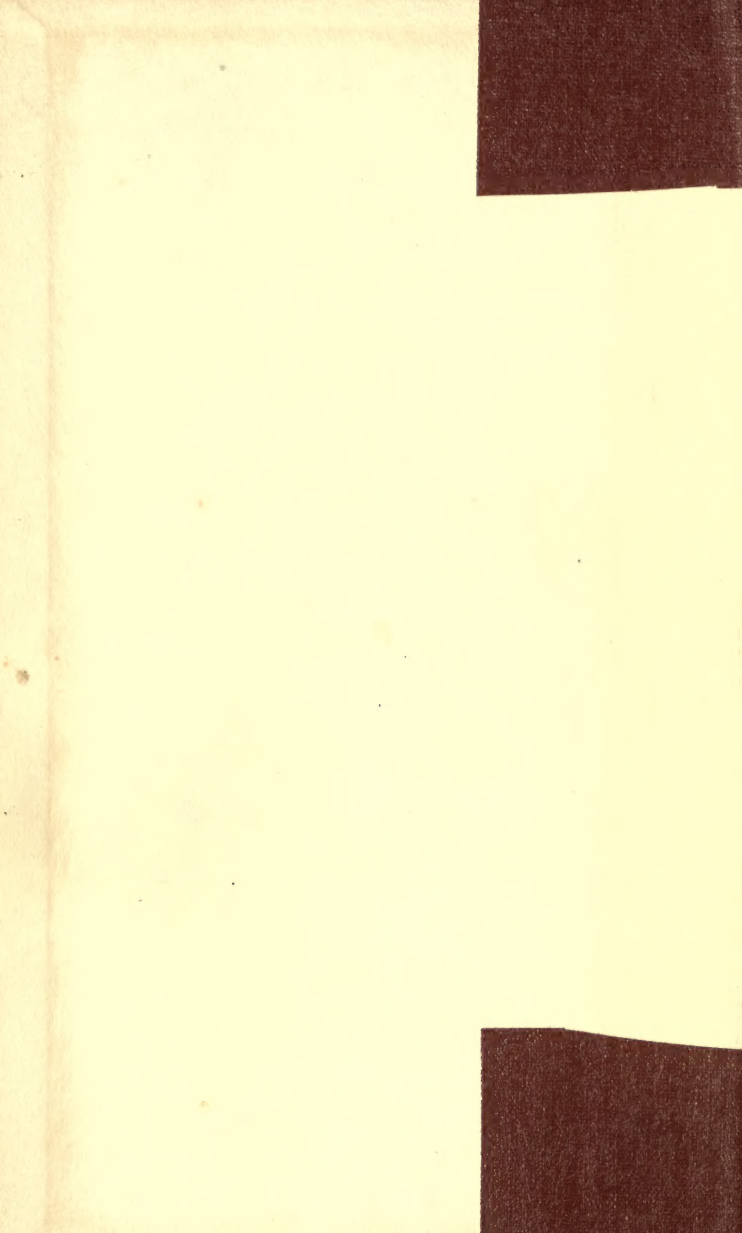


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Some Counsels of
S. Vincent de Paul

Some Counsels of S. Vincent de Paul

to which is appended

The Thoughts of
Mademoiselle le Gras

(First Superior of the Sisters of Charity)

Translated and Selected by E. K. Sanders



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London, England

JAN 25 1955

Translator's Note

THE counsels contained in the following pages were addressed to the Companies of Mission Priests and Sisters of Charity, founded in France for the teaching and assistance of the poor more than two hundred and fifty years ago.

They are characterised by the simplicity and the directness which distinguished S. Vincent de Paul himself, and it may be found, perhaps, that their significance does not depend on place, period, or condition, but still has application here and now.

London, January 1914.



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Some Counsels of S. Vincent de Paul

I

HUMILITY

IN the sixty-seven years which God has allowed me upon earth I have tried over and over again to find out the best means of living in union with God and in charity with my neighbours. I have never found anything that helped as much as humility—the lowering of oneself below everyone else with the sense that one is really worse than others, and the refusal to judge anyone. For it is pride and self-love that blinds us and makes us struggle for our own opinions against others.

We must never glance at what is

good in ourselves, much less ponder over it, but we should search out what is wrong and what is lacking; this is an excellent way of remaining humble. No gift for winning souls nor any other capacity that is within us is our own; we are only agents for it, and it will not save us from perdition. However great the work that God may achieve by an individual, he must not be pleased with himself nor indulge in any sort of self-satisfaction; he ought rather to be all the more humbled, seeing himself merely as a clumsy tool of which God has condescended to make use, just as He did of Moses' rod which wrought miracles but remained only a common rod—a brittle stick.

How greatly I desire that God may give sufficient grace to this poor little company to make it humble, so that it may be founded and built upon humility, be centred on it, and fenced about by it. Let us not deceive ourselves, if we have not got humility we

have nothing. By this I do not mean merely an outward semblance of humility, I mean far more that humble-ness of heart which shall make us really understand that the world does not contain persons more to be despised than you and I ; that the Company of the Mission is the weakest of all companies and the poorest, both in the number and in the quality of its members ; we must be ready that the world should so regard us. In truth, if we wish to be admired we are wishing to have different treatment from that which Jesus Christ received. That would be intolerable conceit. What was said of the Son of God when He was upon earth ? What standing did He have in the eyes of others ? He was regarded as a madman, as a rebel, as a fool, and as a malefactor, although He was none of these. He went so far as to let Himself be exchanged for Barabbas, who was a brigand and a murderer and a man of evil life. O Saviour ! how will sinners such as I am dare to appear in the light of Thy

holy humility when the Day of Judgment comes ?

During the last few days the subject of my meditation has been the lowliness of the life our Lord chose to lead upon earth, and I have seen that He cared so much that it should be lowly and despised by others that He made Himself conform to it, even to this point that — though He was the Wisdom of the Eternal Father incarnate—He chose a method of preaching that was far humbler and more familiar than that used by any of His Apostles. It seems as if the style He used was of one who had little learning, and the teaching of His Apostles seems to come from people who had much more than He.

And what is even more astounding is, that He chose to allow His own sermons to be far less effective than those of His Apostles. We see in the Gospels that His Apostles and Disciples were conquered almost one by one, and then with labour and diffi-

culty, but the first of S. Peter's sermons converted five thousand. This, I believe, has given me greater knowledge and understanding of the wonderful humility of the Son of God than any other consideration of it has ever done.

Every day at mass we say the words: "In spiritu humilitatis," etc. It was said to me once by a devout person, who had heard it from the saintly Bishop of Geneva,¹ that this spirit of humility which we always ask of God when we offer our sacrifice, depends for realisation chiefly on an intention of constant self-humbling, on every opportunity, and as much by interior means as in outward practice. But from whence shall we get the humble spirit? Indeed, our Lord will give it us if we ask Him and are faithful to Him.

I give thanks to God because He has shown you how to tear yourself to pieces—that is to say, the means to become really humble by realising and

¹ S. François de Sales.

acknowledging your faults. You are right in regarding yourself as you do and in considering yourself unfit for any sort of office. That is the foundation on which Jesus Christ can build up His purpose for you. At the same time, while you consider your own inward state, you should lift up your soul to realisation of His supreme goodness. There is great reason you should distrust yourself, but there is much greater reason that you should trust yourself entirely to Him. If you feel yourself tend towards evil, you know that He—to an incomparably greater degree—tends towards good, that He can make you good and can do good by your means.

What I desire is that you should make this a matter of prayer, and in the course of the day look up towards God from time to time and ask for grace to establish this rule: that you will always turn your eyes from study of your own sin to contemplation of His mercy, devoting much more thought to the grandeur of His love for you

than to your unworthiness towards Him, to His strength than to your weakness. When you have done this, surrender yourself into His arms, in the hope that He will make you what He requires you to be, and will bless all you do.

Perhaps you may say to me : “ When I have discovered that I am full of pride what am I to do ? ” What you must do is to ask God to give you power to fight against this sin which is—as I have told you already—your greatest enemy, which is the root of all that is evil and of the failure of all that is good, which makes us the enemies of God Who resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble. This is why we must ask every day for grace, and say to Him : “ O Saviour, save me from secret pride, save me from my good opinion of myself and my desire that other people should think well of me ! ”

II

HUMILITY—*continued*

NOTICE the charge our Lord gave us when he said, "Learn of me, for I am humble of heart," and beseech Him to give you understanding of it. For if only He will fire us with the desire to be humble, that is enough ; we cannot realise the value of this gift as our Lord did, for He knew it in relation to the perfectness of God the Father, and the degradation of sinful man. We shall only see this very dimly during this life, it is true ; but through the darkness we may still be certain that, if our heart is seeking humiliation, God will give us humility, will sustain it, and will cause it to grow by every effort He suggests to us. One strong effort leads on to another ; and

from the first step in humility we mount to the second, from the second to the third, and so on. Remember, my brothers, that Jesus Christ, referring to the humility of the publican, said that his prayer was heard. If this was said of a man whose life was evil, what may we not hope for if we are really humble? What, on the other hand, was the lot of the Pharisee? Here was a man set apart from others, living what—among the Jews—resembles the religious life: praying, fasting, and doing many good works, and in spite of all that he was censured by God. Why was it? Simply because he prided himself on his good works, and took satisfaction out of them as though they were really of his own doing. Here we see a Just Man and a Sinner before the Throne of God, and because the Just Man lacked humility he and his work are repudiated, and that which appeared good is declared evil. On the other hand, the Sinner, conscious of his guilt and moved to a real sense of humility,

remained on the threshold of the Temple, beating his breast and not daring to lift his eyes to Heaven, and, though he came there full of sin, he is justified because of his lowliness of heart, and his self-abasement is the means of his salvation. This teaches us that real humility brings other gifts with it, and that we may pass from a state of sin to that of grace by sincere and real self-humbling. Yes, though we were criminals, if we grasped real humility we should become innocent ; and if we seemed to be angels and possessed of every virtue, if we were lacking in humility those virtues would be without root and would not last.

O Saviour Christ ! shed on our hearts that light with which Thy holy soul was filled, which taught Thee to prefer contempt to praise. Extend to us those pure desires that glowed in Thee and taught Thee to offer Thine own ignominy for the glory of Thy Heavenly Father. Grant us Thy grace, that from this moment we may put away from us everything that tends

to any honour but Thine, everything of vanity, of display, or of self-esteem : that once and for all we may reject the praise of men and the vain ambition to succeed in the work we do : and finally, O Lord, that we may learn real humbleness of heart by Thy grace and by Thy example.

Many times when I have been visiting Religious Houses I have asked to be told the virtue that was most to be desired there ; I have even asked this question of some whom I knew avoided all humiliation, but I have hardly found one in twenty who did not tell me that the most desirable of virtues is humility. How is it, then, that there are so few who strive after it and fewer still who possess it ? The reason is that people are content to contemplate it, but will not take the trouble to make it their own ; in theory it is charming, but in practice it becomes extremely repulsive, and its effects are unpleasing because they involve the choice of the lowest place and require

us to give in to others, to endure slander, to accept contempt, to desire to be despised ; to all which things it is natural to us to object. Nevertheless it is necessary that we should conquer our disinclination, and that each one of us should make a real effort after some practice of this virtue, otherwise we shall never get any nearer to it.

