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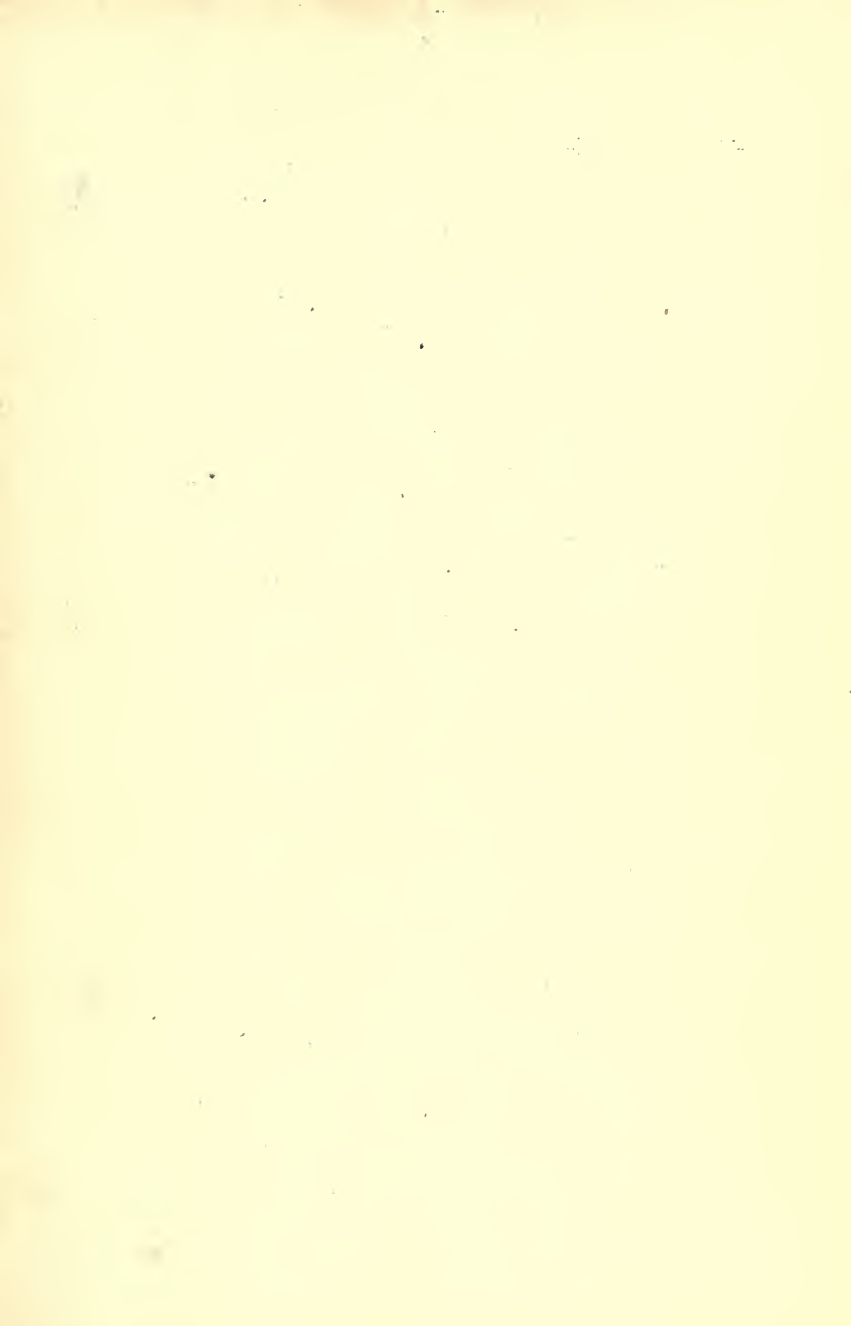


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THE LIFE
OF
B. GIOVANNI COLOMBINI.



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B. IOANNES COLUMBINVS INSTITVTOR ORD. IESVATORVM

THE LIFE
OF
B. GIOV. COLOMBINI.

BY
FEO BELCARI.

Translated from the Editions of 1541 and 1832.

"SITIT SITIRI DEUS."



London :
R. WASHBOURNE, 18 PATERNOSTER ROW.
1874.

TO THOSE
GLORIOUS AND HIDDEN SAINTS,

S. John Baptist

AND

S. Abel.

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PREFACE.



BOOK read and recommended by S. Philip Neri needs no other word of introduction.

Though the Gesuati are not to be found in England, there are the children of S. Paul of the Cross, whose simplicity and love of God is as bright an example to Catholics of the nineteenth, as that of B. John Colombini and his followers was to those of the fourteenth century.

The editor of this edition trusts that the life of the Saint may take a place in the hearts of English Catholics next to that of the "Flowers of S. Francis."

He begs the prayers of all such readers for those whose labours have been spent on it.

The frontispiece is taken from an engraving prefixed to "De B. Joanne Colombino, Gesuatorum ordinis fondatore, Oratio Francisci, Ignatii Tonelli, Rom. Senn. Rom. clerici. Romæ, 1631, 4to." Dedicated to Card. Aldobrandini.

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B

B. GIOVANNI COLOMBINI.

CHAPTER I.

The Country and Parentage of Giovanni.

ERE begins the venerable and holy life of the Blessed Giovanni Colombini, who was the first of the poor ones called, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Gesuati.


The ancient and famous city of Siena, as she has beyond any other countries had a most singular reverence and devotion to the Mother of God, so she has been a most fruitful mother of good servants of God; and, amongst other holy men to whom she has given birth, was one by name and by grace called Giovanni, of the honourable house of Colombini, who, much in accordance with the simplicity and

purity of his heart, was surnamed Colombino. His father was called Pietro, and his mother Agnolina. This gentleman was rich in temporal blessings, and no less so in honourable relations; and amongst the chiefs of the city he was in such repute that, raised to the post of governor of the city with the other good and wise citizens, he many times wisely ruled it.

His lawful wife was Mona Biagia, daughter of Messer Giovanni, whose father was Messer Niccolo (both knights of the noble family of Cerretani), a venerable and honourable lady, and well brought up in all the approved manners; and by her he had two children, a boy and a girl, to whom he gave his parents' names, that is, to the boy, Pietro, to the girl, Agnolina. He was much given to earthly gains, and always anxious about his business, prudent and circumspect in all secular affairs. But the good and merciful God, wishing to draw this man to Himself and free him from the power of darkness, converted him in the manner hereinafter written.

CHAPTER II.

His Conversion.

NE day, A.D. 1355, Giovanni having returned home, wishing to dine at once, and not finding the table and meal prepared, as was usual, he began to be angry with his wife and servant, reproving them for their delay, alleging that for urgent reasons he was most anxious to return to his business; to which his wife, gently replying, said, "Thou hast too much gain, and little expenditure; why dost thou worry thyself so much?" And she prayed him to be patient, that he should very soon have something to eat. She also said, "While I prepare the meal, take this book and read a little;" putting before him a volume which contained some lives of saints. But Giovanni, offended, took the book, and throwing it into the middle of the room, said to her, "Thou thinkest of nothing but legends, and I must very soon return to the warehouse."

While saying these and many other words, his conscience began to prick him, so that he picked up the book from the ground, and sat down; and having opened it, there came before him, by God's will, the life of S. Marie of Egypt, a sinner converted by God to marvellous piety.

While Giovanni read this his wife prepared the dinner, and desired him, when he pleased, to sit down to table. Giovanni answered her, "*Thou* must wait a little now, till I have read this legend;" which happened to be of some length, and because it was full of heavenly melody, his heart began to soften, and he would not leave off reading till he had come to the end. His wife, seeing him read so attentively, and silently considering it, was much rejoiced, hoping that he would enjoy it to the edification of his soul, for it was not his custom to read such books. And certain it is, that by the operation of the Divine grace it so fell out, for that history so impressed itself on his soul, that he continually meditated on it day and night. And with his thoughts thus fixed, the gracious God so touched his heart, that he began to despise the things of this world, and to be no longer so anxious about them as he used, but rather the contrary; for at first he was so avaricious that

he rarely gave alms himself, or liked any one in his house to do so, and out of covetousness he tried in his payments to deduct something from the agreement made; but after the aforesaid salutary lesson, to punish himself for his avarice, he often gave twice as much as was demanded of him, and to those who sold him anything, he paid more money than was due. And so he began to frequent the churches, to fast often, and to give himself up to prayer and other devout acts.

CHAPTER III.


How the Blessed John made a Vow of Chastity.

IN this way, chastising the flesh and bringing it into subjection, he wished to live in chastity; and with many reasons and examples he exhorted his wife that she should willingly abandon every carnal action and live holily; who, consenting to the holy desire of her husband, though she was young, they both determined and firmly resolved to keep chastity till death; and directly this resolution was made the true-hearted Giovanni knelt down in presence of his wife, and courageously said, "O Lord Jesus Christ, as my wife is willing to observe chastity, so I promise thee to observe it as long as I live." And from that hour he began no longer to lie down in bed, sleeping sometimes on a box, and sometimes on a bench, watching great part of the night in prayer. And having been occupied in such works for some time, growing in virtue, and daily improving

in the way of the Lord, giving large alms to the poor, he began to wish to be entirely poor and a mendicant for the love of Jesus Christ, so that, deprived of all, and of every earthly care, he could diligently follow the poor Christ, his Lord. And then he began to despise himself in the sight of others, and to go meanly clad.

CHAPTER IV.


Francesco Vincenti joins him.

ONTINUING this life, it happened that he met one of his friends and companions who was called Francesco, the son of Mino de Vincenti, a man held in honour, and one of the chief men of the same city, to whom he revealed the secret of his heart, *i.e.*, how he wished to be utterly poor out of love to Jesus Christ, begging and praying him to do the like ; and after often talking together, and speaking much of God and of contempt of the world, Francesco resolved to be of one mind with Giovanni in everything ; and being so far mutually agreed, they began, for the love of Jesus Christ, to distribute largely amongst the poor those riches which they formerly used to heap up with much avarice and eagerness, and Francesco began to go meanly clad like Giovanni, determining to follow him in manner and in everything. The people of the country spoke

much of this novelty, for they all wondered at such a marvellous change; and certainly they might marvel at seeing these very diligent patricians of their city, so abounding in earthly riches, despise and hold in contempt with such fervour their own selves, their substance, and all earthly things. And whilst they were leading this sort of life, it happened that at one time the new knight of Christ, Giovanni, being sick, and seeing that he received many kind attentions from his wife and the aforesaid Francesco, from the desire of poverty he rose from his bed, put a blanket over his shoulders, and went secretly to the hospital for the poor in Siena. His wife and Francesco entered his room, and not finding him they marvelled much. Then they went about seeking for him amongst relations and friends, and could not find him; at last, searching the hospitals, they found him in the very poorest, and said to him, "Why hast thou fled in this way, for we have been nearly two days looking for thee?" Giovanni replied, "I am happy, and you will not let me stay because this lady of the hospital wished me soon to cook a potage of leaves." But at last, not to grieve them any further, he returned home with them.

CHAPTER V.

A Marvellous Light seen in Giovanni's Chamber. He gives more Alms, in opposition to his Wife.

GAIN, while the devout servant of God lived in his own house, it happened that Mona Alessa, of the noble race of Bandinelli, wife of Spinello, son of Messer Niccolo Cerretani, having come to spend a few days with Giovanni's wife, one night before she went to bed she saw Giovanni's room full of a marvellous light, and not thinking that he was there, on going in to know the reason, she found him kneeling at prayer, without any other natural or artificial light; therefore, having perceived without doubt that that extraordinary light came from God, she, silently, and without making any noise, and full of wonder, left the room.

And thus leading a holy life, after a little time Giovanni's son, having reached the age of twelve years, passed from this mortal life, for which death


Giovanni gave God thanks, congratulated himself, and received great consolation, seeing that he was left more free, and at liberty to devote his wealth to God; and so he did, for from this time he began to give alms often, and still more often to bring poor beggars to his house, giving them food, washing their feet, and re-clothing them.

Now Giovanni's wife, seeing that he thought so little of himself, and gave so largely of his wealth to the poor, although she was, as we have said, religiously disposed, still, as she was not so enamoured of poverty, she bore his great compassion impatiently; and advising him, under colour of temperance and discretion in the great fervour and action of his spirit, she tried with prayers to convince him; but he gently answered her, "Thou prayedst to God that I might become charitable, and give myself to virtue, and for this thou also prayedst to His servants; and now thou art vexed that I make a little amends for my avarice and my other sins." His wife made him this reply, "I prayed that it might rain, but not that a deluge should come." And Giovanni affirmed that every one was in a dream and raving, and that human life was like smoke, and a wind that passes away; and that he who has gathered most riches has the worst bargain.

And he added, we should think of the life in heaven, which will be everlasting, which one can acquire with little fatigue, and also that the greater the pains which we suffer for Christ, so much greater are the consolations which we receive for those pains; because to every one who, out of love to Christ, will leave riches and honours, He will give such a fulness of sweetness and comfort to the soul, that it will say, "I refuse every delight which a hundred worlds would give me." And with many other words he tried to persuade her to be willing that he should follow Christ in extreme poverty; and many times he earnestly implored her to give him leave, and by her consent free him from the laws of matrimony, so that, released from every earthly care, he could more easily devote himself to God, and walk in the way of His good and holy vocation; but in no way did she consent to set him free.

CHAPTER VI.

*What happened to Giovanni and Francesco about a
Leper.*

OW it happened one day that the servants of God, Giovanni and Francesco, when going to hear Mass at the Duomo, saw at the door of the church, amongst the other poor creatures who were begging there, a man sick with leprosy, and half naked, who was covered from head to foot with scabs and sores. Giovanni seeing him, and moved in his inmost heart to pity and compassion, said to Francesco, "Look at this poor creature here, deprived of every human aid. Shall we take him home, and for love of Christ take care of him? We were about to hear Mass; this will be to do it." Francesco replied, "Do what thou wilt." Then this despised Giovanni embraced that leper, and lifted him on to a bench, and put his head between his thighs, and so bore him on his shoulders in triumph, holding the

leper's hand in his, and with a sweet charity he gently laid his cheeks on those corrupt and wounded thighs, first on one, then on the other; and on arriving at the house they brought him in. But when Giovanni's wife saw him, disgusted and horrified at the ghastly disease, she said at once, "Are these the goods that thou bringest to me? Hast thou brought me home corruption and rottenness? I will leave the house, and thou canst do thy pleasure, as thou art wont." But Giovanni gently answered her, saying, "I pray thee to have patience. This is one of God's creatures, redeemed as we are by His precious Blood, and we *might* become like him, if God willed it. For the love of Christ, I pray thee allow me to put him in our bed, so that he may rest awhile. Oh, remember how many pleasures we have had, and how many sins we have committed, and offended our Creator. Don't let it trouble thee to make some little amends for them; know that the poor and the sick represent the person of Christ, because He says in the Holy Gospel, 'Whenever you remember and do good to one of these My least ones, you do it unto Me.'" She replied, "Thou hast plenty to say, do as thou wilt; I will not meddle in it, and if you put him into our bed, I will never lie there again. Dost thou not now perceive

and smell the stink he gives forth? I can bear it no longer." Then Giovanni and Francesco, not heeding the lady's words, having prepared a tepid bath, carefully washed the leper all over; and after they had gently dried him, they laid him to rest awhile in the best bed, where the lady was accustomed to lie, at which she was displeased. Finally, Giovanni, that he might mortify himself still further for the love of Christ, drank some of the same water with which they had washed the leper, and afterwards admonished his wife, that before they should return from church, she should sometimes visit the sick man; and with his companion, Francesco, he returned to hear Mass. But she did not promise to do this: nevertheless, beginning to be stung by the pricks of conscience, because she did not fulfil her husband's commands, and was not moved to pity for the invalid, rising up, she went to the leper, and when she opened the door of the room, she smelt such a very sweet fragrant smell, as if all sorts of spices and sweet scented things were gathered there. For which reason, not daring to enter, she shut the door, and began to weep bitter tears of repentance, thinking specially of the words she had spoken to her husband about that poor sick man. At this moment Giovanni and Francesco

returned from church, having on the way bought confections for the relief of the sick man. And directly they entered the house, Giovanni said to his wife, "Why weepest thou? and what news of our invalid?" to whom replying with many tears, she narrated what had happened to her on going there; on understanding which the servants of God ran to the room, and on opening the door smelt that same sweet fragrance, and uncovering the bed, they found no one there. Then they knew it had been Jesus Christ who had shown Himself to them in the form of a leper; and perceiving such a great gift of God, they returned Him most hearty thanks. But Giovanni, the servant of God, anxious only to please Christ, strictly commanded his wife to tell this to no one as long as she lived; and she, having seen the great sign which God had shown, gave her husband full liberty, and entirely loosed him from the bonds of matrimony, and set him free; and said to him, "Go or stay, just as it pleases thee, and give what thou wilt for God; for I will never again oppose thee in anything thou wouldest do." Giovanni, much rejoiced at this permission, gave thanks for it to the Author of all good.

Then Giovanni and Francesco, still more kindled by the Divine fire, wishing to give up the world en-

tirely, and not being sure of their own judgment, sought for good advice as to the way and manner of life they were about to lead, and prayed much, and decided on being advised by religious people on the best course to take.

CHAPTER VII.

