity of frustrating God's grace in our souls, and therefore they wisely provided efficacious protection against its assaults, in the shape of those little penances and humiliations; so that, as we have it in our power to make frequent and almost daily use of them, we may thus acquire the salutary habit of contending with our own will and defeating it in such a manner that we

can have outward, sensible proof of our victory. The good and zealous Religious will therefore be very exact in practising the various mortifications prescribed for her, and she may rest assured that they will help her, in no inconsiderable degree, to attain to the perfection of her state; she, on the contrary, who is carried away by self-will to such a degree that she "loves reputation more than a good conscience," will try to avoid all those things and will thereby forfeit much merit in the sight of God, and will place herself in great danger of losing the spirit of Religion and of being enslaved by the false maxims and lying doctrines that keep the world in the bondage of Satan.

Yet a moment's reflection should suffice to cure a Religious of this kind of folly. Of what use to her is the empty bubble of reputation that she strives for, and for which she sacrifices the precious treasures of the virtues of her state? Will it perhaps help her to die well? We have seen that it is capable of embittering her life, and that it can deprive her of peace of mind; will it at least soften the anguish of her last moments or mitigate the terrors of death? But how could that be? Men cannot help us in death, so that their good opinion can then be of no use to us, nor can they injure us then, so that we need not

be afraid of losing anything if they have a bad opinion of us. It is God alone whom we need dread in that solemn moment, it is to Him alone that we can fly for support and consolation. But if we neglect Him during life, how can we hope that He will be propitious to us in death? If we are so anxious for the praise and good opinion of our fellow-creatures, that we do not scruple to wrong the Almighty God and deprive Him of our service, how can we expect that His infinite justice will be favorable to us when the time comes for Him to judge us? And that time is approaching very quickly. The day of the Lord is at hand, when human praise and flattery will not be able to excite in us even the least movement of self-complacency, for we shall be so overwhelmed with the Divine Majesty that we shall look upon all that is not God, or that is not sought for and desired solely for His sake, as dust and ashes.

## CHAPTER XIV.

OUR OWN WILL IS MORE MISERABLE WHEN ENJOYING THE OBJECTS OF ITS DESIRES, THAN WHEN IT IS WITHOUT THEM.

A COMMON subject of regret, amongst worldly people, is the time of youth and childhood. They say, "Oh! would that I could live that happy time over again! The very remembrance of it excites a lively desire in one to go back to the time when I was full of hope and energy, when I looked forward to everything with joyous anticipation, when I welcomed every little change as the forerunner of something still more brilliant and advantageous. But alas! these desires are fruitless, and I must bid adieu forever to the past." This vain and useless longing for an impossibility shows how unreasonable the desires of our unmortified will can be, and how they stop at no absurdity, once the will forms and adheres to them. It is to this as to their immediate cause that we may trace most of the

evils that afflict humanity. When people are content with their lot, that is to say, when they keep their desires in check, they are able to enjoy the blessings that Providence bestows on them; but when their desires carry them away beyond their condition, then they are, as it were, torn asunder by conflicting influences, and they must experience all the discontent, unhappiness, and misery that unsatisfied longings invariably cause. Even the old pagan philosophers were persuaded of this truth, and therefore they tried to reduce their desires to the smallest possible compass. It is related of Socrates that he once said, on seeing a grand procession pass by, in which many precious objects were carried, "How many things there are that I do not require!" The story of Diogenes and his tub is well-known, and does not require to be repeated. So that even the natural light of reason tells us that if we wish to save ourselves much useless uneasiness and misery, we must restrain our desires; that is to say, our desires for natural and earthly things, for there should be no bounds to our desire to possess God and to do His will perfectly in all things. And here was the great defect of the old pagan philosophers: they mortified their desires for the riches and comforts of life, but they had nothing satisfac-



tory to replace them, or at least they so far neglected the natural law, the unwritten law of God in their own consciences, that they became filled with pride and self-conceit; in vain should we seek for anything like the example of our Divine Lord in their lives. Hence St. Jerome says, in his homily on the 19th Chapter of St. Matthew, "Christ does not say, Because you have left all things, you shall be seated on thrones, and shall judge the tribes of Israel; because Crates the philosopher did that, and many others too despised riches: but He says, Because you have followed me: for therein lies the true mark of an Apostle and a believer." Thus, the light of faith supplies what is wanting to human reason, and while the latter tells us that if we wish to enjoy life, we must restrain our desires, the former shows us the real emptiness and deceitfulness of earthly things, and teaches us to aspire with all the force of our will to the possession of eternal life.