But above all is it possible that—if we fix our eyes on the model set before us, on that wonderful type of humility, our Lord Jesus Christ—we shall still cherish a good opinion of ourselves, seeing how immensely we fall short of His self-abasement ? Shall we dare to rate ourselves before others when He gave place to a murderer ? Should we fear that our weakness should be detected, when He who was innocent was treated as an evil-doer and hung between two criminals as though He were guilty ? Let us ask God to deliver us from such snares as these ! Let us ask Him to give us grace always

to be lowly, acknowledging before Him and before our fellowmen that of ourselves we are only sinful and ignorant and vicious : let us hope they will believe it and will despise us. Finally, let us never miss a chance of crushing out self with humility : it is not enough to wish to do this and to make a good resolution about it, as many people do ; we must put it into practice at whatever cost to ourselves, for it is that putting into practice which is not sufficiently accepted.

*Not to be read at length
from the text*

III

THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE

YOU know that God's gifts differ greatly, and that He bestows them according to His good pleasure: to one may be given wisdom but he may lack capacity to command; another may go far on the path of sanctity yet not be able to guide others. And further, it is His Divine Providence that must call us to the tasks for which He seems to have given us capacity; it is not we who are to choose for ourselves. Our Lord Who meant His Apostles to be the leaders of the whole Church throughout the world told them that it was He who had chosen them; and another time, seeing that there was rivalry among them for leadership, He gave them this maxim—that he who

would be chief must be the servant of all,—to show us that of ourselves we should be seeking only to learn sub-mission. This is what He teaches by His own example having come to serve others and taken upon Him the form of a servant. He, then, who desires to exalt himself is breaking this rule and rejecting the teaching of the Son of God; he is joining the enemy, and surrendering to pride, which is the root of all evil.

When we are with the poor we should try to put ourselves in their place, that we may suffer with them in imitation of the great Apostle, who said, “*Omnibus omnia factus sum.*”¹ The reproach of our Lord will not then be against us. “*Sustinui qui simul mecum contristaretur, et non fuit*”;² and that it should not be so we should strive to keep our hearts open to the suffering and wretchedness of other people, and pray continually that God may grant us that spirit of compassion which is

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 22.

² Psalm lxix. 20.

truly of the Spirit of God. The Church teaches us that mercy belongs to God. Let us implore Him, my brothers, to bestow on us the spirit of mercy and compassion, so that we are filled with it and may never lose it. Only consider how much we ourselves are in need of mercy, we who profess to exert it towards others.

The whole of life is just a moment that flies away. All my own seventy-six years of life seem to me now to be only a dream and a moment, and nothing of them remains to me save sorrow that my moment has not been better used. Think what the distress of meeting death will be if in our moment of life we have not been compassionate towards others. Be merciful, my brothers. Use mercy towards others, so that there can be no one in need whom you touch without helping, no one whom you know to be in darkness to whom you do not try to bring the light and show him what he must believe if he would be saved. O Saviour, help us that we fail not in

Thy service ! Preserve in us the spirit of mercy, for what hope is there for us if Thou shouldst withdraw Thy mercy from us. Teach us to be merciful, and grant us the spirit of gentleness and of humility.

We have confidence in other men if we believe them to be good and if we love them, not on account of their wisdom. The Evil One is very wise ; but we have no confidence in anything he says, just because it is impossible to love him. It was the love of our Lord that prepared those who were to put their whole trust in Him. We may do what we will, but we shall never win the faith of anyone whom we want to convince, unless we have shown them our love and our compassion.

Blessed be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave you so strong and deep a desire for this endeavour to extend the knowledge of the Faith ; and blessed be our Lord Himself, not only because He came into the world

to ransom those souls you are to teach, but also because He won for you the grace you will need in labouring for their salvation and your own. It is a grace which is always waiting ready, and the loving God Who gives it to us desires to pour it out on those who will use it to good purpose. What should prevent you from being filled with it, and by its strength crushing out the evil that remains in your own nature and the ignorance and sin in the people to whom you are sent? I wish to be sure that you for your part will not spare labour or health or life. This is the object for which you gave yourself to our Lord; nothing remains but that you should resolve firmly to be whole-hearted in your work.

If you are to begin well and to prosper, remember that all you do must be in the spirit of our Lord, that every act must be linked to His, and its whole object be pure and high, and for the increase of His glory. If this is so, God will pour down blessings upon you and all you do; it is quite

possible you may not see them, or at least only in part, for God does not always let his servants see the fruit of their labour, though the fruit none the less may be very great. The labourer in the fields has long to wait before he sees the result of his toil, and sometimes he never does see the rich crop which is due to his sowing. This was the lot of S. François Xavier, who was not allowed to see all that his holy industry accomplished after his death, nor the success of the Missions which he had begun. Remembering him, keep your whole heart uplifted towards God continually, confident that all is well even when everything seems at its darkest.

The world may parade its pleasures and its vanities before you, but it does so too late, for you wish to be crucified with Jesus Christ and to find all your glory and delight in Him.

But another temptation may come to you from yourself: I mean, the weariness of always doing the same

thing, or despondency at seeing small result, or none at all. The remedy for the first is a reminder that no struggle wins its crown without perseverance, that all indeed is lost without it ; and for the second you should impress upon yourself that God only requires you to cast the net into the sea, not that you should catch fish ; that is His part. If, heedless of all difficulty and not discouraged by the hardness of those hearts that will not wake to the call of God, you go on fishing all night long and wait in patience till the morning breaks, you need not doubt that His part will be done, that the Sun of His Truth will pierce those stubborn hearts, will enlighten them and warm them. Only, to your labour and your patience you must add humility and prayer, and in the end you will behold the glory of the Lord.

IV

THE CHARITY OF CHRIST

YOU have found it difficult to settle down in a strange place, but you have done well in the sight of God in overcoming your discontent and preferring to do His will rather than your own. Go on like this, my sister, and you will see the glory of God ; you will, through your patience, achieve control over yourself ; and if once you get complete control, our Lord will be your Master, seeing that, by His mercy, you are His, and that you desire to be so for time and for eternity. O my sister, when the hour of death comes, what a comfort it will be to you that you have spent your life for the object to which Jesus Christ gave His : for charity, for God, for the poor.

If you realised your own good fortune you would be overflowing with happiness ; in doing what you do you fulfil the law and the prophets, which command us to love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves. What greater proof of love is possible than to give oneself altogether, all one is and all one does, for the saving and the comforting of the unhappy ? In that way lies perfection. See to it that your own love is united with your gift of grace, that you surrender to the good pleasure of God, working and suffering in all things by the same motive for which our Lord worked and suffered.

The poor cannot be judged from their outward appearance nor by their show of wit ; very often they do not look nor seem like intelligent beings, so rough and homely are they. But if you look at the reverse of the medal you will find, by the light of faith, that the Son of God, Who chose to be poor Himself, is represented by the

poor, His visage was so marred more than any man in His Passion, He appeared as a fool to the Gentiles, as a stumbling-block to the Jews ; and, besides, He called Himself the Preacher of the Poor—" Evangelizare Pauperibus misit me."

If we take a person who fixes his love on God only—a soul, we will say, which has soared in contemplation, and, finding such delight in this method of loving God, Who alone seems to him to be worthy of love, limits himself to this unfailing source of satisfaction, and does not trouble himself about his neighbour ; and then take another who loves God with his whole heart and who also loves his neighbour, however rough and faulty and repulsive, because of his love for God, and does everything he possibly can to bring him to God. Which of these two should you say has the purest and most perfect sort of love ? Surely it is the second, who, by uniting the love of God with love of his neigh-

bour, or rather by making his love for God reflect upon his neighbour and lifting his love of his neighbour up towards God, fulfils the commandments more perfectly than the first.

It is true, therefore, that we have been sent here, not only to love God ourselves, but to make others love Him. It is not enough for us to love God if our neighbour does not love Him also; and we cannot be loving our neighbour as ourselves unless we achieve for him the blessing that is our great object for ourselves: that is to say, the perfect love which unites us with Him who is our Supreme Good. We must love our neighbour, as being made in the image of God and as an object of His love. It should be that men, in loving their Creator, love each other for love of Him in a spirit of mutual charity, for He loved them so much that He gave His own Son to suffer death for them. I do beseech you to look on our Divine Master as the perfect example of the charity we owe to our neighbour.

O Jesus ! tell us, we pray Thee, how did it come to pass that Thou didst come down from heaven to bear the curse of earthly life ? What overflow of love can have urged Thee to humble Thyself to our level and to accept the shameful penalty of the Cross ? What overflow of charity brought Thee to face all our distresses, to take upon Thee the form of sinful man, to live a life of suffering and die a death of ignominy ? Where else shall we find charity like this—so unmeasured and so splendid ? It is the Son of God only Who could attain to it, it is He only Who could care so greatly for His people as to leave His Throne of Glory and take upon Him our nature, subject to all the infirmities and miseries of our existence, to make all the amazing ventures that He made, that we, through His example and His teaching, might realise the love of God and of our neighbour. Yes, it was by reason of His love that He was crucified and was able to bring to pass the wondrous work of our redemption.

O my brothers ! if we have one spark of that sacred fire that glowed in the heart of Jesus Christ, can we remain with folded hands ? Can we neglect those whom we might be helping ? Nay, truly, for real charity cannot stand idle nor allow us to see our friends in need without showing them our love. The inward spirit most often shows itself by outward acts. When the true spirit of charity is within there is some visible sign of it ; just as it is the function of fire to give light and warmth, so is it the function of love to spread the sense of love.

V

INDIFFERENCE

INDIFFERENCE is a state wherein we are so far detached from created things, and so closely united with the will of God, that we are almost free from desire for one thing rather than another. As a virtue it is not only very valuable but also of infinite assistance for advance in the spiritual life, and indeed it may be said that for those who would give perfect service to God it is indispensable: for how may we seek the Kingdom of God and labour for the conversion of sinners and the salvation of souls if we ourselves are clinging to the comforts of this present life? How are we to fulfil the will of God if we are following our own will? How can

we be denying ourselves, as our Lord has bidden us, if we are seeking praise and recognition? How can we surrender all things if we lack determination to renounce some wretched detail that is hindering us? Let us grasp the necessity of this indifference and the degree to which we are bound to give ourselves up to God, that we may win it if we would avoid being slaves to ourselves. To be slaves to ourselves is, in other words, to be slaves to a brute; for he who allows his animal nature to get the better of him does not deserve to be called a man, but rather to be regarded as a brute.

Indifference is of the nature of pure love, or rather it is an outcome of pure love which directs the will to that which is most perfect and destroys every obstacle: fire not only moves towards its sphere but consumes everything that intervenes; and in the same way, as one of the saints has told us, indifference leads to all goodness and is death to all evil.

The soul which has attained to perfect indifference is compared by the Prophet to a beast of burden, who has no choice between one load and another, between a rich owner or a poor one, between a fine stable or a hovel : everything is the same to her, and she complies with whatever is required of her ; she moves, she stops, she turns in one direction or another, she suffers and she toils night and day. Here we see what we must do ; we must give up our own judgment, our own will, our own wishes, everything that is apart from God, and yield ourselves to every suggestion of His holy will. That is what the Saints did.

Look at S. Peter : he spoke truly when he said he had left all ; and he showed that it was so when, seeing his Master on the shore, and hearing the well-beloved disciple say " Dominus est," he cast himself into the sea, that he might go to Him. He gave no thought to his boat, to his raiment or even to his life ; he thought only of his Blessed Saviour, Who was his All. And the

great apostle, S. Paul, was given special grace from the moment of his conversion, that he might make perfect practice of the virtue of indifference, saying, "Domine quid me vis facere?" Those words signify a miraculous change, and the detachment of them could have been wrought only by a stroke of grace. In one moment he was severed from the Law, from his own avocation, from his party, from all his previous ideas, and attained to such a degree of perfection that he was ready to accept whatever God required of him with indifference. If, then, this virtue of indifference was so prized and practised by these great Saints, we should imitate and follow them.