*How they take Counsel with some good Servants of God,
and resolve to Live in Poverty.*



AT that time there were living in Siena some good and enlightened servants of God, of great holiness, among whom were Don Pietro dè Petroni, of the same country, a man of much thought, and of holy life and doctrine. Of this man and many others, Giovanni sought for advice as to the best way of following Jesus Christ, and all agreed in saying that the shortest and most direct way was through the meanest and most abject poverty, which is the least open to the praise of men, and most hidden from the opinion of the vulgar. He also consulted many masters of sacred theology, who all agreed in this, affirming that abject poverty had been the way of the Saviour Jesus Christ, who called and said, "Let him who will be my servant follow me." Then the servants of Christ listened with greater confidence to the very wholesome advice of their spiritual

friends, when they perceived that it was confirmed by the voice of the great counsellor Jesus Christ, Who having shown the necessary way of the commandments to the young man who had asked Him, and wishing to give him the highest rule of life, added directly the perfection of His counsel, saying, "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and come follow me." Then having taken counsel of the great Master Christ, and having determined on following Him in the way of abject poverty, there remaining to Giovanni a girl of thirteen years of age, and to Francesco another of five years, both legitimate and natural, they mutually agreed to put them into one of the best convents of venerable and honourable ladies of the Benedictine Order, dedicated to SS. Abundio and Abundanzio, vulgarly called Santa Bonda, about half a mile from Siena, and in the year of our Lord 1363 they put those children into that convent. Giovanni divided his possessions into three parts: one part he gave to the above-mentioned Convent of Santa Bonda, one to the great Hospital of Siena, and another to the sisterhood of the Virgin Mary, on condition that the convent and the sisterhood should each be bound to give annually a certain sum of money to his wife,

also some articles of food for her sustenance, and a maid to wait upon her; and this he did with his wife's consent because of his gifts. His other goods he had already distributed to the poor, for some time before he had given up his traffic in the sale of cloth goods and other merchandise, which he had carried on in Siena and Perugia and other places, and had given up everything for God; for when he was converted to Christ he possessed about 1200 florins. Francesco gave, for the love of God, all his goods, both movable and immovable, to the same monastery, on condition that the Abbess would receive into it, for God's love, six poor girls, without any dowry, to become nuns. And he offered up his daughter on the altar of this convent; and to make his alms perfect, he also offered up himself, vowing perpetual chastity, poverty, and obedience to the Abbess, saying, "I thank God, who has given me grace to offer to Him all my wealth and my own self. I wish that the convent should not be bound to give me even a piece of bread, but as alms are given to the rest of the poor;" and he wished this to be set down in writing by the hand of the public notary, so that every one then present was moved to tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

*Wonderful Mortifications of the Servants of God,
Giovanni and Francesco.*

THUS the brave soldiers of Christ, having become new spouses of extreme poverty, gladly began to beg, asking for bread and wine for the love of God, and were raised in this way to a great height of love, treading the world under their feet, and esteeming every earthly thing as dust, and increasing every day in the desire of suffering and bearing pain out of love to Christ. For the love of Him they esteemed hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness, great inconveniences, oppressions, reproaches, and all the railing of the world, as pleasure and ease. Indeed it was a wonderful thing to see men, who were much respected, and by the world thought prudent and circumspect, now having made themselves fools that they might become wise. For whereas the man of God, Giovanni, before he became poor, was richly dressed in clothes dyed in

fine colours, and in winter wore under his doublet a lining of the finest fur, with a hood over his head, gloves lined, and sometimes two pairs of hose, one over the other, as well as socks and shoes; and used to eat by the fire, using fine and delicately-prepared food; with all that often suffering pains of the stomach, weariness, headache, and other infirmities. Now, warmed by the Divine fire, forsaking every luxury and care of the flesh, he went unshod, wearing nothing on his head, clad in a scanty robe, with a short cloak of rough coarse cloth, and that patched; he took food roughly prepared, and nevertheless he was cured of every infirmity, and freed from his accustomed pains; and because of the love which burnt in his breast, he was so kindled with heat, that cold was driven away from his body; whence, also, the few clothes that he wore were left unbuttoned over his chest. All which things one of his friends observing, asked him one day, saying, "Art thou not cold, Giovanni?" To which he replied, "Give me thy hand," and taking his hand, he put it into his bosom, saying, "Does it seem to thee that I am cold?" His friend answered, "No, surely, rather thou art so hot that I can no longer bear my hand there."

Thus then the good servants of God, living poorly and meanly, gave themselves up to mortifications whenever they could. Therefore, that they might follow the steps of their Lord Jesus Christ, they determined on receiving dishonour where they had received honour: for having held high office amongst the nine chief men of the city, and remembering the honour and reverence which had been paid them for two months, they wished to be abased for the same period, and in the same palace, and to perform the meanest services. As there was yet no fountain in the palace, they brought all the water that was wanted from the well in the field, and also carried the firewood upstairs; they turned the roasts in the kitchen, they washed the pots and the pans and other necessary things; they swept the halls and the piazza in front of the palace, and did all the lowest offices; and for these two months, when they had become for the love of God the lowest servants of the cook, they would not have meat or drink in the palace, but begged for their food in the streets. Also in the country round they humbled themselves, going to the houses of the dead, bearing the tapers to the Church, burying the dead bodies, and doing similar offices; and when

out of reverence it was denied to them, they begged that for the love of Christ that spiritual gain might not be taken from them. And all these things they did without any reward, that they might avenge themselves for the honours they had received in their own country.

And in such mortifications they were by some laughed at and held in scorn, and by some commended and had in reverence. But they never listened to what was said of them, either in praise or blame, but were all the more anxious for the salvation of their own and their neighbours' souls. Only once, when the man of God, Giovanni, wishing to avenge himself for the pomp with which he had ridden through the city, mounted an ass, and going round the market-place, certain merchants who were at their warehouses, seeing him going in this manner, began by words and actions to deride him; to whom Giovanni, with a joyful look, replied, "You laugh at me, and I at you," as if he would say, "You despise me because I follow Christ, and I despise you because you follow the world."

CHAPTER IX.

How they Received Novices into their Poor Society.

AND in such severe living Giovanni and Francesco served God two years or more, from the day they began to beg, without any other companions. But their holiness, like a city set on a hill or a light on a candlestick, could not long be hid; for many, having seen the honours and riches which Giovanni and Francesco had renounced, and the misery and poverty which they had embraced for the love of Christ, attracted by the odour of their virtues, had such great reverence and love for them, that by their example and teaching they left off sin and vices, and gave themselves up to holy works and good living. Some, renouncing the world, became religious, and many, remaining in their houses, lived virtuously, amending their lives. Many citizens also, who wished perfectly to serve Christ, joined Francesco and Giovanni, really left the world, and became, to-

gether with them, lovers of abject poverty. And so these men of God went about the city, praising the Name of Jesus Christ with loud voices, affectionately exhorting sinners to turn to repentance.

CHAPTER X.

Conversion of the Son of Niccolò di Nerdusa.

THE sòn of Niccolò di Nerdusa, of Siena, a young man above twenty years old, came one day to Giovanni, the servant of God, and told him that he was very anxious to become one of his spiritual children, adding that he would do whatever he wished; so Giovanni, wishing to see if he was really in earnest, told him that he should strip and re-clothe him at the public fountain. The young man replied that he might do what he would with him, as if he were a dead body. So Giovanni and his companions went to the market-place, and after first kneeling before the image of our Lady, they went to the fountain, where Giovanni ordered certain young men to pull off the youth's shoes and stockings; then they returned to the image of our Lady, and stripped him of his clothes, and put other very shabby garments on him. Whilst this was going on, Giovanni

and one of his companions called Il Boccia, sang a devout hymn, beginning: "Diletto Gesù Cristo, chi ben t'ama;"* and then they led him to the Duomo. This sight brought many people together, as usually happens on such occasions; and in this way they inflicted great mortifications on the young man, for Christ's sake. He said afterwards that the suffering of death could not be worse than what he had then endured; but the good Jesus rewarded him, for the following night God came to him with such power that he could not sleep for excessive joy. God worked great wonders in him, and revealed great things to him, at which, when he related them, those who heard him were astonished. He earnestly exhorted Giovanni and his brothers to preach Jesus Christ, saying that the time was come when God would show great mercy to sinners, and that Jesus Christ had said to him: "Tell people that if they will truly confess and repent of their sins, and faithfully call on my Name, they shall see what I will do for them." After having received great spiritual consolations, the young man was deeply imbued with the love of Christ, and going with Giovanni to the convent of Santa Bonda, he spoke to the Abbess on

* "The beloved Jesus Christ, Who loves thee much."

behalf of Christ, saying, "It has been revealed to me by Christ that I owe this favour to your prayers, and that we should pray for people, for our prayers will be heard, and all are precious in God's sight;" and other wonderful things he related. He spoke so earnestly that the Abbess said to him: "Tell me, if thou lovest Christ so much as thou sayest, what wilt thou do for His sake?" The young man replied, "I would do anything that I was told." Then the Abbess said, "Go and strip thyself, and walk through Siena, proclaiming the Name of Jesus Christ." She said this to see if he really meant what he said. He at once took off his clothes and went out, but the Abbess told Giovanni to go and meet him, and bring him back. When the man of God (Giovanni) was writing an account of this to his friend, brother Giorgio, of San Domenico, who was then preaching at Volterra, he said to him, "Now you see how Christ blesses the man who really gives himself to Him, for in one day He can cause sinners and worldly-minded men to acquire the grace of perfection."

CHAPTER XI.

The Conversion of Tommaso Guelfaccio.


MUST not omit to mention the wonderful conversion of Tommaso de Guelfaccio. This man was a citizen of Siena, of a noble family, one of the nine rulers, but was given to gluttony and every sensual and worldly pleasure. He hated all religions, especially this poor confraternity. One day, however, when Giovanni was going out of the city with some of his poor brothers, to visit his loved Convent of Santa Bonda, Tommaso followed him for his amusement; and when Giovanni came to a place where three roads met, and where a great cross of wood was erected, he looked behind, and seeing Tommaso, said to him, "Oh, Tommaso, wilt thou do me a favour, for Christ's sake?" Tommaso answered, "If I can I will gladly do it for you." "I pray thee," said Giovanni, "for Jesus Christ's sake, to kneel down at the foot of this cross and say a Paternoster and an Ave Maria." Tom-

maso said, "If that is all thou requirest, I will willingly say not one only, but two." Giovanni replied, "I do not want anything else of thee." Then Tommaso, uncovering his head, knelt down and began to say the Paternoster. The loving Giovanni also knelt down and prayed earnestly that God would enlighten Tommaso with His truth, and warm his heart with His love. After Giovanni had spent some time in prayers he rose up, when Tommaso threw himself at his feet, imploring his pardon, and saying, "I will not go until thou hast accepted me as one of the least in thy holy company;" and thus miraculously converted, he cast off his clothes, and dressed himself meanly like the others, and so was received into the poor congregation. All the city marvelled at this conversion, and many thought he would not persevere; and Giovanni, the man of God, that brave soldier of Christ, who fought so valiantly for His honour, exhorted him earnestly, saying, "Remember, dear brother, how thou hast laboured for the wicked world, and now seek that Jesus Christ our Lord may employ thee to His honour and glory. Know that in proportion to thy faith and holy desire so will God fill thy mind with goodness; therefore be brave, and seek and strive for the honour of Jesus Christ." Tom-

maso fought victoriously against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and went barefoot and bareheaded, like the other poor brothers. One day a lay brother, begging for his convent, seeing that Tommaso, who had very often ridiculed him, had a hard black substance on his head, said to him in joke, "Tommaso, thou hast eaten so much liverwort that it is growing out of thy head;" to which he humbly replied, "Now it is your turn." And thus receiving mortification from many people, by God's grace he grew better and better, and persevered to the end.

CHAPTER XII.


Of the great Mortification Practised by the Blessed Giovanni during a Journey to Montecchiello.

IOVANNI, the servant of Christ, was once going to Montecchiello with Francesco Vincenti, Vanni, and another of his companions, and when they came near San Giovanni at Asso, and were passing the estates which Giovanni had given to the Convent of Santa Bonda, he, wishing to punish himself for his sins in every place where he had lived, stripped himself almost naked, and ordered his companions to drag him by a cord through all the villages of the district, beating him at the same time; and he told the one who held the rope to say, "Look at this fellow, who wanted to starve you, who every year gave you old corn which had been spoilt by the weevils, and then asked for the good new corn more than was right, and wanted to charge it a florin a bushel. Give it to him well, this cruel man,

who hates the poor." And in this way they led him through the villages, beating him, and dragging him by the cord so fiercely, that he could hardly breathe, and they obediently did and said all that he commanded them; and the people, astonished at this strange sad sight, and at his thus mortifying himself before them, their compassion and admiration were so great that not one of them was able to say a word. Afterwards the humble Giovanni said to his brothers, "Christ will reward you for your obedience and charity towards me, yet do not think that the sinful and unholy desires which I used to have in these places are atoned for; rather I deserve to be dragged in this way over the whole country."

CHAPTER XIII.

Of the Conversion of Messer Domenico of Montecchiello.

NOTHER time when the man of God Giovanni was going to Montecchiello with his poor brothers, they stopped at Corsignano; and there preaching Christ's Name, very great honour was shown towards them, and having rested there for the night, they left the next morning, though with great difficulty. But when they had gone a little way, the men of Corsignano sent after them, praying them for God's sake to return; for one of their place said he had had a vision, in which he had seen men drowning, and they were saved from danger and from death by the hands of Giovanni and his companions: so these poor brothers in their charity returned to Corsignano, and there gained much fruit. After this, when they reached Montecchiello, they found many of the people there very hard and obstinate, and they had to bear a great deal of

suffering and ill-treatment from them for Christ's sake. And when Giovanni, the servant of God, noticed that the people neither feared God nor kept His commandments, he saw in the spirit the scourge that God had prepared for them. For more than twenty years before he had warned them that if they did not repent they should be destroyed, and so it happened; for in the war that followed between the Siennese and Florentines, Montecchiello was ruined and plundered. However, I cannot say that the man of God Giovanni gained *no* fruit there, because Messer Domenico of Montecchiello, a doctor of laws, and Monna Antonia, his wife, were converted by his holy words. This Messer Domenico was one of his first companions; he devoted himself to God's service, and had very great spiritual knowledge; he was also a man of many tears and much prayer. He translated, for the comfort of Giovanni and his companions, a little book of Mystic Theology which had been written by a holy man, a Carthusian. The twelve nobles who governed the city at that time made Domenico the vicar for the year at Petriuolo, which office he held with Giovanni's consent, and afterwards, when Giovanni and his brothers went to Montecchiello, they usually stayed at his house.

Another man from this place, called Francesco, also followed the man of God Giovanni in the way of holy poverty, and when he was converted, he presented himself to his wife and children barefooted and poor, like his companions, and by his self-mortification and humiliation, his wife was converted also.

CHAPTER XIV.

What the Blessed Giovanni did in Montalcino.



AFTER this, Giovanni, the servant of God, and his poor brothers, went to Montalcino, and there preached about God, and the salvation of the soul, which excited such fervour of weeping and lamentation throughout the place, that many men and women heartily changed their lives; and amongst those who were converted to Christ were Fazio di Betto, who became one of Giovanni's followers, never to leave him again; also Agostino and his wife Binda. This man afterwards grew so very fervent, that whenever he heard Christ spoken of, he could not resist crying out in the excess of his fervour, and it was just the same with his wife. Another man, also, called Barna, became poor for Christ's sake: he was a devout servant of God, and sang many holy hymns. One Monna Jacopa of this place, who had a husband and four children, was also converted;

and of her Giovanni used to say that he had never seen any one more ardent or self-denying. She was very often so overcome by her fervour that she was almost beside herself, so that once she fell into the fire; and sometimes, when she was going along the road, she fell into the mud: she was a woman of many tears, and very humble and charitable.

Once, when Giovanni and his companions were at Montalcino, they were joined by Francesco di Montecchiello; and one Sunday evening, when Francesco was taking the discipline, in the oratory belonging to the Flagellants, with whom the poor ones of Christ were staying, such sudden fervour was kindled in his heart by Christ, that he hardly slept all that night, nor could Giovanni sleep either. Francesco declared that till that moment he had never known Christ, and that all his works hitherto had been dark and deceitful; and the next night his fervour was still greater, he shed many tears, and could not refrain from crying out and leaping for joy. This astonished Giovanni greatly, for Francesco had only lately become a follower of Christ, and he (Giovanni) had never said anything to him which could give rise to such strong feelings. When Francesco returned to Montecchiello, he went about the

place, proclaiming the name of Christ with such earnestness that people thought he was mad.


Giovanni, the servant of God, remained some days in Montalcino, and while there, about twenty of his companions in poverty were taken ill with ague, which was a common complaint in those parts. Meo Martino of Montalcino was very kind to them, taking them sugar, wine, and other good things. Francesco di Montecchiello, his wife, and three old ladies also brought them plenty of provisions from Montecchiello. A young man, the nephew of Messer Cione, the Count of Montecchiello, came with Francesco, and before Giovanni and the others, he took off his shoes and stockings, and gave all his clothes and money to those ladies of Montecchiello, that they might give it to God; and so he became one of the poor of Jesus Christ. Francesco's wife and the other ladies were so greatly edified by the life and doctrine of Giovanni, the man of God, and his companions, that they returned to Montecchiello full of the love of Jesus Christ. Amongst those who were ill were Messer Domenico di Montecchiello, Ambrogio di Giucca, and Giovanni d'Ambrogio d'Agnolino, a citizen of Siena. This last would have died of his sickness, but owing to the prayers of Giovanni, the servant

of God, and his companions, he was miraculously healed by God. During his illness, Giovanni said to him one day, "Tell me, Giovanni, which would you like best? or which do you think I had better do? Give myself only to prayer, and wholly retire from the world, or go about preaching Christ?" To this he replied, "Do not cease to preach Christ." And this was a cause of sorrow to himself till the day of his death, because he was of a weakly constitution.