The devout Religious, the true Spouse of Jesus Christ, easily yields to the influence of faith in this respect. She is so thoroughly convinced of everything that the Church teaches, that she uses her faith constantly as a mighty weapon to restrain her will and to overcome every desire of her nature that is in

the smallest degree opposed to her high Vocation. She thus leads a truly mortified life, and, besides "leaving all things," she follows Christ and becomes a sort of Apostle in the convent, by her close imitation of the all-perfect and mortified life of her Divine Spouse. On the contrary, the unmortified Religious, who loves herself more than she does her Heavenly Spouse, follows her own will, in spite of the teaching of faith, and fritters her life away in idle and useless desires, thereby bringing on herself many miseries, of which she has no right to know anything at all. For the desires of our own will, as opposed to obedience and the will of God, are prompted either by personal vanity, or by the devil, the father of lies, or by a worldly spirit; whatever source they come from, they can only deceive and mislead us, and while they buoy us up with hopes of happiness before the time comes for their fulfilment, when that time really arrives we are sure to be bitterly disappointed, and to find that the possession of the desired object does not give us any satisfaction, or at most only a very transitory and uncertain one.

If our will is set in motion by personal vanity or self-esteem, so that we desire something to support our idea of our own excellence, it is

evident that we are doomed to disappointment and misery, unless we mortify our will and trample our vanity under foot. Because the excellence on which we found those acts of the will is purely imaginary, it does not exist at all; more than that, the effort that we make to suppose it is directed against the teaching of the Church, and our own inward conviction as Catholics. We know that we have nothing good in us unless what we have received from God, and therefore, that any desires having for their object an excellence which we try to consider as our own, without referring it to God, must be unjust to Him and injurious to ourselves. Even if we do acknowledge that we have received everything from God, yet every wilful desire of self-esteem founded upon God's gifts is false and sinful, because it deprives God of the praise and homage due to Him for His liberality and goodness to us. Any one might receive the gift that God has bestowed on me, many have received far more precious ones than I; would it not then be very foolish for me to extol myself on account of such things, and, if I commit that act of folly, what can I expect but misery and unhappiness?

Again, if our will is impelled to action by the wiles and deceits of the devil, and obeys the

impulse, we prepare a vast amount of misery and suffering for ourselves. The devil makes use of the sensitive and lower part of our nature as a weapon against the rational and superior part. He knows how to excite passions, to stir up desires, to fill the imagination with selfish and worldly ideas, by holding up before us some imaginary good or happiness which we might gain by yielding to his temptations. His object is to ruin us eternally, but he carefully conceals that in the beginning. He knows that, generally speaking, to propose anything grievously sinful to a Religious would at once fill her with horror, and therefore he is content at first with seizing hold of some weak point in her character, by which he may all the more easily influence her will. Thus, for instance, if she is disposed to value highly her own natural power of judging character, and gives way to this weakness, he easily leads her on, first to criticise, and then to find fault with her Sisters or Superiors, until in the end he brings her so far that she lives in open and constant violation of the duties of sisterly charity and of her vow of obedience, and instead of sharing in the community life of her Sisters in the spirit of humility and unselfishness, she looks upon herself as a privileged person in the convent, for whom the Rule and Con-