Bearing all this in mind, is it not clear that we must empty our hearts of all longing save for conformity with Jesus Christ and of every wish save that we may be obedient to Him? And those who are not in this condition must examine themselves, to see what it is that draws them in one

direction rather than another, that by means of constant self-discipline, outward and inward, they may attain, by the help of God, to the liberty of His children—which is holy indifference.

You know that among the labourers mentioned in the Gospel some were called late in the day, and still were paid the same, in the evening, as those who had worked since morning. You see, you deserve just as much for waiting patiently on the Master's will as you do for fulfilling it when it has been shown you, because you are ready for anything, ready equally to go or to stay.

Holy indifference towards all things is the state of the perfect, and your indifference makes me hope that in you and by you God will be glorified. We must serve Him with goodwill, ceasing to have any choice as regards the place or the manner of service. It is enough for us that we belong to God, and that we desire to be honoured by the name of Servants, as are the

dearest of His children : to be of those by whom our Lord desired to be made known and to be served. If we have part with them, what can place or method signify ? And assuredly we shall be of them if we allow ourselves so to be.

When you are about to do any special thing, or to speak about anything, and also from time to time as the day goes on, you should take the cross of the chaplet at your girdle in your hand, and, lifting your heart towards God, you should say to Him : “ Lord, may what I do be done for Thy glory ! ” You must not allow yourself to cling to anything, neither to places nor persons nor special occupations, when obedience calls ; you must always give up readily, with the sure belief that the change comes by the will of God. It is true that it is so, my daughters, and it is specially necessary for you to remember it, for there is no other way of softening what you may have to suffer.



O my Lord Jesus Christ, I give myself wholly to Thee. I give Thee all the love that is in my heart, all the fervour that is in my soul, that I may live and die in obedience even as Thou hast done. I have no choice of my own, O God. Whether I may be sent to one place, or recalled and sent to another, whether the time be long or short, whether I go to live or go to die, I can accept what Thou hast permitted if Thou wilt grant me grace to offer the obedience of my whole life for love of Thee.

VI

THE SPIRIT OF WORLDLINESS

PERHAPS you will say to me : “ We are merely poor priests, monsieur, who have already renounced all worldly vanities ; our dress is shabby, our surroundings of the meanest, we have nothing that suggests those vain luxuries which are a glory in the world, why should you urge us to renounce the worldliness which is so far out of our reach ? ”

My brothers, let there be no mistake ! Though our clothing and our furniture be of the poorest, we may none the less be full of the spirit of worldliness. If, for instance, it is your object to preach a fine sermon ; if you are pleased that what you do and what you say is approved and

praised by others ; if you get satisfaction out of flattery ; if you make known the good you have done, even if you are self-complacent over it,—all these things are tokens of the spirit of worldliness. And that we may seize on this and crush it out, it is better to do the thing that makes outward show badly than to be pleased with ourselves because we have done it well. And then we must be careful to bar the door of our mind against vanity, and to be as rigid in rejection of secret thoughts and reflections as of the applause that may come to us openly. We must surrender ourselves to God, my brothers, that we may be preserved from our secret self-esteem and from the praise of others. In these lie spiritual worldliness.

Our Lord did very few outward things Himself. He willed that His Apostles and Disciples, though they might be rough and poor and ignorant, should be animated by His Spirit, that they might accomplish more than He did. And what was the reason ?

Clearly that He might set us an example of absolutely perfect humility. O my brothers, why are we not following the example of our Divine Master? Why do we not always give place to others? Why do we not always choose what is hardest and humblest for ourselves? Truly, by so doing we should be pleasing and honouring our Lord, and that is all we need to aim at. From to-day, then, let us make a resolution to follow Him and to offer Him our little sacrifices of self-esteem. For instance, if I have any public business, and could make it of great importance, I will not do so; I will refrain from such and such things that would make it more impressive and would add to my own reputation. When there are two suggestions in my mind, the one I produce shall be the least noteworthy, the brilliant one I will retain that I may make it a sacrifice to God in the secret of my own heart. Finally, my brothers, it is one of the maxims of the Gospel that our Lord has no

greater delight than in humbleness of heart and simplicity in word and deed. In these His Spirit dwells and we shall seek in vain for it elsewhere. If you would find it, then you must give up all attempt or desire to shine ; all spiritual as well as all outward worldliness ; you must renounce the vanities and the pleasures of life.

What was the life of our Blessed Saviour except perpetual humiliation, active and passive ? So highly did He prize it that no moment of His life on earth was lived apart from it. It was His will also that after His death the Church should give us His image in the Crucifix, that He might appear to us in a condition of the utmost ignominy, as one hung like a criminal and put to death by the most shameful and degrading method. And why ? He did it because He knew the worth of humility and the danger of the sin which opposes it ; a sin which—besides increasing other evil—poisons actions that in themselves are harm-

less, and can corrupt and spoil what is otherwise completely good and pure.

He who imagines that he can of himself do anything for the glory of God or the salvation of souls is really a hindrance both to one and the other. May it please Divine Goodness that no member of the Mission should ever become guilty of this by flattering himself that people have been converted to God by his activities, and that he is, therefore, worthy of respect and consideration. How deeply I long that each one of us should have this truth graven in his heart: "Whoever believes that he is the author of any good work, or that he has any share in it, and gets self-satisfaction from the thought of it, is doing far more harm than good by his labour."

Let us be resolute in resisting self, for if we once give her an inch she will take an ell; and be assured of this, that our chance of advance in the spiritual life depends on our pro-

gress in the practice of mortification. To those who should be labouring for the salvation of souls this is essential, for if we ourselves have no understanding of penitence, how may we preach it to others?

Be careful to give no credit to yourself for anything ; if you do so, you are stealing from God, to Whom alone every good thing is due. Strive to be lowly, to love your own insignificance, and to be ready to accept contempt and disgrace in defiance of human nature, which always longs for success and celebrity. This is the means beyond all other to become the servant of God, and to draw down the special blessing of Heaven upon all your labour.

VII

CONFIDENCE IN GOD

YOU say that God is troubling you to test your patience. I am glad to hear it, my sister, for it shows that in His merciful kindness He desires that you should grow in that virtue until it is so much a habit that all the troubles and worries of this miserable world come to be of use and advantage to you. We can only get to Heaven through suffering,—we all know that ; but it is not all that suffer who find salvation ; it is only those who suffer readily for the love of Jesus Christ, Who first suffered for us. Is this not a reason that you should rejoice rather than be discouraged, and instead of giving up should put greater confidence

in God, Who never will allow you to be tempted beyond your strength?

You say, also, that you have already shed many tears and offered prayers and novenas. That is all to the good. Our Lord said, "Blessed are they that weep, and that they that ask receive." But He did not say that our prayers would be answered at once, because He intended us to go on praying. Therefore, my sister, when you allowed yourself to say that the more you prayed the less you got, you were wrong, for it showed that you are not really resigned to the will of God and do not rest in His promises. Often He does more for us by refusing what we ask of Him than by according it, and we are bound to be certain that He—knowing better than we do what is good for us—will send us what is best, even though it is not what we hoped for, and we dislike it.

Indeed, my sister, I am very sorry for you in all your troubles. Yet it is a trial that God allows—as you say yourself—to test you. Take it then

as a blessing from His hand, and try to make good use of it.

I am fearful lest we think too much about small troubles, and have not enough resolution to overcome the difficulties that impede our service of God and of the poor. We want to get encouragement out of service, and that everything should go just as we would like ; we are not ready to serve God at our own cost ; we want here and now to have peace in our hearts in exchange for the labour of our bodies. But it is not in this way, my sister, that you will become pleasing to God ; it is rather by patient acceptance of interior distress as well as outward difficulty.

* I am grateful to you for your share in the devotions of my Blessed Patron, and I pray God that your faith may obtain all that my weakness is unworthy to ask for you. Please ask pardon for me for my lack of devoutness, which has resulted from slack-

* Written on the Feast of S. Vincent, Jan. 22.

ness in preparation. I have been encumbered with business all the morning and had only time for a very little prayer, and then I was much distracted. You see what degree of gain is likely to reach you from my prayers on this blessed day! I am not cast down, however, because it is in God that I have confidence; most certainly I have none in my own preparation or my own labours. I wish with all my heart that you should feel this also, because it is on the foundation of our nothingness that the Throne of the Goodness and the Mercies of God is established. If we trust ourselves to His Goodness we shall never be confounded, as His Word assures us.

Unburden your soul of all that weighs it down, God will take charge of it all. You cannot withhold yourself without—if one may say so—grieving the heart of God, because He sees you do not give Him the honour due to Him, and have not confidence. I beseech you to trust in Him, and He

will give you your heart's desire. Once more I bid you reject all those misgivings which you sometimes allow yourself. Why should not your soul be full of confidence, seeing it belongs to our Lord ?

Just as one cannot have too much belief in the truths of the Faith, one cannot have too much hope in God. It is quite true that one may get into difficulties by hoping for things that God has not promised, or perhaps by hoping for what He promises under certain conditions, and not being willing to do what He requires to obtain it : as in the case of a sinner who hopes for pardon himself, yet will not pardon his brother when he asks for mercy : or one who is confident that he can triumph over temptations, yet will not resist nor fight them. Hopes of that kind are deceptive and vain ; but the real ones can never rise too high, being founded on the goodness of God and the merits of Jesus Christ.

In each of us there is a grain of the almighty power of God, and that

should be a great motive for hope and for putting all our confidence in Him, in spite of our own feebleness. No ! you must never be surprised at the sight of your failures ; it comes to each in turn. It is well that we should see them, but not that we should give in to unbounded distress ; indeed, when the thought of them leads us into despondency we must turn away from it, and renew our confidence in God and our surrender into His hands.

If it is His pleasure to lead you by rough ways—as was that of the Cross—by sickness, by sorrow, by inward desolation, leave that to Him. Ah yes, my daughters ! let us surrender everything to God, and let Him do as He wills, for He knows well how to guide it all for our good and for His glory, because He loves us more tenderly than a father loves his child.

If we cannot put our trust in God, where can we place it ? Indeed, we are not able to guide ourselves, and shall we draw back from the Arms of

Providence that we may direct our own doings? Truly that would be to take a very false step, seeing that we can never think rightly unless God directs our thought, and that we cannot do anything or see anything, not even, as S. Paul tells us, repeat the words "Abba pater," without the grace of God. What are we after all but poor sinners,—poor blind? What we think is good is evil, and often what we think is evil is not so. For instance, we think that illness is an evil; nevertheless it may not be, for God, foreseeing that harm might come to us in health, that we might have chances of wrong-doing, sends us bodily sickness to spare us the inward sickness of the soul.

Touching the intrigues that go on against us: let us pray that God will keep us from intriguing. If we blame it in others, we must be free from it ourselves. It is an offence against Divine Providence, and it makes the offenders unworthy of the care God gives to all

things. Let us trust ourselves completely to His guidance, and be certain that, if we do, all that men can say and do against us will turn to our advantage. Even if the whole world rose up to overwhelm us, nothing would happen but what was pleasing to God, on whom we have set our hope. I beseech you to realise this, so that you will never again disturb yourself with these useless apprehensions.