They had been about fifteen days at Montalcino, when a young man who was on guard at the Castle there, entreated Giovanni so earnestly to receive him into his family, that he could not refuse his request; and this youth suffered himself to be led through Montalcino, clad in his shirt only, with a halter round his neck, being abused and insulted at the same time. After this the humble Giovanni and his good brothers left Montalcino; and they departed secretly, because of the great devotion in which they were held.

CHAPTER XV.

An Exhortation to Charity and Self-mortification.

IOVANNI, the man of God, said that he noticed throughout Christendom more virtuous acts than ever, more learning, more morality, more respect, more ceremonies, more offices; and that all would be holy, and *are* so in proportion as they contain charity, but of that he found scarcely any, at least, not the true sort which Christ kindles in the soul. And for this he only saw three remedies. First, to speak constantly of Jesus Christ, His love, and great benefits to the soul; for the more strongly a man speaks the more he feels. Secondly, to cultivate great love and charity for all creatures, to make much of them, and show them love without measure: he found that greater honour was done to Christ by this second rule than by a long sermon, for this kindles on both sides great feeling and fervour towards God. Thirdly, to mortify ourselves greatly, for

that takes us out of ourselves, and sets us free. If these three rules, he said, were assiduously followed, the soul would certainly gain by them: after that we should wish to follow Christ in humility and gratitude. In proof of this he related, that one day being in Montecchiello, he there found three of his converts wanting in fervour, so he enjoined them to mortify themselves, and spoke joyfully to them of Christ. They were immediately aroused to much thought of God, and a child, the son of one of them, was suddenly seized with fervour, though he did not know what it was. Fervour awoke also in the hearts of the others, and they were so inflamed with Divine love that they were willing to cast themselves into the fire, or suffer any pain or shame for the honour of Jesus Christ. For this reason the much-loving John said to his dear brothers: "It is my opinion that virtues are failing because we fail to speak enough of God, for I have seen and known that, as a natural consequence, the heart feels what the tongue utters; so he whose talk is of the world, grows lukewarm and worldly; he who speaks of Christ thinks of Christ. Therefore, if you wish Christ to give Himself to you, you will always be ready to speak, sing, or read of Christ, or else to meditate on or pray to Him. You

must know that no worse temptation can befall a man than that of hiding and being silent about the blessings and gifts of God, because sweet converse about Jesus Christ is food and life to the soul; and Christ will never leave the soul who loves to talk of Him. He will be always with him. Therefore, if the whole world were to tell you not to speak of Christ, you can laugh them to scorn; for whoever will confess Him before men, him will He confess before His Father. For this reason I exhort you never to forget the holy art of speaking about God." Then he cried out, vehemently, "Oh, let us not sleep; let us proclaim the blessed Name of Christ by day and night, in the streets and market-places: let us go to *hell*, if need be, to proclaim It there and do It honour: the *world* goes there because it does not remember It: let *us* go there to proclaim and publish It: may the most holy Name of Christ live for ever: let not tongues be weary or hearts satiated with proclaiming Christ crucified: may He reign a thousand thousand years: may the most holy Name of Christ reign for ever: may Christ reign over the world in the hearts of all men. To Jesus Christ be all honour and glory; to us shame and dishonour."


Once, when Giovanni, the servant of God, was in

Montecchiello, he went to see a sick man there; who, although he was very patient, groaned continually, and could take no rest, because his sickness was very painful. The compassionate John began to comfort him, exhorting him to continue patient to the end, telling him that God had laid that sickness on him for his good, and for his soul's health, and that he would be rewarded in the next world. After that, he wished to see him naked, and uncovered him, and seeing him full of sores, he felt great pity for him. Then, without the least dread or loathing, he bent over him tenderly, and for love of Christ licked him all over. That done, he said, "May the blessing of Christ be with thee, and be in peace, for God will help thee." As soon as John had left him he felt better, and was relieved of his pains. When John and his poor little ones were at dinner, great honour was done to them, and chickens were set before them; and the charitable Giovanni took one of them, and said to his companion, Vanni, "Take this, and carry it to that sick man, and bid him take comfort in Christ." Vanni immediately took it to him, and on seeing Vanni, the sick man was very glad, and said, "Tell Giovanni that, by God's mercy and by means of his charity, I am better, and my pains have left me."

Not long after that the sick man died, and for his constant patience under his great infirmities the gracious God worked miracles by him. Giovanni ate very little meat, and did not like it at all; but when it was set before him, not wishing to appear singular, he pretended to take some, as the others did. He used to sigh when he was at table, and often wept while eating.

CHAPTER XVI.

What the Blessed Giovanni did at Asciano.

NOTHER time, when Giovanni, the man of God, was walking with Francesco Vincenti and other companions towards the Castle of Asciano, they being hungry and weary, stopped at a poor countryman's door, and said to him, "For the love of God, we pray thee give us something to eat." The countryman replied, "I have but little, but of that little I will gladly give you." "Pray prepare us a little cabbage," they said. The countryman answered, "God knows that there is none here, for Anechino's troop of soldiers, and others besides, have cut away, not only leaves, but whole plants, and not a leaf is left in the neighbourhood." To this the servants of God replied, "Go and look about well, for perhaps thou mayest find some." And he said, "I will go, but I am sure there are not any." So he went, and found a quantity of beautiful cabbages, and wondering greatly,

he cut some and had them dressed. When the poor of Jesus Christ were eating, they said again to the countryman, "Canst thou give us a leek?" "Both leeks and everything else that is eatable have been plundered," he replied; "but if you wish, I will go and see, and perhaps I might miraculously find some leeks also;" and they told him to go. So he went, and found some leeks, and brought them with great joy, and every one wondered greatly at the cabbages and the leeks, and they all thanked God, who works wonders by His servants.

When the fervent Giovanni and his poor little ones arrived at Asciano, they preached the Word of God there; and the people of that place were moved to such fervour that they blessed him who cried out, "Glory to Christ crucified;" and they were so greatly and miraculously inflamed with love, that it was a marvellous sight to behold. The above-mentioned poor ones, and certain from Montalcino, who had followed them, lodged with the Brothers Minor, who entertained them most hospitably, and could not make enough of them. Amongst others of that place who were converted to Christ was one Girolamo, who became one of his most earnest companions. He was a man of great intellect and great peni-


tence, of holy life and doctrine, and was often rapt in ecstacy.

Another time, when Giovanni, the man of God, was passing near Asciano, to avoid walking on the Sunday they remained in Asciano on Saturday (which is the festival* of our Lady) and the day following, and lodged at the house of James Messer Grifolo, who showed them much kindness. And there came Barna from Montecchiello, bringing him a letter from Francis. When the zealous John had read it, he left the house in great fervour of spirit, and he and the above-named Barna went about the place and neighbourhood, praising God with great gladness, so that the loving Giovanni said he then experienced sweeter sensations than he had ever before felt.

* La festività.

CHAPTER XVII.


An Exhortation to Holy Poverty by the Blessed Giovanni.

IOVANNI, the poor little one of Christ, said :
“ Give yourselves to Christ without measure, and despise everything else, for time is short, and we may not have long to stay here, and blessed are those who love Christ unsparingly. He who loves anything, except in God, that very thing prevents his loving God, and obscures his intellect ; for just as anything we put over our bodily eyes hinders our seeing, so do the things we love out of God destroy our union with Him, and shut out the light of the truth of Jesus Christ. Holy poverty empties the soul of earthly cares and affections, and of all created things ; and the soul thus lightened, when touched by God, is easily turned to contemplation of Him, and meditation on the Holy Passion of Jesus Christ. It feeds on, and takes pleasure in these things, lamenting

the time formerly misspent, and offences committed against God, and is anxious by penance to take vengeance on itself in every possible way; desiring to be humble and patient, and very charitable towards all creatures, for the love of God; hating and despising itself, and being ready to suffer insult, torment, or persecution, knowing God's goodness and its own vileness and misery. Know, my brothers, that Jesus Christ wishes you to be zealous lovers of holy poverty, and to embrace it heartily; to avoid, as you would poison, appropriating anything to yourselves, for the devil will try to make you say, even of a little thing, "This is mine." Do not be too burdensome to people, for that is neither pleasing to God or them; and keep holy poverty clean and pure, not spoiling or corrupting it, for it is the foundation on which all virtues are built, and the nurse of humility; therefore, as we have no merit of our own, but the merit of holy poverty, we have no desire for the state or riches of the Emperor. "Poverty! poverty!" he cried out, fervently, "thy language is not understood. May holy poverty live in our hearts!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

Of two Miracles which befell the Blessed Giovanni.

 ONE day, when Giovanni and Francesco were travelling with their poor brothers, on reaching Torraniere, one of the company fell sick, so that he could not eat. Then Giovanni went to him, and tried to comfort him, asking him if he had an appetite for anything in particular. "I fancy nothing," said the sick man, "but a little lettuce salad: if I had that, I think I should be cured." Upon this, the charitable Giovanni went into the garden and looked about carefully for lettuces, but could not find any, and not knowing what to do, for the sick man's longing was great, he had recourse to Divine aid; and kneeling down in the garden, he prayed God to provide for the comfort of his poor one. When he had finished his prayer, he saw before him a beautiful lettuce, and taking it, he returned thanks, and joyfully bore it to the invalid, who on eating it with an appetite was quickly healed of his sickness.

Another time, when Giovanni, the lover of Christ, was walking with his devout brothers, they came to a large meadow, which was very full of flowers. His companions, being seized with sudden fervour of spirit, took hold of Giovanni, laid him on the ground, and very soon covered him with so many flowers, that he was completely hidden from view. After he had been a little while in that position they began to uncover him, and on removing the flowers from his face, it appeared so glorious and shining, that they could hardly bear the sight, and by degrees the splendour faded away.

CHAPTER XIX.

An Exhortation to Patience by the Blessed Giovanni.

THE fervent Giovanni said: "Let us rekindle our love in the burning charity of Jesus Christ; let us fully believe that as yet we have done no good thing, and bravely and earnestly begin again, waking up as the plants do, and preparing to bring forth much and holy fruit; and with all humility, and for love of Christ, let us be patient with all men and under all adversities. God sends consolations and afflictions to the soul, that it may be benefited in all ways, just as the wise man is as glad of the frost in January as of the heat in May, knowing that the corn takes root beneath the ice. Therefore, do not be frightened at temptations, which are the life and crown of the soul: rather let us look for them cheerfully, and bear them bravely. Gold is refined and perfected in the fire, so let us rejoice at every tribulation, suffering, or temptation."

In fervour of spirit he said: "He who refuses to fight is already beaten; he who fights bravely is almost conqueror: therefore let us take up arms, and fight boldly for the Cross of Christ, always invoking His aid."

Once when John, the servant of God, had gone to Colombajo with his poor brothers, to visit that devout place, and the Brothers Minor there, it happened that a leaden pipe fell upon the head of his dear companion Giovanni d'Ambrogio, and he lost about ten pounds of blood. It was next to impossible that his natural strength should survive such a blow, but by the intercession of John, the man of God, he was miraculously healed.

Again, when the charitable Giovanni was at Siena, he heard that his friend and neighbour, Ludovico di Noddo of the Malescotti, was very ill, and at death's door, so he went to visit him. On his arrival he began to comfort him, beseeching him to have hope in Jesus Christ, and put his trust in God for help. "But what hope can I have?" said Ludovico: "you see that I am dying, I cannot live, and even now can hardly speak."

Giovanni answered him compassionately, and said, "Believe me, thou shalt recover, and not die of this

sickness; and I tell thee further, thou shalt yet have a son." Ludovico could not believe it, but it happened as Giovanni had foretold, for he was cured of his sickness, and he afterwards had a son, to whom he gave the name of Agnolo.

The humble Giovanni said to his beloved brothers : " The Holy Gospel says if the grain of wheat does not die in the ground, it will not bear fruit. So must we die to the world, if we wish to bear fruit to God. Let us then forsake the world: you know Christ did not pray for the world, because it hated Him. Therefore if we wish Christ to love us, let us hate the world, with all its honours and everything belonging to it. Let us partake of the shame of Jesus Christ, and desire death with Him, being willing to shed our blood for Him, as He did for us." In fervour of spirit, he said : " I recommend Christ to you, who is neglected a thousand times more than you think. Christ is so neglected that the way of perfection and virtue is looked upon as a dream; and it seems to me that he who loves Christ ought to dress in sad colours, weep, and die of grief. Let him therefore who loves Christ mourn and weep, for even a felon would not be treated as our Lord Jesus Christ is treated: therefore, my Lord being so neglected, I

would willingly die to everything, if by any pain or poverty I could recover His lost honour. It is such pain and grief to me not to hear the Blessed Christ spoken of as He should be, that I can hardly contain myself, and am ready to die; and if you knew what I know by experience, you would never cease to love Him, or to speak of Him by day and night. Pray to God for me that my wish may be granted; namely, that I may see and hear this loudly proclaimed all over the world, 'All Glory to Christ Crucified!' and then may God do what He wills with me.

CHAPTER XX.

How, owing to the Malice of some, they were Banished from Siena.

NOW as the said servants of God were increasing in number and merit, and growing in grace and virtue before God and man, the enemy of mankind, being envious at seeing so many souls enter the way of salvation, made use of the tongues of certain murmurers, who wickedly persuaded the twelve lords of Siena then in power, that Giovanni Colombini and Francesco Vincenti, the leaders of the poor ones of Jesus Christ, should be banished beyond their territory, fearing the injury and depopulation of the city from the multitude of people who left the world (which they thought they were chiefly bound to serve). So Giovanni and Francesco were commanded under pain of death to leave the city before a little lighted candle, which was carried to the gate, should be burnt out. Joyfully did the servants of God receive this sentence

of banishment, knowing, as the Apostle said, that here they had no abiding city, but they sought that one eternal in the heavens, from which they could not be banished, unless they frowardly rebelled against Christ; and so, rejoicing at their persecution for righteousness' sake, and singing and shouting for joy, they left Siena and went to Arezzo. But no sooner were they gone, than the sky grew dark, and there came a heavy thunderstorm, and with it such rain and hail, that people thought it was the end of the world. At the same time also a great many of the Siennese were stricken with fever. Upon this miraculous wonder, the twelve lords released Giovanni and Francesco from their banishment, and restored them to their former position, sending to ask their pardon, and praying them to return to Siena.

CHAPTER XXI.

What the Blessed Giovanni did at Arezzo.


NOW the servants of God, Giovanni and Francesco, with twenty-five of their companions, having arrived at Arezzo, and entering the city singing and praising Jesus Christ, all the country was moved to see and hear them; and preaching there the Word of God, they gained great fruit there, so that hundreds of sinners, who had lived many years without confession, repented of their sins, and confessed themselves. By the admonition of these servants of God, many who had been robbed of their good name, or their possessions, obtained restitution, many enmities were extinguished, and some deadly quarrels appeased, and these men were universally held in great reverence and esteem. Not only the citizens, but many people from the surrounding country, came to listen to the salutary exhortations and good advice of these poor for Jesus Christ.

At that time Vanni of Montecchiello fell sick at the monastery of Santa Bonda, where the said poor ones resided; and perceiving his sickness was increasing, he was very anxious to see Giovanni, his father in Christ, before he died: and he so urgently entreated his poor companions, that, moved by charity, they bore him to Arezzo in a litter. They entered the city by night (for the gates were left open, owing to the multitude of country people who were coming or going), and in the suburbs and the streets they met a great many people with lights in their hands, who were returning from hearing Giovanni preach. On inquiring for him, they were told that he lodged with a company of secular Flagellants, but it would be almost impossible to speak to him, because of the number of people who were about him. Nevertheless, they went to the said fraternity, and spoke to some of the brothers, saying, "We have brought Vanni here, who is ill, and wishes to see Giovanni, our father." They replied, "It would be impossible at present, but let us put him in the room where Giovanni sleeps, so that at least, when he goes to bed, he may see him, and we will do our best to inform him of the matter;" and so they did. But when the charitable Giovanni heard that

his friend Vanni, whom he greatly loved, was lying there ill, he said, "Tell him to wait patiently, while I send away this company;" and having very gently ordered every one to return home, he said, "Where is my Vanni?" and they led him to him. When Giovanni, the man of God, saw him lying on the bed, he began to comfort him with very soothing words, and, constrained by charity, he took off his cloak and laid it upon Vanni, who, as soon as the cloak touched him, felt quite well; and, entirely cured of his sickness, he rose from the bed, and he and his companions heartily thanked God for the new blessing of this miraculous cure.

CHAPTER XXII.

An Exhortation to Humility by the Blessed Giovanni.