stitutions were not made, and who is not bound to acknowledge any Superior but the vagaries of her own will. It is evident that the Religious who thus allows the devil to deceive and mislead her is in a most miserable and unhappy state. No matter what class of temptations or what natural weakness the devil makes use of to turn her aside from the path of perfection, she will find nothing but bitterness and falsehood, as the reward for having believed the suggestions of the father of lies. Not only is she tortured with the stings of remorse, but also the very fulfilment of the desires that carried her away from her duty remind her of graces neglected, of a Vocation to which she is unfaithful, of a great dignity conferred on her by God, which she has despised and trampled under foot. Therefore, as it is impossible for anything good to come from the spirit of evil, so it is impossible for a Religious who obeys the desires he excites in her to find anything but misery and unhappiness as the result of her folly.

Perhaps the most dangerous source of the desires of our own will is a worldly spirit. At all events, it is pretty clear that a Religious who renounces the world heart and soul, outwardly and inwardly, will have little difficulty in overcoming the temptations of the devil or the

movements of self-love, because she is so thoroughly under the influence of the Religious Life that she is almost forced to make use of the powerful helps it affords her, so that she can combat those two enemies, as if they were foreigners invading her own lawfully acquired territory. Neither the temptations of the devil nor the movements of self-love can ever gain firm footing in the soul of the Religious who is filled with the spirit of her Vocation. But where she falls away from that spirit, the rival influence steps in, the least retreat she makes from the spirit of her Vocation is an advance which the spirit of the world makes upon her; and there is no other alternative. We must either progress or retrograde in the way of perfection; there is no such thing as standing still. The two spirits, that of Jesus Christ as displayed in the Evangelical Counsels, and that of the world as shown in the efforts it makes to render these Counsels impracticable—these two spirits are in deadly antagonism to each other, there can be neither peace nor truce between them. Now, suppose a Religious inclines, though never so little, to the spirit of the world, is it not evident that she then invites the enemy into her soul, and offers him the possession of the territory which she has compelled her true friend and ally, the spirit of her Vocation, to

evacuate? And what a disastrous and insidious warfare the invader can then wage upon her peace of mind! How he befools and deceives her, until she gets so infatuated with worldly desires, that her will is almost absorbed by them, and obedience to her Superiors is the last thing she thinks of! Alas for the Religious who gets into this state! For she is a Religious only in name and dress, but in reality and by reason of the perversion of her will, which influences her whole nature, she is a woman of the world. And her conduct bears witness to her true character: she is given to fault-finding, to criticising, to time-serving; she is false and cunning in her speech, affected and unnatural in her actions; she judges without truth, and condemns without mercy; she trespasses on the rights of her Sisters and Superiors with the utmost effrontery, and does not scruple to treat them with disrespect and uncharity. There is not much difficulty in detecting in a Religious the traces of a worldly spirit. For the business of the world is to flatter our natural desires, and to encourage them as much as possible. But when it comes to the fulfilment of those desires, what misery, what a disappointment, what a downfall is there! She who was almost in possession of Heaven has given it up for the vile things of

earth ; she who was inebriated with the sweetness of the supernatural truths, infused into her soul by God, feeds herself with the filthy garbage of worldly cunning and deceit ; she whose will was strengthened by a great and special grace against all the powers of evil, has made herself a slave to the very enemy whom she declared unceasing war against when she entered the convent. Hence the worldly Religious betrays the spirit that animates her, because she cannot conceal the restlessness and agitation that worldly desires cause her, nor can she hide the unhappiness and bitter disappointment that the fulfilment of such desires always brings with it.