VIII

PERSEVERANCE

YOU should always remember that, in our spiritual life, it is not how it has begun that matters, but its progress and its end. Judas began well but ended badly, and S. Paul ended well though he was wrong at the beginning. The attainment of perfection depends on unswerving perseverance in advance in every virtue. In the way that leads to God we slip back if we are not advancing, because no man can ever remain stationary; and the blessed, as was said by the Holy Spirit, "ibunt de virtute in virtutem."¹

Now the best means to that end, monsieur, is to keep the mercy and goodness of God towards us continu-

¹ Psalm lxxxiv. 7.

ally in remembrance, and to have also a constant dread lest we become unworthy and forfeit them. So we must be faithful in daily practices of prayer, of meditation, of self-examination, of spiritual reading, and in making daily efforts in charity, in mortification, in humility, and in simplicity.

Let our Lord lead you ; He will direct everything through you : trust yourself to Him, and, in imitation of Him, be humble and gentle and faithful in all you do. You will see that it will all go well.

I feel for you in the pressure of work upon you, and, as your strength diminishes owing to illness and outward difficulty, the work seems to increase. But it is God who directs it all. You may be sure that He will not leave you overburdened as you are now, unless He bears for you. He will be your strength as well as your reward in the immense labour you are doing for Him in this crisis. Three can do more than ten when our Lord's

hand is with them, and this is always so when He takes away all visible assistance.

This life is full of distresses and of suffering of mind as much as of body ; it is one long uncertainty, and gives ease only to those who are asleep ; it never gives ease to those who seek it. Was life easy for Jesus Christ ? Were not all the difficulties and calamities that we shrink from part of His experience ? He was the Man of Sorrows, yet we desire to escape sorrow. He sets before us nothing but the Cross, if we would have part in His glory, and we imagine we may follow Him without having anything to bear. That is not possible. We must deny ourselves if we intend to serve Him, and the Gospel impresses on us that he that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

Trust yourself altogether to the care of Jesus Christ, and be prepared for whatever may happen to you, so that

you may know how to accept the things that you dislike. I am quite sure that these will come ; if they did not, I should fear your work was not prospering. If God does not allow you to achieve much, or even a little, for the good of others, what you do is still enough to show your obedience to His commands, so that you may be at peace. There is no happiness for us save in fulfilling His will, and we have no true wisdom if we are hoping for any other. Sometimes when God has work He intends should endure He seems to found it on the patience of those whom He uses in it, and therefore He puts them to the proof in many different ways.

There is no one on earth, however holy, who has not some tendency towards evil. By that righteous souls are continually tested and sanctified. Perhaps S. Paul may have been deeper in sin at the moment when God called him to conversion than at any other time ; and was never dearer to the heart of our Lord than when he was

in the thick of the temptations that he suffered afterwards. That being so, you should not be overwhelmed when you find these inclinations in yourself; they will teach you to be humble and less confident, and so learning you will be inspired to greater confidence in God. His grace suffices for the conquest of the evil in us.

I sympathise deeply in this interior suffering of yours, for there can be no greater distress for a soul that loves God, nor one so disturbing to all resolutions and so dangerous in exposing you to temptation, as this indifference to all the things that are of God—your distaste for prayer, for spiritual reading, etc. etc. You should ask God very earnestly either to deliver you from them or to grant you grace to make good use of them. His loving kindness will certainly answer you in one way or the other if you are faithful to your rule in spite of your difficulty.

And for the rest you must not be too much disturbed at your own plight;

you are having an experience that has been shared by very many of the saints, and I hope it may very soon change into fervour and eagerness of heart. I am specially hopeful because no man remains in exactly the same condition, and our Lord tests the servants He most values, sometimes in one way and sometimes in another, that they may be put to every sort of proof.

This being so, my dear brother, try to accept every detail of His loving guidance, and to remain resolute, in the midst of all vicissitudes, to desire nothing but Him and your own self-surrender.

There are several possible causes for the weariness of your work that you are feeling. I. Human nature, which grows tired of always doing the same thing (and it is God's will this should be so, that there be opportunity for the practice of two great virtues; to wit, perseverance, which will bring us to our goal; and steadfastness, which overcomes the difficulties on

the way). II. The depressing character of the work itself, which, when it is done by one who is naturally depressed, leads to a sort of disgust, especially when it has pleased God to withdraw that inward delight and warmth that is sometimes bestowed on those who serve the poor. III. The influence of the Evil One, who suggests this loathing, that he may check the splendid work you are doing. And, finally, it is possible this weariness was sent you by God Himself (for if He wills to raise a soul towards real perfection He makes it pass through desert places, bear the sharpness of thorns, and endure conflict, that it may pay tribute to the dying-life of His Son, our Lord, Who bore infinite anguish and desolation).

Take courage, monsieur. Surrender yourself to God, and declare to Him that what you wish is to serve Him in whatever way may be most pleasing to Him. Your own triumph over your enemies is involved — over the flesh at war with the spirit, over

Satan who rages against your success. It is the will of God that you should persevere in the work He has given you to do. Be confident that He will give you grace to fulfil your vocation.

However great may be the dryness of your spirit, however great your temptations, even though they seem to be ceaseless, you are not failing in faithfulness so long as you are doing your duty in all things. Though you may do it without any enthusiasm and like a beast of burden, or even feel that it is all repulsive to you and you yourself are falling into misdoing, yet, if you struggle to get straight and to go on doing right, you are not failing.

IX

THE DAILY DIFFICULTY

CONTINUE to go on towards perfection, my dear sisters. Consider the sanctity of your condition as truly the Daughters of God. It is so wonderful that human understanding can conceive nothing greater for a poor earthly creature. It seems to me that perhaps you may reply that this is what you desire to do, but that you are disturbed by an infinity of temptations which overwhelm you. To which I answer that all these temptations are sent to you, or are permitted for you by God, for the same reason that they were sent or permitted to His Son—that He might have opportunity to show His infinite desire for His Father's glory and for the perfecting of His Church.

Yes, you say, but it does not seem to me that other righteous souls in the world or in religion have inward suffering to the degree that I have. Thereon I answer, that there are no souls on earth who profess to have devoted themselves to God and to His creatures who do not bear trials outward and inward equal to yours, for it is God's will—not against but in favour of righteous souls—that all, whoever they be, shall suffer temptations.

Perhaps you reply, my dear sisters—they may be tempted sometimes; but to be tempted always and everywhere, and by everyone with whom I am forced to live, this it is which is unbearable! Yet it is the good pleasure of God that the chosen souls who are so dear to Him should be tempted and afflicted daily. This is what He shows us when He says in the Gospel that those who would come after Him must deny themselves and take up their cross—that is to say, must suffer—daily. Weigh that word daily, my dear sisters.

I will bear anything from outside persons willingly, monsieur, you say; but that it should be from my own sisters, from those who should help me, but who are nothing but a care and a cross and a distress in all they do and all they leave undone. Alas! from whom do we suffer if not from those amongst whom we live? Is it from people a long way off—from those we never have seen and never shall see? From whom and by whom did our Lord suffer if not by His Apostles, His Disciples, and the people among whom He lived, who were God's people?

I hope that your practice in following the will of God helps you to bear all the little troubles that may come to you for love of Him, for there is never any lack of these wherever and with whom we chance to be. Seeing we are so often at variance with ourselves, why should we not have small dislikes, jarrings, and disagreements where another person is concerned? One of

the chief requirements of charity is that we should bear with our neighbour, and it is an unquestionable fact that the difficulties we may have with our neighbours are due to our own undisciplined tempers more than anything else. This is all I will say to you now, monsieur, though there is a great deal concerning holy charity that I would like to say, for it is such a blessed condition that those who attain to it have achieved a little paradise in this world and eternal glory in the other.

I can well believe that the person you mention has given you cause for offence, and I regret deeply that it should have happened. Nevertheless, you must not look at what he does merely as coming from him, but rather as a test that God has imposed to try the reality of your patience. That virtue is all the more a virtue in you, because you are naturally quick to resent injury, and have not provoked what you have received. This then,

is your chance of bearing witness that you are really the child of Jesus Christ, and that all your hours of meditation on His sufferings have not been wasted, but have taught you to conquer yourself and to accept the thing that wounds you most deeply.

Tolerance is an important part of charity; without it it is difficult for two persons to get on together; moreover, tolerance is the bond of all friendship, and unites people in heart and opinion and action not only with each other but in unity with our Lord, so that they may be really at peace. I am well aware that one may have a natural aversion that one cannot help. In the world people give in to these; but a true Christian ought to struggle against them, and with the help of the grace of God, which He never withholds from the humble, to conquer them. Humility is an excellent antidote to all antipathies, because those who resort to it grow loving, and esteem others as better than themselves.

Endeavour to attain to real unity and loving kindness among yourselves, and do not accept the world's standard, which says you need only be righteous when it is necessary to avoid infringing the law of God, and, when you desire to break loose a little, will tell you "there is no very great sin in such and such things!"

That is no way for you. Instead, you must say to yourself: "The smallest thing that I do against my rule, or to break the friendliness I owe my sisters, means that I grieve the heart of God." Oh, if you understood what it means to grieve the heart of God you would face any disaster rather than that. There is nothing which is more frequently urged upon us in the Gospel than the renouncing of our own wills. He that would come after me, says Jesus Christ, let him deny himself and take up his cross. Do you see, my daughters, to deny ourselves really means to get rid of all that tenderness for ourselves which proceeds from our inordinate self-absorption. You must,

therefore, stamp out all your desires for the companionship of one particular person. We pretend that our happiness consists in being given to God, but at the same time we must have everything to our liking; we wish to be loved and respected among the poor we serve, and to inspire admiration among the richer sort.

It is the inspiration of God which teaches us to say, when the morning begins: "I offer to Thee all that this day may bring"; and it is so even more clearly when in the chief things to be done or suffered we can glance up towards Him to tell Him without any words, "I do this, however difficult and trying it may prove to be, for love of Thee; for nothing is too difficult if I may do it for Thy love." The more we conquer ourselves the more He gives us of His grace; and if to-day we have had power to overcome one difficulty, to-morrow and the day after we shall be able to surmount others that are much greater and more distressing.

X

THE SPIRIT OF SIMPLICITY

SIMPLICITY means more than telling the truth plainly ; it entails the refusal of all tricks and cunning and double-dealing. And as it is chiefly in our use of words that we need this virtue, it will demand that our tongue should convey things as they really appear to us ; that we should say what we have to say simply, with no other wish than to please God. This does not mean that simplicity requires us to express all that we are thinking ; it need not conflict with prudence, which will show what it is well to say or to leave unsaid. If, for instance, I have something to say which is quite clear in substance and in detail, I can state it plainly ; but if, in the midst of what

is good, there is something harmful or unnecessary, that should be omitted. As a rule the thing that is in any way against God or against my neighbour should never be said at all, nor that which is to my own credit or tends to self-indulgence or to my own temporal advantage, for in saying it I may fall into many sins.

Where the spirit of simplicity affects our actions, the result is that what we do we do thoroughly, honestly, and as in the sight of God, whether it be in business or in practice of devotion ; and no sham or scheming or hypocrisy will have any part in it. For instance, the person who gives a present to another, pretending that it is a proof of affection, but really doing it that he may attain something of greater value to himself, is offending the spirit of simplicity, which will not permit us to pretend one thing and to mean another—although he is doing what the world sanctions.