HE humble Giovanni said to his beloved brothers: “God has sown in us the seed of good works, and therefore if this seed should spring up, increase and multiply, we must not glory in it, for it is not our own, and we cannot bear any fruit of ourselves; but let us glory in Jesus Christ, who is our true glory. The better the seed that is sown in us, and the better fruit we bear, so much the more do we owe to the Sower—that is, God; and the more we increase in good works, the greater is our obligation to the good and gracious God, because by ourselves we can do nothing. Therefore, if any virtue grows in us, that of humility ought to increase above all, for the more grace we have, the more will be expected of us. Great is our debt, and quite* unable are we to pay it. We must be careful to call ourselves only unprofitable servants; and so indeed

* Poverissimi.

we are, for it is only by grace that we receive grace. We have good cause for weeping, and for thinking whether even the soldiers may not rise in judgment against us; and I doubt not that if God had given them half the help He has to us, they would have done far more than we have. Alas! I am full of fear, and I think rightly so; for if the receiving of heavenly gifts entitled one to eternal life, who ever deserved it more than Solomon? God was so pleased by his praying for wisdom, that He gave more to him than to any other man in the world. He built His holy temple, and was endued with great wisdom, so that he was enabled to perceive that everything belonging to the world was "vanity of vanities;" and yet, notwithstanding all this, S. Augustine believes that he is damned. Also, how many there have been who had great spiritual knowledge, some who have been gifted with learning, some with prophecy, some with working of miracles, and they are now in hell! because in virtue only, and in doing the will of God, lies our happiness and our safety. He is not God's friend who only thinks of Him, but he who follows up that thought by virtuous living; because to whom Christ gives much, of him will He ask the more: therefore, the servant who knows his Lord's will, and

does it not, shall be beaten with many stripes. For these reasons, I think that pride, not thanking God for His blessings, and not being in charity with all men, destroys every other good gift we may possess.

CHAPTER XXIII.

What the Blessed Giovanni did in the City of Castello.



AFTER spending some days in Arezzo, and gaining much fruit there, the Blessed Giovanni and his poor companions departed, and went towards the city of Castello. And when they were near it, they saw a peasant, called Santi, ploughing his field, to whom Giovanni, the man of God, called with a loud voice, telling him to follow Christ; upon which he left the oxen and the plough, and went with Giovanni, and never returned to his husbandry. He was a very charitable, holy man, and often had beautiful visions of angels. Entering Castello, the Blessed Giovanni and his fervent brothers went first to the principal church, as their custom was, and on their way, in the street of the Tartarini, they met Benedetto di Pace, the Bishop's notary, and Giovanni looking on him, and being assured by the Spirit of his salvation, said to him suddenly, "Come with me, thou ill-living old man; leave the world, and follow Christ." Benedetto (the grace of God converting him) imme-

diately accompanied Giovanni, and afterwards became one of his poor brothers. After saying their prayers in the Duomo, they went about the place, praising Jesus Christ, and exhorting all persons to turn to God, and be converted; so that the whole city was moved to exclaim, "Praised be Jesus Christ, blessed be the Name of Christ." And very many men and women, seeing the fervour of the Blessed Giovanni and his companions, and hearing their holy exhortations, were converted, and became true penitents. Amongst others who forsook the world, and joined the poor ones of Jesus Christ, was one called Stefano, a man of rare intellect, who became a devoted servant of God; and another called Bartoluccio di Santi, who was so inflamed with Divine love, that whenever he heard any one speaking earnestly of God, he could not remain quiet. To mention one instance. One day, when he was listening with other citizens to a sermon in the Church of San Fiordo in that city, such fervour was kindled in him that he could no longer contain the ardour of his spirit: he ran out of the church, and leapt into the square, without touching any of the church steps. Many times against his will he made the bystanders laugh with astonishment. The said Bartoluccio, Giovanni di Jacopo, and another of the

principal inhabitants of the place, called Ghingo, showed much kindness to the poor brothers.

They were also favourably received by Messer Buccio, the Bishop of that city, a very kind-hearted man; and he grew so fond of the Blessed Giovanni and his companions, that he was on the most friendly and intimate terms with them; and he thought that to be a member of their company was better than even the pontifical dignity; so he joined them, and they regarded him as their beloved father. The Blessed Giovanni, perceiving that Messer Buccio was most strictly conscientious, and learned in canonical law, and remembering that Domenico di Montecchiello had advised them, for the better security of their congregation, to obtain Apostolic sanction, asked the said Bishop if what they were doing was contrary to any decree, or could be deemed suspicious in any way, and if he thought they ought to apply to the Cardinal, who was then the Legate at Viterbo, for a license. He replied that they did nothing which was against rule, or could be thought so, therefore he did not think it necessary for them to ask for sanction: they were poor, simple, and pure-minded men, with no earthly cares, and so they might safely leave all in God's hands. These words of His good vicar, the


Canonist, comforted them greatly, and the Blessed Giovanni was much pleased by them; and as the said Bishop was of holy life and doctrine, these poor ones always asked his advice on all important matters, and to his death he continued their zealous and loving friend; and not he alone, but all the bishops of that province were their great benefactors and protectors. The charity of these soldiers of Jesus Christ was so great, that finding a great sinner in the city who would not repent, the Blessed Giovanni, being very anxious for his salvation, said to him, "If thou wilt forsake thy sins, I will give thee all my merits, and every good thing I have ever done;" and the ardent Francesco said to him, "And I will gladly take all the sins thou hast committed on myself, if thou wilt truly turn to God;" each of them making him these offers from his heart. And this sinner (the grace of God and their good counsel aiding him) became a true penitent.

I must not omit to mention three beneficial works which were done by these poor for Jesus' sake, early in Lent, before they left that place. First, they accepted and received two men into their company. One was Perugino, who had been a bad man, the other was a secular priest: he had been a proud and wicked

man, but he gave up a good benefice and did much penance. Second, the before-named Benedetto di Pace, much to the satisfaction of the Blessed Giovanni and his companions, placed his niece with the sisters of the convent Del Sacco. Up to that time these sisters had each kept her own possessions to herself, but from that day, by the grace of God and the good advice of the poor ones of Jesus Christ, six of the richest of them began to live in common, refusing to call anything their own. The third thing worthy of remembrance was that, owing to the gentle and peaceful words of the merciful Giovanni and his brothers, a citizen of Siena, of the noble house of Tolomei, called Larino, who, out of devotion to the Blessed Giovanni, had accompanied him from Arezzo to Castello, did, in the presence of the above-named Bishop, make peace with, and fully pardon, three of the family of the Piccoluomini, for the murder of his uncle, Meo di Larino Tolomeo. A thousand florins could not have bought this peace. The charitable Giovanni sent the public announcement of it to Siena, with a loving and tender epistle to these three Piccoluomini, and by this action he not only made peace between these two families, but brought about their friendship.

CHAPTER XXIV.

*An Exhortation to Holy Living by the Blessed
Giovanni.*

ITH great fervour Giovanni said to his brothers: "Let us, dearly beloved, mourn and weep, and take bitter vengeance on ourselves; for if we were guilty of no other sin but that of ingratitude, and of despising and almost refusing God (who, whether we will or no, gives Himself to us, while we, proud, ungrateful wretches that we are, wanting in faith and ardour, receive this immeasurable gift with irreverence and coldness, and keep it carelessly), we ought to seek to die for Him a thousand times, if such were possible. We ought, all of us, to be lion-hearted, ready to endure anything for the love of Christ crucified, and if this were our will, other things would be of little importance. It is our duty to exercise ourselves in holy desire and fervent prayer, even with a loud voice; and in all holy

virtues, especially in perfect love to God and our neighbour, and holy humility. Therefore, my dear brethren, since the Lord has called and chosen us to a higher degree of perfection, we are bound to do everything as perfectly as possible, that we may not be reproached as liars or deceivers: but, above all, let us act so that our light may shine, and give forth bright rays, that our Heavenly Father may be honoured in us, and that by our good example, many, forsaking their sins, may return into the way of truth, together with us honouring our Lord Jesus Christ: and doing this with purity and charity, we shall live happily and in the joy of the Holy Ghost, and continue in this to a happy death, which will lead us to true and everlasting life."

These poor ones of Jesus Christ went to a village on the mountain of Siena, called Arcidosso, where they gained much fruit. Among those of that place who were converted to God, was one called Giusto, who became an ardent follower of Giovanni, the man of God, in the way of holy poverty. He led a very strict life, and always slept on the bare ground or on a plank.

And thus these servants of God went about the cities and villages, preaching the Name of Jesus

Christ. Not once only did they visit the places mentioned, but they often returned, both to encourage their companions who lived there (for they did not all preach) in the service of God, and also to exhort sinners again to repentance. They most frequently lodged with the secular Flagellants, because these confraternities of the discipline showed them much kindness.

CHAPTER XXV.

Of some Miracles worked by the Blessed Giovanni.

ONCE, when Giovanni, the servant of Christ, was at Montalcino, he thought of his first companion, Francesco Vincenti, who was then at Siena, and who now never cut his hair or his nails, or shaved his beard, so that he looked like a wild man; and the Blessed Giovanni thinking this a useless penance, he was allowed, by God's will, to appear to Francesco in a dream, telling him that severity to the body was pleasing to God, but not too great austerity of life, and that this singularity was very dangerous; and on waking in the morning, and considering his dream, Francesco immediately shaved his beard, and cut his hair and nails. After this, Giovanni, the man of God, wrote to Siena, saying: "Tell Francesco that he has done well to obey;"

at which he was much astonished, for he had not told any one of the vision.

Nor can I by any means keep silence about a wonderful miracle worked by our Lord Jesus Christ, to show the holy doctrine and life of His most devoted servant, Giovanni; which is, that once, while the Blessed Giovanni and some of his poor companions were talking earnestly, round a great fire, about the edification of souls, one of them, being tempted by the devil, contradicted, and spoke rudely; so Giovanni, the man of God, commanded him to be silent, and ordered him by holy obedience to put his head under the burning logs which were on the hearth. He, being sorry for his presumptuous words, implicitly obeying his holy father, laid his head directly under the burning wood, and kept it there till Giovanni, the servant of God, gave him leave to remove it. What I shall relate is very wonderful, but yet true. When this poor obedient man stood up, not only was his head not burnt, but not a single hair was injured; and all the bystanders, astonished at such a grand miracle, and perceiving the sanctity of their master and father, never dared afterwards to contradict him in the least thing. Amongst those present was the before-mentioned Vanni of Montecchiello, who sur-

vived Giovanni, the man of God, more than forty years, and who often related this miracle with great devotion, and also the gift of holiness which he received at Arezzo, by virtue of the power of the Blessed Giovanni.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A Discourse on Humility by the Blessed Giovanni.



THE humble Giovanni said: "The Blessed Jesus Christ is the only one who can set us free from the many and great struggles which we all have to maintain in our journey through this short life. They are so frequent, that our strength would utterly fail if it were not for the pitying help of our merciful and tender Father; and this we need, not only on rare occasions, and in great dangers, but hourly, and on the least occasion. And we require to be not only helped, but almost forcibly held and borne up, for if the good God let go His Hand from us, we should soon fall into every sort of wretchedness. Therefore, if we see that without His continual support we cannot stand upright, but fallin to great sin, what shall we say of any virtue that we practise, be it one or many, great or small? Should we wish, or ought we to glory in ourselves, as if

our virtue was our own? Let us not on this score become proud or presumptuous, despising others and exalting ourselves. I think we should be worthy of double condemnation, if, while receiving great blessings and gifts from God and Jesus Christ, we should become less holy, or fail in the virtue of humility: hence, the upright proud man is more displeasing to Him than the humble sinner. Therefore, my dear brethren, the more we have of Divine light and grace, the more clearly shall we perceive our misery and frailty, for we shall see that our actions fall far short of our duty. In short, the more we by God's grace draw nigh to Him with holy virtues, so much the more shall we be illuminated, and the better we shall know that He is the Author of all goodness and strength, and we are utterly vile and weak."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Of what more befell the Blessed Giovanni at Arezzo.


ANOTHER time, when the very ardent Giovanni returned to Arezzo with some of his poor ones, they passed the night in a hospital belonging to the Eremitani brothers, the governor of which was a very good man, who showed much hospitality to pilgrims, especially to religious. When the hour of rest came, the Blessed Giovanni, being fatigued in body and mind, unfastened the coat that covered his chest, in order to lie down on one of the beds. As soon as it was opened, such a brilliant light shone from that holy breast, that the hospital at night was as light as at noon-day, and the brightness was so great, that the bystanders could not in any way bear to look upon that holy breast.

Once Giovanni, the charitable, and some of his poor brothers, were spending the evening of the Carnival in the same house, and cold meat soaked in vinegar

was provided for their supper ; upon which one of the poor brothers, moved by his love for the Blessed Giovanni, said, “There is one here who has a weak stomach, and much vinegar is hurtful to him.” When they were all at table, before they began to eat, Giovanni, the man of God, being kindled by Divine fire, began to speak earnestly of the love of God, and how Divine love warms not the soul only, but sometimes the body also; and he grew so animated in his talk, that they spent the whole night in these holy discourses. When these poor ones of Jesus Christ saw that the morning was come, without having had any supper, they went to church, to cast ashes on their heads.

CHAPTER XXVIII.


*An Exhortation on Loving God and our Neighbour by
the Blessed Giovanni.*

IOVANNI, inspired with love, said: “Let us, my beloved brethren, renew holy ardour and desire in ourselves; and although we are much to be blamed for the time we have lost, let us not be too much occupied with that thought, lest we should fall into despair; but rather let us go confidently to our good Jesus, and ask, like one who did so formerly, which are the commandments most pleasing to Him; and He will answer and say to us, ‘Love me above all things, with all your heart, with all your strength, with all the powers of your mind and body;’ and then, ‘For the love I bear to you, love your neighbour as yourselves.’ These words, so sweet and dear, you must know are part of life eternal, and the witness of them in ourselves is the love and charity we bear towards each other. Who then can say that he loves

his neighbour far off, if he does not love his brother at his side? And if thou sayest, 'He has faults,' consider in thyself whether thou hast not as many: if thou lookest carefully, thou shalt find much greater in thyself. Therefore, my dear brethren, love each other with love kindled by the fire of the Holy Spirit; speak, each of you, that which will give glory to God and spiritual consolation to your fathers and brothers; let the elder reprove and correct the younger compassionately, and with paternal love, and the younger meekly take whatever chastisement is given to them. Also be more tender and respectful, one with the other, and strive to pray to God more for each other; so you will all be holy, wise, and kind, and your lives will be full of happiness. Rejoice in God, that He may rejoice in you. The time for our work is very short, and the reward is beyond all measure; and even if our life were long, still it is better to live in the joy of holiness than in the remorse and pain which are caused by sin."

CHAPTER XXIX.

How the Blessed Giovanni Established a Convent for Women.

N the return of the Blessed Giovanni to Siena, he felt more and more strongly that a life of entire poverty was the most sure way of salvation, so he tried to establish this most salutary rule amongst women also. And thinking that a relation of his, called Caterina, daughter of Tommaso Colombini, his father Pietro's brother, was a fit person to begin such an order, because she was of good understanding, he tried as much as possible to persuade her to choose this life; and so he often talked to her about the edification of the soul and the great treasures of virtue, and especially of the merits and blessings of deep poverty. But she could not bear to hear the name of poverty, still less would she consent to accept such a rule of life, for she was rich, and delicately brought up. Yet she was a virgin, and did

not wish to marry. Giovanni, the man of God, was not a little grieved at this, and he often prayed to Jesus Christ, that He would be pleased so to touch her heart as to incline her to holy poverty. And so it pleased God to do ; for Giovanni, the charitable, being one evening at home with his wife, he called Caterina, who lived close to them, to a window which overlooked their house, and asked her what she was doing, and whether she was going to say her prayers ; and she replied, “ To say the truth, I am just going to bed, and you see that the lamp in my hand is just refilled for that purpose.” And Giovanni, in his ardour, again began exhorting her to renounce the world entirely, with all its false pleasures, and to become a lover of Jesus Christ and His holy virtues, especially that of holy poverty ; showing her by many arguments, authorities, and examples, that whoever trusts in God, and with all his heart places his hope in Him, is never forsaken in his need ; that as even the birds of the air are cared for by Jesus Christ, much more so are the creatures He has redeemed by His precious Blood. Amongst other examples, he told her of the widow in the time of Elisha the prophet, whose pot of oil was multiplied by God ; and he added, “ In the same way, God can cause this light

not to go out, as He has already done to many saints." Caterina listened most attentively to these burning words, which, Giovanni perceiving, he continued the whole night talking with her of the very great blessings of holy poverty, and of the many virtues and graces which are gained by it. But God having already begun to soften her heart, she did not perceive that the night was passing away, and the morning dawned upon this holy conversation. When the Blessed Giovanni saw that the sun had risen, he said to her, "Go and lie down;" and she, turning to depart, perceived that daylight was entering by the windows, and said with the greatest astonishment, "It is broad daylight!" But Giovanni, the servant of God, replied, "How can it be daylight? See your lamp, it is still full." And looking at the light which she had held in her hand all the time, and seeing that it had not grown dim, she understood that the merciful God had worked a miracle in proof of the wholesome words of the Blessed Giovanni; and being converted by the will of Jesus Christ, and the assurance of this miracle, she said to Giovanni, the man of God, "My father, from this hour do what you will, for I am resolved, by God's help, to do all to His honour." And together with some ladies who had also been persuaded


by the holy words of the Blessed Giovanni to devote themselves to Jesus Christ, she began to dress as a poor person, and to beg her bread, for the love of God. And so proceeding in the love of holy poverty and other virtues, by her holy life and doctrine she helped to turn women to repentance; following her friend and father Giovanni, with some other ladies, in the company and under the care of the older poor ones of Jesus Christ. Amongst others of that place who were converted to Christ, and became companions of the devout Caterina, was a young woman called Giovanna, daughter of Francesco dei Malescotti, and another called Petra, daughter of one named Petro, who was himself afterwards a brother of the magnificent hospital in that town. Also Francesca d'Ambrogio d'Agnolo, sister of Giovanni d'Ambrogio, who has been so often mentioned in these pages, and Andrea, who was one of the first to begin this life in Florence. They were also joined by Simona, daughter of Ristoro of Fazio di Gallerani, who, after the death of those above named, was left head and guide to all the others. Her heart was on fire with charity, and by her holy example and her wholesome words she drew many into their poor company. They all gave themselves to mental prayer, holy reading, and useful

occupations, working with their own hands; and what they wanted for their support they begged, for the love of God. They went barefoot, clad in coarse undyed cloth, their heads covered with a piece of linen; and when the younger ones went out seeking alms, they were always accompanied by one of the elder sisters: they walked with downcast eyes, and were never out long at one time. Thus they all lived together at first in Caterina's house.