But, it may be urged, is it quite true that self-willed Religious have a monopoly of misery in the convent ? Have good and mortified Religious nothing to suffer ? Is there no danger, in fact, of attributing misery, unhappiness, or restlessness to the wrong cause, at least sometimes, if we invariably put these things down to an unmortified will ? I answer without hesitation, there is no danger of a mistake in such cases, for there is a peculiar mark about the suffering caused by our own will, by which it may be easily recognized and at once attributed to its proper cause. It is quite true that good Religious have to suffer ; how could they



conquer their own will otherwise? If the "word of God is a sharp sword" that searches out the inmost recesses of our nature with its penetrating point, if it tells us to hate ourselves and everything belonging to us for Christ's sake, if it impresses on us the necessity of doing constant violence to ourselves, who shall say that that sacred word can be fulfilled in us without causing us many a pang? For our nature feels and tries to rebel against the violence we do it. But what we suffer in that way is more than compensated for by the many advantages we gain. The merchant, intent on gain, travels over sea and land; he spares himself no trouble, shirks no inconvenience, provided only he can add to his wealth; he suffers much anxiety, but if at the end he finds that his efforts have been successful, he makes light of all his trouble, and forgets it in the joy that he feels at seeing his wealth increased. The good Religious is far more eager for heavenly treasures than ever merchant was for earthly ones; like St. Paul, she thinks that all the trials and sufferings of this life, and all the trouble it costs her to mortify her will "are as nothing compared to the future glory which shall be revealed in her," nay, even she rejoices in those sufferings, knowing that they are the means by which God will purify her

heart from every worldly and selfish affection. Her suffering, therefore, has nothing of bitterness or discontent, it is rather the foundation of the great contentment and peace that fills her soul and makes every duty of her life easy and agreeable to her in spite of the opposition of nature. But it is quite the contrary with the Religious of unmortified will. What she suffers is the result of perversity. The desires of her own will have led her astray away from God, and have taught her to seek for things that she formally renounced in her profession; so that the knowledge of her own unfaithfulness must add an element of bitterness to the discontent she experiences in the very fulfilment of her desires. Thus, she suffers as worldlings do; without resignation to God's will, without hope in His mercy, without any effort to abandon that which caused her sufferings, nay, she is always ready to throw the blame of her wretched state on her Sisters and Superiors, rather than acknowledge that her own will is in fault. There is no difficulty, then, in tracing her misery to its source; it comes from self-will, and bears about it the unmistakable marks of its origin.

But it may be said, Surely this picture is too highly colored: if self-will brought nothing but misery, there would soon be an end to it, for

we have such a strong natural desire for happiness that we are quite ready to avoid anything that causes misery and suffering. Therefore, although self-will is not a good thing in a Religious, yet it must bring her some satisfaction, some contentment, when its desires are fulfilled.

No doubt it does bring her satisfaction and contentment—such satisfaction as Pharaoh felt when the plagues of Egypt were decimating his people and threatening his own existence; such contentment as he experienced when his obdurate will drove him out in pursuit of God's chosen people and hurried him on to destruction. The Religious who is obstinate in following her own will is like Pharaoh. She refuses to submit to the "signs and wonders" of grace that God is constantly working around her, to convince her that His will is contained in the Rule and Constitutions of her Order and in the authority of her Superiors, and she must only expect that, like Pharaoh, after suffering many miseries, she will at length become obdurate like him, until her spiritual life is drowned and utterly extinguished by the waves of tepidity and worldliness. May God preserve every Spouse of His Only Begotten Son from this great evil, for a deep and terrible damnation awaits those who trample under

foot the immense and precious graces that accompany a religious Vocation, unless the mercy of God steps in by a miracle of grace, to save them from the destruction which their own will would certainly bring upon them.

To save ourselves all this misery and wretchedness, and the rapid hardening of conscience that must follow, we have only to take our desires away from this woful world and from everything belonging to it. What, in the name of truth and right reason, has the world ever given to us that was worth keeping; and, on the other hand, have we ever had reason to regret or to repent of having received any of the supernatural graces and gifts that God bestowed on us during our lives? Nothing can come from God but what is good and true and conducive to our happiness, whereas the world has nothing to offer us but misery and falsehood and lying promises of happiness that are sure to end in bitter disappointment. And there should be no necessity of argument to convince a Religious of this. By the very nature of her holy state she belongs more to heaven than to earth; the Spouse of her soul has set His seal upon her and separated her from the wickedness and fascinations and allurements of the world, His

own deadly enemy. What difficulty then can she have to free herself completely from the trammels of earthly desires, and to desire only the things that are eternal, heavenly, and supernatural? Would to God that we could be eaten up and consumed with the intensity of our longing for the full and perfect accomplishment of the divine will in us! Then, indeed, should we have no room in our hearts for earthly desires, because all earthly things would seem to us as dust and ashes, compared to the eternal things to which we aspire.