Because simplicity would require us to say what we really feel, so it will

force us to do what is honest and upright; for both the sole object must be the service of God. Therefore it is evident that the spirit of simplicity cannot be in persons who, for the sake of the world's opinion, try to appear to be different from what they really are; who do good works publicly that they may gain respect; who collect numbers of books they do not read to appear learned; who endeavour to preach well for the sake of notoriety and applause; who have a double motive in the practice of the devotional life. It becomes clear, does it not, that the spirit of simplicity is a thing to be desired? And surely it is needful that we should guard ourselves with the utmost care from all these deceits and tricks in word and deed? But if we are to possess the spirit of simplicity we must win it by expressing it in practice; it is by simplicity in action that we shall learn how to be really simple, and to attain to this we shall need the help of the grace of God, and must ask for it continually.

It is right to desire to be better than other people, but to desire to appear so is merely vanity. I would urge you to be good and to do your duty, but also always to think of yourself as more faulty than anyone else and of the work you do as of little value.

First, then, among the virtues to be achieved is humility.

The second is simplicity and truthfulness, which will prevent us from scheming, from using expressions that may be understood in more than one way, from every sort of lying, so that we shall only say what we really mean.

It is well to have the habit of stating things quite simply as they actually took place ; for my own part, God has given me so strong a conviction of this that I call it my Gospel, and I am specially helped in telling the exact truth, because to do so is in conformity with the Spirit of God.

The methods by which God chooses to work are not in accordance with our ideas and our wishes. We must

content ourselves with using those small powers which He has given us, and not be distressed because they are not higher or more far-reaching. If we are faithful in a little, He will give much into our charge; but that is His province, and does not depend on efforts of ours. We must leave it to Him, and try and fill our own niche.

The spirit of the world is restless, and desires to be active in all things. Let it alone! We must not choose our paths, but follow those into which it is God's pleasure to direct us. So long as we know ourselves unworthy to be used by Him, or to be esteemed by other men, we are safe. Let us offer ourselves to Him to do or to suffer anything that may be for His glory or for the strengthening of His Church. That is all He asks. If He requires results, that is in His hands and not in ours; let us spread out heart and will in His presence, having no choice of this or that until God has spoken. And, meanwhile, pray we may have grace to copy our Lord in

those virtues that belonged to His hidden life.

Remember always that the Son of God remained unrecognised. That is our aim, and that is what He asks of us now, for the future and for always, unless He shows us, by some method of His which we cannot mistake, that He wants something else of us. Pay homage to the everyday life led by our Lord on earth, to His humility, His self-surrender, and His practice of the virtues such a life requires. But chiefly pay homage to the limitations our Divine Master set on His own achievements. He did not choose to do all He might have done, and He teaches us to be content to refrain from undertakings which might be within our power, and to fulfil only what charity demands and His will requires.

I rejoice at this generous resolve of yours to imitate our Lord in the hiddenness of His life. The idea of it seems as if it must have come from

God, because it is so opposed to the ordinary point of view of flesh and blood. You may be quite sure that that certainly is the state befitting children of God. Therefore be steadfast, and have the courage to resist all the suggestions that are against it. You have found the means by which you may become what God asks you to be and learn to do His holy will continually, and that is the goal for which we are striving and for which all the saints have striven.

XI

PRAYER

IT is easy to tell those who have real understanding of prayer, not so much by their manner of referring to it as by their way of life ; it is that which shows the true fruit of it. And this applies equally to those who pray half-heartedly ; it is quite evident that while the one grows the other dwindles. Now, to get the real good from prayer it is necessary to prepare for it ; and those who are slack in preparation, and give time to prayer only from custom or because others are doing it, are losing a great deal. “*Ante orationem præpara animam tuam,*” says the Wise Man. For prayer is the raising of the soul to God, to show our needs and to beseech the help of His

mercy and His grace. Surely it is only reasonable that before we seek audience of His glorious Majesty we should consider a moment: How are we going to behave? Before whom are we to appear? What are we going to say? What is the grace for which we ought to ask? Nevertheless, it very often happens that carelessness and sloth intervene, or hurry and confusion of mind prevent reflection, so that we fail in preparation. This is a fault that must be checked. Also, we must get hold of our imagination, that it may not wander, and prepare our poor feeble selves to abide in the presence of God. Yet it must all be done without enormous effort—exaggeration of any kind only does harm.

Notice the difference between the light of a flame and that of the sun. In the night we see by the fire; things are visible, but only dimly; we can discern outlines and nothing more. But the light of the sun envelops every-

thing ; it not only illumines the outside, but by some secret power it penetrates further ; everything is moved by it, and springs up into growth and fertility according to its nature. Now the thoughts and reflections that come from our own understanding are only little flames that light up the outside of things and go no further ; but the rays of grace which the Sun of Truth strikes into our souls are all-pervading ; they reach the innermost depths of our hearts, and may bring about the most astonishing results. We must ask God that our light may come from Himself, and that He will show us what He wishes. Sublime and elaborate reflections are not prayer,—when we are seeking these, when we pride ourselves on the originality of our thought (particularly when we intend to impart it to others in discussion of prayer and to be admired for it), we come very near to blasphemy. In some degree we are making an idol of our own souls. If, when you come before God in prayer, you

are thinking how you may encourage your self-esteem, if you use this sacred time for your own satisfaction and are glorying in the beauty of your own ideas, you are sacrificing to the idol of personal vanity.

Ah, my brothers ! let us not risk such folly as this ; remembering what poor creatures we are, let us seek only for that which will humble us and help us really towards goodness. In prayer let us bring ourselves as low down as we can. The Son of God had power to delight mankind by His eloquence, but He did not choose to do so ; on the contrary, to explain His Gospel He always made use of the most ordinary words and expressions ; He liked better to be scorned and despised than praised and admired. Let us try to imitate Him, my brothers, and with that end let us suppress all thoughts of vanity in our prayer and in all else. In everything let us assume the marks of the humility that was Christ's, always expressing ourselves in the most common and

familiar way, and being glad—if God permits it to be so—that we should be held as of no account, that we should be disregarded and laughed at, for it is quite certain that unless we possess real and sincere humility we shall not be of the slightest use either to ourselves or others.

The fact that we have failed in carrying out our resolutions is no reason for not making them anew in every prayer : although the food we eat may seem not to do us any good, we do not give up eating ; and it is one of the most important parts of prayer that it should lead to good resolutions. We must make that specially an object, and give less thought to reasoning and method. The real fruit of prayer is good resolve ; but it must be made strongly ; it must have firm foundation, and we must be ready to carry it out, and to avoid the obstacles that may intervene. And even that is not sufficient, for in itself a resolve is merely an act — physical and moral, — and

though it is well we should make them and adhere to them, we are bound to recognise always that any good in them, in practice or in result, is absolutely dependent upon God. Why is it, do you suppose, that resolutions are so often broken? It is because we put too much faith in them. We have confidence in our good intentions; we rely on our own strength, and that is the reason there is no result. Therefore, when our prayer has brought us to the making of good resolutions, we must pray a great deal and implore His grace, in complete distrust of our selves, that He may give us the help we need to fulfil them. And when in spite of this we fail, not once or twice only but repeatedly during long spaces of time, and even when we have never brought one to any real fulfilment, we must none the less renew them, and throw ourselves on God's mercy, that we may have His grace to help us. It is well that past sins should humble us, but they must not rob us of our courage; and however deep the sin

into which we fall, it is not a reason for abating the confidence that God requires we should place in Him. We must always resolve afresh, and trust to His grace to save us from another fall. We do not find that doctors cease to treat the ills of the body because at first their remedies appear to do no good ; rather they continue them until they see a hope of life ; and if they persevere with physical maladies, however obstinate and violent, although there are no signs of improvement, how much more must we be patient with our spiritual diseases, on which, when God pleases, His grace may work wonders of healing.

What is prayer ? My daughters, when we speak of prayer we mean the uplifting of the soul towards God, to show its love or to declare its needs. Now, to attain to that we must get rid of all earthly thoughts, or we cannot rise towards God. When you begin your prayer, say : “ Lord, behold a poor publican, a miserable

creature coming to Thee in love, desiring to think of Thee.”

Those who approach God in this way are worthy that our Lord should speak to them heart to heart.

Just as air is necessary to the life of the body, so is prayer to the life of the soul. A man will die at once if he has no air, and it is impossible, in like manner, that a Sister of Charity should live without prayer.

The prayer which is called *affective* is not given to everyone. God grants it to whom He pleases, when He pleases, and in the way He pleases. Man cannot teach it, nor can he attain to it by his own labour and effort. In this prayer the soul without any impulse of its own finds itself filled suddenly with light and holy love, and given understanding of certain truths which are incomprehensible to any other than itself. The will also is inflamed to all high desire. Although learned people would seem to have the greatest possibility of prayer, yet God has special dealing with simple hearts.

It is on them that God pours down His fullest light and grace. He teaches them what scholars cannot learn, and mysteries that the wisest cannot solve He can make plain to them.

In all communities a certain number of persons will be found (and very often they are the best) who cannot meditate by a method that demands the use of imagination and reasoning. The saintly Bishop of Geneva¹ recommended another method of prayer to his Religious,—one that was suited even to the sick. They were to come into the presence of God quite quietly, showing Him their needs without any further effort, in the same way as a beggar shows his sores, and by doing so excites far more sympathy from the passer-by than if he shouted himself hoarse. If, without straining mind or will, we can hold ourselves in the presence of God, we have prayed well.

I wish to give you a method of prayer. Take one of the stages of

¹ S. François de Sales.

our Lord's Passion. There is no better subject. If you meditate deeply on the Passion of our Lord, it will become for you the school both of virtue and of suffering, and every day you will find in it some fresh inspiration for the following of your Divine Leader. S. François made it his one subject of meditation, and taught his spiritual children to turn to it continually.

There are some among you, my dear sisters, who have a great love of God, who know the sweetness of prayer and of all devotions, to whom the Sacraments are the chief consolation, who have nothing to contend with in themselves, and can submit joyfully to whatever comes from the hand of God. But there are others who do not feel—and never have felt—like this ; who do not know what it means to feel delight in prayer ; who seem to themselves incapable of any devotion ; and yet they labour diligently, and are faithful to their hours of prayer and to their rule. Do they love God, do you think ? Ah, truly yes ! for they

do all that the others do, and their love is deeper, because they feel it less. It may be that they have none of the warmth of love, but they have its reality, solid and certain.

Prayer acts as a looking-glass by which the soul beholds all the stains and defects which make it unsightly before God. In the world people rarely leave the house without first arraying themselves carefully, and looking in a mirror to see if their array becomes them ; some, indeed, are vain enough to carry a mirror at their girdle, that they may see themselves from time to time. Now, if people in the world take all this trouble to be pleasing to the sight of men, is it not still more necessary that those who are dedicated to God should array themselves and look constantly at their reflection in the mirror of prayer, by the uplifting of the soul and by inward scrutiny ? By this they will see all in themselves that is unpleasing in the sight of God, and may ask His forgiveness for it, and again enjoy His favours.

XII

THE DEDICATED LIFE

* FIRST of all, I am not the least surprised that you have this sense of shrinking from religious practices ; I should, on the contrary, be surprised if you had not. Sooner or later God tests all the souls that He summons to His service by some distress of this kind. It is really better that you should be tried at the very beginning of your vocation rather than in its development or near the end ; because you will learn in good time how to know yourself and how to humble yourself ; how to distrust yourself and place entire confidence in God ; how, in short, to lay a foundation of

* This letter is addressed to a Novice of the Order of The Visitation.

patience and strength and mortification — the virtues you will need throughout your life.