CHAPTER XXX.

Exhortations to love Christ.

Addressed to the Sisters of his Company by the Blessed Giovanni.

IOVANNI, the charitable, said to the ardent Caterina, and the sisters belonging to the company of poor ones of Jesus Christ: "Dearest sisters, my desire is that Christ may be glorified, and that each one of you may be His holy, true, and faithful spouse and handmaiden, a temple and tabernacle where He may rest. Prepare for Him a furnished chamber, that is, a pure heart, adorned with virtues, and the unruffled bed of holy love. Learn how to love, dear sisters, and feed on love. She who loves not Jesus Christ is not alive, but dead, for love is the true life of the soul: the soul which loves fears nothing, but that which loves not is very sad and desponding of her salvation. Remember, my beloved, if you would be heirs of Christ, keep His commandment of love,

which was the Testament He left us. He did not lay many burdens upon us, but one only, and that is love. He who has love has Christ Himself, who is the fire of love, and possessing Him, he possesses all virtues. No one can really love his neighbour if he is not filled with the true love of God and Christ. The direct way of approaching Him is by holy contemplation, which can only be reached by the ladder of love. Love begets love, and it is attained by ardent and holy desire. Flee then to the mount of holy contemplation, on which is a lofty rock, where you need fear no enemies; not even the strongest can come there, where all is light, not darkness: on that rock is safety without fear. Retire to the recesses of your own consciences, and close the door against evil thoughts, which are like fierce and savage beasts; then enter into the caverns and secret places of pure and holy desires, and meditate on the great God, and His only-begotten Son, His holy Passion, His great and excellent gifts, and those unspeakable blessings, the mere recollection of which overpowers the soul with love. Therefore, my beloved mothers, sisters, and daughters in Christ, rouse yourselves to holy and zealous deeds and words; be, all of you, satiated, burning, and radiant with love; love each other with

perfect charity, flee from sin, and from every person or thing which may turn you from holy love, but seek and make use of every person or thing which may help you to it. Be also wise and prudent, and do not suffer yourselves to take offence at anything, but be patient under every trial, for patience is the best evidence of your love to Christ.

“How many saints have been glad to be accounted fools for the sake of this love: how many have cheerfully waited for death under every form of suffering. Let your whole hearts be set on seeking Jesus Christ, and I must tell you you will not find Him by going from church to church, or by wandering about the world, but by continuing steadfast in prayer, holy conversation, and good thoughts. Let each, as a loving spouse of Jesus Christ, give her dear Husband and Lord the honour due unto Him. If an earthly wife obeys, honours, and strives to please her husband, how much more should the wife of the Heavenly Spouse? Do not seek to obey or love Him a little, but rather try how much honour and worship you can offer to Him. Jesus Christ, your Spouse, wishes for two especial honours from you: first, that you should be humble and full of charity; second, that forsaking all worldly affections, and being loosened from every

earthly tie, you should often in contemplation fly heavenwards, and there feed, still keeping His holy Passion in remembrance, for that is the right gate and direct road to the vision of God. If you persevere in the love of Jesus Christ, and the practice of virtue, everything that you devoutly ask of your Spouse will be granted to you, according to His promise to those who ask in faith."

CHAPTER XXXI.

What the Blessed Giovanni did for the Convent of Santa Bonda.

WHEN the Blessed Giovanni by his holy exhortations, added to the wisdom and discretion of Donna Paula, daughter of Ghino Foresi, Abbess of the above-mentioned Convent of Santa Bonda, had induced all the nuns to live in common, they having at first retained their own property, he persuaded many citizens of Siena to place their daughters there, and advised many young women to maintain holy virginity, and become the spouses of Jesus Christ; and many in the convent, especially his own relations, became nuns, owing to his persuasive words. One Palm Sunday five girls of noble birth were taken there by the ardent Giovanni, bearing olive garlands on their heads, and branches of olive in their hands. The daughter of Francesco Vincenti, whose name was Giovanna, when she became a nun was called Sister


Francesca. In the thirteenth year of her age, having been professed in the order, her spirit returned to God. Agnola, the daughter of the Blessed Giovanni, received in the convent the name of Sister Maddalena, in honour of S. Mary Magdalene, for whom the loving Giovanni had an especial devotion; and within a year after she entered the convent she also went to God.

When the very devout Giovanni lived in Siena, he often visited the Convent of Santa Bonda, not only for the purpose of exhorting the nuns to persevere in God's holy service, but also for the sake of the consolation he derived from the odour of their very great virtues, for the great God endued them with so much light and grace, that they were esteemed the holiest nuns in all Italy; so much so, that the Blessed Giovanni affirmed that Christ and a multitude of angels lived in the convent; and many signs of this were given, of which I will only relate one. One night, when Ambrogio, one of Giovanni's companions, was near the place, at the house where they lodged strangers, he distinctly heard a host of demons leave the convent, with much noise and lamentation, like an army discomfited and routed; and this defeat, the Blessed Giovanni said, was a sign that Christ abode amongst them, on account of the virtues, especially

the great love and charity, which they possessed. Giovanni, the man of God, was so impressed by the sanctity of the Abbess and the other nuns, that when he went to visit them, he often shed tears of devotion the whole way from the gate of the city to the convent. And once, when he was talking to the Abbess at the gate, of the most holy charity and sweet love of Jesus Christ, and the unspeakable gifts and graces which He grants to all who serve Him faithfully, they were so inflamed by this Divine converse, that, without being aware of it, they spent the whole night in that employment. The Blessed Giovanni had such faith and trust in this venerable and holy Abbess, and loved and revered her so much, that he obeyed her in everything, as he would a spiritual Father, and wished all his poor companions to do the same.

CHAPTER XXXII.

An Exhortation to Patience by the Blessed Giovanni.

HE Blessed Giovanni said to his much-loved nuns of Santa Bonda: “Dearest mothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, let us purge out the old leaven, that we may be a new paste; let us humble ourselves before Christ, turning to Him in ardour and charity, with consciences purged from sin; let us break the chains which bind us fast, and hold us back from Christ; and in self-abandonment let us devote ourselves to Him, Who, for us miserable sinners, willingly suffered such great and undeserved pains. In God’s Name let us open our eyes and bewail our misspent time: till now we have only been intent on receiving good; henceforth let us think a little what return we can make. We must be no longer weak children, but strong men, able to bear any wind which blows, not troubled or turned from Christ by any adversity.”

In fervour of spirit he added: “Oh! if we loved


our true Friend, Jesus Christ, we should for very fealty be willing to die for Him. Oh! let us die for Him who died for us. There is no greater proof of love than to be ready to die for a friend. If our love was perfect, we should be more grieved at offending God than at our own damnation,* because we ought to love Him better than ourselves. How much then should we love those who afflict us! kiss the hands which strike us! bless the tongue which curses us! love him who persecutes us! One only should we hate—ourselves—as the worst friend we have. Remember what that devout servant of God, S. Francis, said, that ‘we ought greatly to love those who persecute us, because they help us to conquer our enemy, and beat down our tyrant, *i. e.*, ourselves, and our own concupiscence.’ Oh, wretched man that I am! I leave the straight and shortest way, to wander in crooked and tedious paths. What avails it, our talking or knowing much about God and holiness, if we refuse the way that leads to it, and will not walk therein? This thought does not allow me to speak or write with a clear conscience, for the good opinion of others will not make me, such a sinner as I am, the less displeasing to God. Oh, what

* Compare the prayer of St. Gertrude before Communion.

shall I do? I shall certainly die if I do not enter on this way of holiness. I ask you, therefore, dear spouses and sisters of Jesus Christ, to aid me by your holy prayers, beseeching God to help me to love Him in purity and truth, that not only I may hate myself, but that others may hate me also, that so I may make some little return for His great love towards me."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

What the Blessed Giovanni did in the Convent of the Preaching Friars at Siena.

 HERE came once some ambassadors from Pisa to Siena, who, hearing of this newly-formed society, wished to show their devotion to its holy founders, the servants of God, Giovanni and Francesco, by asking them one day to dine with them: so these two soldiers of Jesus Christ accepted their charity, and took with them one of their companions, Cecco, surnamed Il Boccia, who sang many devout hymns, accompanying himself on a viol; and after dinner, the ambassadors being much edified by their conversation and manners, they all went together to the Convent of Preaching Friars at Camporeggi, and on their arrival the poor ones of Jesus Christ sang hymns of praise, according to their custom, and the twelve brothers gave them welcome. And it pleased God that the Blessed

Giovanni and his companions should begin so to speak of that holy truth which gladdens every heart which thinks and speaks of it, that great desire thereto was kindled in the hearts of the Friars, and some wept, and others sighed. Presently, Brother Cristofano Biagi, a man of learning and of good report, took the Blessed Giovanni into his cell, and at once gave him everything in it, his books, and all his wearing apparel, except what he had on him. He emptied the room, till nothing was left but the mattress, and said Giovanni might give the things to whom he pleased. These words were not spoken to deaf ears, for Giovanni and some of the others carried off all the things, and gave them away for the love of God. After this, Friar Cristofano, accompanied by a lay brother, went about the city for two days, begging bread; and then, as if courting shame and reproach, he went to the new Abbey, to a certain brother Pietro, driving an ass before him with a load of dung, and having a basket full of dung hung round his neck, and so he went about the streets and squares, mortifying himself for the love of God. Furthermore, it pleased God that the charitable Giovanni and one of his companions, called Ambrogio, should go and stay with the above-named

Friars, and they discoursed so forcibly and eloquently on holy poverty, that by the mercy of Jesus Christ they were moved to such contrition, that most of them emptied their cells and gave away all their goods; some changed their dress for what was coarser and thicker; others preached Christ with marvellous fervour and godly wisdom; and there were some amongst them who received such enlightenment, that their own learning seemed to them as nothing in comparison with the spiritual light and truth that burst upon their minds; others wore very rough hair shirts. Any one who witnessed the operation of God in that convent would have been struck with astonishment, and a certain brother, who went there to mock at them, was smitten by Christ before he departed. Thus did a desire after holiness increase in this convent, of which many signs were observed by people living in the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

An Exhortation to Conversion by the Blessed Giovanni.


HEREUPON the man of God Giovanni said that the grace of the Lord had come very near to man, and that Jesus Christ was showering on the world immeasurable gifts and blessings, especially in the revival and increase of religious orders and fraternities, so that in fervour of spirit he added: “Do not, my beloved ones, be careless or slothful, but hasten to meet this great gift of God with boundless charity,* excessive love, desire after holy poverty, and charity amongst yourselves; with joy, gladness and singing, and hearts emptied of all carnal and worldly affections. Christ never enters the soul that is occupied with other love than His; therefore spoil and empty your hearts, and clothe and fill yourselves with the dear and blessed Lord Jesus Christ, who, in giving Himself to you, will impart such delight to your souls that

* Che senta del pazzo.

they will be warmed and filled with joy unspeakable. Oh, blessing unperceived, lost and ignored by the miserable world! O ye blind and most foolish souls, who will not set yourselves to receive and taste the sweet and blessed Christ! Awake, you that sleep! rise up you that are like the dead! Christ will awake all people, inflame the coldest heart, and rekindle the dying embers. Go forth, then, bravely to the Blessed Christ, who is hastening to visit you."

CHAPTER XXXV.

*How the Blessed Giovanni and his Brothers went to
Pisa, Lucca, Pistoja, and Florence.*

HE loving Giovanni was so zealous for God's honour, that when he was preaching the Divine Word, he feared neither cold, nor heat, nor storm; and once, in the middle of the winter, when snow was on the ground, he, not heeding the chilblains on his feet, went to Pisa with his devoted little company; and God worked a special miracle on their behalf, for as soon as their feet touched the snow, he and some of the others, who also had bad feet, were perfectly healed. As they went along they exhorted sinners to repent, and sang devout hymns. They took the road which went by the village of Cigoli, and here with great devotion was exposed a beautiful picture of our Lady, to whose protection they all lovingly recommended the venerable sisters of the before-mentioned Convent of Santa Bonda.

Another favour which God granted them was this : it took them nine days to reach Pisa, and though it very often rained during that time, their cloaks never got wet, nor did they take cold, or suffer the least inconvenience throughout the journey ; except that the charitable Giovanni having, more for his brothers' sake than his own, taken some pitch with him, in case of insect bites, he was himself stung. So he said this had happened to him because he had not trusted in God, and that in future they would carry nothing whatever with them but the love of God deep down in their hearts.

In Pisa God so ordered it that they were turned away from the hospices, in order that the rich and good men of the place might give them welcome. And so it happened, for a noble and excellent citizen, who had four sons, distinguished merchants, showed much kindness to these poor men, keeping them all the time in his own house ; and the alms given them were much more than they wished to receive, so they refused many offerings of money and clothing. They found there many virtuous people, both secular and religious, full of great and holy desires ; and they saw, as people worthy of belief had already told them, that there were two hundred ladies in the city

who wore very rough hair garments, also many gentlemen who used much self-mortification. According to their custom, they went about the city, publicly preaching the salvation of souls, exhorting persons in general and in particular to practise holiness and forsake sin; in this way giving much honour and glory to Jesus Christ, and doing much good to men. At last they, with their hosts, visited the Convent of Preaching Friars, and were much exhorted and encouraged by their venerable and holy Prior to continue their present way of life. He told them that no one, be he man or woman, should, either from error of judgment or false pride, desist from the practice of holiness, or from speaking about God in every place, adding: "Those who, in any place, refuse God when He wills their good, or for fear of man turn from their true comfort, are fools; for such people seem to think they know better than God, which is the greatest folly. God Himself knows best when to visit His spouse the soul, and he who refuses Him then will not have Him when he seeks Him." The poor ones of Jesus Christ were much rejoiced at these words, and praising God and returning thanks to the brothers, they departed. Then they took leave of their benefactors, and departing from

Pisa, they went, moved by the same charity, to the city of Lucca. Here also, as usual, they preached the Word of God, and went about the place praising the Name of Jesus Christ; and by the help of Divine grace they gathered there not a little fruit. Afterwards they came to Pistoja, doing and saying there what they thought would conduce to the honour of God and the salvation of men. Amongst those in that place, who, by the grace of God and their holy words, gave themselves wholly to Jesus Christ, were two who joined the company of poor ones, and became very zealous in God's service. One was called Pietro, and the other Paulino. And so, continuing their way, they passed through the magnificent city of Florence, singing and preaching Jesus Christ as they went along.

Throughout this journey Jesus Christ was so much honoured, and these poor brothers received such spiritual consolation, that the Blessed Giovanni said afterwards it was the happiest one he had taken for a long time.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

An Exhortation to Humility of Spirit by the Blessed Giovanni.




THE loving Giovanni said to his dear brothers: “Let all worldly and anxious thoughts for your kindred, or other vain things, give place to the love of Christ, and let all your thoughts and words be good and holy: in your conversation with each other be careful to say nothing that could cause offence; take kindly and calmly what is said or done to you; let each of you seek to be the least, and consider himself the worst; think how much time you have lost, and begin now to do well. Let us esteem others better than ourselves, not murmuring, or finding fault with others, for any cause. Let us grieve for the sins we have committed against God, let us sympathize with those who are afflicted, and weep with those who weep; let us mourn over a world which is so ignorant of its true happiness that it refuses the

greatest good, and chooses the worst evil. Let us help our neighbours, and constantly pray for them : let us despise earthly things, and leaving them to the world and its followers, let us set our hearts on the high and great things of heaven and holiness. Finally, let us strive to be Christ's disciples, and show that we are such, by keeping the holy commandment He left us, to love each other without measure. Let us never be wanting in love—love as tender as that of a son to his father, with the addition of unfeigned humility. And last of all, when, by God's grace, we have been enabled to do these things, we must say, as our Blessed Lord commanded, 'We are useless and unprofitable servants;' for we have no merit of our own, but God of His goodness allows us to serve Him, that He might make us at length His sons, and partakers of the joys of eternal life."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

How the Blessed Giovanni, with his Company, went to meet Pope Urban, at Viterbo.

 **Q**N the return of the poor followers of Jesus Christ to Siena, they heard that the Holy Father, Pope Urban V., had arrived at Viterbo, from Avignon, with his court; and so the loyal-hearted Giovanni, and about seventy poor brothers whom he had gathered round him in less than two years, set out thither, to introduce themselves to the Holy Father, and to put themselves entirely under his direction, so that, by making the bishops of the Holy Church acquainted with their rule of life, all doubt about the lawfulness of the order might be removed.

At that time there dwelt in Siena a young man called Bianco di Santi: he belonged to Anciolina di Val d'Arno di Sopra, in the Duchy of Florence, but having from his childhood upwards been employed at Siena in the manufacture of wool, he was always

called Bianco di Siena. He had often asked the Blessed Giovanni to receive him into his fraternity, but Giovanni seeing that he was a very beautiful and delicate-looking youth, and fearing that he would be unable to bear the severity of their rule, did not like to admit him. Now, when Bianco heard that the fervent Giovanni and most of his company were going to Viterbo, he left Siena immediately, and on reaching an inn, about three miles from the city, he waited for them there, ordering a plentiful repast to be prepared at his own expense. When Giovanni and his poor brothers came up to the place, Bianco went out to meet them, and affectionately and humbly prayed them to yield to his loving desire that they should rest there and dine, which they did; and when they had been somewhat refreshed by the good meal provided for them, Bianco fell on his knees, and with great vehemence implored the Blessed Giovanni and the others to receive him into their society. On which the beloved Giovanni, considering how his heart was set upon it, and how kindly he had treated them, consented to do so. Then they left that place, and continued their journey together.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

How they Arrived at Viterbo.