The last characteristic of our own will that we propose considering is that "experience increases its misery." This requires no proof, because it is self-evident; it admits of no exception, because it is founded on the universal truth of the Christian's Vocation by baptism to be a child of God, a co-heir with Jesus Christ, and consequently, of his obligation "to live in this world as if he were not of it, and to use the things of this world as if he used them not." *Præterit enim figura hujus mundi*—"the figure of this world passeth away;" it has no existence for the true Christian except as a place of banishment, or a gloomy prison in which the glorious light of eternity is seen only "darkly, and as in a glass." And who

ever confined his desires to the walls of a dungeon, who ever looked forward to happiness in a place of banishment, separated from his friends, at a distance from his true country? Yet that inconceivable folly is perpetrated by those Christians who consume their lives in worldly desires; and worse than all, it is committed by Religious who follow their own will, and who refuse to learn from what experience teaches them.

If it is true that sin is the only cause of misery, that if there were no sin in the world neither would there be any woe or unhappiness, what greater folly can there be than for us to perpetuate the cause of evil in ourselves by following our own will? For sin is the work of our own will; we have every right to claim it as our own handiwork and creation; nor could sin exist unless there was an intelligent will so perverse as to oppose itself to the wise laws and fatherly commands of its Creator. God, in giving us the power to sin, did not give it to us that we should sin, but rather that we should intensify every act of love and service that we render to Him during our lives. Nay, He has even mercifully decreed that as the proper use of our liberty will certainly bring us peace and joy in the Lord in this life, and eternal glory in the next, so the

abuse of it is sure to be followed by restlessness and misery and the torture of unsatisfied longings, in order that we may dread the eternal torments to which our own will would certainly lead us if we followed its behests. Thus, according to the immutable decree of Almighty Providence, the self-willed Religious must find that the more her inordinate desires are gratified, the more unhappy she becomes; the longer she perseveres in following her own will, the farther does she recede from the only source of peace and contentment; and the more she is agitated by earthly desires, the less is she able to taste or appreciate that heavenly peace which "passeth all human understanding," and which is given only to those who know how to mortify their desires that they may desire God alone.

Why do we then insist so much and so often on having our own will? Can we fathom the depths of perversity and folly into which we sink when we deliberately throw away peace and contentment and joy in the Lord, for misery and disappointment and the stings of an uneasy conscience? Alas for poor human nature! We suffer from the disease and know that we suffer, yet we are afraid to apply the remedy. We shrink from the mortification of our selfish desires, al-

though the very gratification of them makes our life a misery to us. Is it not clear that we are wanting in courage, that "we tremble with fear where there is no cause for fear?"—*illic trepidaverunt timore ubi non erat timor*. Has God ever failed us yet, that we should doubt of His power or readiness to assist us? The vows that we make, the holy state to which He has called us, the life of community that we lead in the convent—all these things are so many ratifications and repetitions of the promises so often made by God to support and help those who call upon Him in the day of trial. Can God do any more than He has already done to give us courage and confidence? May we not see, every day of our lives, examples of the might and power of His grace over every passion and evil propensity of our nature? The very fact that we have been able to give up the world and to persevere so long in religion is in itself a standing proof that with the grace of God there is nothing we may not undertake and accomplish. The way is then clear before us; let us advance on it courageously. And if we have reason to believe that we follow our own will too much, if we can detect the marks of that great foe to perfection in our actions, let us make up our minds, once for all, to spare no effort, shirk no



sacrifice, avoid no mortification that will help us to give our will completely to God, so that we may hand over to Him, in the persons of the Superiors He has placed over us, all the responsibility of our lives and actions.

**THE END.**

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