Secondly, I can quite understand that you would be glad to remain uncommitted, as you are at present ; but it is due to self that you feel this, and it would not continue. No one may serve two masters ; and if you desire to gain your liberty as a child of God, you must follow Jesus Christ in the narrow path of complete subjection which will lead you to salvation ; for however clearly you may intend to do right on the wide road of your own free will, it is likely that you will go astray, as do most of those who refuse to bind themselves to God save by a silken thread. Human nature is very changeable.

Thirdly, I beseech you reflect for a little on the Son of God, who came down to earth not only to save us by His death, but that He might submit Himself to the will of His Father, and draw us to Him by the example of His life. While He was yet in His

Mother's womb He obeyed the order of the Emperor. He was born far from His own country, in the depths of winter and in the utmost poverty ; and soon after we see Herod persecuting Him, and His necessity of flight, and all that the Blessed Virgin and S. Joseph were obliged to endure on His account. When He had returned to Nazareth, and was grown up, He was subject to His parents and to all the conditions of a hidden life, that He might set the standard for all consecrated souls, who, in accepting like conditions, become obedient to their superiors and to all the regulations of their calling. And without doubt you yourself had a place in the design that was His from all eternity, and He intends to save you by the complete withdrawal which you have begun. Moreover, if you in your turn will consider our Blessed Saviour, you will see how ceaselessly He suffered, how He prayed, how He laboured, and how He obeyed. If you live after the flesh—S. Paul tells us—you die ; and if

you would live after the Spirit that gives life, you must live as our Lord lived ; that is to say, deny yourself, do the will of another rather than your own, make good use of every difficulty, and prefer suffering to satisfaction. “ Is it not needful that the Christ should suffer these things ? ” He said to His Disciples, when they spoke of His Passion ; and by that He shows us that as He came to His glory only by the way of affliction, we may not hope to ascend without suffering.

Fourthly, there are different ways of suffering. The Apostles and the Early Christians suffered persecution from tyrants, and every kind of hardship, and it is said that all who desire to follow Jesus Christ must suffer temptation. If you look back over your past life you will find it has not been free from suffering ; and whatever your condition, whether you are in that of marriage—even the most fortunate of marriages—you will find pain and bitterness. You will find hardly

anybody in the world who has not some complaint to make of their circumstances, however easy they may appear. Surely those that are most to be desired are those which will give us most likeness to our Lord, in temptation, in prayer, in labour, and in suffering, and it is through these that He leads those souls whom He destines for perfection.

Fifthly, you must not be cast down because you take no delight in your efforts after righteousness. Righteousness is only righteous by means of the struggle it has cost for attainment. The life of man is all a battle; one must fight lest one be worsted. The devil—being like a roaring lion, for ever prowling round us to seek whom he may devour—cannot fail to attack you, touching your purpose of giving yourself wholly to God, and will try to discourage you in it and to overcome you, because he knows that if you remain steadfast he will be routed. It is necessary, therefore, that you should resist him resolutely, by prayer,

and by exact observance of all the rules of your community ; and most of all by your own personal confidence in God as being His child. His grace will never fail you ; but the more difficulty you have, the more you will find it overflowing your soul, if you are strong to resist by means of it. God never allows us to be tempted beyond that we are able.

Sixthly, for every reason it seems that you would do well to stand firm against all your misgivings ; the more you surrender to our Lord the more blessings you will receive. His yoke is easy to those who accept it willingly ; and your burden is light if you compare it with that of Jesus Christ, Who bore so much for you, or if you look on to the reward He promises those who serve Him constantly and gladly in the place and in the manner that He wills—as I hope that you intend to do.

XIII

SELF-SURRENDER

AH, my brothers, we must have complete confidence that wherever God may place us there will be nothing lacking that is necessary to us. Beseech Him of His Divine Goodness to give us utter confidence as to the result of everything that may happen to us. So long as we are faithful we shall have all we need. He Himself will dwell in us. He will guide us, watch over us, and love us. All we say and all we do will be pleasing to Him.

You remember the great Patriarch who received the Divine Promise that a great people should descend from the son whom God had given him. And then God bade him make an

offering of this son. Anyone might say on that : “ If Abraham put his son to death, how could God fulfil His promise ? ” But because this man had taught himself to surrender to every command of God, he prepared to fulfil this one without considering the result. “ It is for God to arrange all that,” he seems to have said, “ if I do as He bids me, His promise will be fulfilled.—How ?—I cannot tell. It is enough for me that He is All-Powerful ; I am ready to offer Him what is dearest to me on earth, as He wishes it.—But it is my only son ?—That makes no difference.—But in taking the life of the child I destroy the only means by which God can fulfil His promise ?—What matter ! This is His will ; it must be obeyed.—But if I spare his life my seed shall be blessed ; God has said so.—Yes, but He has also said that I must slay him. He has declared it to me. I must obey at whatever cost, and continue to rest my hope in His promises.” Think of the degree to which he trusted ; he

would not be troubled about the result, although this was a thing that touched him so nearly, but because it was in God's hands he was certain that all must go well. Why should we fail in the same confidence, my brothers, if we cast all our care on God and do what He commands us ?

The true mission-priest must never disturb himself about this world's goods, but must trust everything to the Providence of God, satisfied that, so long as he himself does not fail in charity or in trust, the Divine Protection will not fail him. Although it may seem that disaster is imminent, no harm can come to him, nor anything he really needs be wanting. It is not I that say this ; Holy Writ teaches it : " Qui habitat in adjutorio Altissima in protectione Dei cœli commorabitur." ¹ This being so, he must be confident that he is secure from misfortune, and all things will work together for his good. Surely as God gives Himself to him he can lack nothing either for

¹ Psalm xci. 1.

body or soul. And so, my brothers, you may be assured that so long as you hold this hope firmly you will be preserved from evil, and every sort of blessing will be showered upon you.

We shall not bring our love nearer to perfection by going into ecstasies, but rather by striving to obey the will of God ; and he who comes nearest to perfection will be he who has brought his will nearest to God's will. In fact, perfection consists in the union of our will with the will of God, so that we have no desire apart from His, and he who has most understanding of this is the most perfect. When our Lord wished to show the path towards perfection to the man of whom the Gospel tells us, He said : " Whoso would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Now, I ask you, who denies himself more truly, or who takes up the cross of mortification with more reality, or who follows more closely in the steps

of Jesus Christ, than he who is heedless of his own will and only seeks the will of God? And somewhere the Scriptures say that he who draws near to God has part with the Spirit of God. Now, I ask you, who draws nearer to God than he who always follows God's will and never his own, who has no wish or hope apart from the good pleasure of God? Truly, this is a simple method to win a great treasure of grace, now in this present life.

This morning, in the midst of my own feeble prayers, I was seized with a great longing that I might always welcome whatever happened in the world, whether for good or for apparent harm and sorrow, as much in public as in personal things, for as God sends it it must be His will. And truly it seems to me that if we could practise this it would have wonderful effect, and would be very important to the Mission. Let us make a great effort to yield our will to that of God in such a way as this, and among the many blessings

that will result, the peace it will bring to our own souls is not the least.

I feel sure that each one of us has tried to do something during this day which in itself was righteous and good ; and yet it may well be that God will not accept it, because it has been done with some personal motive. Was it not just this which was the message from God delivered by the Prophet, when he said : “ Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure. Ye fast for strife and debate and to smite with the fist of wickedness : ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.”

The same thing may be said of all pious practices, if there is any mingling of personal desire tainting and corrupting our prayer, or our labour, or our penitence. For the last twenty years I have never been able to read the Epistle from the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah without great distress. What must we do then that our toil be not wasted ? Surely what we do must

never be affected by our personal desires or whims or fancies. We must make it a rule to follow the will of God in everything. I say in everything. There must be no half-measures. That is the real sign of grace, and means that we—ourselves and what we do—are pleasing to God.

It is the thought of the presence of God that makes the constant fulfilment of His will seem possible. Little by little the recollection of His presence grows in the heart until by the help of grace it becomes a habit, and at length we draw our life from it. How many people should you think there were in the world who hardly ever lose the recollection of God? Lately I met someone who reproached himself because three times in the day he had been distracted from the thought of God. People like that will help to our condemnation when we appear before the Majesty of God to answer for our forgetfulness of Him; for we have no other object but to love Him, and to bear witness to our love

by our homage and our service. Beseech our Lord to give us grace to say as He did, "Cibus meus est ut faciam voluntatem eius qui misit me"¹: implore Him that we may always have hunger and thirst for this.

¹ S. John iv. 34.

XIV

SELF-SURRENDER—*continued*

BY your last letter you tell me, my dear brother, that you have no fervour, that you have lost all enthusiasm for your rule or for any spiritual exercise, and that you hope I can suggest some remedy.

I wish I could do so—all the more because the affection I have always had for you makes me sympathise deeply with your distress—but there is no curing a malady unless one has full knowledge of it. As far as I can judge, I think yours is the result of feebleness of will and spiritual slackness in the things that God requires of you. I am not surprised that this is the case, because by their own nature all mankind are in this condition.

And if you ask me why it is that there should be such a division among them, that, while some give themselves so generously, others hang back, I answer that some rise above the shrinking of human nature, while the rest do not force themselves to conquer it. You will find that the first are at peace, because, as they have given all to God, there is not strife in their heart ; while the others are always unsettled ; they wish to love God, but not to give up loving other things that are apart from God,—such things very often as bodily ease, which unfit the soul for religious practices. In that way sloth is born and nourished in us. A state of sloth is one which God abhors. The state of spiritual tepidness is also a state of damnation.

Ah, my dear brother, what immense cause we have for fear—both you and I—when we think of the condemnation that must await those who profess to work for God, and work carelessly. We might well take example by the farm-labourer or the town-artisan or

the soldier on active service. They work continually, and endure a great deal for the sake of things that perish ; while we—who work for our own salvation, for the increase of God's kingdom upon earth, and that souls created for heaven may know the full power of the Passion of Jesus Christ—do not care to take much trouble or even to overcome our own evil desires ; and I call all desires evil that distract us from the claim of our vocation. Our vocation pledges us to follow our Lord ; it claims also the surrender of ourselves, that is to say, of our will, our own opinion, our own pleasure, our goods, our own family. We fulfil this if we fulfil our rule ; and by true faithfulness to it we shall find peace at heart and the way towards perfection ; but it needs courage to face the difficulties that assail us.

Resolve, my dear brother, once and for all that you will rise above all this sense of repugnance. Ask God constantly for grace to submit your inmost self to Him. This is the season

for retreat. I hope that yours will show you how to break entirely from the sweetness of this present life, and will inflame you with real longing for life eternal. The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence. We must fight if we would win it, and we may give no quarter to any of the desires of the flesh. Fight in this way, my brother, and it will no longer be you who are alive, but Jesus Christ alive in you.

How do you regard the calling of the Priests of the Mission, whose task it is to handle and to lead human souls of whom the impulses are known to God only? It is the same calling as that of the Son of God on earth. It is the purpose for which He came down from heaven, and was born of a Virgin, for which He gave His whole life and for which He suffered a painful death. You must realise, therefore, how great a thing it is to which you have been called.

You will not find that philosophy or theology or argument can do anything

for a soul. Jesus Christ must join with us or we with Him. We must work in Him and He in us. What we say must be in imitation of Him and in His Spirit, just as He was in His Father, and taught the doctrine His Father gave Him—as the Scriptures tell us.

Therefore, monsieur, you must surrender yourself, that you may be filled with Jesus Christ. You know that, as a rule, everything is governed by its nature, one sheep is like another, a man behaves as other men. If, then, he who guides others, who forms and teaches them, is himself full of the spirit of the world, those who listen to him and follow and imitate him will become worldly. Whatever he says or does he will only give them the forms of righteousness, and not the root, because he will infect them with the spirit that possesses him.