THROUGHOUT this journey, these poor followers of Jesus Christ had much honour and kindness shown them, especially in the States of Holy Church, and more alms were offered to them than they needed. It was esteemed a privilege to be able to offer them any hospitality, every one was anxious that they should eat or lodge at his own house, and they were looked upon as saints. At length they arrived at Viterbo, singing praises with great gladness.

First of all, they went to the principal church; then they sat down to eat in the market-place, and here they were surrounded by a great multitude, bringing them a wonderful supply of provisions. Both town and country people flocked eagerly to see them, and many were moved to tears by their devotion. While waiting here the arrival of the Holy


Father, they visited a nephew of Pope Urban, who was then Abbot of Marseilles. He was very glad to see them, and exhorted them to persevere in the service of God; and after they had taken their leave, the Abbot sent them some money, which they refused, however, at the same time thanking the donor.

Afterwards they visited the Count di Nola, who was at that time governor of the patrimony: he also was much pleased to see them, and offered them large gifts. One evening he invited the Blessed Giovanni and some of his companions to sup with him, and it being summer time, some lettuces were laid on the table. But Giovanni, the man of God, observed that the Count did not take any, and said, "Do you not eat lettuces, Count?" to which the Count replied, "I have not eaten any for fourteen years, for I have a weak stomach, and lettuce disagrees with me." Then, said the loving Giovanni, "Take a little with us for friendship's sake;" and the Count replied, "I would willingly do so, to please this company, but it would make me ill." Again Giovanni implored him to take some, for the love of Christ and for their satisfaction. Then the Count, seeing the anxiety of the Blessed Giovanni, took one leaf, saying, as he did so, "Thou wilt make me have

a bad night." But no sooner had he eaten it, than his stomach was so strengthened, that he never felt any more pain, and from that time he was able to eat salad, or anything else, however cold or hard it might be.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

How they went to meet the Pope at Corneto.


HEN the time drew near for the arrival of the Holy Father at Viterbo, Giovanni and his companions went to visit the cardinal legate of the church in that place, having been prevented from doing so before by his illness; after which Giovanni, Francesco Vincenti, and many of the poor brothers accompanied him to the Port of Corneto, where Pope Urban was to land, and there they were received with great honour. While they were there, they made themselves very useful in preparing for the worthy reception of the Holy Father, helping to make ready his bedchamber, and that of the cardinals. Then they went to the harbour, where a great wooden bridge, with triumphal decorations, was being built on the shore for the Sovereign Pontiff and his cardinals; and in this work they also helped as much as they could. Upon the approach of the Holy Father,

almost every one was sent off the bridge except these poor brothers, all of whom, with olive branches in their hands and garlands of olive on their heads, stood waiting for him, some on the bridge, and some at its foot. As the Blessed Pope Urban and seven cardinals stepped on the bridge, the poor brothers raised shouts of joy, and cried out, "Blessed be Christ, and long live the Holy Father!" Giovanni, Francesco Vincenti, and some of their companions, humbly kissed his feet. These men were treated with the most wonderful respect and devotion, for though there were a great many prelates assembled, and not a few temporal lords, and notwithstanding the great crowd of people, room was always made for them: they walked close to the Holy Father, and two of them carried the banner under which he rode. On reaching Corneto, he dismounted at the Convent of the Friars Minor, amidst shoutings and rejoicings; but the greatest and most wonderful novelty of that day was the presence of those fervent and lowly men, and many letters were written about this new and holy society, and sent to different parts of Christendom. When the Holy Father heard of them, he said he should like to talk with them, and encourage them in their holy life; but the foreign

bishops and ambassadors were so angry at this, that he was not able to do so. However, the poor brothers visited the Cardinal of Avignon, who was the Pope's brother. He showed them great kindness, giving them comfort and counsel, and offering to be their protector and father, which made the Blessed Giovanni say that he was like a lamb for his meekness and gentleness. Francesco Bruni, of Florence, secretary to the Holy Father, also treated them very kindly.

CHAPTER XL.

How they accompanied the Pope from Corneto to Viterbo, and how the religious Habit was promised to them.


HE entry into Corneto of the Holy Father, Pope Urban, took place on Friday, the 4th of June, A.D. 1567. The Monday following he rode towards Viterbo, accompanied by the poor brothers, who almost ran by his side, for he rode fast. The Holy Father considerately sent word to them to come on at their ease, on which the ardent Francesco, wishing to be obedient, said, "I am at my ease if I can come close to him, hear him, and touch him." Then he ran on in front, so that he might kiss his feet when he passed. And such was the kindness of the Sovereign Pontiff, that when he saw him kneeling on the ground, he stopped his horse, and allowed Francesco to kiss and touch him, and twice on crossing over water, the devoted Francesco held

up his robes. On reaching Toscanella, the Holy Father dismounted, and on Tuesday evening he sent one of his courtiers to fetch the poor brothers, who said to them, "I bring you good news: come to the Pope." They joyfully obeyed, and going to the monastery of the Friars Minor, they awaited him there. Presently there appeared a venerable man, who said to Francesco Vincenti, "Come to the Holy Father," and led him into his presence. On entering the room, Francesco laid his old cloak on the ground and knelt down; and when the Blessed Pope Urban told him to come close to him, Francesco humbly knelt at his feet, while the Holy Father, full of wonder and admiration, questioned him on their rule of life, and the motives which led them to it; adding, that he did not like their having such variety of dress amongst them, but he would give them a habit: they might wear hoods, and he wished them to continue to go barefoot. In reply to this Francesco began by saying what a happiness he felt it to be in the presence of the Holy Father, and then briefly told him what were the motives which induced them to undertake their present life. This interview lasted some time, and before it ended the Blessed Pope Urban gave orders to one of his servants that all the

poor brothers who were on the shore when he landed should be clothed in white. In conclusion, the fervent Francesco said that they put themselves under the authority of the Pope, and were anxious to devote their lives to the Holy Church and to his service: they would be content to wear long robes or hoods, or anything he pleased. He also begged that his Holiness would quite understand that they fully intended to serve him lovingly and faithfully. These words pleased the Holy Father not a little, and the devoted Francesco, having received his blessing, took his leave, and joyfully related everything to Giovanni and his companions. On Wednesday morning, the 9th of June, the Blessed Pope Urban made his pontifical entry into Viterbo with great pomp and magnificence, attended by eight cardinals, a number of bishops and other dignitaries, and many nobles and ambassadors, while praises and shouts of joy resounded on all sides, so that it seemed as if the very stones cried out, "Benedictus qui venit in Nomine Domini."

CHAPTER XLI.

How they were Accused of Heresy in Viterbo.

FTER these poor brothers had followed the Holy Father to Viterbo with great devotion and reverence, God permitted their faith to be tried, in order that the purity and holiness of their lives might shine forth more clearly; and He allowed the devil to tempt many prelates and other religious with his malicious suggestions, putting it into their heads that these poor men held the pernicious and heretical opinions of the Fraticelli. For this reason some of the cardinals and bishops, and certain Mendicant Friars who did not really know the poor brothers, suspected them of heresy, and spoke against them to the Holy Father, defaming and slandering them. Many of the courtiers also hated them, and spoke evil of them, but by the Blessed Pope Urban, and his brother the Cardinal of Avignon, and all who knew them well, they were not only loved and ho-

noured, but also openly commended and protected. This persecution obliged them to exercise much patience, humility, and many other virtues, and they had so much to endure, that some of them would not bear it, left the congregation, and returned to the miserable world. The loving Giovanni and the other brave soldiers of Christ were very much grieved at this departure, for they feared for the salvation of those who left them; but their own injuries gave them no uneasiness, for they trusted in God for help, and in the testimony of their pure consciences, knowing too that "it is through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God;" and that "God is faithful, Who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able." They were not surprised at their persecution, when they learnt what they were ignorant of at the time they determined to wait on the Pope; viz., the heresies which had crept in upon the state of holy poverty, and were still arising. Then was fulfilled that which a holy man called Il Nero, of the city of Castello, had prophesied about them,—that they would have to cross a great river, and that this would show which of them were of God, for many of them would obediently cross it, and some would refuse to do so: and so it happened. But the

just God very soon manifested His displeasure against those who had left the congregation of poor ones, for on returning to the world, they were detested by almost everybody: and during the persecution God worked a singular miracle, in the case of two Aretini (men of Arezzo), who had previously given up their possessions, and together joined the congregation. One of them, called Se Biliotto, was the first to leave, and he was hung at Arezzo, in company with fourteen others; and on the same day, in Viterbo, the other one, who was called Pietrino, and had remained in the brotherhood, rendered up his spirit to God in great fervour and devotion.

CHAPTER XLII.

An Exhortation to Perseverance by the Blessed Giovanni.

FOR this cause, Giovanni, being full of faith, said to his patient companions: “Behold the working of Divine Justice, how fearful it is; see how God wills that the flour should be discerned from the bran. Yet this need not dishearten us, because even some of the angels fell from heaven, and those who remained were perfected; and in all holy congregations there have been some who wanted perseverance. And so I believe it will be with us; but woe to him who goes out from us! God wishes to prove who are serving Him faithfully, and who are not, so that no one may deceitfully shelter himself under His cloak. Therefore rejoice, and take comfort in this, that you have remained on His side, and have not joined those who, being deprived of the grace of our Lord, have returned to the miserable world, to the abominations of a sinful life, accompanied by such

disgrace and shame, that few will have anything to do with them. Let us therefore learn wisdom at their expense, and at the same time have compassion on them, and pray for them, and be watchful over ourselves. Let us, my beloved brethren, persevere bravely if we would not be discomfited and confounded; for he who runs away, instead of fighting bravely, can have no right to the crown of victory; and in this battle none are defeated against their will, for our enemy is no stronger than we are. Be humble, then, and patient, so that all may know you to be disciples and servants of Jesus Christ."

CHAPTER XLIII.

How they were Examined by the Inquisitor on their Heretical Depravity, and being found Pious and Religious, the Pope gave them the Habit.



AS the ill-treatment of the poor brothers continued, and so many complaints of them were made to the Blessed Urban, he ordered the Cardinal of Marseilles, who was one of the Preaching Friars, and learned in theology, to examine them strictly, although his brother the Cardinal of Avignon advised him to the contrary, as they were simple and unlearned men; and he feared lest, out of very ignorance, they might say something which would be considered heretical. However, the men themselves were very eager to be examined, and so one morning the Cardinal of Marseilles sent for them; and in the presence of a notary, who had prepared a blank sheet of paper, he and the Inquisitor began to examine them very carefully, asking them a great

many questions ; but the Blessed Jesus Christ, Who is infinite truth and wisdom, so enlightened their minds, that they were enabled to give a right answer to everything, according to the Catholic Faith and the decrees of the Holy Roman Church ; such being their intention. And they spoke so eloquently of their poverty and holy purpose, that the cardinal was full of admiration ; and so there seemed nothing to write against them. The cardinal invited them to his table that morning and the following, when he treated them as his own sons, waiting on them himself. He gave such a good report of them to the Blessed Pope Urban, that whereas he had at first procured enough white cloth for twenty-five of their number, he now wished to clothe them all, and ordered sixty robes, and as many hoods of the same colour, to be made for them ; and besides that, he gave them money out of his treasury for their support, all which they respectfully received. All the brothers who were at the Papal Court were then clothed in white, and the Holy Father ordered robes to be sent to those who were absent, which was done by the Blessed Giovanni, who also wrote thus : “ Let those who have courage to persevere to the end, accept this habit, and with God’s blessing devoutly


put it on ; but let not him accept it who is irresolute and fearful, for woe to him who wears it under false pretences ; woe to him !”

The Cardinal of Marseilles, who had at first looked suspiciously on them, being doubtful as to their opinions, afterwards became their benefactor and protector, and he took them to hear Mass in the Pope’s Chapel, on S. John Baptist’s day, and on the day of the blessed Apostles S. Peter and S. Paul. He also commanded them to attend the solemn Mass of the Blessed Pope Urban in the same chapel, which they did ; and to these poor men it appeared almost heavenly. The cardinal likewise cleverly and effectually silenced certain masters in theology and Mendicant Friars, who disapproved of the poverty of these men ; and he told a chaplain and secretary of the Cardinal of Avignon, who was also friendly to them, that if necessary he would die in their defence ; and wherever he went, he praised them and took their part. But many who spoke against them, when they understood their pure and holy intention, held them in devotion and respect, and so their character was continually being cleared. Almost every one rejoiced when the Blessed Pope Urban had invested them with cassocks and hoods,

and they magnified the Name of Jesus Christ, and blessed the Holy Father for his gift, and the men were called throughout the province "the Pope's poor." Other cardinals and lords also welcomed them to their houses, and showed them much honour, so that, as they said afterwards, it seemed sometimes as if they themselves were cardinals. Monsignor of Marseilles was their chief friend, and he invited them to his table so often, that another cardinal used to call them the esquires of the Cardinal of Marseilles.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Of the reasons which induced them to remain awhile in Viterbo, and how, when they left that place, they went to the Lake of Bolsena.

HE poor brothers remained in Viterbo for some days after the Habit had been given them, for three special reasons. First, that they might be fully informed of the will of the Holy Father concerning their manner of life, so as to advance still further in God's service, by conforming themselves always to the decrees and constitutions of the Holy Church, and they learnt much on this point from the prelates of the court—especially the Cardinal of Avignon—who gave them full information on every matter connected with their life. And on the part of the Holy Father, he told them not to keep all together, for a multitude causes confusion and disorder, but to disperse themselves about in the cities or villages of their neighbourhood, as they thought best,


always with the consent of the bishops of those provinces: they were also cautioned against holding the opinions of the Fraticelli. These instructions were gratefully received by the poor brothers. Their second reason for remaining with the court was, that their pure and holy design might become better and more generally known; and the third reason was that they might see their particular Father, Monsignor Buccio, Bishop of Castello, who had written to tell them that he was coming to court that day.

But when they heard that for some good reason he was unable to come, they paid a farewell visit to his Holiness, Pope Urban, who promised them every support and assistance, and with loving words exhorted them to persevere in their holy life: and after receiving his blessing they took leave of him. He also gave them enough money to buy six ells of cloth, which would be sufficient to make five Habits. They also paid farewell visits to the cardinals and other prelates, and the Cardinals of Avignon and Marseilles gave them much additional comfort and encouragement, by tendering them all the help in their power. Yet notwithstanding all these offers of help from the Holy Father, and cardinals, and their other friends, they would not ask for a Papal Bull, or any exemp-

tion whatever, for they wished in everything to keep the commandments and counsels of the Holy Gospel, and humbly to obey the pastors of the Holy Church. Besides which, the Bishop of Castello, in two later letters, had advised them to this effect: "Trust to virtue for your defence, and not to Papal Bulls." Other bishops who loved them, also, counselled them not to ask for any privilege whatever. And so these poor humble-minded men, clothed in white, took their departure from Viterbo, and with loud voices, praising Jesus Christ, they went on their way till they came to the Lake of Bolsena, where there is a convent for women, called the Convent of S. Mary Magdalen; and Giovanni being very much devoted to that saint, and it being the day of her Feast, he and his devout company went to that Church to hear the Divine Office, and were gladly and lovingly welcomed there.

CHAPTER XLV.

How Giovanni, being seized with Fever at the Lake of Bolsena, was carried to Acquapendente.

OW it came to pass that the merciful God, seeing how nobly His brave soldier Giovanni had borne the fight, and how many pains of mind and body he had endured for His sake, and seeing too that the poor brothers had received the Habit from the Pope, and were fully instructed in all things necessary for their welfare, He resolved to give Giovanni the crown of victory, and transplant him to eternal rest. So the same day Giovanni was seized with a burning fever, at which this patient man was greatly rejoiced, perceiving that it was God's visitation. His brothers and sons in Christ were full of sorrow, however, and fearing that his sickness might increase in that place, they bore him to Acquapendente, and there used every possible means to cure him. But as his sickness increased, the most faithful Giovanni was

anxious to make his confession once more, and to receive the Viaticum of the Body of Christ. On the arrival of the priest with the Blessed Sacrament, Giovanni humbly prayed Benedetto di Pace, of the city of Castello, one of his most zealous companions, to write down the words he spoke, a copy of which is contained in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XLVI.

The last Will and Testament of the Blessed Giovanni.

IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED. AMEN.

IN the year of our Lord 1357, in the 5th Indiction, on the 26th day of July, Urban the Fifth being the reigning Pope. Be it known to all who shall behold this writing, that the good and venerable Giovanni di Pietro Colombini of Siena, being very infirm in body, but in full possession of his senses, humbly kneeling before the most Holy Body of Christ, Which was held in the hands of the priest Giovanni di Schiavo, rector of the Church of S. Angiolo at Acquapendente, in the presence of witnesses, and of me, the undersigned notary, dictated these words:—

I, Giovanni, in the presence of my Lord Jesus Christ, confess that I have been ungrateful to God for the blessings He has conferred upon me; that I am the greatest sinner in the world, and for my evil deeds am deserving of hell-fire: nevertheless, trust-

ing in God's mercy, I hope that He will be gracious to me, and grant me eternal life.