For your calling, monsieur, it is needful that our Lord should mark you with the impress of His own character. We can gather fruit from a wild briar if we have grafted a fruit

tree on it ; and in like manner we, in our wretchedness, though we are but thorns and stubble, may be given life from the Spirit and grace of our Lord. We may have the reflection of His character ; and being united to Him as are the branches to the vine, we may do even as He did on earth, and bring many children to new birth for Him.

One thing which is very important, and in which you must take special care, is the endeavour to have constant communion with our Lord. Prayer is the source from which you can gain all the directions for your task that you can need. When any question arises, turn to God, and say to Him : “ Lord, Who art the source of knowledge, show me what I ought to do in this matter ! ”

We must resort to prayer also that we may place the needs of those whom we direct before our Lord. It is quite clear that we shall gain more result by this means than by any other. Jesus Christ—Who should be our guide in all things—did not think it sufficient

to preach, to labour, to fast, and to die for us; He prayed also. For Himself He did not need it; it was for us that He prayed so continually, and to teach us to do the same on our own behalf and also for those whom He is helping us to save.

One other thing that I urge upon you is the humility of our Lord. Say to Him very often: "Lord, who am I that I should have such work as this? What have I done so far that could fit me for the charge that has been given me? Lord, I can accomplish nothing but harm, unless Thou Thyself wilt prompt me in all I say and all I do!" If we could always keep present in our minds all that there is of evil in ourselves, there would be only too much to serve to keep us humble, not only before God but before men, and when we are with those who are below us.

Also, be very careful to depend completely on the guidance of our Lord. I mean, when you must choose what you will do, ask yourself: "Does this

agree with our Lord's teaching ? ” If you can feel that it does, hasten to do it ; but, if not, you must decide against it.

Further, when there is a question of undertaking good work, say to our Lord : “ Lord, if Thou wert here, what wouldst Thou do ? How wouldst Thou teach these people ? What would Thy comfort be for these who are sick or unhappy ? ”

Distrust of our own capacity is the foundation for the right sort of confidence in God ; without it we may discover ourselves to be much lower down than we ever imagined. But do not keep your thoughts fixed on yourself ; look to our Lord, who is near you and in you and is ready to join you in your work as soon as you turn to Him. All will then go well.

XV

THE OBJECT OF SUFFERING

CONDITIONS of suffering and distress should not be regarded as evil. God gives them to us that we may practise the virtue of patience and to teach us sympathy with others. He Himself chose to have experience of them that we might have a High Priest touched with the feeling of our infirmities and that His example might help us to be patient.

When God sends to any individual one calamity after another and sorrow upon sorrow, it is the surest sign that He has some great purpose for him. It is in the time of temptation and distress that one may mark the growth of a soul, because what it is under

that testing that it is really ; and far more growth is possible in one day of trial than in a great many of peace. The stagnant water which becomes muddy and tainted is like the soul that always remains placid ; but the souls that are proved by temptation are like streams flowing over rocks and pebbles, whose waters are clear and fresh.

Sickness is a far better proof of what we really are than health, and the bravest of us are tempted by impatience and depression under the test of pain. But, as it is only the weak who give in, it will have been to you an opportunity rather than a disaster, because our Lord gives you strength to accept what is His pleasure.

O Saviour, Who Thyself suffered so much, and Who died to win our salvation, and also to show how God may be glorified in the bearing of pain, teach us, we pray Thee, to realise the great treasure that lies hidden in the state of sickness !

We must remember that all incapacity and unhappiness is sent to us by God. Life and death, health and sickness, are all ordered by Him ; and in whatever form they come, it is always to help us and for our good. Nevertheless, there are some who are extremely impatient of suffering, and this is a very grave sin. There are some also who become possessed with the desire of change ; who want to go hither and thither, to one particular house, or to another part of the country, or to their own province, on some pretext that the air suits them better. And to what purpose ! Such people are wrapped up in themselves, weaklings who cannot bear any suffering—as if bodily ills were an evil from which to run away. To run away from the condition in which God places us is to run away from blessing. Yes, suffering is in truth a blessing, and purifies the soul.

I have seen a man, who was called Frère Antoine, who could neither read nor write, but who was rich in the

Spirit of God. He addressed every one as his brother, or, if it was a woman, as his sister ; even when he spoke to the Queen he called her his sister. Someone asked him one day : “ My brother, what do you do about illness when it comes to you ? In what way do you meet it ? How do you turn it to account ? ” “ I take it,” he said, “ as a claim that God makes upon me : for instance, if fever lays hold on me, I say to her, ‘ Good-day, Sister Fever, thou comest from God ; prithee be welcome.’ And after that I yield to whatever is God’s will for me.” That was his method, my brothers. And that has always been the method of the servants of Jesus Christ, the lovers of the Cross. This does not prevent us from taking the right remedy for the relief and cure of different ills : in so doing we are honouring God, who made the plants and gave them their properties ; but to take great care of ourselves, to lay up for the smallest malady—that is a thing we must not give into ! Truly,

the whole idea of interest in ourselves must be got rid of.

When you say that praise does not lead you into vanity, but that disgrace makes you unhappy, I can only answer, monsieur, that you are learned and I am stupid, and, therefore, you are far better able to analyse human nature than I am. According to Seneca, it will always cling to whatever it likes, and reject what is distasteful; and S. Thomas tells us that holy souls overcome desire and master themselves sufficiently to make a willing offering of their own satisfaction; but only by great effort do they learn to welcome the harm that comes to them from their fellows.

In fact, we are all more sensitive to pain than to pleasure, and the prick of a rose affects us more than its perfume. The way to balance this inequality is to accept what really pains us as willingly as we renounce what gives us pleasure; to prepare ourselves for suffering by the thought

of the blessing that goes with it, and always to be ready for it, so that when it comes we shall not be taken by surprise nor overwhelmed.

“The Spiritual Combat”¹ advises us to picture the troubles that may come to us, to do battle with them until we feel we are the victors; which means that we should be willing to bear them if they came. Of course, we must not imagine immense evils, of which the very thought is terrifying—like some of the sufferings of the martyrs,—but such things as the contempt of our fellows, or slander, or a fever, and the like.

Let us see why God allows those who serve Him to suffer. My daughters, we are each like a block of stone which is to be transformed into a statue. What must the sculptor do to carry out his design? First of all he must take the hammer and chip off all that he does not need. For this purpose he strikes the stone so

¹ Scupoli.

violently that if you were watching him you would say he intended to break it to pieces. Then, when he has got rid of the rougher parts, he takes a smaller hammer, and afterwards a chisel, to begin the face with all the features. When that has taken form he uses other and finer tools to bring it to that perfection which he has intended for his statue. Do you see, my daughters, God treats us just in this way. Look at any poor Sister of Charity, any poor Mission Priest—when God drew them out of the corruption of the world they were still as rough and shapeless as unhewn stone. Nevertheless, it was from them He intended to form something beautiful, and so He took His hammer in His hand and struck great blows upon them.

Our joy depends upon the Cross, and our Lord would not enter into His glory save by the way of bitterness. He leads you by the same path as the saints. Do not shrink from it, I

beseech you ; but be patient, yield to Him, ask Him to follow His will and not yours ! I am sure you are doing this, and that you surrender to Him, to suffer whatever He asks of you ; but you must go on doing it, and never let despondency have possession of you.

The Thoughts of
Mademoiselle le Gras

*(set down by her for the help of the Sisters of
Charity, and printed and published under this title
in 1675, being fifteen years after her death)*

The Thoughts of Mademoiselle le Gras

I

ON THE LIFE OF OUR LORD

THE Kingdom of Holy Poverty has His cradle for its throne. I have a great desire to be admitted to that kingdom, for the King of the Poor takes most delight in the virtue of poverty. He shows that it is so by accepting only such as are poor in spirit; and the heavenly voices that announced His birth proclaimed that God Himself was honouring the state of poverty.

Seeing how God has brought His greatness low—not only by becoming man, but by choosing a place among the poorest—I have thought that those

who will fulfil the will of God in the difficult affairs of the world are in need of great courage and must learn humility ; that sometimes God may choose those who are rich and of high estate, but that they will be useless until He has humbled them according to His good pleasure.

That God should have been born in obscurity and in destitution teaches me the perfection of His love, which does not seek to impress itself on men, but tries to achieve for them all that it can. From this I ought to learn that I must be hidden in God if I desire to serve Him, and cease to look for recognition from others or to require their encouragement. It should be sufficient for me that God sees what I desire to be towards Him.

By His Incarnation He does not ask of us gratitude for redemption and salvation only ; but He requires that, just as He Himself came down from heaven to be united with the world, we should raise ourselves above earthly and visible things, to be one with

His divinity, and that we should never allow sin to divide us from Him.

Cast all else aside, my soul, and adore the child Jesus only—newly born! The Magi teach us how we should approach this wondrous Child. They dwelt a long way off from Bethlehem! That is true; and in that there is evidence of His love and His strength. To us sinners who are far from His grace it is an assurance that we may attain to it if we follow His holy guidance, as the kings followed the star. We know how they allowed themselves to be led by it.

But before we may start upon our road, we must leave all else, as they did. Even so, Lord, I would follow them, and renounce all my besetting sins, and chiefest among these, three failings that are an absolute barrier to Thy love. First, I desire to renounce my indifference for Thy service, and in its place to offer Thee the incense of perfect prayer; second, to reject all luxury and pleasure, that I may offer

Thee the myrrh of fasting and self-denial ; and, thirdly, to quench all love of possessions, offering to Thee as alms the gold and the goods that Thou hast given to me.

When I consider Barabbas preferred before Jesus I am resolved henceforward so to love Jesus that nothing shall ever again interfere with my love of Him ; and I beseech Him to give me enough strength and enough courage not only to prefer Him to all else myself, but to teach others to love and cling to Him.

The scorn and the shame which were a part of His suffering, and which took special form when He was crowned, are an offering to God in reparation for that sin of pride from which spring all other sins. The insults of His enemies are, in truth, the witness to His sovereign power, for by means of them He reaches the glory of His triumph. For this reason I desire to yield myself in obedience to Him, desiring no other life save as

a subject of the King Who was rejected of men.

He bore His Cross as does a king who will not leave his battles to be fought by others, but must take up arms himself. He means to win the victory, and conquer hell and sin and the human race for the glory of His Father. So I surrender to my King, and will submit and hold for Him all of myself which He has fairly won; and I volunteer to follow His Majesty, because He has already allowed others to share the burden of His Cross with Him. I resolve to bear my own as He teaches me; that is to say, all distress which it is His pleasure to send me; and I offer it to Him now and henceforward, that it may be united to His own and I may have part in His Merits.

It is not enough that our daily life should be founded on our Saviour's life on earth; we must follow Him even unto death. We must show Him that not only do we desire to copy Him in all our daily actions, but also we

would learn from His sufferings and His death how to find happiness in death ourselves.

O Love, Thou camest to Calvary bearing Thy Cross. I see Thee cast down upon it, that Thy limbs may be bound and nailed and rendered helpless. From this Thou wouldest have me learn, O Love, that I may not give myself to Thee until all my self-will is chained and fettered; and Thou knowest how I am hindered in bringing this to pass.

If men imagined they had controlled Thy power, they were shown that they had only given it greater opportunity; although Thy holy hands were bound, none the less Thou didst work marvels. The earth trembled and the rocks were rent; the graves opened and the sun was darkened; and, greatest of all, Thou didst make atonement for our sin, and accomplish our salvation.