I do in very deed and truth confess and believe in God the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost, and in all that the Holy Mother Church of Rome, and her pastors, Pope Urban, the cardinals his brothers, and the other bishops of the Church believe. And I declare that the life I have led since I embraced poverty, to the present time, has been and is for the glory of my Lord Jesus Christ, and the honour and advancement of the Holy Church of God, and her most holy and blessed Father and Ruler, Pope Urban the Fifth, the cardinals his brothers, and the other bishops and governors, to whom, being Christ's vicars upon earth, I have always, and will be obedient until death. I affirm that this is the way of salvation, and that whoever wanders therefrom, and does not fully believe what is ordered and determined by the aforesaid Pastors to be the work of God by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and is not obedient, is not a true Catholic Christian : and I believe and am sure that whoever errs in this respect is separated from Christ. But if I have in ignorance said or done anything which is contrary to the will of the said holy Pastors, I repent of it, and confess my

fault, and demand of you, Giovanni the priest, the sacrament of penance; although I do not know that I have ever failed on these points. I place myself entirely, both body and soul, in the bosom of the Holy Church and her Pastors, and so I hope for eternal life. And I exhort my companions, absent as well as present, who have hitherto been faithful to Holy Mother Church, and to her Pastors, never to separate from her, for in doing so they would be departing from the Blessed Christ. Furthermore, as goodness is very often envied, and persecuted, and my conscience urges me to vindicate the truth, I affirm, respecting the convent of SS. Abbundio and Abbundanzio, near Siena, where I have placed my daughter and other relations of mine, and where I and my companions have often lodged, for the sake of the good and holy instructions we have received from the sisters dwelling there, that these sisters are the holiest, the most pure, the most devoted to Holy Mother Church, and the most upright in the whole world; full of penance, charity, and almsgiving; very poor in spirit, possessing no private wealth, though they are rich in common. I consider them all to be saints.

Executed at Acquapendente, in the patrimony, in the house of Ambrogio di Gianni of that place, in the

presence of the undersigned Ambrogio, Benedetto di Conte, Simone d'Agnoluccio of Perugia, Bartoluccio di Santi of the city of Castello, Seculars ; Francesco di Mino Vincenti, Giovanni di Geri, Bianco di Santi of Siena, and Simon di Muccio of Monterelli, all cited to be witnesses: the aforesaid Giovanni praying me, the undersigned notary, to make a public writing of the same ; and I, Benedetto di Pace, of the city of Castello, by imperial authority judge in ordinary and notary public, being present, have attested and written down these words, publishing them, and setting my seal and name thereto.

CHAPTER XLVII.

*How he was borne in his sickness to the Abbey of
S. Salvatore.*



WHEN the faithful Giovanni had concluded these sayings, he received the Most Holy Body of Christ with such devotion, that all who were present shed tears at the sight. Afterwards, his loving companions being anxious to take him, while yet alive, to his beloved convent of Santa Bonda, carried him as far as the village where was the Abbey of S. Salvatore ; and many people followed them all along the road, for they were very desirous to see this servant of God, and to help him, if possible. On reaching the village, he was taken to the house of a good man, called Naddo di Vanni, who had always hospitably received these poor men whenever they came to the place, and here Giovanni grew so much worse that he could not be moved again. Perceiving that his death was drawing near, he gave


directions for his burial, and declared his last wishes, praying the before-named Benedetto to write this down also, a copy of which is contained in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

*The Blessed Giovanni's Directions concerning his
Burial.*

IN THE NAME OF OUR CRUCIFIED LORD JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1367, THE 29TH DAY OF JULY, IN THE 5TH
INDICTION, IN THE TIME OF POPE URBAN V.


E it known to all who shall behold this writing, that the good and venerable Giovanni di Pietro Colombini, a citizen of Siena, being weak in body but sound in mind, I, the undersigned notary, in the presence of witnesses, asked him where he would like to be buried, if it should please God to take his life; and he replied that, if he should die (and he told me and the witnesses to bear this in mind), he wished to be buried near the boundary wall of the Convent and Cloister of SS. Abbundio and Abbundanzio at Siena, by the door of the kitchen garden belonging to the convent: that his dead body was to be wrapped up in canvas, the hands tied

behind, and he was to be taken thither on the back of an ass. These he said were his last wishes, and he told me, the notary, to record them in writing.

Executed in the village adjoining the Abbey of S. Salvatore, in the province of Siena, in the house of Naddo di Vanni; in the presence of Naddo di Guglielmo, of the aforesaid place, and of Fazio di Betto of Montalcino, Gualtieri di Pietro of Siena, Donato di Giovanni e Santori, surnamed Romeo, of the city of Pulignano, in the kingdom of Apulia, cited as witnesses; and I, Benedetto di Pace, of the city of Castello, being requested to do so, recorded the above, and set my seal and name thereto.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A very Holy and Edifying Exhortation delivered by the Blessed Giovanni in his last Sickness.

IOVANNI, the man of God, having declared his last wishes, began most affectionately to exhort his beloved companions, and he said to them : “ Oh, dearest fathers and brothers in Jesus Christ, you see that God wishes to take me to Himself, and it is our duty cheerfully to submit to His Will, for He is the Giver of life and death, and what He lays upon us is for our good, and the salvation of our souls. You need not be afraid of that happening which is spoken of in Holy Scripture, ‘ I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep shall be dispersed,’ for I am not a good shepherd, on account of my ignorance. I know not even how to govern myself, much less others ; and I deserve to be punished, but in the kindness of your hearts you have borne with me. Besides, there are many amongst you who are capable of governing, and I especially

recommend Francesco Vincenti to you for that office: he is more worthy of it than I am, and will be your father and ruler. Follow and obey him, and do not forsake his guidance, for he will lead you in the right way. And I earnestly beseech you all, absent as well as present, for the sake of the Blessed Jesus Christ, to pardon me if I have failed in my duty towards you, if I have foolishly corrected you too much or too little, or have given you any cause for offence; and if so, I ask your forgiveness (I would do so on my knees if I could) for the sake of Christ crucified. And I implore you to love each other, and always live peaceably together, no one wishing to be above his fellow, for he who will be greatest shall be the least, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted. Study as much as possible to follow the example of Jesus Christ and the holy apostles, and when your works are done after that pattern then you will be true Gesuati. Let your every thought, word, and deed, be for the honour and glory of Jesus Christ. Whatever you may be doing, let His holy Name be ever in your heart and mouth; and I implore you to persevere unto the end, for he who only begins well will not be saved, but he who perseveres. Be brave soldiers of Jesus Christ, and by His help triumph over the world, the flesh, and the devil.

‘God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able.’ The labour of the battle is of short duration, but the crown of victory is perpetual: you have only to bear this penance for a little while, for death comes quickly upon us all. Learn, dearly beloved, how to make the most of your time, that death may not find you unprepared. Again, I tell you that if you persevere in the way you have begun, you will increase in merit and in number, every one will love and respect you, and you will never want for any necessary thing. When your wants are supplied, give thanks to God, and pray for your benefactors; and when you are not so well off, have patience, and put your trust in Jesus Christ. He will speedily help you, for He never forsakes His faithful servants. In all your sorrows and adversities also have faith and hope in God. See how often the Divine Goodness has helped us, and particularly observe how this saying of the gospel has been anew fulfilled in us, ‘When you shall be brought before councils, do not think beforehand what you have to say, for it shall be given you from above.’ When the chief prelates of the court unjustly accused us to the Blessed Pope Urban, and he ordered us to be examined by men of great learning and authority, we foolish and unlearned

men were enabled by God to answer so correctly, that instead of being shamefully condemned, as many thought we should be, we were honourably rewarded: men's hatred towards us was turned into love; those who sought to injure us were the cause of our being benefited; and his Holiness, being convinced of our innocence and purity, gave white Habits to all of us, not only those who were present, but the absent ones also. You are bound, therefore, to do your very utmost for the glory of God and Holy Church. Try to have your souls whiter than your Habits, by keeping your hearts pure, confessing frequently, and receiving the Most Holy Sacrament of the Body of Christ at Easter, and on other great feasts. Be joyful, and serve the Lord with gladness; love each other as brethren; and when any of your companions are sick, tend them as lovingly as possible, as you would Jesus Christ Himself, for He says in the Holy Gospel, 'What you do to one of the least of mine, you do it to me.' Spend your time usefully; take care that the enemy does not find you idle, but always occupied in some good work. In all your labours let some holy thought find a place in your heart; read, or listen to the reading of spiritual books; be constant in prayer by day and night; meditate on the justice and mercy of God, in order that you

may love and fear Him. Think over your sins with heartfelt sorrow, and accuse yourselves of them to God with simplicity, humbly asking for pardon: think how miserably prone we are to fall, and how good God is in raising us up again. Meditate often on the hour of death, the day of judgment, the punishment of the damned, and the glory of the blessed; think of the general and special blessings you have received from God, and thank Him heartily for all; and above all keep in mind the holy life and Passion of Jesus Christ. This enlightens and fortifies the devout soul, and is the best medicine for all our spiritual infirmities. Contemplate also the lives and sufferings of the saints: this will help us to despise vicious practices, and all sensual and worldly pleasures, and kindle in our hearts a desire after holiness, and a willingness to suffer for Jesus Christ's sake, for 'through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.' Be sure, my beloved brethren, that you cannot enter heaven by any other way: therefore fight bravely, and as much as possible strive after God's glory and the salvation of your souls, so that, when this short life is over, the Blessed Christ may grant you eternal glory."

CHAPTER L.

*What the Blessed Giovanni said to Francesco
Vincenti.*

WHEN turning to Francesco Vincenti, he said to him in the tenderest accents: "Oh, my dear brother, thou knowest how long we have loved one another, not from any relationship between us, but solely in God. For the sake of Christ crucified, I commend to you our spiritual fathers and sons, whom God has committed to our charge. See how fully they have trusted us, believing us to be good servants of God. They give up their own will entirely, and obey us in all things; they have forsaken their relations, friends, and everything they have in the world: therefore we are bound to take care of them, as if they were our own, for we shall have to give account of them to our just Judge. I entreat you to watch over them, be the good father and shepherd of their souls, their master and brother both in doc-

trine and example, so that by God's help, and thy love and care, they may attain a happy end."

Francesco, full of sorrow, answered him with sobs : "Thy loving words break my heart, not because I am unwilling to bear any fatigue, or do all in my power for the welfare of our poor companions, as I am in duty bound, but deprived of thy dear companionship, my life will henceforth be a continual death; and, besides that, not being capable of governing them, they will derive very little benefit from my rule. For these reasons, therefore, I implore thee, as thou lovest me, to intercede for me with Jesus Christ, that He will soon remove me from this mortal life." He made this request so humbly, that the loving Giovanni promised to pray that God would grant him this desire.

Then the Blessed Giovanni requested all those present to withdraw, except the priest Giovanni di Schiavo; and calling him to his side, he revealed to him in confidence many things which were going to happen, and asked him to make them known to Madonna Paola, the venerable Abbess of the Convent of Santa Bonda. After this the others returned, and assembled round his bed, and although the loving Giovanni was so exhausted that he could

hardly speak, he forced himself to do so, out of the love he bore to his companions; and looking at Francesco Vincenti, he said to him: "Oh, my dear brother, I may no longer be with thee; again I recommend this our family to thy care, and although I believe that thou wilt not long survive me, I still entreat thee to watch over them."

Then turning to his other spiritual children, of whom about twenty were present, the rest having been sent, some to Siena, some to other places, he said: "Oh, my dear sons and brothers, I have not deserved to be the father of such a good family, but so it is. I have loved you much, and have indeed desired the salvation of your souls. I would willingly have died for you a hundred times a day, if such had been possible. Again I exhort you to continue in the way you have begun, and again I ask your forgiveness if I have given you any cause of offence. I bless you all, absent as well as present, also those who shall in future join our holy society, and persevere unto death." Then he made the sign of the cross over them, saying, "God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, bless you."

CHAPTER LI.

The Last Exhortation of the Blessed Giovanni.


QUON hearing these loving words of their master and father, Francesco and the other poor ones were overcome with grief, and perceiving that death was drawing near, they began to weep; and although they restrained themselves as much as possible in his presence, for fear of distressing him, Giovanni saw their tears, and said: "Do not weep for me, dear brothers, for I trust that God will not leave me, nor I Him; not for my merits, but of His infinite mercy. So do not grieve at my departure, for I believe that I am going to a place where I shall help you in future better than I have in times past. You are not born of my confidence, but of God; hope then in Him, and put your trust in Him; and if you love me do not weep, but rather rejoice that I go to our Saviour Jesus, who of His mercy has given us His Name; therefore, whether we will or no, we are called

Gesuati. Besides, you know what Jesus said to His Father, 'I will, Father, that where I am, there shall my servant be;' and so, if we serve Him faithfully, we shall all spend eternal life with Him, not in sadness and weeping, but in perpetual happiness and glory. One thing more I ask of you, and for love's sake I command you, and that is, that you should take the Convent and the sisters of Santa Bonda under your protection. You remember I have said in my will that I wish to be buried there, because I know their holy and praiseworthy life. I should have thought myself highly favoured if it had pleased God to allow me to die in that devout place, but because I am not worthy of it, or for some other reason, such has not been God's Will. Therefore, as far as in me lies, I commend this convent to your care. When you can do them any good, do so; and when you want anything of them, do not be afraid of asking it, for they are very charitable, as most of you already know. But do not be too familiar either with that or any other convent of women, and as a rule be reserved with all women, and be very prudent and discreet in your conversation with them, not because I mistrust either you or them, but to avoid any cause for scandal. As I said before, I believe all the sisters

of Santa Bonda to be saints, and therefore, when you go there, ask them to pray for me. And I pray thee, Francesco, that as we have been of one mind ever since we resolved to embrace poverty for the sake of Jesus Christ, so we may still be so in our burial, and that thou wilt be buried in the same place with me;" and with many tears Francesco promised that it should be so. Then, once more gathering up his remaining strength, the loving-hearted Giovanni gave them all his blessing.

CHAPTER LII.

*How the Blessed Giovanni received Extreme Unction
and the Recommendation of the Soul, and how he
Died.*


HEN after the manner of a faithful Christian he demanded the Holy Sacrament of Extreme Unction, which he received most devoutly, being then perfectly conscious; and as his death drew near, his brothers knelt around his bed, and heartily prayed God to have mercy on his soul. The priest said the Office for the Recommendation of the Soul, and some other prayers, and lastly read to him the Passion of Jesus Christ from the Holy Gospel; and when he came to the words, *Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum*, that blessed soul was released from the body, and went, we fully believe, to the glory of eternal life. This happened on Saturday, the last day of July, in the year of our Lord 1367. And although we ought not to mourn when holy men depart from

this mortal life to the immortal, yet as soon as the Blessed Giovanni was dead, there arose great lamentation amongst his sons, because their beloved father was lost to them in the flesh. Francesco Vincenti, especially, was overwhelmed with grief; he threw himself on Giovanni's neck, and kissing him all over, he cried out: "Oh, my Father Giovanni, why hast thou left me? Is this the companionship I hoped for from thee? To whom can I turn now for advice and support? From whom else shall I ever gain such comfort as I have from thee? Thou wast my good master and father, thou didst enlighten my mind, inflame my affections, and guide me always in the right way. Oh, dear Giovanni, I weep not for thee, but for myself; thou art gone to happiness, I am left behind to lament; I rejoice much in thy bliss, but grieve over my misery. Oh, most loving Giovanni, of thy charity, I earnestly implore thee to ask God soon to take me from this darkness, and let me join thee in perpetual light. When will the hour come that I shall find myself with thee?" Having said these and other words, the good Francesco embraced him again, and with many tears kissed his hands and face. All the other poor brothers also poured forth their lamentations, each one relating the great benefits and loving

ministrations he had received from Giovanni; and this lasted for more than an hour. Afterwards, when their weeping was a little moderated, they saw that their Father Francesco was still so overcome with grief, that he could not restrain his tears; and they tried to persuade him to leave the Blessed Giovanni's body, but in vain. So they took him by force, and raised him upright on his feet, and then withdrew from him a little, for it seemed as if his heart would break with grief. Lastly, these poor brothers, with sighs and tears approaching in order the body of the Blessed Giovanni, kissed his hand, as if he had been a priest, with much reverence and devotion.

CHAPTER LIII.

*How the Body of the Blessed Giovanni was borne to
the Convent of Santa Bonda.*

FTER this, they questioned amongst themselves whether they were obliged to carry that holy body to the grave in the ignominious way he had desired in his will; and being distressed at the thought of such disrespect, they took counsel thereon with certain good men, who all agreed that they were not bound to treat his body with such contempt as he in his humility had ordained, but that they should bury him with all the honour which his holy life deserved: and this being settled, they decided on carrying him to the Convent of Santa Bonda, where he wished to be buried, and with many tears they removed him from the house where he had died. All the people of the country round, both men and women, came to see him, and to kiss his hand devoutly, as if he had been a priest; and the Abbot and

community of S. Salvadore sent many wax candles. His body having been reverently put into a coffin, they devoutly carried him forth, being accompanied for some distance by almost the whole neighbourhood, many of whom followed him as far as the confines of the territory, and in all the places through which they passed people came out to see him; and in this way that holy body was borne with much reverence and devotion to the village of San Quirino, where they rested for a little while. At last they reached the before-named Convent of Santa Bonda, where the holy body was placed in the church, and exposed to view.

CHAPTER LIV.

How many holy Women wept over the Body of the Blessed Giovanni in the Convent of Santa Bonda.



WHEN Madonna Paola and Sister Bartolommea and the other devout nuns saw that the Blessed Giovanni, whose life they had earnestly hoped for, was dead, they burst into tears, and bitterly lamented being deprived of the spiritual consolation of their venerable father. Each one spoke of his holy words and works, and chiefly of the great love which for the glory of God and their own salvation he had shown towards them; and in the midst of their weeping they never ceased talking of the great benefits they had received from him. Then the brothers sent word to all their companions who were within reach, so they came immediately, and when they saw the venerable body of their beloved father, they mourned as the others had done. When the news reached Siena, almost the whole city wept, and

not only the Blessed Giovanni's relations and friends, but nearly every one went to see him.

Madonna Biagia, the holy wife of the Blessed Giovanni, came to the convent, full of sorrow, with many of her relations and friends, and when she saw the holy body of her dearly-loved Giovanni, she threw herself upon him, and weeping bitterly, said, in piteous tones: "Oh, most chaste and holy face, which for the sake of Christ I have refrained from kissing for twelve years! Oh, holy eyes, how many tears you have shed for Christ crucified! Oh, sweet mouth, which preached so fervently for God's glory and the salvation of souls, and so tenderly comforted those in sorrow, comfort me, who am afflicted beyond all other Siennese women. I do not mourn *thy* death, but *mine*, being deprived of thee, my life. Thou art living in the glory of the heavenly country, but I am dead in the misery of this wretched world. I deserve more pity than all other afflicted widows, for I am deprived of the best and holiest husband in all Siena." Then devoutly kissing his hands, she said: "Oh, blessed hands, what large alms you have given to the poor! what menial offices have been done by you! what loving letters you have written! and all out of love to your Creator!" Likewise, kissing his feet, she said,

in broken accents: "Oh, feet, so delicate formerly, when covered, that even the seams of your stockings hurt you, yet afterwards, when you went barefoot for the sake of Christ, you cared not for wounds from stones, or thorns, or for bitter cold;" and then earnestly gazing on him, she said, with sobs and tears, "Oh, most tender, weak, and delicate body, which was enabled by Divine strength gladly to endure what was impossible for human strength. Oh, Colombini, pure and chaste, filled with the fire of the Holy Ghost, now is the favour granted thee which thou hast longed for so many years, to die in preaching the Name of Christ." And turning to Caterina di Colombini, she said: "Oh, dearest sister, who with thy tongue didst pierce the heart of our lord and father, Giovanni, saying to him, when he left Siena, 'May the Lord protect thee,' He has cared for him so much that He allowed him by excessive suffering, both of body and mind, to die for Him."

Caterina and his other relations and friends also mourned for him, and one of them, Alissa de Bandinelli, when she saw the precious body of the Blessed Giovanni, said, with tears: "Now is that light extinguished from our view, which I saw when thou prayedst so fervently in thy chamber. Who will now

help me in the work of my salvation? How affectionately, dearest father, didst thou exhort me to live to God's glory! How earnestly didst thou write to me that I should love Jesus Christ more than my sons, saying that my children could not admit me to eternal life! I entreat thee, for Jesus Christ's sake, Whom thou lovedst so much, to intercede with Him for myself and my sons." Thus did all his relations and friends mourn and weep over his body, remembering how beneficial had been his life and teaching, and every one devoutly kissed his hand.

CHAPTER LV.

Of the Burial of the Blessed Giovanni.

BY the time that their weeping was somewhat abated, all was ready for the funeral, and the priests, both secular and religious, a great number of whom were present, began devoutly to chant the Divine Office, and reverently performed all the ceremonies, as if the Blessed Giovanni had been a priest. Then his companions, about forty of whom were there, being all clothed in the Habit given by the Holy Father, took the coffin containing that holy body, which looked more as if it was asleep than dead, and with sighs and tears laid it in the grave they had prepared in the church near the entrance to the cloister; and after covering it with many flowers and sweet-smelling herbs, they replaced the earth and the pavement. This was on Monday, the third of August, A.D. 1367. This being done, the holy wife of the Blessed Giovanni talked for a while

with the sisters, commending to them, with many tears, the soul of her beloved Giovanni, and entreating them to pray for him, although she believed that he had entered into life eternal. To Madonna Paola she said: "For the sake of the devoted love you in this convent show to my husband's memory, you need not be afraid to ask anything of me, for I will gladly do for you all that is in my power." The venerable Abbess could hardly speak for her tears, but she answered: "We rejoice greatly that you should commend the soul of the Blessed Giovanni to our prayers, although it is needless, for it is far dearer to us than our own souls. Oh, that we might be where he is! We thank God for giving us such a precious relic as his holy body, unworthy though we are of such a treasure. But we earnestly entreat you to think of us, and rely on our friendship, just as did the Blessed Giovanni; and as a special favour, although we do not deserve it, I beg that you will come and live with us." The venerable wife of the Blessed Giovanni thanked the Abbess and all the sisters, and then she and her relations sorrowfully took their departure. After that, everybody went away except the new father, Francesco Vincenti, and some of the poor brothers.

CHAPTER LVI.

*How the Blessed Francesco fell Sick seven days after
the Death of the Blessed Giovanni.*

FRANCESCO, who was staying with the chaplain of the convent, in his great grief wished for death, to reunite him to his beloved father in Christ, Giovanni; and he often said, with tears: "Oh, dear Giovanni, thou knowest how thou didst promise that I should only be parted from thee for a little while, and that after a few days I should rejoin thee. Thou hast never told me a lie; may God grant that *these* words may come true. Have pity on me, dear Giovanni, for although I am with my good companions, I feel very lonely without thee. When will the happy time come that I may see thee? Woe is me! for my banishment is prolonged." And in words like these he continually gave vent to his sorrow.

But the good God, who always listens to His

servants, willed to grant his holy desire ; and as for His sake he and the Blessed Giovanni had together endured much worldly suffering, so it was His Will that they should enjoy eternal happiness together, and He visited Francesco with a great fever. When this good man felt it come upon him he was filled with joy, and said, with S. John Baptist, “Blessed art thou, O Lord, who hast remembered me.” His sickness increased daily, but the brave Francesco bore it very patiently, for he hoped that he should die, and join his beloved Giovanni in eternal life. And in his suffering he said : “ Oh, Blessed Giovanni, I see now that thou bearest me the same love in death as thou didst in life, since God has heard thy prayers on my behalf.”

CHAPTER LVII.

*How the Blessed Francesco died fifteen days after the
Death of the Blessed Giovanni.*



AS his sickness increased, he demanded the Holy Viaticum of Christ's Body, and when Ser Ghero, Rector of the Church of S. Desiderio in Siena, brought him the Most Holy Sacrament, Francesco humbly knelt before It; and after confessing how ungrateful he had been for the blessings God had granted him, and that he was the greatest sinner in the world, he said some words in the same form and manner as his father in Christ, the Blessed Giovanni, had done, dictating them also to Benedetto di Pace of the city of Castello. This was on the 7th of August in the same year, in the presence of these his poor companions, who were cited as witnesses: Giovanni d'Ambrogio, Gualtieri di Piero, Giovanni di Messer Niccolo de Malescotti, Ambrogio di Giucca, Matteo di Meglioruccio, Domenico di Guido, and Bartoluccio di Santi of the town of Castello.

The Blessed Francesco was such a lover of holy poverty, that when he was very ill he laid on a mattress out in the street, and many people from Siena and other places visited him there, for he had a great many friends. His wonderful and holy life had gained him the friendship of many holy men, both secular and religious, who, moved by their love towards him, exhorted him to patience; unnecessarily so, however, for he exhorted them much more earnestly to despise temporal things, and long for the blessings of eternity, and they left him, very much edified by his fervent words.

One day, some of the family of the Piccoluomini came to see him, and as is the custom of many when they visit sick people, they comforted him, saying: "By God's mercy, thou wilt be cured, and be well and happy again; trust in the Lord;" and other such expressions. "My brothers," said the good Francesco, "you do not know God's secret thoughts. I would rather not recover, if that were His Will, for I am longing to go to Giovanni, my dear father, companion, and brother. I do not deserve it, because of my sins, but I hope for his merits God will count me worthy." They talked together a little longer, and at last the men said to Francesco: "Before we depart, we pray

thee to give us some words of counsel ;” but he answered them kindly, saying : “ That is not for me, yet love constrains me just to say one word, and note it well—We must not let a good opportunity pass.” And considering this saying, they left him, very much edified.

By his wonderful patience in this sickness, and his holy doctrine, Francesco taught every one who saw him, especially his sorrowing companions, who were utterly overwhelmed with grief. At last, about fifteen days after the death of his holy father, he received the last Sacraments with the greatest devotion, and in the presence of his sons in Christ yielded up his soul to God. His poor companions having lost the bodily presence of the supporters, or rather founders of their holy confraternity, renewed their weeping ; but though their hearts were full of sorrow, they trusted in Jesus Christ, and in the merits and prayers of their blessed fathers, Giovanni and Francesco. And being joined by many sorrowing relations and friends, they sang the solemn Office of the Dead over the body of Francesco, and buried him by the side of his father in Christ, Giovanni.

From the time that these two soldiers of Christ gave up the world, till the day of their death, they

continued to grow in holiness, and with affectionate solicitude sought after God's glory and the salvation of souls; and thus sowing the Word of God by their holy life and doctrine, thousands of persons were turned to repentance. It seems to me that Isaias prophesied of these two fathers, and of the other poor ones of Jesus Christ, who for the glory of God endured hunger, thirst, and many other hardships, when he said, in the fourteenth chapter, "And the first-born of the poor shall be fed, and the poor shall rest with confidence;" for now in Paradise they feed on heavenly food, and their poor brothers are enjoying eternal rest with them.

CHAPTER LVIII.

*A brief Description of the Person of the Blessed
Giovanni, and of his Wisdom.*



THE Blessed Giovanni was of a fair complexion, and small and delicately made, but the Blessed Francesco was strong and tall. The Blessed Giovanni never learnt grammar, or any other science, having from his boyhood been occupied in mercantile affairs; but owing to the virtues he practised after his conversion, and his continual meditation and prayer, he was greatly endued with learning, as his beautiful letters, burning with Divine wisdom, plainly show; and his charity was so great, that he would willingly have been put to death a hundred times a day, if he could have saved any souls thereby. His heart was literally on fire with Divine love, for which cause he always wore his coat unbuttoned, showing his naked flesh; and when speaking of the things of God, it seemed as if he

could hardly contain himself, so very earnest was he. The Name of Christ was so impressed upon his heart, that he often mentioned it; and in one hundred of his letters which I have read, most of them very short, I have found this name Christ written about 1,400 times, without the other name which is generally joined to it. Truly his conversation was in heaven, and his love to God was so great, that he was almost consumed by it, like the Blessed Giacobone da Todi.

Now it happened a few days after the Blessed Giovanni had departed to the Lord, that the priest Giovanni di Schiavo, mentioned a few pages back, wrote to the Abbess of the Convent of Santa Bonda, telling her how the Blessed Giovanni had revealed to him in secret many things that were to happen, which he was to make known to her only; so he said he would come and see her, and tell her everything by word of mouth. But it pleased God after this to take the priest's life, and so he did not go there, and the things were never revealed.

CHAPTER LIX.

Of some Miracles, which, by the grace of God, were performed by the Blessed Giovanni after his death.

NOW it happened not long after the death of the Blessed Giovanni, that the devil (for what cause I know not) entered into a young woman who lived near the convent, and tormented her greatly. One day she fled out of her house, and her parents followed her to bring her back. But she went on till at last she reached the convent, and as God willed it, she found the church door open, so she went in, and as she passed over the grave of the Blessed Giovanni she suddenly fell down in a swoon. When her parents came up to her they began to rub her with good wine, and by the grace of the merciful God, when she came to herself, she was perfectly cured, and entirely freed from the evil spirit. When her parents asked how it was that she had been so suddenly cured, she said that when she stepped upon the saint's grave the

devil fled away, and she declared that it was the saint who was buried there who had delivered her from that evil spirit; and so they took her home, healed and set free, praising and thanking God and the Blessed Giovanni, and the young woman told everybody who asked her about it of the mercy she had miraculously received. This miracle was published throughout the city and province of Siena, and this being the case, the sisters, inspired by God, with great solemnity, and in the presence of many priests, caused that holy body to be disinterred, in order to remove it to a place more worthy of it. On opening the coffin, they found that all the flowers and sweet-smelling herbs with which his poor brothers had covered him were turned into mud and water, but the precious body was whole and sound, as if it had been only just buried. They removed him with great solemnity and devotion inside the church of this convent, inhabited by nuns only, and here they put him into a beautiful coffin which his venerable wife had had made for him, on which was painted the figure of our Lord Jesus Christ, also those of the Blessed Giovanni and Francesco; and this was seventeen months after his holy death. Here he was held in such great veneration, that many people devoutly came to see him.

God was graciously pleased to work another miracle in one of the lay sisters of the convent. She was afflicted with a sore disease in the thumb of her right hand, which the doctors had for a long time tried to cure; but as she grew worse instead of better, and the thumb had begun to mortify, they decided on taking it off, to prevent the mortification spreading over the hand. On hearing this the sister had recourse to prayer, with much faith, humility, and contrition for her sins, devoutly praying God, that by the merits of the Blessed Giovanni, He would restore her to health, so that she might not lose her thumb. She also affectionately and reverently prayed the Blessed Giovanni to intercede with God for the healing of her sore; and having passed the whole night in prayer, when the morning came, she, full of faith, unfastened the bandage round her hand, and found her thumb was healed, and as sound as the other fingers, except that it had no nail. When she saw this miracle she heartily thanked God and the Blessed Giovanni, and again had recourse to earnest and faithful prayer to God and the Blessed Giovanni, that the nail might be restored, which prayer God in His mercy granted, seeing her pure faith. All the sisters, greatly marvelling at this miracle, returned thanks to God, and

when the doctors came and found the diseased finger whole as the others, they also, greatly wondering at this sign, thanked God, and published it throughout Siena, and many people went to the convent and certified themselves of the miracle.

The holy body of the Blessed Giovanni being thus honourably and reverently kept in the coffin above mentioned, many people devoutly came to see it; and when, in time of war, the sisters for greater safety went to stay at Siena, they always had it taken to that monastery. But afterwards, to prevent the necessity of removing it in time of war, they caused a secret vault to be built in the church, in which they kept it, and here it remained whole and sound for twenty years. But as the devotion and frequent visits of the people increased, the chaplain of the convent, Giovanni d'Ambrogio, who has often been mentioned before, fearing that the coming and going of so many people might in future distract the minds of the sisters, or for some other reason, once, when they were gone to Siena in time of war, arranged, so report says, that the water from a pipe in the roof should secretly drop upon the vault, so as to corrupt that holy body, hoping that when the flesh was wasted away such a multitude would not come to see

it. And so the sisters found it all corrupted except one foot, which remains entire and without blemish to this day. The venerable wife of the Blessed Giovanni lived some years after his death. She practised much self-mortification, and spent most of her time in her private oratory, praying, or reading some religious book, of which she had many. She was very charitable, and often gave away food to the poor, especially to the poor Gesuati, who when they came to Siena lodged at her house, as they did when the Blessed Giovanni was living; and in the year 1371 she made her will, and desired that she might be buried as a nun in the Convent of Santa Bonda. Soon after this she yielded up her soul to God, and was buried in the convent with much honour and devotion.

Now it happened while the venerable and holy Paola was Abbess of Santa Bonda, that a woman called Nutina, who was possessed of the devil, was taken to the holy body of the Blessed Giovanni, and the Abbess and other devout sisters sought by psalms, prayers, and other words, to force the evil spirit to depart from her. At last the Abbess said to it: "I command thee, by the power of Jesus Christ, and the merits of the Blessed Giovanni, to come out of this

woman, and to give us some sign that thou hast departed." The devil replied, "What sign wilt thou have?" "Go into that lamp which is before the altar," said the Abbess. "I cannot go there," he said, "for I am not worthy." The Abbess answered, "Do as thou wilt, only give us some sign of thy departure." Then the woman was delivered from the unclean spirit, and in a wine cellar of the convent, where there was a well of water, there came such a smell of sulphur, that for three weeks the sisters were unable to enter it.

There was a very devout and self-denying lady, the wife of Messer Martino di Simone, a citizen of Siena, and during the pestilence of the year 1400, she gave away to the sick poor so much of a very good wine which they possessed, that a cask was emptied only a few days after it had been tapped. Upon this she began to weep bitterly for fear of her husband, who was a very hard, severe man; and in her necessity she prayed most earnestly and humbly to the Blessed Giovanni, that he would free her from this trouble. As soon as she had finished her prayer she found the cask was full, so that even Messer Martino wondered afterwards that it was so long in emptying.

A venerable citizen of Siena, called Marco Ciotti,

who had no children, prayed to the Blessed Giovanni, and immediately afterwards his wife conceived, and a son was born to him, whom he called Giacopo; and after this another, and he was called Rinaldo.

In the month of July, A.D. 1435, a poor woman, Francesco di Meo dello Scassa, being possessed with a devil, was taken to the body of the Blessed Giovanni, and by his merits she was, in the presence of the sisters, delivered from the evil spirit.

Cecco di Buonaventura Colombini, an honoured citizen of Siena, having no sons, devoutly prayed to the Blessed Giovanni, and promised, that if God gave him a son, he would make him, as far as lay in his power, one of the poor Gesuati. After this vow his wife conceived, and bore him a son. He called him Giovampiero, and clothed him in the habit of the Gesuati.

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