In meditating on the Resurrection of our Lord I was filled with the desire

to be raised with Him. And because without death there can be no resurrection, I saw that all my evil inclinations must be put to death, and that in the recesses of my innermost being self must be searched out and slain. I know that I alone am incapable of any attempt at this, but, as God asks it of me, I give to Him my free consent, that He Himself should work in me whatever is His will.

II

ON THE SACRAMENTS

BECAUSE Baptism is a spiritual birth it follows that He in Whom we are baptised is our Father, and further, that being His children we should be like Him. And "so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into His death," therefore our life should be a constant dying, and it is a great hindrance to the soul to seek after delight. I will try, then, to conform to the likeness of my Father; and that I may be in truth a child of death, I will—if He will give me grace—have no more fear of dying, which is to be the means of uniting me to Him for all eternity. It is senseless that members of Him should be attempting to escape that which He

desired so ardently. Let us live the dying life then ; and that we may do so there must be no more struggling against Jesus, no more labour that is not for Jesus, no more thoughts that are not in Jesus, no more life, in short, apart from Jesus. So, being united with this all-embracing love, I will love all that Jesus loves, and will love for the sake of Jesus, from Whom all love proceeds.

To have a right view of the Sacrament of Penitence it is essential to have great reverence and a great desire for it, and, therefore, to have real knowledge of its value and of its results. We require the spiritual capacity for true understanding of it and serious reflection as to our reason for wishing to receive it. Because it is only the sinful soul that needs it, we should realise before we come to seek it that we are sinners, and, being so, are out of touch with the Grace of God. To the Christian soul that is a misery too terrible to be endured.

The soul being thus prepared and being conscious that Confession is the sole remedy for so great an evil, must, after strict self-examination, be full of hatred for herself, because she has fallen into the madness of disobeying God, Who has shown such loving kindness towards her and in Himself is worthy of infinite adoration. From this will spring the distress of the child who has displeased his father, and a firm resolution to overcome self and to avoid those opportunities that most often lead to misdoing. And, above all, we must recognise that of ourselves we are powerless to avoid sinning. We must make an act of love and confidence, and ask God for grace, —first that we may have a deeper desire to please Him, and then that we may conquer even the smallest of evil inclinations. We need to love God for Himself, and to have no interest apart from Him.

When we come before the priest it should be as a criminal before a judge, with the thought that it is God to Whom

we are going to speak rather than the individual confessor. We must be plain and humble in self-accusation, never laying blame on others for our own offences against God, and especially never mentioning an individual as being involved in our misdoing. We must lay bare our faults just as they are, not hiding or withholding anything.

And, finally, we must listen very humbly and reverently to what is said by the confessor. We must direct our thoughts anew to a great regret for our offending against God; and in expectation of His mercy we must listen with awe to the holy words of Absolution, realising that by them our souls receive the gift bought by the Blood of the Son of God.

ON THE MOST HOLY EUCHARIST

To make a good Communion there are three stages that must be considered: that before the Holy Communion, that of Communion itself, and the time after.

For the first we should try to meditate on what Holy Communion is, and what manner of persons may be admitted to it.

We must remember that the Faith teaches us that the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity is in His sanctified humanity really and in fact in the Sacred Host: and, therefore, the Most Holy Trinity in its essential unity is there also. This must imbue us with the respect which the creature owes to the Creator, and make us recognise our own nothingness and our complete dependence upon God.

We should try and see the intention of this act of God, which to the human mind is so wonderful and so impossible to understand; and finding that it proceeds wholly from His perfect love, we should glorify Him by the tributes of our own love and adoration in gratitude for this marvellous device by which He unites us with Himself. Sometimes we may protest to Him that He did enough when He was made Man to win our hearts completely.

Sometimes we may ask what He could find in us that was worth buying at so great a price ; and whatever it is, we can make an offering of it to Him.

The Holy Communion of the Body of Jesus Christ admits us really to the joy of Communion with the Saints in Paradise. And as in heaven He shows Himself as Divine and Human to the Blessed, so He has also chosen to be present upon earth in the Most Holy Eucharist, so that all men in all conditions may be united with Him. O infinite Love ! how is it that men in their blindness are heedless of so immense a benefit, and by their sin miss all the effects of it, for it is sin only that keeps them separated from Thy loving kindness.

Because, then, the chief purpose of Holy Communion is to unite us with God, we must do all that is in our power to remove all hindrances to that union ; and seeing that the chiefest of these is the self-sufficiency that grows from love of our own will, it is necessary that we should yield

ourselves to God, to have no will but His, if we would have a share in the fruits of this great Sacrament.

Another thing which it has seemed to me we ought to do is to give closer study to the practices of the Son of God, and thus attempt to unite ours with His. Such a union can come only by the copying of His virtues, and especially His gentleness, humility, tolerance, and love of others.

Further, for a good Communion we are bound to give ourselves to God in thankfulness for the great love He has shown by giving Himself to us. We can only do this by showing Him a love that, in a manner, corresponds; that is to say, by desiring with our whole heart to receive Him, because He gives Himself to us so freely.

The understanding of the dignity of this Most Holy Sacrament must convince us of our own impotence, and so make us more ready to receive it. It will also make us hope for and implore the Holy Spirit (which is the same Love that provided this means

of grace) to come and dwell in our hearts, and prepare them to receive so great a Lord.

The second stage is when we receive the Holy Communion. When, by the aforesaid process, our souls have attained to peace, we must receive, in this Most Glorious Sacrament, our God and our King, with acts of adoration and of confidence, offering all that we are, and imploring Him to accept it, yielding our will up to His completely. And as we make these many acts of love we must see what great reason there is that we should do so ; chief of all is His real presence within us ; and though we cannot see Him, we must be seeking to understand what He would have us do.

The time after Holy Communion should be filled with these same thoughts and intentions. We remain in the Divine Presence in thankfulness.

The gratitude with which the soul is filled is simple. It inspires a wish to give glory to God by every act of daily

life, and it offers to Him again the glory that is His own, that which is His for ever from the Sacred Humanity of His Son, and that which the Blessed are offering continually.

Those of us who make frequent Communion must humble ourselves utterly, for we ought to be such as have attained to complete detachment, who have a great love of God, and who never stray from the path of holiness.

III

ON TEMPTATION

IF you aspire to perfection you must labour to die to self. Those words, my sisters, contain tremendous meaning. Why may I not write them with my blood, or leave them to you in letters of gold,—to you, my closest friends in Jesus Christ! You must die to self; which means that you must destroy those impulses that come from your own capacities of soul or body which may conflict with the design of the Holy Spirit upon you.

The will is so high a power in your soul that in relation to it you become god-like, because in truth it is you and you only who can master it. God Himself, when He gave you being, chose

to renounce direction of it. Very often He uses gentle means to bend the will rightly ; but hardly ever does He command, and, therefore, we must never depend upon His doing so. Be mindful of this warning, for there are some who are so heedless, who are so enveloped in self-love, that—rather than take the trouble to bridle their will—they will dare to assert that they are doing as God directs them, when their misdoing is pointed out to them. Those who make it their chief endeavour to fulfil the will of God may well say this ; but for the indifferent, who constantly evade it, such words are madness.

The surrender of our own will becomes easier if whenever we yield to others we think of it as yielding to Jesus Christ, our dear Master. Did He not show us His desire to do the will of His Father, and that it was necessary to the life of the soul when He said : “ My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me.” Do you not see that in His agony in the garden

He cares more for it than for His own life, because He says : “ Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done ” ? You see by those words that His lower will had desired to escape suffering ; but His higher will, which He united to that of His Father, had command, and, therefore, He consented to all that He was required to suffer in His Passion. O Love most perfect ! this is the school in which Thou teachest those who are Thine ! Therefore, my dear sisters, if you aspire to be united with Him for all eternity, while you are on earth you must unite your will with His. You can see the greatness of the power in a will yielded to God by the example of His Son, for thereby the grace which had been forfeited by disobedience was restored to the human race.

Let our eyes rest continually on Jesus crucified, our Master. Is it possible that we should ever have such real and immense excuse for hatred as He had ? Could we, indeed, — pitiful and wretched creatures that

we are—maintain that anyone had really maligned us if we had true knowledge of ourselves? Yet see how He can make excuse for those who blaspheme against Him and persecute Him, and the charity with which He implores His Father to pardon them!

And if the example of Jesus seems to you to be too exalted, because He was God as well as man, remember that to meet your own natural incapacity to resist temptation you were made a Christian, and He gave you the strength in Him to overcome your enemies. It rests with yourself. Do not spare yourself, but plunge bravely into the midst of the Christian's warfare.

The Son of God did not think it sufficient to say to His Disciples, "Be meek." He desired a stronger witness of His love, and said: "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart"; teaching us that as it is the high test of love to seek to be like its object, so, if we love Him, we shall be meek, in imitation of Him.

Souls that are weak and timorous are overtaken only too often by a certain type of discouragement: because they have laboured—though only for a little while—to overcome some of their faults and evil inclinations, and still find they are conquered by them very often, they grow weary and despondent, and at once abandon their attempt, because they despair of its success.

In reflecting upon this let us remember that God, though He desires so deeply that we should be saved, will not save us unless we ourselves respond to His grace; and that having given us—in His love—the sufficient means of salvation by His Son, He has chosen never to put force upon our will. Let this be deeply impressed upon your heart: God in His love for us has desired to save us by His Son, but our salvation is not His will unless it is ours also.

Therefore, you must never let yourself be discouraged; even though you may struggle all your life to subdue

some of your sins, even though you may realise that you fail completely, you may hope that God sees you are possessed by the wish to please Him, and that you labour for love of Him. If this is so, I dare promise you that, although you may not have the happiness of feeling improvement in yourself, He in His goodness will be pleased with you, and your endeavour will be counted to you in place of that virtue after which you strive.

Try and preserve a quiet mind and a heart at peace amid all the painful changes that may occur. Make it your custom to accept all your little discomforts as from the hand of God. He is your Father, and knows so well what is best for you. Sometimes you feel His touch, to check or punish you; and sometimes to show you His great love, by permitting your sufferings, to give you a share in the merit of His Son.

The lack of outward human help will serve to bring you nearer to the

perfection of Divine Love, and will gain for you the special guidance of God. Do you know what He does to a soul that is deprived of all human comfort and support if she has courage to profit by it? It is His pleasure to lead such a soul; and though she may not be conscious of it, she may be sure, none the less, that if she clings to Him with entire confidence He will support her with His own hand, and will never let her sink beneath the burden of her wretchedness.

S. Paul tells us that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world."

We cannot hope for any truce with this enemy so long as we live; and, however strongly we may have fought him for many years, he is never discouraged, and is always trying to undermine our perseverance. He has no greater triumph than to lead us into sin, and he is satisfied if only, a

little time before we die, he can break through our resolutions. Take care, my sisters, lest you give him such a chance, and for this reason be faithful in the smallest detail, and every day desire anew to please God and to do all that you ought to do. Life is short and eternity is long, blessed, and to be desired. We have no knowledge of our way except we follow Jesus, always working and always suffering. And, again, He could never have led us, unless His own resolve had taken Him as far as death on the Cross. Consider, then, whether we do well to spare ourselves, lest we lose whatever we have gained hitherto. When we have laboured forty-nine years, if we have relaxed in the fiftieth, and it is then that God calls us, the whole of life will have availed nothing.

Perseverance must then be the last flower in our crown, as it is only at the last moment of life we can receive it. Without it our work and labour have no completeness.



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